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Chapter 16: REACTION OVERSEAS

Although previous reviewers had found faults, nobody had launched a wholesale attack on the film - nobody, that is, until the first overseas reviewer. Written as *New Zealand Newsletter* under the heading of “Sincerity, Cliché, Ruckus Left Colder than the Alps” in the Australian magazine *The Bulletin*, the review began: “What should have been one of this country’s cultural events of the year – the first New Zealand-made feature film in a dozen years – has turned out to be a cruel disappointment”. The reviewer was New Zealand fiction writer and former National Film Unit director Maurice Shadbolt. With the exception of some complimentary phrases about the acting of Selwyn Muru and Barry Crump, Shadbolt’s attitude was highly dismissive. He described the film as being about a young Aucklander who “roams the countryside converting cars and sleeping with women”, and that “the makers of the film failed signally to take advantage of natural settings, and to relate people to the landscape”. Such a sweeping comment gave little recognition to the specific use of locations in the film (such as Westland and the Hokianga). The role of the hero was condemned as being “a total blank” [with a] “thin and absurd” story. Readers were informed that “even on the level of simple credibility the story often falls down: Auckland audiences howled with laughter in the wrong places”.

Shadbolt’s comment about O’Shea himself implied that neither of his films had been up to standard: “When the patriotic tom toms have stopped beating from the North Cape to the Bluff and *Runaway* has been forgotten, it is to be hoped that he will have a third chance to prove himself as a feature film- maker”. The reviewer seemed to be speaking with thinly-disguised contempt and anger. He went on: “A certain amount of professional competence aside, New Zealand feature films have not progressed one inch since they were first made forty or fifty years ago.”¹ This statement was a remarkable exaggeration. In many technical and artistic respects, *Runaway* was clearly superior to its predecessors, *Rewi’s Last Stand* and *Broken Barrier*, to say nothing of the feature films of the 1920s. *Runaway* set new standards in lighting, camera operation, continuity, costuming, sound recording, editing and sound mixing and deserves credit for the sophistication of its script and artistic ambitions generally. But O’Shea was caught in the crossfire of cultural politics. Born in 1932 (12 years later than O’Shea), Shadbolt was the angry young man of New Zealand literature,

often at loggerheads with the older generation. He preferred popular fiction to work he regarded as earnest and pretentious.

His review prompted a strong reaction from Peter Munz, a Professor of History at Victoria University and a contemporary of O'Shea. He wrote a letter to the editor of *The Bulletin* which began:

Why don't you suggest to Shadbolt to deploy his meagre journalistic talents in a journal other than *The Bulletin* which is, after all, widely read both in New Zealand and Australia by educated people? ... Shadbolt's Newsletter about the film misleads your readers by employing cliché after cliché so that in two columns of your valuable space he manages to say nothing either truthful or enlightening about the film.

Munz was one of the very few commentators who saw deeper meanings in the film:

Shadbolt complains that the story is thin and absurd. Had he stopped to think rather than rushed to write, he would have noticed that the film is a slow moving allegory – a tale about a lonely soul's blunders – a progress from silly, non-motivated blunder (how much like the things we do in all our lives!) to a yet sillier blunder. Until, in the end the young hero – or might we not consider him an anti-hero – goes off towards the icy and lonely glaciers of his own soul.

This suggests a philosophical allegory, a kind of pilgrim's progress leading to a deeper confrontation with his "soul". It seems a thoughtful and valid reading of the film, yet very different from O'Shea's "New Zealand" allegory. (If a Professor of History was unable to spot the local dimension of the allegory, then it is little wonder that virtually no-one else did.) Munz concluded: "The film has many grave faults. The allegorical quality is, unfortunately, not sustained consistently. But in a 'Newsletter', as in any critical review of a book, painting or a film, one is entitled to expect a kind of help in appreciation. Shadbolt's string of critical, empty phrases is intolerable."²

Certainly the review was exceptionally harsh, and its publication had a most unfortunate timing. Eager to keep up the momentum, O’Shea was endeavouring to “get the next film going in Australia. [It was] called *Gulf*, made about Barry Crump’s experiences in the Northern Territory. It even got so far as to have a German co-production deal.”³ Unfortunately, as O’Shea recalls, Shadbolt’s “review came out on the day I went to see the investors in Australia, and when I went into the room, *The Bulletin* was open.”⁴ Although O’Shea does not see the review as solely responsible, he notes wryly that “it didn’t help.”⁵



Plate 26: The Runaway Killer poster



Plate 27: *Runaway Killer* publicity still

***Runaway* in Great Britain**

After attempting unsuccessfully to market the film in Australia, Pacific Films set about marketing it in Britain. In its home country it had received a mixed response from reviewers but, by marketing it as an adventure story, Pacific Films had managed to attract sizeable audiences. It was therefore decided to further develop this strategy for the British market and to exaggerate the sex and action elements. The first step was to change the title from *Runaway* to *Runaway Killer*. On the new poster the close-up of Broadley kissing Regin was again featured prominently, but the image of Broadley helping McCarron up the face of the glacier was replaced by Manning holding Clarrie's rifle, and the slogan "The intimate drama of a young KILLER on the run and the women in his life". The word "KILLER" in the title was repeated four times. The poster was larger than its New Zealand equivalent to enable the designers to add an additional image, the bikini-clad Tanya Billing emerging from the water. She was described as "Australia's Tanya Billing", but the poster made no mention of New Zealand. Juxtaposed with this shot was the name of Nadja Regin, described not as "guest star" but as "that James Bond sex kitten".

The New Zealand publicity for the film had been misleading by exaggerating its adventurous aspects. The British publicity was even more cynical in its exaggeration. The story did *not* feature “a young killer on the run”, and the grasping of the rifle was only a momentary incident in the film. These decisions were made by the English distributor who even considered adding a contrived drawing showing a Manning-like figure aiming a weapon at some hapless, unseen victim. Unfortunately for Pacific Film’s finances, the revised titling and marketing of the film was to no avail. As O’Shea recalled, “The distributor [in London] changed the title [of the film] and also changed his bank accounts as we never heard any more from him and we never got a penny out of it.”⁶ O’Shea, although unhappy about the title change was also keen to make some money from the British market and reluctantly agreed to the change in name and poster. He recalled, “I thought [the change] was silly but I didn’t worry about things like that – if you’re in this industry you’ve got to have the stomach for vulgarity and stupidity ... you don’t make films otherwise ... you have to put up with it, that’s all, or get out of the industry.”⁷

The British release was very important to O’Shea as the only realistic opportunity he had to gain overseas success, both financially and critically. But *Runaway*’s contradictions made the marketing exercise even more challenging than it had been at home – a film about a killer, in which nobody was killed, an unfamiliar mix of art film and populism, and an allegory about a country on the other side of the globe which even New Zealand audiences had found obscure. The idea of “a New Zealand film” held so little appeal for British audiences that its origins were concealed.

Did any film critic see it clearly? The critical reception in New Zealand was largely replicated in Britain. Reactions were muted and mixed. The British Film Institute’s *Monthly Film Bulletin* published a review in June 1965, which commented that “the most interesting thing about the first locally produced feature film to come from New Zealand for many a year is New Zealand itself.” The film’s narrative was characterised as “strange [and] downbeat” and “misleadingly re-titled to attract an audience unlikely to enjoy it”. As in many New Zealand reviews, the camera work was praised for “the unsentimental and evocative way in which it uses its immensely varied settings: semi-tropical swampland dark mountains coming down to the sea, wooded lakes and arctic-looking snowscapes, succinctly caught by Anthony

Williams' camera". But the script-writing was seen as inadequate. "In a vague way (too vague to mean anything to anybody) the script tries to embody the whole ethos of mixed-up kids ... and despite a pleasant performance, Colin Broadley's personality is submerged beneath the load of familiar liberal clichés."

It is interesting that the reviewer felt that the film reflected an established set of "clichés" about mixed-up kids; vague yet familiar. Presumably this referred to the "angry young man" tradition in British cinema and the "juvenile delinquent" tradition in American cinema. It was still too soon for the hippie film to have become a cliché (though *A Hard Day's Night* had appeared in 1964). And the reviewer appears not to have seen Manning as a particular New Zealand variant (the angry young man alone).

O'Shea's direction was viewed with somewhat faint praise - "although occasionally thought provoking, [it] also has its share of clichés (especially in the love scenes)". The Lake Mapourika scene in which Diana falls overboard, comes in for the strongest criticism, being "astonishingly amateurish". The final sentence was, however, a little more positive: "On the evidence of this film, in fact, John O'Shea is rather at a loss with actors, but he directs with style (however conscious) and one would like to see him trying again."⁸ The MFB's criticisms of the film were shrewd, though it must have been frustrating for O'Shea to see overseas reviewers making no allowances for the inexperience of his actors, or the pressures of a limited budget generally.

On 25 August 1965 an intriguing article appeared in the British daily newspaper *The Guardian* under the heading "Breakaway from Meat and Rugby". The article was said to be written by F.A. Jones, "12 years a New Zealand film critic" to describe "a breakthrough in his country's movie industry."⁹ Jones began by pointing out that "until recently almost the only films New Zealand has exported to Britain have been the largely scenic documentaries of the National Film Unit. Now she has sent a feature called *Runaway Killer* which is going the rounds with a local product, *Primitive London*."¹⁰

The article appeared in the *Guardian* prior to the Commonwealth Film Festival in London, where the film was shown under its original title. Intriguingly, Jones devoted a considerable amount of space to *Runaway*'s symbolism, an aspect that had

barely rated a mention in the New Zealand media, suggesting that the film is “an allegory about a situation ... close to New Zealand hearts: their relationship with Great Britain.”¹¹ From details in the article it was obvious that the writer had been provided with inside information. For example he highlighted the link between *Runaway* and *Food for Thought*, pointing out that *Runaway* had been “shaped by ... a film O’Shea had made for the New Zealand Meat Producers’ Board about the Dominion’s opposition to Britain’s joining the Common Market.”¹² In fact, O’Shea and Jones were closely acquainted. O’Shea recalled that Jones “went to England and he had discussed [*Runaway*] with me and ... he knew my preceding film *Food for Thought*.”¹³ However the director was at pains to point out that Jones had not written a supportive review simply because the two men were friends - “he was nobody’s patsy.”¹⁴ Nevertheless Jones was obviously reflecting something he had heard from the director when he wrote that as the film developed “it became something more than they [the writers] had originally intended – straightforward fiction with an anti-hero in the lead”. The *Guardian* went on to explain: “*Runaway* became an allegory about their [the writer’s] country at a time when Commonwealth ties were wearing thin: about New Zealand’s dilemma between her prosperous past as a British dependent, and her uncertain future, with lower living standards, as an extension of Asia [The] young runaway, David, who takes to the road after an embezzlement and a family rejection, is conceived as New Zealand itself, and his journey is projected as a parallel to the national experience.”

This suggestion was followed by a detailed description of the plot and some comments on the failure of local audiences to perceive *Runaway*’s allegorical intentions.

Though it failed in some key scenes, this was certainly the most professional-looking feature film to be made in New Zealand. But when it was shown there a very odd thing happened. It was judged a failure by almost everyone who saw it – and even the most discerning critics failed to follow the allegory – in spite of the fact that it made more money in the provinces than *Lawrence of Arabia* or *West Side Story*.

The comment that “it was judged a failure by almost everyone who saw it” seems an overstatement. The novelty of a New Zealand feature film which included well known local personalities in the cast had generated considerable interest nation-wide and had become a topic of conversation among a broad cross section of the community. Had those who went to the earlier screenings informed others that the film was totally lacking in interest it would surely have suffered a much earlier demise at the box office and could not have generated more “money than *Lawrence of Arabia* or *West Side Story*”. (Granted, the comment is qualified by the phrase “in the provinces”.) The *Guardian* article went on to suggest that New Zealand “audiences were so self-conscious [about seeing a local film] that it was uncomfortable to be with them”. This fascinating comment was not explained. Presumably Jones had observed similar reactions to New Zealand accents and settings as those documented two decades earlier when audiences had seen the first NFU newsreels. Whether this needed to imply discomfort is debatable. If audience members were noisy, perhaps they were reacting to the film in a lively way – the so-called “shock” of recognition. The writer moved on to speculate about why thoughtful New Zealanders had not been more supportive of the film:

The reaction of discriminating cinema goers was particularly difficult to understand *Runaway* after all was made in a style thoroughly familiar to them after so many Continental importations. It might have been expected, at least, to invite their sympathetic criticism. But they thought it silly. They condemned the film’s anti-hero, found the script weak, complained that the local settings were obtrusive.

Presumably this description applied to reviewers such as Shadbolt. The article concluded with the hope that English audiences might respond to the deeper level of meaning, sharing “the view of a handful of New Zealanders who felt that their fellow countrymen [having] told the uncomfortable truth about themselves, not only refused to face it but reacted to it with revealing violence.”¹⁵

This article seemed to offer information (albeit second-hand and confused) of what O’Shea felt at the time about the reception of his film. It is understandable that a year after the release of this work to which he had devoted his heart and soul he was

distressed and perplexed by the negative criticism directed at him and his production. Even those who had praised the film had hedged their comments, speaking of it as a brave attempt. The negative comments of a writer such as Shadbolt must have stung badly. In this situation, it was tempting to see the viewers at fault – unwilling to face the truth, uncomfortable with such a strong dose of localness, and slow to recognise allegory. In releasing *Runaway* in Britain O’Shea may have harboured the dream of British reviewers being prepared to look more deeply. The liberal *Guardian* was obviously an ideal place to plant the seeds as its readership was generally well educated and interested in new artistic trends. Certainly the film needed all the help it could get to be taken seriously when its commercial packaging was so crude.

When *Runaway* was screened as part of a Commonwealth Film Festival in London in September 1965, a newspaper article by Gerald Pratley noted a revealing incident. The New Zealand feature *Runaway* (being shown by Odeon cinemas under the title “Runaway Killer”) was discounted by a New Zealand National Film Unit director as being “distorted” because it showed a bleak side of life among the Maoris (“they are really very happy and treated well. It’s a ‘thing’ with John O’Shea, the director”).¹⁶ Presumably an official representative of the NZFU had been at the Commonwealth Festival and had made his adverse comments known to the journalist. Given the mutual antipathy between O’Shea and the NFU, the comment was not surprising. It was also characteristic of an attitude shared by many Pakeha of the period, an assumption that New Zealand had the best race relations in the world and any film that carried New Zealand to the world should convey that proud, positive view. Gerald Pratley had, in a previous paragraph, noted that “Officially, all Commonwealth Governments wanted to wear a good face. There may be starvation and drought in Africa, but to judge from the films it’s a continent of happy, dancing people whose days end with glorious sunsets.”¹⁷ The NFU director’s comment that it was a “thing” with O’Shea obviously referred to *Broken Barrier* yet there, as in *Runaway* the depiction of Maori rural life was far from “bleak”. The problem was presumably their modest standard of living. (In 1964, Ans Westra’s delightful book *Washday at the Pa*, published for schools, was recalled and destroyed because the government and the Maori Women’s Welfare League felt that its working class realism was too negative.)¹⁸

Such disparaging comments could be seen as a compliment to O'Shea. It showed that he had established a reputation for attempting to depict New Zealand and its people in a realistic fashion, thereby rejecting the current NFU propaganda ethos. John Grierson, the original inspiration for the NFU, would certainly have sided with O'Shea in this debate. Through the challenging format of the dramatic feature, O'Shea was striving to develop his "thing" – the thoughtful presentation of a multi-faceted society, its failures as well as its successes. This had of course also been the ideal pursued by serious New Zealand literature and art (from R.A.K. Mason to Colin McCahon, Robin Hyde to Hone Tuwhare).

Runaway was also reviewed in the London paper the *Daily Telegraph* which picked up on the allegory from the pages of the *Guardian*, but remained unimpressed by this "banal parable in which hero, a respectable and suburban teenager, is supposed to represent the white man in the Antipodes trying to cut himself away from his European origins and find his own destiny."¹⁹ Once again, however, Tony Williams saved the day for the critic who concluded that "the action is slow and the dialogue leaden, but the photography is tremendous, as good as any in the festival and suggesting that the natural splendours of New Zealand have never been given their rightful credit."²⁰ (That final phrase would not have pleased the NFU!)

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- ¹ Maurice Shadbolt , “Sincerity, Cliché, Ruckus”, *The Bulletin*, 14 November 1964
- ² Peter Munz, letter, 11 January 1965
- ³ John O’Shea, interview, 5 February 1998
- ⁴ Ibid
- ⁵ Ibid
- ⁶ *Breaking Barriers*, Bryan Bruce Productions
- ⁷ John O’Shea, interview, 8 March 1993
- ⁸ *Monthly Film Bulletin*, British Film Institute, June 1965, p94-5
- ⁹ *The Guardian*, 25 August 1965
- ¹⁰ Ibid
- ¹¹ Ibid
- ¹² Ibid
- ¹³ John O’Shea, interview, 5 February 1998
- ¹⁴ Ibid
- ¹⁵ *The Guardian*, 25 August 1965
- ¹⁶ Gerald Pratley, London, 19 October 1965 (origin unknown)
- ¹⁷ Ibid
- ¹⁸ See William Main and John B. Turner’s *New Zealand Photography from the 1840’s to the Present* (Photoforum, 1993) p 58
- ¹⁹ *Daily Telegraph*, circa Oct 1965
- ²⁰ Ibid

Chapter 17: A FALLING OUT

After John O'Shea and John Graham had first made contact they had quickly established a positive working relationship. O'Shea was eager to make his second feature film after a break of over a decade. Graham, who had always been interested in the film medium, was very keen to make the most of the opportunity to write the script for a major feature. The effort by both of them to be honest with and supportive of each other in the months leading up to the completion of the script was evident from their correspondence which was sprinkled with phrases such as, "it's a winner!", "your savage shaping suggestions are exciting", and "thanks for surprising me so soon". However the first cracks in their relationship had begun to appear during the shooting of the Hokianga sequences. O'Shea was by now in sole charge of the project, and initially Graham had been happy with that arrangement. But his visit for a few days to the location had not gone well. Graham remembered a little shamefacedly that he and the friends who had come from Auckland with him indulged rather too freely in the local pub. O'Shea remembered Graham's behaviour as being "most disappointing. I expected much more of him than resulted."¹

This was Graham's only visit to watch the filming. During the remainder of the shooting O'Shea had kept in touch by occasional letter but Graham recalled that "there was no communication between us on those script changes. There could easily have been. John could have rung."² For example, O'Shea sought to incorporate an allegorical content into the film regarding New Zealand's precarious situation, but there was little or no discussion of it between the two men. O'Shea recalled that "it was spoken about"³ but only superficially, while Graham was adamant that this was never done. Although it is common enough for scripts to be altered, edited and re-written during the shooting of a film (due to variables such as costs, cast and crew changes and weather), O'Shea's cuts had, in places, quite radically altered the original concept. One can understand him being so busy with the problems of the shoot that he did not wish to get into detailed debates with his fellow script-writer, and the behaviour of Graham and his friends in Hokianga may have reinforced O'Shea's view that he was the only one who could be entrusted with taking the project to its final resolution. While he may have found it therapeutic as well as diplomatic to communicate his thoughts periodically by letter to Graham, the key decisions and the

ultimate control was his alone. Towards the end of the production the director was undoubtedly under great pressure. Although his qualities of calmness and responsiveness had endeared him to cast and crew, even his optimistic personality was having difficulty coping with the financial, scheduling and personnel pressures.

Knowing that he had made a number of changes to the script without consulting Graham, O'Shea undoubtedly anticipated some negative reaction from his co-writer. What he never imagined was the extent of Graham's outrage. After the Wellington première, *Runaway* had its Auckland release in the Civic Theatre and John Graham was invited to the first screening. As the story developed on screen, so too did Graham's anger, and by the time the final credits appeared, he was gone. As he recalled, "When it finally appeared that first night at the Civic Theatre, I was pretty appalled at what I was seeing ... and I walked out. I couldn't stand any more."⁴ His friends Ian and Gerd Free accompanied him to the Civic screening. They remembered his increasing anger and his muttered comment, "That wasn't my script". In Ian Free's words: "He was very pissed off."⁵ They caught the Devonport ferry back to the Graham house for "a gathering in Bond Street, but it was more of a wake than a party."⁶ What triggered Graham's anger as he later explained, was the "ham acting".

Colin was a good-looking lad but I don't think he could act very much, and Kiri Te Kanawa, who couldn't carry out what was required of her in the script ... It was just so amateurish, and I think it could have been very much better. Instead of John going for names, for box office effect, he could have found people who could have acted out the script with a great deal more authenticity.⁷

Graham's experience with live theatre had made him very sensitive to such issues. He also felt that the inadequate acting may have been responsible for cutting of key scenes. In the case of Kiri Te Kanawa, he believed that she "could not have played the part that she was required to play, and I think that maybe John may have rehearsed it and then struck it out completely."⁸ Graham was thinking in particular of the scene in the script where Isobel through the vigour of her dance reveals her true character, a scene not included in the final production.

When she dances with him with a sort of gay abandon, she reveals her voluptuous self, which again she was running away from because she'd had this kind of life in Auckland. [Now] she was back to her roots in a sense and trying to quieten down, or change a mode of living that possibly got or inferred that she had got into some trouble with it in Auckland, but then, with the music and the wine, I think, she revealed the self that she once was. But this didn't occur in the film.⁹

His anger was conveyed to O'Shea by a letter written a few days later on Labour Day. No longer addressed to "Dear John" the epistle began "To John O'Shea" and the first sentence set the tone. "The day fits the task, and the task is to try and convince you, that you, after all the subterfuge, have fooled no one but yourself."¹⁰ In the credits, the names of the two Johns had been listed as co-writers. At the commencement of the project Graham was no doubt looking forward to having his name linked with John O'Shea as co-author of a ground-breaking New Zealand feature film. He was now embarrassed to be linked with it. The letter continued:

A collaboration? You may think so. I am appalled at what you have done and the way that you have done it. How rapidly the co-author becomes the author! He'll do. However, unfortunately, there are a few people who know that there was a script, there was a screen play, and that if it had not been so stupidly and insensitively treated a film worthy of its name and author would have emerged, in spite of the poor casting and direction. And who added the bubbles of unlippped dialogue and the plaintive bleat from the snowy ridge?¹¹

The "plaintive bleat" referred to the scene at the end of the film in which David gazes back at his love and moans, "Diana" (Graham's criticism of this, the film's final utterance, is justified. When as a student I went to the 1964 screening in the Civic Theatre I vividly recall the audience laughing with collective embarrassment at this point.) Graham, although feeling that O'Shea had misrepresented his role in the authorship, was determined to be seen as having the moral high ground.

Do you think you should explain all this to people who might be interested? I won't tell. I did give my word to you that the press won't know. At least your

reputation is safe. The only satisfaction left for me now, and it will not be able to remove the hurt, is to have a contract completed by making the gesture you might have made a long time ago. I ask for immediate payment for my part in the film.¹²

With memories of the film's premières in Auckland and Wellington, at which VIPs dressed in their finery had drunk their congratulations to Pacific Films, Graham ended his letter: "After all if champagne is possible, so then is my share, irrespective of what you have done to the material. Yours in subduing anger, John Graham."¹³

O'Shea had anticipated some disappointment from his co-writer but he was certainly not prepared for a letter with terms like "subterfuge", "glaring imperfections" and "stupidly and insensitively". Many directors would have responded with angry self-justification, but his reply, penned a few days later on 1 November 1964 reflected a profound sense of sadness:

Dear John

I was dismayed and shocked by your letter and overcome with a greater sense of failure than I have had over the past year. There have been many times when my inadequacies have been all too evident to me. I went into the final agonising marathon of getting the film recorded and printed to a deadline in a fairly clear knowledge of its defects ... I also knew that on its completion many long knives would be waiting. Sure enough and predictably, we've been chewed up. It's easy to do. People can see an awful lot of ham – sometimes they can't see the bone at all. Especially people like us and our friends.

Obviously he regarded Graham's criticism as being in the spirit of *et tu Brute*.

None of the knives did more than take strips off. Yours, however, really got under my ribs. As well as I could – and certainly to the utmost of good intentions – I kept you informed of script changes and the reasons for them. Script deletions, as you know, often spring from the inadequacy of the playing – and/or directing. Script additions were mainly circumstantial, except for the

off-screen (unlipped) voice and dialogue for which I was indeed solely responsible. But when we came to recording, it seemed necessary to provide a narrator – character bridge over both the drive into Hokianga and the drive across Westland.

O’Shea added that the “heavy reduction of the motel sequence [was because it] just looked, played and was probably written too badly, on all levels, to stay in.” He also explained that additional scenes had been written to sharpen the role of Clarrie (the deerstalker) as “his character emerged so strongly that it was terribly flat after such a build up to have him disappear completely from the story line”. He then reiterated his disappointment at Graham’s attitude. “I hope that I have learnt from the arduous of making *Runaway*. And I find it very sad that you are overwhelmed by only the ‘bitter experience’. As for letting critics know of my responsibility, I think that has surely been done by the credits.” For a man who had gone through hell to make the film, O’Shea’s response seems admirably measured and self-critical. He was not, however, prepared to accept that the film was as bad as Graham implied. If audiences were restless, that was partly the result of cultural cringe: “The response of NZ audiences (mass audiences) is at times so self conscious, laughter at the pub exterior, for instance, that it can be misleading. I am myself disappointed that the peculiar self consciousness of NZ audiences tend to inhibit their (and most critics I’ve read) seeing the significances in the film beyond its surface level.”¹⁴ However, he was pleased that at least some people had seen the deeper meaning of the film and he sought to link this with Graham’s play. “You may be interested to know that our *Lest We Resemble* and *Runaway* motivating themes have been perceived by some. Among them some of the aware people in Wellington ... And on the radio, Catherine de la Roche, the only international critic in the country, had something to say about this.” O’Shea added that he had also been pleasantly surprised by a supportive and thoughtful letter from the Deputy Prime Minister Jack Marshall. “The mere fact that he [Marshall] bothered to add to the usual courtesy letter of thanks for the Premiere invitation ... says something for the film’s impact, especially as he saw the film with the worst possible audience (the première – half paid, half complimentary).”

He then reproduced the key paragraphs of Marshall’s letter.

You did succeed in creating an authentic New Zealand atmosphere which obviously appealed to a New Zealand audience. I hope this will give the film an added appeal for overseas audiences looking for a film with a difference.

I personally approved of the subdued and almost inarticulate dialogue – hardly a voice raised – and I also appreciated the subtlety with which the feelings and motives were suggested. I felt however that this imposed greater demands on the actors than they were able to meet and perhaps too great a demand on the perception of the audience. Generally I thought the acting was good – natural and easy and restricted without rising to any great heights. The character actors were perhaps the most interesting.

Marshall had added a few comments regarding budget limitations and ended with the wish that New Zealand could continue making feature films as a “genuine expression of our way of life in this country”. Marshall’s comments were exceptionally thoughtful. After his retirement from politics he would gain some success as a writer of children’s fiction.

O’Shea also hoped that Graham was “not too disappointed by the reception by a Civic audience instead of a Lido audience – for which the film was really intended.” (Clearly the film was better suited to an art house than a picture palace, but for *Runaway*, as for so many later New Zealand films, the need to maximise box office receipts forced an “art film” into the less sympathetic atmosphere of large commercial cinemas such as the Civic.) In spite of his disappointment at the reactions of some audiences and critics O’Shea expressed himself as being reasonably pleased. “The only review still to come within NZ is the *Listener*—but by and large they’ve been, especially when written by film critics, generous to our faults and not too discouraging.” His next two paragraphs are significant ones. Although written as a private letter, it had much that could be commended to artists and those who criticise them. It defined an appropriate attitude for all artists, but at the same time suggested an understandable concern that Graham could undercut the film by making his arguments public.

What I “did to the script” refers, I take it, to our inadequacies as film-makers. I have never professed to do anything other than exercise what craft I have to the best of my ability. Making a film is, in a way, like being a fall guy. You stand up—there you are—and critics and public can and have judged for themselves. That you and I and others who have worked closely on the film should be the most penetrating critics of our own work should surely not be surprising—in fact, it’s most desirable. But we are in show business and I feel it ill behoves the magician to let anybody know if his saw is blunt or his cabinet has a false bottom—the illusion should remain for the audience (and the critics) to dispel if they can. I can only hope that you keep in mind the very factors that have to be balanced and equated in making a film – time, weather, the ability of actors, the difficulty of locations, the capacity of technicians—all of them complicated by money.¹⁵

The last sentence is the most fundamental issue in the perennial arguments between directors and script-writers. O’Shea also had the unenviable task of having to remind Graham that there was “absolutely no hope of profits being made from NZ screenings of the film”¹⁶ (as he had warned him in a previous letter).

You know there has never been much of that [money] around – nor will there be for some time. The receipts from New Zealand alone will, I hope, be enough to pay off outstanding accounts and most of the backers finance. We do not expect a penny from the film until after its screening abroad. This is unlikely before the middle of next year. Meanwhile, all our future activities, whether documentaries or TV commercials or another feature, have to be financed individually from scratch.

With specific reference to a final payment, O’Shea’s perspective differed considerably from that of his co-writer. “Our arrangement was for a deferment of your fee for the screenplay (£200) until the backers had their money refunded, except for a small portion of it which was paid as evidence of our goodwill.” He added that financially he was at “rock bottom at present with many pressing accounts.” He concluded on a personal note. “Meanwhile, there is little more to say except that I have been deeply affected by your letter and most upset that I seem to have been

unable to maintain a relationship with you that could withstand your disappointment at the end result of our efforts.”

Signing himself “Yours sincerely, John” he then added a final conclusion in a post-script: “The ‘last bleat’ [of David Manning] is a ghastly mistake that is all too evident before a mass audience.”¹⁷ In pen he has then added “probably” after “is”- a sign that he was still agonising over whether the response of the “mass audience” should be the final arbiter.

Graham replied the following month. While remaining highly critical, he was prepared at least to offer a detailed analysis of the final version of *Runaway* and trying hard to explain his perspective. “If my letter dismayed and shocked you it was only because it was a small reflected portion of my own shock and dismay that *Runaway* failed in its concept. I will endeavour to say what I mean, and if what I say seems harsh remember that I am trying to be as truthful as I am able to be on paper.” Although he was pleased with the opening scenes which “established a milieu in which David seemed to belong” he was less than happy with the music which was not what he and O’Shea had discussed. And: “I did think you were to use this [theme] throughout with variations and adaptations. This surely would have tied together some of the loose ends.” He was also unhappy at “the cutting of the scene between Alex and Crawford [as it] removes one of the main explanatory pieces of dialogue that was to have established some of the reasons for David’s discontent.” Graham seems to have been particularly troubled by the lack of motivation which had earned the film a number of criticisms. To him, this was not the fault of the script but “the inability of the people cast for the job”. He remarked: “By the time David got to the Hokianga I knew it was all over as far as a taut, well integrated production was concerned”. Besides questioning O’Shea’s casting he saw carelessness in the production details. For example in the scene in which Broadley, clad in working man’s clothes, helped to unload timber, Graham commented “I winced at the black singlet with the creases still on it [and] the handling of the timber, (I at least could have given direction there)”.

His background in theatre had made him confident that he could criticise “direction” as well as writing. Some of his criticisms such as the singlet and the timber seemed

somewhat picky, but his comments on the ineffectual fight scene after the Hokianga dance were justified in dramatic as well as realistic terms: “The gentle aggression of Tana after the dance [was] so tame that I wonder if you’ve ever seen an angry man whose sensibilities have been hurt.” He was particularly unhappy about the handling of key relationships. Dismissing the role of Isobel as being “without any character at all, there only to answer the door” he considered that Laura Kosavitch’s taunting remarks about Manning’s relationship with his “brown brothers” were therefore rendered meaningless. He was also unhappy with the way relationships were portrayed in other sequences.

The cutting of the motel sequences invalidated the future relationships between David and Diana, even if the people cast for the job had been adequate to do what was asked of them. As it appeared any relationship was played with such abandoned boredom that I wondered if a new note had been struck for this synthetic age when emotion is played in tenths on a descending scale.

There were valid criticisms here, but also a familiar difference of opinion between the vision of a script-writer thinking in terms of live theatre and that of a director struggling with the limitations of budget and infrastructure, and taking the more low-keyed acting style of cinema (particularly that of his favourite art films) as his model. As far as Graham was concerned, the responsibilities for all the film’s shortcomings were entirely O’Shea’s. Building up a head of steam, he went on to sum up the film as a “diatonic dirge” and less than the sum of its parts because “in the main you allowed yourself to be seduced by the grand moment. To shatter an epoch one must be in stern control of the factors.” As an example of O’Shea’s lack of control he added, “Why did you allow Crump to be Crump instead of demanding that he play the part of the script required? And by so doing allow the climax (in concept, or on paper) to dissolve into disconnected statements?”

Clearly two different aesthetics were in conflict here – the writer wanting his original conception realised, and the director making the most of a small budget by permitting a certain amount of improvisation. Graham had made full use of his considerable writing talent to attack O’Shea’s end product. Not interested in the production

challenges of money, weather and personnel he concentrated his judgement on the film's shortcomings. His criticism was sharpened by the feeling that he had been badly let down on two counts. First, his script-writing had been compromised and misinterpreted, and second he had been forced to share the blame for a film for which he could no longer feel ownership. Again, the disagreement between the two men was a classic example of the potential conflict between any scriptwriter and any director. Graham returned to the question of remuneration, questioning O'Shea's contention that he had already been paid £50 as a deferment of the final fee. He added, "Remember that I was your first backer and that money in this poor man's pocket is as important to this poor man as to any other of your poor backers."

Was the writer's investment (in time and ideas) not as concrete as that of any supplier of props or film stock? His final paragraph provided a clear insight into his self perception and attitude to his creative work.

One final word. I am always disappointed in anything that I do, because I know that I could have done it better. I only know this after the event of course. Up until the event I am living in hope that my work has not been in vain. This is the first time that I think it has been for nothing. I accept some of the recriminations for this, both from within myself, and from the outside uncommitted voices who, worse than tearing strips off, have laughed outright. That's why I'm glad it's over for me. I know I was born with a skin missing. That is my suffering. Forgive me for not being able to be extolatory about the effort. I was too involved in its concept and will remain so, no doubt forever, to condone readily a clumsy and inadequate presentation of it. And if what I have said fails (as you intimate at the end of your letter) to maintain a relationship with you that can withstand disappointment at the end result, then the failure is mine for trying to tell you the truth as I see it.

His letter which concluded with "Yours sincerely, John"¹⁸ profiles a man who takes his writing very seriously and is as critical of himself as he is of his collaborator. With equal care, O'Shea replied to Graham's letter the following month. He began by acknowledging his co-writer's critical comments as being carefully considered not merely an impulsive "bitch at what you must have felt was a deplorably disappointing

construction from the film you had in your mind's eye, but a considered and profound revulsion at the vulgarity of visualisation ... or something.”¹⁹ While conceding that he shared Graham's opinion on many of *Runaway's* shortcomings, he rejected the idea that he was “seduced by the grand moment”, seeking once again to explain that the day-to-day work of film production was a struggle very different from the ideal vision of the writer of the hype of the publicist. “The marathon of film-making weighs hourly too heavily for one's mind to be taken by the illusion of grandeur which, if it exists, exists surely in the attitude of the publicists.”²⁰ For O'Shea it was too soon after the marathon to rationally reflect on the film and its aftermath. “At present, with bursts of spurious acclaim and equally spurious censure (I don't mean yours) around me, I find it difficult to have any perspective about the film. One recalls the enormous exhaustion of completing it in time – perhaps in a year or so, it will be possible to view the film objectively.”²¹ After a rather confusing attempt to sort out the financial arrangements between them O'Shea concluded, “I couldn't gather from your last sentence whether or not our personal relationship has been obliterated by the completion of this work. I suppose if I ring you next time in Auckland I'll find out for sure. For my part, I would hope we can still meet amicably.”²²

In tracking this debate, I have tried to treat both men with equal respect. Both were thoughtful, articulate men writing about a project of profound importance to them. Each had a consistent and justifiable point of view – but tragically the collaborators had ended up far apart. O'Shea had absorbed Graham's bitter criticisms and, in spite of the personal distress that they caused, had made an effort to evaluate them objectively. Graham, for his part, had made an effort to concentrate his comments on the film itself and not on what he saw as O'Shea's personal shortcomings. O'Shea made no attempt to shift the responsibility for any of *Runaway's* limitations on to Graham, and both men were remarkably open to the idea that their work was far from perfect. O'Shea was the only person who fully understood the enormous challenges required to bring the film to the screen, yet he never referred to these challenges in a self righteous tone. He too was aware that, in the final analysis, the images and sounds on the screen were the only basis on which a film could be judged. However, there is no doubt that both men felt deeply hurt; and having articulated their

irreconcilable points of view on the film, there was nothing left to talk about except the unhappy business of money.

A month later O'Shea wrote again to Graham, enclosing £50, and an explanation. "I must apologise for, on looking through our records, Eric found that not even the original £25 which I had intended to send you had been sent."²³ While accepting that a further £200 could be due on the basis of Graham's share of the profits, he was at pains to explain the financial pressures.

The balance of £200 I trust you will agree to leave swinging as we are going to continue to be hard pressed on all sides for the next year – or until overseas revenue starts to come in. All revenues from NZ and most from Australia are going to be heavily and quickly swallowed by the series of arrangements we have had to make with various cash backers. Nevertheless I am jealous of Pacific's reputation of paying artists and other creative talent whose services we employ—until this oversight, we have never been labelled as that particular type of bastard who develops professionally on amateur efforts.²⁴

In a final attempt to cool things down he added, "If anything I have said about professionalism must have rung hollow, I hope this serves to remedy things belatedly. Kind regards and best wishes to yourself and Phyl [Graham's wife] for Christmas and the New Year."²⁵

Graham's reply came 5 months later. It was brief and to the point. "I suppose it's time I broke the silence, and by breaking it make a request. Due to unfortunate personal circumstances I find myself in need of money. I would therefore be grateful if you could finalise the balance of payment on the script of *Runaway*. This means that I forego any share in the profits as offered by you."²⁶ O'Shea's reply was written 3 days later. "It would have been nice to have heard from you again if I could write an accommodating reply. But at this stage we are quite powerless either to vary the arrangement with you or to send you a cheque for the deferred payment." Referring Graham to his letter of the previous November he reiterated the point that any additional payments were dependent upon the film making a profit. This was "unlikely to be so for at least another year. I only wish we were in a position to get

our own fees out first – but we’re not, and that’s all there is to it.” O’Shea was not wholly pessimistic as he was in the process of arranging for the film’s release in the U.K. He explained, “It has been re-titled – the original title was held by someone else, so it had to be changed. It is now going out as ‘RUNAWAY KILLER’ – which further adds to the irony – he barely runs and doesn’t kill.” O’Shea’s explanation of the name change was not entirely accurate as shown by the melodramatic poster. O’Shea was presumably skimming lightly over the name change for fear of opening up old arguments. He added a touching account of the difficult situation he and his company faced.

Our financial problems in connection with the film are still horrible. As I’ve mentioned to you, we rely on overseas revenues to get back the production cost – a large percentage of it. Waiting is very nerve-wracking and painful, apart from the problems of endeavouring to stay in production.

This is an aspect of film production – finance – which I find awful and would rather leave to those who enjoy it. The trouble is – nobody does.

O’Shea then referred to his plans for making a second feature (ultimately released in 1966 under the ironic title *Don’t Let It Get You*). He hastened to assure Graham that this did not contradict his previous comments about “financial problems”. “We do plan on making a musical with Howard Morrison later this year, for which, thank goodness, I will not carry the financial burden. We couldn’t anyway.” O’Shea mentioned in passing that he had been in Auckland “for only two days since last year and didn’t have a chance to ring you”. He then concluded on a conciliatory note. “How are things going with you – apart from everyone’s perennial money troubles? Have you kept on writing – or did the horror of *Runaway* inhibit you? I still deeply regret your animosity towards the final production and have done my best to face and evaluate your criticisms.” The letter is signed “Kind regards, Yours sincerely, [and then by hand over a typewritten ‘John O’Shea’] John.”²⁷ O’Shea was still clearly hoping that Graham’s anger would pass – and no doubt also still feared that the money issue would blow up into a public dispute. Graham held back from that option, but continued to feel betrayed. He knew nothing could change the completed version of the film, and he saw money as the only recompense (albeit very

inadequate). Unfortunately, the overseas release was confined to Britain. Public reaction was at best mediocre, and as already stated the financial returns were virtually nil. As far as O'Shea was concerned, the film had not broken even therefore no money was owing to Graham.

Some months later Pacific Film's records noted:

Late in 1966, after the release of the film *Don't Let It Get You* which was produced by Pacific Films but in which the Company had no financial interest, other than a production commission on profits, John Graham rang and asked whether he could be paid what was owing to him. O'Shea repeated the situation as contained in the letters.

Early in 1967, John Graham rang again. Lack of revenue had placed Pacific Films in a position where it could not even make a gratuitous payment in respect of Mr. Graham's deferment.²⁸

Graham's anger was unabated. The fact that Pacific Films had gone on to produce another feature film helped to keep alive his feelings about *Runaway*. The details of the financing of the new film were no concern of his. (The complex way in which each new feature film tends to be a unique financial entity has often led to arguments of this kind.) In an effort to create additional pressure Graham instructed the Takapuna law firm of P.D.L. Von Sturmer & Ramsay to write to O'Shea on 13 March 1967²⁹ threatening proceedings if the £200 was not paid. O'Shea's prompt reply explained at length that Pacific Films, "do not consider we 'owe' your client the sum claimed, and that at all stages of our dealings with him we have been completely open about the matter. Nor have we departed one iota from the original basis on which we opened collaboration with him."³⁰ O'Shea continued with a promise:

Should revenue from sales of the film ever reach the point where the £200 can be paid to Mr Graham, I trust you can assure him, and that he will accept our assurance, that it will be paid The fact is that there have been to date no profits from the sale of the film. The production cost has not yet been recovered ... It seems to me that by accepting the position outlined in the letter

of 15 October 1963, namely that £50 be accepted for the film rights, no legal claim exists, other than a further payment of £100 in the events of profits It is possible that, due to the harmony with which we worked with Mr. Graham during the making of the film, I personally told him that I thought our “deferred” payment (in the event of profits) should be increased to £200 each, but at no time would I have ever even verbally or mentally increased the sum to a pre-profit total of £250.³¹

O’Shea concluded by expressing the hope that “this formal explanation will be sufficiently comprehensive for you and for Mr. Graham and I am taking the liberty of writing to him separately and enclosing a copy of the extracts from relevant correspondence.”³² The letter was signed “Yours faithfully/PACIFIC FILM PRODUCTIONS LIMITED /John O’Shea/ Producer.”³³

The day after O’Shea wrote a personal letter to Graham. Commenting that he found the lawyer’s letter “pretty nasty”, he again reiterated his understanding of the financial arrangements, and explained that the situation for feature film-making in the country was difficult in the extreme – so different from the popular conception of big money and glamour.

Securing co-operation in a venturesome project can, as it apparently has with you, leave people with the feeling that somehow or other they’ve been cheated – even though the other party has and had no intention of this, and has tried to be quite clear about the matter from the start.

We are surviving, but only just—goodness knows what the economic plight of the country will do to us. We have a diet of documentaries and TV commercials still in work, however. Feature films have not made us any money and I still haven’t got out of *Runaway* by any means—and hope in the future does get dimmer, especially as the cinema business is in decline.³⁴

Two years after *Runaway*, O’Shea was still paying off bills. And the introduction of television into New Zealand in 1960 had seen the number of licensed TV sets increase by 1966 from 81,839 to 434,877,³⁵ a major factor in the decline of cinema audiences.

As always O'Shea concluded on a personal note in an attempt to salvage the vestiges of an old friendship: "What are you doing – and how are you keeping? ... How's Phil? Cormie has gone back teaching this year – the kids are all old enough (if they ever are) and we need the extra money ... Like to hear from you – but not through your lawyer."³⁶

A week later, O'Shea's reply to the lawyer was forwarded by him to John Graham with an accompanying letter. "Dear John 'Your lawyer' encloses herewith a copy of the letter he received from Pacific Films. Like you we cannot see the difference between you and the backer of the film but it looks as though we will have to let the matter ride."³⁷ John Graham conceded that it would be futile to pursue the legal option any further, but he was not prepared to let O'Shea off the hook. Nineteen months later he sent O'Shea a short hand-written note:

Dear John O'Shea

Just a line to let you know that I still exist, and I wonder how close you may be to solvency. I trust you have satisfied all your "backers" by now. How many years ago was it?

I would be prepared to write off my investment if I was in a position to do so. I'd be glad to hear from you.

Yours sincerely

John Graham.

Graham was probably not too optimistic. Sure enough, O'Shea's reply, two months later, made it clear that there had been no change in his financial circumstances or his interpretation of the agreement:

Sorry as it may be, we really now have to face the fact that despite the best endeavours, the enterprise that led to *Runaway* (or foolhardiness, as some prefer to call it) remains and is likely to remain unrewarded. Financially, the film has not recovered anywhere near its production cost. Sales abroad could

not be finalised, nor could we afford the extra cost of sending someone off to sell hard in person. There is nothing surer in any export selling that you MUST have a person to peddle the merchandise ... and particularly if it isn't sure fire. The overseas sales agent (Russell Rankin) had, before he died, the discomfiture of seeing many of his hopes for sales and the promises he had had made to him come to next to nothing.

The troubled history of the project continued to unfold in this correspondence. The lack of an adequate support system for marketing the film was one more example of gaps in the necessary infrastructure. O'Shea added, "Pacific Films is still liable for all outstanding accounts against the film and from our day to day work have had to pay off all creditors, a process that still continues." There is, as in previous correspondence, no acceptance from O'Shea of Graham's belief that he is himself a creditor. The tradition in New Zealand film-making of creative people deferring their payments and of companies having to cross-subsidise feature films from bread-and-butter work had begun in the silent era and still exists in some cases today, although the Film Commission has made a significant difference since 1978. In the case of Pacific Films, its cash flow was provided – as O'Shea explained - by "commercial documentaries and TV commercials". As always he finished his letter to Graham with personal family greetings and the invitation to "look us up if you're passing through Wgtn – we're still in Ngaio."³⁸ It is interesting that here, as on earlier occasions, O'Shea did not suggest that Graham might work on any of these commercial projects, a move that might have offered some kind of recompense. Neither man ever raised the possibility, and presumably there was no longer enough trust on either side to make it feasible.

Graham's reply was more philosophical than before. "At least I have been spared the agony of uncertainty of waiting even if I have experienced a degree of sharing your own regrets." Resigned to receiving no further payment from Pacific Films he added: "I daresay my need is not so great after all, and in my case, one does build up a certain resourcefulness which can find other directions of answering urgent demands." While warning O'Shea that he would keep on writing he noted that "the horror you speak of with *Runaway* faded very rapidly. Life has a habit of catching up on me and placing everything into an acceptable perspective." He could "even accept

private jokes about my part in its [the film's] making and laugh also". He felt he had learned a great deal from the experience and had recovered: "[It has] done me no harm, and ... a small measure of resolve to do something new as soon as I am able, remains. A kind of vindication I suppose." After describing some of his current activities, including his work at a Devonport shipyard and his yachting experiences he concluded:

I would be glad, when you're in Auckland again, to get a ring from you. About my animosity to *Runaway*. It was in the main an impulsive burst of anger, the pain of anti-climax, the agony of a concept thrown to the wilderness, a deep sense of personal failure. The rest of the reasons for writing to you as I did have dissolved into that perspective I spoke of earlier. Above all there is no animosity toward you. I do value your friendship.³⁹

O'Shea's attempt to keep their relationship from breaking down completely had finally paid off. But in the end neither saw any point in making the effort to maintain the relationship and for the next 26 years the two men had no further contact.

A Resolution

In 1994 I completed a documentary for the Ministry of Education entitled *Runaway Revisited*. This 20 minute production, designed for use in media studies courses, included interviews with John O'Shea (recorded in Wellington) and John Graham (recorded at his home on Great Barrier Island).⁴⁰ During their separate interviews neither man offered any strong criticism of the other, but, through a reading of the correspondence, and my conversations with others involved in the production, the story of their bitter quarrel had emerged. Several months after the documentary had been completed O'Shea phoned to inform me that he would be in Auckland for a couple of days and would like to view my documentary. Seeing this as an opportunity to bring some of the key personnel together, as well as being a chance to thank them for their assistance with the documentary, my wife Bess and I hastily made arrangements for a dinner party which would conclude with the screening of *Runaway Revisited*. With a few misgivings I then phoned Graham and asked him if he would be in Auckland on the night of the screening. He accepted the invitation, and I then

added, after a moment's hesitation, "John O'Shea will be there". Graham accepted the invitation without further comment.

I collected O'Shea from his motel and had just settled him in the lounge with the other early arrivals when John Graham arrived. Both now in their 70s, the two former protagonists faced each other. There was a long moment of hesitation and then to my relief they simultaneously took a step forward and shook each other's hands with a genuine warmth. During dinner and for the remainder of the evening, they reminisced enthusiastically and parted with further handshakes. I was delighted, as I had learned to admire both men greatly. I also hoped that in bringing them together after a rift that had lasted nearly three decades, I had repaid in some small measure their generosity in co-operating with my research. In subsequent conversations both men came to the conclusion that over the passage of time, the issues that had divided them had greatly diminished. O'Shea saw it as a case of "all passion spent". And Graham said similarly: "It's done. It's finished with now, it was a hell of a long time ago and I was a hell of a lot younger then, and probably a little more volatile than I am now."⁴¹



Plate 28: Some of the guests at the 'resolution' dinner party – (L to R) John Graham, William Johnstone, author, John O'Shea, Clyde Scott

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- ¹ John O'Shea, interview, 21 May 1997
- ² John Graham, interview, 24 July 1997
- ³ John O'Shea, interview, 21 May 1997
- ⁴ Ibid
- ⁵ Ian and Gerd Free, interview, 16 September 1998
- ⁶ Ibid
- ⁷ John Graham, interview, 24 July 1997
- ⁸ Ibid
- ⁹ Ibid
- ¹⁰ John Graham, letter, circa 15 October 1964
- ¹¹ Ibid
- ¹² Ibid
- ¹³ Ibid
- ¹⁴ The similarity between these remarks and *The Guardian* review essay reinforces my belief that O'Shea was the "deep source" for that account.
- ¹⁵ John O'Shea, letter, 1 November 1964
- ¹⁶ John O'Shea, letter, 15 October 1963
- ¹⁷ John O'Shea, letter, 1 November 1964
- ¹⁸ John Graham, letter, circa 10 November 1964
- ¹⁹ John O'Shea, letter, 19 November 1964
- ²⁰ Ibid
- ²¹ Ibid
- ²² Ibid
- ²³ John O'Shea, letter, 22 December 1964
- ²⁴ Ibid
- ²⁵ Ibid
- ²⁶ John Graham, letter, 18 May 1965
- ²⁷ John O'Shea, letter, 21 May 1965
- ²⁸ Pacific Films, records (Undated)
- ²⁹ Appendix 20
- ³⁰ Pacific Films, letter, 15 March 1967
- ³¹ Ibid
- ³² Ibid
- ³³ Ibid
- ³⁴ John O'Shea, letter, 16 March 1967
- ³⁵ Source: Rober Boyd-Bell, *New Zealand Television The First 25 Years*, Auckland, Reed Methuen
- ³⁶ John O'Shea, letter, 16 March 1967
- ³⁷ P.D.L Von Sturmer, letter, 22 March 1967
- ³⁸ John Graham, letter, 2 October 1968
- ³⁹ John Graham, letter, circa December, 1968
- ⁴⁰ In 1970 Graham and his wife had left Devonport and purchased a plot of land in Tryphena, Great Barrier Island, where they settled.
- ⁴¹ John Graham, interview, 24 July 1997

Chapter 18: *RUNAWAY* AND ITS RELEVANCE: A SUMMING-UP

Assessing *Runaway* 30 years later Brian McDonnell described the film as follows:

[A story that is] picaresque, full of existential longing to be “free” and authentic, to be yourself. Despite its theme of the Pakeha New Zealander’s failure to define an independent identity, the film partakes in some Eurocentric rhetoric itself ... I must say that *Runaway* is still enormously relevant: its ambitiousness and seriousness at a time when mainstream drama was not being made is a marvel, and the societal questions it asks are years ahead of its time.¹

McDonnell seems to be saying three things: firstly, that *Runaway* is influenced by European culture, particularly 40s and 50s Existentialism; secondly that it was a film ahead of its time; and thirdly that it still has relevance today. Although a rather confusing mix of time zones, the film does have all of these elements. *Runaway*, although produced in 1964, was not a “sixties” film, in the usual sense of the term today. In their book on New Zealand films, *Shadows on the Wall*, Cairns and Martin offer a typical summary of the 1960s as “a time of world-wide social revolution, most particularly in Western countries.”² This was a reaction to post-war consumerism when, as John Hill put it, “youth in particular came to serve as a metaphor for the ‘underside’ of the ‘affluent society’: its slavish devotion to consumerism, allegiance to the superficialities and the absence of ‘authentic’ values.”³ Cairns and Martin went on to explain the “counterculture”. “In this time of social ferment some young people, mostly from the middle-class, in a movement which became known as the ‘counterculture’ were seeking alternative values and lifestyles, rejecting the values of the Puritan work ethic and of society’s authority figures, whom they described as ‘the Establishment’. Parents, for example, were seen to be conformist, narrow-minded, materialistic and unadventurous.”⁴ This period of ferment occurred in most Western countries in the second half of the 60s, and for New Zealand at the beginning of the 70s. *Runaway* thus sits on the edge of this new phase. Its links are more obviously with the earlier styles of counterculture – the New Zealand “man alone”, the French existentialists, the British angry young men with perhaps a few echoes of the American Beats.

Although David Manning had rejected the Puritan work ethic and had left home, the film's setting was too early by several years to be part of the "drop out/tune in/turn on" mass movements which characterised the later 1960s. Bob Dylan had yet to release *The Times They Are A'Changin'*; Barry Maguire's *Eve of Destruction* did not appear until a year after *Runaway*'s release; The Beatles, although making an impact, were still clean cut Liverpool lads in mop top hairstyles and identical suits singing love songs with a style and beat that had its origins in 1950s pop music - controversial, but hardly symbols of cultural revolution. It was ten months after the release of *Runaway* that the Rolling Stones' *Satisfaction* turned up. Its provocative guitar riff introduced lyrics that encapsulated a sense of disillusion with a world founded on consumer goods – a song with which David Manning would have readily identified. A further four years away was the ground-breaking *Sergeant Pepper* album, and five years away was the road movie *Easy Rider* with its Byrds theme song *I Wasn't Born to Follow*, contemporaneous with the flowering of the San Francisco-based "Hippie movement", the upsurge in Black Power and mass protest against the Vietnam War.

This later period developed a distinctive, young-adult counterculture characterised by cult heroes, clothing, hairstyles, slang, music, and other forms of expression with which young people could identify. Because this upsurge was sufficiently widespread, those who sought to rebel against the post-war values of their parents' generation found reinforcement on a grand scale for their ideas and beliefs. For David Manning, whose dress, hairstyle and vocabulary were still mainstream, there existed no such support, no frame of reference in which he could develop and test his half-formed values and beliefs, and no support from like-minded contemporaries. He was still very much a "man alone".

So, ultimately, was it because *Runaway* was ahead of its time that the film was less than successful? Certainly the efforts of the many people involved could be seen as successful in achieving the almost impossible task of producing a stylish 35mm film in a country without a feature-film industry. Furthermore it was successful in launching the careers of several young film-makers, and in setting an example for others in the New Zealand film industry. At the same time it was unsuccessful in terms of box office takings and reviews. Why? The first factor was the inexperience

of the script-writers. Although Graham had written a stage play and O'Shea had co-scripted and produced *Broken Barrier* as well as other films which contained dramatic elements, their collective experience was limited. *Runaway* set out to be a full scale feature film with synchronised sound, commissioned music, and stylish camerawork that would not merely document an area of New Zealand life but raise important issues – all in all a daunting undertaking in 1964. It had to compete in the cinema with well-funded films from established film industries. Unfortunately, there was no scriptwriter in New Zealand with feature-film experience, particularly a writer who could successfully combine cultural or artistic ambitions with commercial craft skills. Today's script assessment process is often criticised for its commercial emphasis, but at least it ensures that potential problems of audience involvement are discussed and a range of options considered. The *Runaway* script was imaginative and ambitious but was not clearly worked through in terms of the likely reactions of local viewers.

Since film-making is highly dependent upon technical expertise, the lack of specialised personnel was another factor. The crew members were young and enthusiastic, but lacked the experience of regular feature film production. For them and their director, the production of *Runaway* was a major learning experience. So much energy and thought had to go into the basic business of filming that there was understandably not much opportunity for O'Shea and his crew to reshoot scenes or “add value” to the script along the way – although some improvisation was in fact necessary simply to operate on such a tight budget. Instead of being able to concentrate totally on creative issues, O'Shea had to shepherd the crew through the exercise, and at times had to accept results that were not exactly what he had hoped.

Similar problems applied to the actors. Nadja Regin was the only actor with any feature film experience. The other actors, like the crew, were learning on the job. Invariably this consumed time, money and resources. There may also have been some mistakes in casting. Certainly there were some excellent performances in *Runaway* but some of the actors came across as being ill at ease. Whether this was the result of a limited pool of actors, inexperience, lack of motivation, or a momentary lack of concentration by the director must remain an open question. Painfully apparent at times was the amateurism of the acting.

At the conclusion of World War II, like thousands of their compatriots, John O'Shea and John Graham married and commenced raising a family. However, neither man was content to meekly accept the complacent assumptions of a puritanical society which saw itself as "God's own country" and an example to the world. Veterans of World War II, O'Shea and Graham would have identified with the closing conversation of Dan Davin's novel *For the Rest of Our Lives*. A New Zealand officer, on leave in Cairo from the Western Desert battles, discusses the future with a female acquaintance. "They got up and danced. She danced perfectly. But tonight not with her mind. She was thinking of something else. 'How long will the war last?' she asked suddenly. 'For the rest of our lives' he said."⁵

In spite of its shortcomings, *Runaway* was an intriguing representation of an unsettled society. It was produced at an important point in the country's social and political development when those born to the survivors of the Depression and World War II were coming of age and challenging the values of post-war society. Manning represented this new restlessness. Writing in 1960 Allen Curnow, a member of an earlier generation, commented that as New Zealand "called home the thousands dispersed by war to the ends of the earth, it seemed a question whether the fragments would ever fit together again to form the nation that had begun to be."⁶ What was lacking was not order – New Zealand was in some respects too orderly and conformist – but a deeper sense of common purpose or "vision" (as Curnow called it). The gradually increasing prosperity could not answer deeper questions about purpose or quality of life. These challenges were not, however, confined to the post-war children. Mature men such as O'Shea and Graham (both in their forties) were also motivated to challenge complacency, choosing to script a film in which the chief characters were drawn from the younger generation.

Graham had already highlighted a number of these social shifts in his stage play *Lest We Resemble*. O'Shea had challenged the accepted view of a racially harmonious society in his film *Broken Barrier*. *Runaway* questioned the values of a Pakeha-dominated society that stressed hard work, prosperity and conformity as the road to emotional peace and contentment. The challenge was embodied in the story of a young man who felt that life must offer something more but had no help from his environment to find such an alternative. Neither the puritan work ethic of his parents'

generation nor the hedonism of his peer group satisfied him, and he set out in search of alternative values and ways of life, beginning with Maori culture. This was a journey with both personal and national implications, like the quest *Easy Rider* would undertake five years later, “chucking it all and searching for ‘the real America’.”⁷ For *Runaway*’s co-writers, in spite of their disagreements, the film represented the need for lifelong challenging of society’s norms and assumptions. It is important to note that, despite their questioning, neither man wanted to leave New Zealand. O’Shea had travelled widely as a serviceman, and had been offered a scholarship at an American university. Graham had lived and worked in post-war Britain. Both, like Frank Sargeson and others, consciously chose to remain in New Zealand as the country of their birth and the one with which they felt most involved. Their nationalism was complex – they took pride in New Zealand but saw that it was a far from perfect society. Although *Runaway* drew on the concerns of the European art film it applied them locally, adapting the existential search for meaning and for intensity of experience to what was often called the “social laboratory” of New Zealand.⁸

O’Shea and Graham had agreed on a storyline built around a young man’s search. The film’s uniqueness derived from its New Zealand setting and characters which included a rural Maori community and a showdown in the wilds of Westland. Although O’Shea was at pains to point out that the film was not a travelogue, the fact that it spanned so much of the country added scale to the story and played on national pride and interest in our landscape. It also held novelty for overseas viewers. Unfortunately Manning’s personal story proved to be an inadequate vehicle for the intellectual and symbolic weight placed upon it – the physical “journey” seemed too accidental to represent a profound individual or national quest.

As O’Shea himself admitted 30 years later, “It concealed its rather serious purpose beneath a superficial, romantic drama, almost a thriller but not quite. In fact it probably had the mistake of not being quite anything clearly enough. It wasn’t clearly an allegory about New Zealand. It wasn’t clearly a thriller. It wasn’t clearly a romantic drama and it wasn’t clearly a sex and violence exercise.”⁹ It was a valid strategy to use a popular genre as a vehicle for serious questions – in the later 60s and early 70s, the “road movie” was often a vehicle for existential odysseys – but it

involved a tricky balancing act, and O'Shea is probably right to conclude that *Runaway* failed to reconcile serious allegory with popular generic elements.

Sullivan and Manning: Contrasting Characters

O'Shea, who had always felt a strong empathy with the Maori people, incorporated strong elements of Maori culture and community in both *Broken Barrier* and *Runaway*. His reasons were both political and filmic. In filmic terms Maoridom was a unique feature of New Zealand society, and the relationships of Maori and Pakeha offered considerable dramatic possibilities. In this context it is instructive to contrast the two different stories, their main characters, and O'Shea's treatment of them. In *Broken Barrier* he chose to use a neo-realist or "dramatised documentary" style. Audiences were able to relate to this down-to-earth style and the film received a positive response. *Runaway*, on the other hand, with its confusing mix of genres, was less successful in connecting with audiences, particularly as its critique of New Zealand society was more complex than that of *Broken Barrier*. Tom Sullivan and David Manning were both young Pakeha men who encountered rural Maori communities and had a romantic relationship with a young Maori woman. Yet their experiences were totally different. Sullivan's relationship survived a crucial test, and by the film's conclusion, he and his lover Rawi were destined for a happy marriage. In contrast, Manning's relationship with Isobel was brief and unfulfilling. Rawi's mother acknowledged and accepted her daughter's love for the young Pakeha whereas Isobel's mother was immediately suspicious of Manning and when she saw him talking to her daughter at the hangi, attempted to divert the girl's attention. Sullivan was welcomed into the Maori family whereas Manning was not. Sullivan acknowledged the distinctiveness of the Maori way of life and eventually became involved in it. Manning perceived it as possibly the alternative he was seeking, but showed few signs of being prepared to make the necessary effort.

In *Broken Barrier* O'Shea used the story of Rawi and Tom to represent key aspects of Maori-Pakeha relationships in post-war New Zealand. *Runaway*, on the other hand was less centrally concerned with race relations. David Manning's interaction with Isobel and her family members was only one of a number of encounters in the course of his unsuccessful journey of self discovery. The scenes with the Hokianga Maori community seemed to be designed more as a way of contrasting Pakeha with Maori

values generally than as the exploration of personal relationships. O'Shea's retrospective comments on Sullivan and Manning 35 years later are interesting: "The young man in *Broken Barrier* seems to me now to be more of a simple-minded idealist, not so much searching for identity as chancing across a romantic entanglement that leads him to a greater understanding of the Maori people around him once he got out into the countryside... [However] for the young man in *Runaway*, a dozen years later, there was more definition about identity. He did display that nascent spark of enquiry starting to mark Pakeha New Zealanders, the conscious search for identity that had run through the literature of the previous two decades, notably the poets – Curnow, Mason, Glover, Fairburn – and the novelists Frank Sargeson and John Mulgan."¹⁰ The film was in that sense more ambitious (so far as Pakeha culture was concerned) but more difficult to script. Even the question being raised was not entirely clear (only a "nascent spark") so that the film was closer to European art films that sought to evoke a particular mood of alienation, decadence, world-weariness, or philosophical malaise.

In a perceptive analysis of the development of the New Zealand novel, Lawrence Jones identified four key periods. The final phase involved "the productive developments and reactions to these traditions in the 'Post Provincial' period (from 1965)."¹¹ While he pointed out that "the dates are approximate,"¹² it is noteworthy that the production of *Runaway* occurred at the commencement of the final period – a pivotal and identifiable point of change where "the profound social changes towards a more affluent and suburban society in the 1950s did not begin appearing in novels until the mid-1960s."¹³ Jones saw the commencement of this period as being "the recognition that the puritan monoculture no longer prevails [and that the] tremendous social and cultural changes the society has been undergoing in this period [are] what Maurice Shadbolt has called, 'that Pacific sea-change which began to overtake the country in the 1960s'."¹⁴ Jones's contention was that the writers, having directly experienced the changes, later began reflecting on them through their fictional writing. Graham and O'Shea chose in their case to express themselves through a film.

Runaway's Shakespearean motif, although finally discarded, added to the confusion. The lines of the play, designed to comment on the main story, were complex and difficult to relate to the main action. This strand was an attempt to provide a greater

depth to the characterisation and storyline as well as adding more intellectual substance to the film. Most of it had to be dropped, but some of its elements were reallocated since both writers were determined that their film would have aspects that provided the discerning filmgoer with a cerebral challenge. Unfortunately, these intellectual themes were presented in such an incomplete form that the great majority of viewers were simply confused. As a commercial film, *Runaway* needed a stronger and clearer narrative line and more effort to ensure that the average viewer understood the motivations of the central character and found him sufficiently sympathetic to care what happened to him. Alternatively the film might have been developed into an uncompromising “art film” but this was unlikely in the New Zealand situation with a desperate need for box office returns. The film seems to have ended up trying to be both artistic and commercial and ultimately “fell between two stools”.

Two key influences were at work on *Runaway*. The film’s critique of a materialistic, parochial and culturally inadequate country, reflected New Zealand’s literary and intellectual tradition. The second influence was the tradition of the post-war European art film. Although developed at opposite sides of the globe in different media, these twin influences had much in common as both grew out of a shared sense of alienation and it was O’Shea’s achievement to link them in *Runaway*. Underlying this attempt was his and Graham’s desire to contribute to the development of a more thoughtful and serious local culture, comparable to the European intellectual tradition and its use of film as a major form of expression. Up until this time serious artistic expression within New Zealand had been largely confined to literature, painting and music. For O’Shea the European art film was a more effective template than Hollywood for translating this area of New Zealand experience to the cinema screen. The films of Antonioni and Fellini depicted Europe as a society which, although rich in cultural heritage and tradition, seemed in the post-war period only capable of offering a life that was materialistic, shallow and absurd. *Runaway* attempted to portray a similarly superficial existence but in the very different context of raw Pakeha society shaped by British traditions of stoicism and emotional repression. Alienation in the postcolonial situation of New Zealand was, in some respects, the result of not enough (local) culture, whereas European intellectuals felt crushed by too much.

The 1983 film *Pictures* was directed by Michael Black and was produced by John O'Shea who co-wrote the screenplay with Robert Lord. Nicholas Reid in *A Decade of New Zealand Film* perceptively described *Pictures* as “a film to be admired as much for its aspirations as for its achievements, more as an intellectual construct than an artistic experience.”¹⁵ The same description could have applied to *Runaway* which pre-dated *Pictures* by 20 years. It aspired to be a representation of contemporary New Zealand culture and society and to demonstrate that the New Zealand artistic community could produce its own serious feature films. Its European influence helped to give it a philosophical dimension, while the film's visual qualities provided viewers with a pleasing “artistic experience”. But in the final analysis its aspirations were stronger than its achievements. Siegfried Kracauer believed that “because films are made for a mass audience, they most often attempt to ‘satisfy mass desires’.”¹⁶ Certainly one of *Runaway*'s aims was to make a popular film and engage with the desires and concerns of the New Zealand public, but the public did not take it to their heart as they had accepted *Broker Barrier*.

Runaway: A New Zealand Film?

With its imitation of imported film styles, does *Runaway* contain elements that would allow us to characterise it as a New Zealand film rather than merely a New Zealand-made film? “New Zealand film” is of course a contested concept. The best way to proceed seems to be to move in sequence through the film analysing the mix of elements, some of which were obviously recent imports and some already well established in the local tradition. (Whether these elements were ultimately unique to New Zealand is a question we cannot pursue to the end. The aim here is to analyse the film in its immediate historical context.) The opening title sequence, with the brooding figure of David Manning on the rocks has elements of the post-war art film. Manning's character will contain elements of the angry young man (a common theme in the writings of authors on both sides of the Atlantic such as John Osborne and Jack Kerouac) and the “juvenile delinquent” as portrayed by actors such as Marlon Brando (*Wild One*) and James Dean (*Rebel Without A Cause*). To this, however, is added the key local motif of the “man alone”.

The opening art film sequence shows Diana walking through what could be a stage set, with a male voice intoning one of Desdemona's speeches from Shakespeare's

Othello – a text known throughout the western world. This is followed by a sequence which features the credits and the lone figure of David Manning with the words “Runaway” superimposed across his body. The message is clear – the young man is, or is going to become a runaway. Laurence Simmonds perceives the scene as having additional elements: “The superscription of the title and credits above David’s supine body, together with the previous image of Rangitoto – itself a reclining body rising out of the Waitemata – inaugurates potent and recurrent associations between landscape and the male body in this film, the potentiality of the male psyche to lose itself in the landscape.”¹⁷ Certainly the landscape plays a prominent part in the film, as it does in the New Zealand painting tradition. Rangitoto is an immediately recognisable symbol of Auckland, and for overseas viewers it would provide a tourist impression of New Zealand. The film’s style then switches to a teen-type movie with bikini-clad girls in an open sports car. However, this is not merely an imitation of an American beach movie since the scenes provide glimpses of a middle class New Zealand teenage lifestyle in the early 60s. Meanwhile Manning continues to be depicted as brooding and ill at ease, rather than indulging in the standard teenage pleasures of swimming, dancing and “making out”. His persona seems a mix of New Zealand “loner” and European “outsider” in the midst of *la dolce vita*. Or he could simply be a love-sick kid in a beach movie. At this stage, however, we wait to see which of the various generic elements is going to develop most strongly. Will the film be uniquely local by virtue of its unusual mixture of overseas genres?

The next sequence, the father and son confrontation in the garden, is one of the film’s strongest, in its dramatic representation of New Zealand family relationships. The older Manning is mowing his lawn, so we are clearly in the territory of “kiwiana”.¹⁸ As Robert Chapman commented, “for the solitary man or husband ... there always remained the garden.”¹⁹ A flourishing garden and a mown lawn with trimmed edges was a hallmark of respectability, and, like a well polished motor vehicle, a status symbol of the successful man. There is also a tradition of Sargeson-style stories in which husbands engage in lawn-mowing as escapism from the daily challenges of relating to wives and families. The fact that the successful man was mowing his own lawns would not have surprised New Zealand viewers, whereas audiences in other countries may have read the scene differently. O’Shea draws attention to the lawnmower as the son, seeking to gain his father’s advice and assistance on a serious

problem, finds himself in competition with the noisy machine with which his father seemed more concerned. The sequence includes a number of other kiwi elements – mother in the kitchen, young man in the standard business garb of white shirt and tie, fruit trees on the section, and the inability of the two men, separated by a generation, to communicate meaningfully. All this adds up to a classic example of “New Zealand social criticism”.

The “art film” style returns with the slow trip on the ferry, though the film-makers are obviously making the most of the local colour. The mood is sombre, the pace slow – an invitation to the audience members to speculate on the young man’s feelings. The following sequence, in depicting Manning’s arrival in the Hokianga township, while continuing the same “art film” pace, creates a montage that is pure rural New Zealand. This is not Auckland with its water skiing, bikini clad teeny boppers spending a day in idle pleasure before being whisked away to local night-spots in the boy friend’s sports car. Evoking some of the early scenes of *Broken Barrier* (and anticipating the 1987 production *Ngati* set in the small communities around Tolaga Bay on the East Coast, directed by Barry Barclay and produced by John O’Shea) the sequence consists of a slow moving montage of virtually empty streets, a few inhabitants leisurely going about their business, a small boy walking hand in hand with an older man, mudflats at low tide on which small vessels lay at rest, and a barefooted Maori woman riding a saddleless horse while puffing on a cigarette. Manning’s initial arrival in the late model Ford Thunderbird (after an encounter with the scheming Laura Kosavitch and her leading question, “Going far?”) heightens the contrasts between consumer-orientated city values and the more relaxed mood of a small town. The sequence endeavours, very successfully, to create an initial impression of a New Zealand town through the eyes of a new arrival. The observational style consisting of a slow paced montage enabled the audience to savour the various elements of the scene rather than have them rush past as a quick succession of images reinforced by carefully tailored music. While still reminiscent of “art film” montage, the style and tempo seem particularly appropriate to a rural New Zealand setting, and recall the documentary flavour of *Broken Barrier*.

In a fairly conventional sequence Manning moves through the main street to the boarding house where he engages in dialogue with the redoubtable Mrs Milligan. The

observational style then briefly re-appears with scenes of Isobel at the beach where, by herself, she is seen gathering kai moana. In general the film distinguishes itself from a Hollywood narrative by its slower pace, but also holds back from the tendency in European art films of the period to use images in a disconnected way to create a sense of unease. The sequence showing Manning's rendezvous with Laura Kosavitch sees another shift in styles. There is a burst of "art film" symbolism where his friend Joe stands on the rocks watching Manning being drawn into the clutches of the *femme fatale*, while a freshly caught crayfish curls its powerful tentacles round his arm. As the couple embrace and commence their love making, the European influence continues with the curves of their bodies juxtaposed with the shapes of the surrounding sand dunes (a sequence reminiscent of Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima Mon Amour* made five years earlier). At the same time, it is traditional – almost a cliché – for New Zealand writers and artists to link landscape and sex (as happens on several occasions in *Runaway*).²⁰

The film then shifts to the documentary (or neo-realist) style of *Broken Barrier* in which local people are rounded up as extras to stage a dance, with the actors inserted. The sequence provides a vivid documentation of the public dances of the largely Maori communities of that time, adopting but modifying the European style of the public dance. The stage band playing popular show tunes and current hits, its broad range of age groups, children imitating adults by attempting to foxtrot together, and the men drinking outside the hall, provide an interesting environment within which the key characters can interact. The consumption of alcohol outside the dance hall was a common occurrence in New Zealand at this time when pubs were closed at 6 p.m. and alcohol was banned from public places such as halls. The scene in which Tana, Isobel's boyfriend, becomes aggressively drunk from the keg outside the hall not only serves a dramatic purpose but also offers a perspective on a nation-wide practice. A similar documentary style is used in the hangi sequence set on the following morning. The authenticity of the hangi is emphasised by shots of local people slotted in to the interaction between key characters. Such a sequence could only be found in a New Zealand movie and owes its strength to the documentary tradition (which had initially close links with the English tradition of documentary, but which developed strongly in New Zealand through the work of the National Film Unit and Pacific Films). Had *Runaway* continued in this vein, it would have been

truly a sequel to *Broken Barrier*. However, in the mud flats sequence, one of the most powerful in the film, where Manning steals a car, we return to a genre evoked earlier - the American road movie. The film risks confusion by toying with too many genres – the troubled teenager, the art film about alienation, rural neo-realism, the road movie, etc. But from this point on it commits itself primarily to the road movie and is the first local film to make extensive use of many of that genre's elements.

The genre is given a distinctively New Zealand slant – perhaps unconsciously at times, as in the Hamilton scene with the traffic officer. In the road movie genre the forces of law and order are seen as violent and threatening or bordering on the farcical. In *Runaway*, set in the egalitarian early 60s, law enforcement is personified by a gunless, batonless traffic officer. He has no military-style helmet, sunglasses or heavy boots, and drives an inoffensive four cylinder Vauxhall Victor. Had he been clad in the menacing paraphernalia of his American counterparts it would have added considerable tension to the scene. Instead the film shows a courteous, slightly self-effacing officer who, having accepted Manning's superficial explanation for exceeding the speed limit, proceeds to engage the young man in a conversation about his Thunderbird. The officer is efficient without being officious and Manning is cautious without being cowed. Intentionally or not the encounter represents New Zealand as a society that, while having its dull and conformist elements, also contains an appealing courtesy and lack of confrontation between its law enforcement agencies and its citizens. The scene demonstrates a filmic as well as a social difference as Hollywood story-telling would have required a greater winding-up of tension. For better or worse, that tendency to “push” a scene to the point of maximum intensity is now standard procedure in New Zealand films which have subsequently favoured the Hollywood narrative approach.

Having realised that the car is a liability, Manning catches a train. However, when he spots a policeman at Taumaranui station he gets off and the following morning is shown hitchhiking south. In the early 1960s car ownership by young people was comparatively rare. Consequently hitchhiking was a common and accepted means of moving around the country and many motorists were quite prepared to stop and offer lifts. This phenomenon, rarely seen nowadays, also evokes a prosperous, egalitarian society with a strong sense of community and shared value systems. Picking up

hitch-hikers was a cost-free way of providing support for others in the community, a continuation of Depression and wartime habits, as well as a way of demonstrating the motorist's material success in having a car of his own. Thus the film's images of a well dressed young Pakeha thumbing a lift on the side of a main highway are typical of New Zealand at that time. This is another example of how the film incorporates a wealth of (perhaps unconscious) social documentation that both dates it today and provides a valuable record of its time.

O'Shea uses the sequence to make a brief comment on Maori-Pakeha relations when the driver refuses to pick up a Maori hitchhiker with a statement, "Don't get me wrong, I've got nothing against Maoris but you have to draw the line somewhere". The incident typifies the attitude of some Pakeha of the period who, although proud of what they imagined was a largely classless, tolerant society, nevertheless regarded themselves as somewhat superior to Maori – an attitude based to a large extent on their own success in education and business. O'Shea cleverly weaves this into the storyline as a factor that leads to Manning's furious demand to be let out. The stopping of the car and the death of the driver has many echoes within the road movie genre. One is reminded, for example, of the death of the policeman in Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless*, though Godard's sequence has more fragmented editing and a European sense of absurd violence (like that of Meursault in *The Outsider*). For Manning, this too is a turning-point. But the New Zealand film is conspicuously low-keyed – an average man is put in a situation where he understandably but foolishly takes the easy way out. Godard is more interested in larger-than-life characters. He brings American gangster-movie violence to France. Rightly or wrongly, O'Shea and Graham chose to keep closer to the everyday situation, to the more "realistic" option.

The subsequent embarkation sequence has elements of an Antonioni real-time approach which evolves into a ship-board dialogue sequence between David and Diana. In *L'Avventura* the dialogue is often spoken in a desultory fashion, the characters seemingly indifferent to the response that their comments may elicit. Similarly, in the ferry dialogue sequence, the pair, while initially engaging in a conventional conversation, make only occasional eye contact with one another. Their stylised body language is also reminiscent of the art film. Ironically, the dialogue is delivered with a British accent in deference to the conservatism of the New Zealand

audience. Today, this scene is often used by film lecturers to illustrate the curious fact that New Zealand audiences at least until the 70s were more comfortable with actors speaking in British accents than in kiwi accents.

At this stage the film turns conspicuously to the New Zealand mythology of “going bush”. As the vessel enters the sounds en route to Picton, Manning muses, “Sometimes I think it would be wonderful to live in a lonely place like this” and later as they pause by a stream he remarks, “I like the clean water down here, that’s what Westland’s like. No-one pretends over there, that’s where I belong”. For him, Westland, where he has spent part of his boyhood, symbolises escape. As he explains to Diana in classic “man alone” terms, “A man could be swallowed by the bush”. Diana, although included in Manning’s escapist fantasy, challenges him with, “Is coming here going to help you?” - a question to which he has no answer. It is fitting that the male Kiwi myth of going bush as the answer to life’s pressing problems should be challenged by a sceptical woman.

Nevertheless, Diana agrees to go with him. The scenes in which their relationship is established and developed are so cryptic as to be puzzling. Was this the film’s attempt to imitate the jump-cut style of some European art films? Did it result from a nervousness about censorship? Was it a kiwi unease about personal emotion? A combination of the last two - nervousness about censorship and emotional unease - seem to provide the most likely explanation. Since sex is an important ingredient of the American road movie, the reticence in the relationship between David and Diana is very noticeable here. This absence of any sexual electricity hinders our understanding of Diana’s motivation and David’s response.

Although increasing numbers of males were, by this time, earning their living through conventional city-based activities, there were still those whose bush craft enabled them to earn a modest living as hunters. While regarded as somewhat unconventional, they were nevertheless objects of envy among many men who, at times, felt that their bush-dwelling counterparts were living the existence of “real men”. Whatever the realities of “going bush” the inclusion of Manning’s fantasising, the character of Clarrie, the isolated hut and the spectacular wilderness setting of Lake Maparika and its rugged beauty accompanied by rain, thunder and lightning, are

elements that gave the film a sense of scope and at the same time resonate with New Zealand's landscape mythologies. The love-making scene provides an extreme example of the tendency in New Zealand art to interweave sex and landscape. At the same time it is one of the sequences of the film most obviously influenced by European art films such as *Hiroshima Mon Amour*.

These myths are further explored in the character "Clarry", played by Barry Crump. Crump himself was seen by many to epitomise the Kiwi male. Despite his bloody-minded independence, this lone hunter who swore and drank hard was a man that a mate could rely on when the chips were down. Self reliant, finding all that he needed to fulfil his basic needs from the large tracts of bush through which he roamed, Clarry was a personification of the "man alone". By the early 60s Crump was already a successful author. New Zealanders would therefore have had difficulty in differentiating between the character of Clarry and Crump himself. The character is, however, treated by the film in a satirical vein – as a macho character with his eye on Diana. The sequence is rich in implications today for a New Zealand audience aware of Crump's disreputable later life. It is an historical curiosity of the same kind as the scene of Kiri Te Kanawa singing an Italian aria on the marae, or Lew Pryme as a rock and roller in *Don't Let It Get You* – future New Zealand icons whom O'Shea's films captured in prescient images.

Overall, one may describe *Runaway* as a highly exploratory attempt to develop a new model for the "New Zealand film". Although many of the elements are imported, the combination is unique, and arguably one that could only have arisen in the New Zealand cultural situation. One might have wished that O'Shea and Graham had completed more experimentation before writing the script, but arguably the spirit of questioning and exploring is exactly what one would expect to find in a serious New Zealand film of this period. The experience of watching the film involves many shifts between genres and between styles – a kind of identity-in-process. The documentary style seems the safest or most reliable of the styles, but O'Shea was conscious of "having been there and done that" in *Broken Barrier*, and wanted to attempt other dramatic possibilities. Particularly striking is the interest in European rather than American film techniques, and I have put particular stress on the links I see between European alienation (as reflected in the art films of the day) and New Zealand's post-

colonial questioning. Had *Runaway* been more successful, New Zealand film-making might have developed differently, with a combination of New Zealand and European traditions continuing to provide the vehicle for the exploration of “New Zealandness”. Instead the American tradition has come to dominate our film-making and increasingly our “New Zealandness” is articulated along American lines.

And what of the character of David Manning? In this Kiwi movie did he really in some sense typify the Kiwi male? Certainly he was not an endearing character. His lack of emotional intensity resulted in few reviewers and critics feeling any affinity with him. Most were puzzled by his actions and apparent indifference to his fate. Was his lack of passion and inarticulateness designed to represent the taciturn male product of what writers such as Allen Curnow had seen as our “state-controlled” culture and Gordon McLaughlan later described as “the passionless people?” Was it the script or the director that failed to provide a sufficient number of opportunities for Colin Broadley to bring more depth to his characterisation of the confused and tormented David Manning? Or was it merely a failure of the actor to convey what the script and director were seeking? Part of the answer lies in O’Shea’s directorial style, which tended to allow the actors to interpret for themselves the feelings they were depicting. *Runaway* is sprinkled with close-ups of Manning and his reactions to a range of situations with sparse dialogue only. O’Shea’s hands-off approach does have the merit of providing actors with a broad framework within which to explore their own ability and present their own interpretation. However, in *Runaway*, it is a technique that only partially succeeds. The recurring close-ups of a brooding Manning, whose inner thoughts are left to the audience’s imagination, often serve only to frustrate the viewer seeking to gain a more specific insight into this young man who appears in virtually every scene. Still, the decision to minimise dialogue and understate emotions – to underplay rather than overplay – is the approach one would have expected from a serious New Zealand director in the early 60s who was determined not to imitate Hollywood but to forge a more subtle style.

Runaway consists of a series of encounters, a cumulative testing of David Manning’s ability to feel passionately enough about the circumstances and issues facing him to take control of his own destiny. Confrontation with his employer and parents, a relationship with a woman who was part of a different culture, a fierce argument, a

direct encounter with death, a more profound relationship with a woman, an encounter with a potentially dangerous hunter, and finally a life and death encounter with the landscape, all add up to a cumulative portrait of David Manning, contemporary young New Zealander. The implication seems to be that he has failed to respond adequately to any of these challenges – to the challenges of work, sex, community, death, or the landscape. Manning’s experience does certainly become more intense as he goes along, but this seems to happen almost by accident.

His final crisis point comes with the lakeside arrival of the police. He again chooses to run, deserting a woman who seems genuinely to love him, becoming a kind of “man alone” on ice. To some extent Manning’s character was based on the concept of the European-style anti-hero as a deliberate alternative to the Hollywood hero. Anti-heroes did not have to be likeable but audiences were still supposed to respond to them and be stirred by their eventual fate. Manning, however, lacks the ability to act on Diana’s existentialist advice that, “You can influence your fate, it’s different from just an accident”. Neither is he capable of displaying enough intellectual depth to articulate his action or his inaction. Only once does he display genuine anger (in the mudflats scene), and while he shows himself to be capable of tender love making, the remainder of his actions are those of a man with severe emotional limitations. As such he seems a stereotyped portrait of the Kiwi bloke – a depressing display, as though he demonstrates the inability of the Kiwi bloke to encompass the depths of the European art film.

McDonnell described *Runaway* as being “ahead of its time”. Quite possibly. While the rather dated existentialism of *Runaway* links it backwards to the 50s, other aspects remain relevant today. Debate continues on Pakeha identity in a bicultural, and more recently, multicultural society. The fact that it anticipated the type of film that would eventually become popular with many New Zealand film festival attendees is noteworthy.²¹ Unfortunately the conflict between its European art film characteristics, and the marketing of it as a spicy drama, was largely responsible for the bewildered responses it elicited from film reviewers, critics and patrons, and its subsequent box office failure.

Commenting on the final scenes in *Runaway* 35 years later, O'Shea acknowledged the flaws. Posing for himself the question as to whether "the Pakeha" was an anachronism in New Zealand, O'Shea wrote: "If he is, there is, dramatically, only the sea waiting for the young white man at the end of *Runaway* if he makes it through the snows. It's an inglorious fate to die up in the mountains or to drown trying to escape the furies – not much of an epitaph to have someone [Diana] say, 'You never really knew him.' My God – that was a flat line – and not well directed either."²²

It could be argued then that the main reason for *Runaway's* shortcomings was the inadequacy of David Manning both as a human being and as a vehicle for conveying the malaise of the nation. However, "the New Zealand sadness"²³ (as Allen Curnow called it) was rapidly becoming an outdated concept by the time the film appeared on the screen. *Runaway* attempted to portray a disaffected young man whose society had been unable to supply him with a sense of purpose. Yet the narrow, stultifying, isolated suburban New Zealand that had been so much a part of the youthful experiences of Graham, O'Shea and their contemporaries was undergoing a significant metamorphosis. The character of Manning drew upon their own frustrations, though they selected as their vehicle a young man whose life experiences and environment differed considerably from their own. New Zealand in the 60s, though still coloured by the same malaise, was increasingly one which offered unprecedented opportunities for its new generation of youth. Manning was not let down by the system, he simply failed to take advantage of all it had to offer. A less alienated viewer in 1964 could have pointed out ways that Manning, as an educated young man, could have sought and found a more fulfilling life in a country where unemployment was virtually non-existent, tertiary education was free, and the state was on hand to provide assistance for any unforeseen contingencies. Furthermore, unlike the situation his parents had faced, his opportunities for travel were virtually unlimited. Although taking Laura's car had been a foolish impulse, and the death of Morton an unfortunate circumstance, he could at any stage have surrendered to the authorities in the knowledge that he had a reasonable chance of receiving a fair trial from a system based on democratic values and traditions. Certainly his relationship with his parents had been difficult, and his sexual encounter with Laura had been unfulfilling, but that hardly made him unique. In Diana he found a woman prepared to love him simply for himself and would no doubt have supported him had he given

himself up. Yet at each stage he showed a puzzling lack of faith in himself and in the people he encountered. He'd acted irresponsibly at the bank, yet his employer, although angry, had not threatened prosecution or sacking. His mother was sympathetic and had he approached his father in a more contrite frame of mind they probably would have agreed to assist him. Yet he chose to run. Unlike many others of his generation he was unable to see the unprecedented advantages which a peacetime liberal democracy had to offer. His was a country to which thousands of immigrants from Europe had flocked since the end of the war eager to carve out a destiny for themselves in a society unencumbered by a rigid class system and a countryside unblemished by dark satanic mills. It was also a time when a New Zealand cultural identity was being more energetically developed and consolidated and, due to the opportunities for travel and the contribution of thousands of immigrants, a time when the country was increasingly shedding its much maligned parochialism and developing a more international outlook.

Of course this optimistic line of argument could have been disputed, but it is a measure of *Runaway's* failure that it did not adequately show why Manning was justified in rejecting the social contract. New Zealand still had profound problems – otherwise “the 60s” would not have happened so strongly here, as elsewhere. The new prosperity had brought with it a narrow minded materialism and an intolerant paternalism and Puritanism against which young people had to rebel. Like Manning they would “drop out” and take to the road and be accused of irresponsibility, but they were also involved in the creation of an alternative culture which had its own strong political values. A more proactive attitude would replace the defensive strategy of the “man alone”. (Granted, Mulgan's character had also discovered a political cause by the end of the original *Man Alone*.) The character that O'Shea and Graham created was not complete enough as a case study or symbolic figure. Assembled out of elements of the kiwi bloke, the “man alone”, the existentialist anti-hero, the angry young man, and the 50s juvenile delinquent, he simply did not add up to an adequate hero (or anti-hero) for the times – or a figure that looked forward to the flowering of the early 70s.

It was only a few years after *Runaway* that thousands of New Zealanders of Manning's generation dispelled the myth of a passionless people by vehemently

demonstrating against their government's involvement in the Vietnam conflict. And 17 years later there were further passionate protests against the government's policy of allowing the 1981 Springbok tour to proceed. David Manning – the unhappy, passionless, bewildered young man – was increasingly a vanishing breed.

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- ¹ Brian McDonnell, "John O'Shea: The Father of New Zealand Film", p 92
- ² Barbara Cairns and Helen Martin, *Shadows on the Wall*, Auckland, Longman Paul, p29
- ³ John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956 – 1963*, p11
- ⁴ Barbara Cairns and Helen Martin, p29
- ⁵ Dan Davin, *For the Rest of Our Lives*, p372
- ⁶ Allen Curnow, *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, p58
- ⁷ *Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide: 2000 Edition*, (ed.) Leonard Maltin, New York, Signet, 1999, p392
- ⁸ Allen Curnow's comment is noteworthy: "I do not remember who called New Zealand the 'social laboratory of the world'. But isolation can be turned to account, in questions calling for experiment and proof." Introduction; *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, p.66.
- ⁹ *Runaway Revisited*
- ¹⁰ John O'Shea, *Don't Let It Get You*, p44
- ¹¹ Lawrence Jones, "The Novel", *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature*, (ed.) Terry Sturm, Auckland, Oxford University Press, 1991, p 107
- ¹² Ibid
- ¹³ Ibid
- ¹⁴ Ibid
- ¹⁵ Nicholas Reid, *A Decade of New Zealand Film*, Dunedin, John McIndoe, 1986 p82
- ¹⁶ Tim Bywater, and Thomas Sobchack, *Introduction to Film Criticism*, New York, Longman, 1989, p121
- ¹⁷ Laurence Simmonds, "Take Them Out of the Crate, Joe", Public Lecture, Auckland City Art Gallery, circa Sept 1993
- ¹⁸ On lawnmowers as kiwi icons, see also Stephen Barnett and Richard Wolfe, *New Zealand! New Zealand!: In Search of Kiwiana*, Auckland, Hodder and Stoughton, 1989, pp.68-69, or the television documentary *Kiwiana* (Point of View Productions, 1996) which discusses the use of a lawnmower in Peter Jackson's film *Braindead*.
- ¹⁹ Robert Chapman, "Fiction and the Social Pattern", p40
- ²⁰ cf. James K. Baxter's discussion of the link between "beach" and "sex" in *Archetypal Patterns in New Zealand Poetry*, Christchurch, Caxton Press, 1967
- ²¹ The first Auckland International Film Festival took place in 1969, although film societies had existed for many years, and "art house cinemas" appeared in New Zealand at the beginning of the 60s. The Film Festivals greatly expanded the range of viewers.
- ²² John O'Shea, *Don't Let It Get You*, p17
- ²³ Allen Curnow, *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, p40

IV. OVERVIEW

Chapter 19: THE FILMS THAT FOLLOWED

Although *Runaway* had been an exhausting experience and had not provided O'Shea with the financial dividends and support for which he had hoped, he was determined to capitalise on the experience that he and his team had gained. The creation of an infrastructure had been a huge challenge, and it seemed only logical to build on it – to take further steps in the direction of a New Zealand feature film industry – rather than accept that such an ambition was not possible. O'Shea may have also been motivated by the need to prove that he was not broken by his critics, that he was capable of making another feature and one which was distinctly different from *Broken Barrier* and *Runaway*. A year after *Runaway*'s completion he was approached by Russell Rankin who was part of a film company called New Zealand Film Services which O'Shea recalled had “a strange catalogue of British quota quickies and art house foreign films.”¹ Rankin offered some seeding money on the basis of a legacy which he was expecting from an elderly relative. However the legacy did not eventuate with the result that O'Shea had to seek the bulk of the budget elsewhere. As he recalled, “Howard Morrison [who was to star in the film] and I supplied equal shares of about \$60,000, mine coming from money we made from documentaries and TV commercials.”² Like his two previous features, O'Shea depended on unpaid support and recalled that, “the local community helped a great deal as Howard Morrison was king of Rotorua and used his influence to gain support for the film, particularly from people like Ernie Leonard.”³ Resistance to Pacific Films was still high within the National Film Unit, who notified him that unless the company's outstanding accounts were paid, access to the Unit's facilities would be denied to him. However, support came from Deputy Prime Minister Jack Marshall whose supportive letter to O'Shea after the *Runaway* première indicated his sympathy for the efforts of Pacific Films. He directed the Unit to allow Pacific Film's access to continue in spite of the debt – a major factor in enabling *Don't Let It Get You* to proceed.

O'Shea realised that the bulk of those who saw *Runaway* “were generally indifferent to the allegory, [and that] many officials were furious with it ... As a rejoinder to the departmental controller of the National Film Unit who objected to the ‘non-happy’ theme of *Runaway* and stated that such an irresponsible company would never make another feature film in New Zealand, Pacific Films delighted in naming its next

feature *Don't Let it Get You*.”⁴ The film was a musical, a new genre for O’Shea, and the antithesis of the angst-ridden *Runaway*. As well as wishing to demonstrate his versatility, the opportunity to produce a film whose characters would be exuberant and musically talented had therapeutic attractions for him. It was also another attempt to discover the magic box-office formula that would make an on-going film industry possible. No doubt there was also the hope that a successful film would cancel out the debts of the previous one.



Plate 29: Shooting a dolly shot of Australian performer Normie Rowe for *Don't Let It Get You*

Don't Let It Get You

Don't Let it Get You had promising ingredients. O’Shea’s associate D. Russell Rankin had just completed an Australian musical *Funny Things Happen Down Under* directed by O’Shea’s former partner Roger Mirams with a cast that included Howard Morrison and a very young Olivia Newton-John. O’Shea’s invitation to Morrison to star in a musical set in Rotorua received an enthusiastic response. As O’Shea recalled, “nothing was too much trouble for Howard or his town and its Public Relations Officer, Ernie Leonard.”⁵

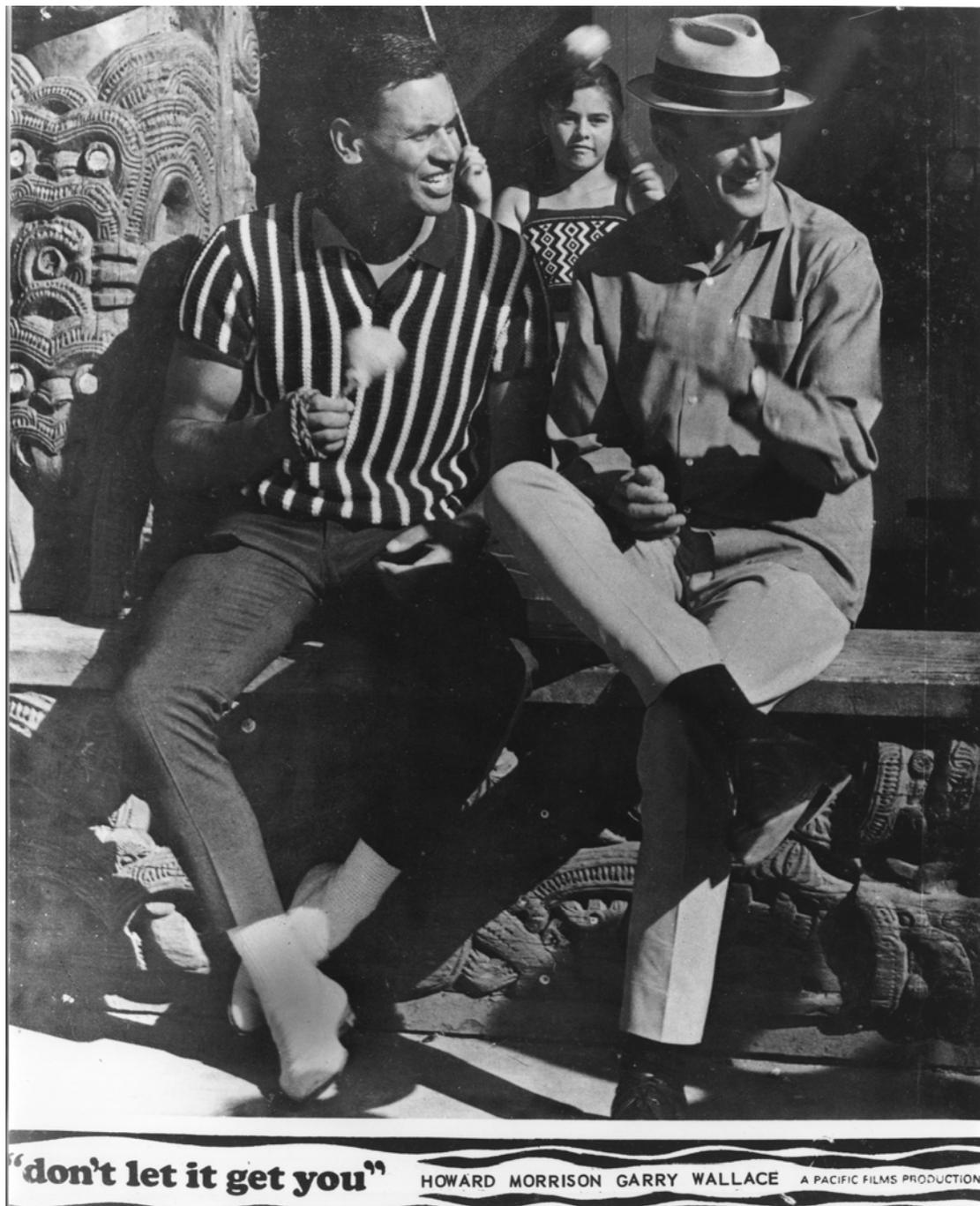


Plate 30: *Don't Let It Get You* publicity still

Describing his film as little more than “an innocuous musical [but which] surprised many with its gaiety,”⁶ O’Shea was pleased with the fact that he was providing further experience for Eric Anderson (production liaison) and the *Runaway* camera team of Tony Williams, Michael Seresin and Patrick O’Shea, who in spite of being only in their early twenties, were shooting their second feature. Actors from *Runaway* included Morrison’s co-star Garry Wallace (who had made a brief appearance in *Rim D. Paul’s band at the Hokianga dance*), *Rim D. Paul* himself, Harry Lavington (the

petrol station attendant) who appeared here as a rival for the affections of a pretty girl, Alma Woods (the Hokianga boarding house owner) as the girl's over protective mother, and Tanya Billing in a familiar bikini-clad role.

One of the film's most memorable scenes featured Kiri Te Kanawa playing herself, in the meeting house at Ohinemutu, surrounded by a group of young Maori children, singing Rosina's beautiful aria from *The Barber of Seville*, "Una voce poco fa" (The voice I heard just now). This sequence of the young soprano on the brink of an international career singing an Italian aria in a Maori meeting house, drawing attention to her whakapapa by singing in the context of intricate tukutuku patterns, powerful carved images and wide-eyed tamariki, had a haunting quality. Other music for the film was composed and conducted by Patrick Flynn who, as well as conducting the recording of the *Runaway* music, had provided several fill-in themes. Robin Maconie, again taking time out from his world of avant-garde music, contributed a pop song, "Come On Into the Sun". Performers and groups were drawn from those who were popular at the time. As well as Rim D. Paul, they included the late Lew Pryme, Eddie Lowe, Eliza Keil and the Quin Tikis.

Don't Let It Get You made an attempt to represent the developing counter-culture of the mid 60s. Sequences featuring Lew Pryme singing "Come On", showed the direct influence of Richard Lester's Beatles films such as *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) and *Help* (1965) – an influence that owed something to Tony Williams and perhaps to other young members of O'Shea's team. The Pryme sequence, along with several others, was a precursor of the modern music video. However, like *Runaway*, the film's impact was lessened by its mixture of styles, particularly in music. It ranged from current pop groups in Lester-style sequences with daring editing and a deliberate "non-miming" approach to the soundtrack, to Maori show bands who had made their name in the 50s, to Kiri Te Kanawa's operatic aria, to Howard Morrison's eulogy of middle class security in home and hearth. This was a mixture – alternately hip and homely, "pop" and middle brow – though these strands had not separated out of New Zealand culture as distinctly as they had in the United States. It was a mixture that one still heard on Sunday request sessions, but with the growth of the 60s "generation gap" the various genres were increasingly becoming the preserve of separate programmes, radio stations and audiences. It was an astonishing achievement, against

all the odds, for O'Shea to complete a second feature film, on a minuscule budget. O'Shea and Pacific Films, by producing two features within two years had gained a considerable amount of expertise as well as creating a foundation of production and acting personnel on whom they could draw for future full length productions. As Roger Horrocks commented, "New Zealand film-making seemed finally to be picking up speed. Though ... *Runaway* and *Don't Let It Get You* were uneven, the best sequences were full of fresh ideas."⁷ Tragically, the experience that had been gained could not be consolidated. The second film lost money as the first had done even though it had a reasonably good run at the box office - for example at Auckland's Plaza cinema from 5 to 28 November 1966. Pacific Films did not go out of business as they managed to repay their major creditors – although O'Shea recalled that "it took 14 years for me to finally clear the debt with the National Film Unit."⁸ However, others associated with the film were left unhappy – such as John Graham who had initially accepted a low initial payment in return for a future share of *Runaway's* profits. The making of the two films had relied upon a good deal of goodwill and many favours, and there was little in reserve for another film, though O'Shea had been making plans to film Barry Crump's novel *Gulf*.

Does a financial failure imply total failure? Is the only benefit of such a project to serve as a cautionary tale for those considering similar ventures? From the hard-headed commercial perspective of today, this would seem to be the case. For over a decade there was no further attempt to produce a feature film by Pacific Films or any other New Zealand company. It could be argued that *Runaway*, having failed to make any significant contact with the public, served only to discourage others from venturing into this risky activity. Such a negative view would imply that feature-film production had to start from scratch again in 1977, this time not in Wellington (where Pacific Films was located) but in Auckland.

But this analysis would be an over-simplification. The reasons for a film failing at the box office are often complex. O'Shea was unlucky that his two films followed the advent of television. Although black and white, and on a small screen, television's immediate popularity resulted in a rapid downturn in cinema attendances. O'Shea himself saw this a key factor, particularly in the case of *Don't Let It Get You*. "By 1966 when the film was screening, television had taken hold of New Zealand and

cinema attendances were low. It fared no better in Australia, where a major commercial release for the film failed to win it box office success despite good reviews.”⁹ By 1964 the number of TV sets purchased by New Zealanders had risen to 167,744 while cinema admissions fell to 26 million, down from 40 million [in 1964].¹⁰ But television was not the only explanation for the film’s disappointing returns since film going was still at a level much higher than it is today. As the international film industry adjusted to its new competitor, it tended to focus more on young adult viewers. *Don’t Let It Get You* certainly started to move in this direction but still attempted to cover too broad an audience. While containing youthful stars, it was not consistently a “youth” film and may have fallen between two stools in terms of finding a niche.

There are many reasons to challenge the claim that O’Shea made little impact on the ultimate development of a New Zealand film industry. The long tradition of Pacific Films as a production company was an important element in the subsequent development of feature film production within New Zealand. Often operating on the edge of bankruptcy, the company provided O’Shea and his employees with an organisation from which money making road safety films and documentaries could be produced. Furthermore it was a continuing source of employment for actors and crew members who could not, or would not work for local television or the National Film Unit. Television although making inroads into feature film attendance, did however, provide local film-making personnel with a new range of potential jobs. As O’Shea had explained in one of his last letters to John Graham (a year after the release of *Don’t Let It Get You*) Pacific Films was “surviving, but only just ... we have a diet of documentaries and TV commercials still in work. However, feature films have not made us any money.”¹¹ O’Shea’s greatest contribution, then, was in helping to develop the infrastructure, which is not to discount the less tangible impact of his films in helping to get New Zealanders accustomed to seeing their country and people dramatically represented in the cinema. None of the local actors in *Runaway* had had any experience in film acting, having learnt and practised their craft on radio and in the theatre. Similarly, his production team learned many new skills. Some went overseas and later returned, while others continued to work in some aspects of film or television.

Between O’Shea’s films and the successful attempt to create a feature film industry in the late 70s several factors intervened – the early 70s brought the energy of the 60s cultural upsurge. Television added to the audience’s familiarity with New Zealand faces and voices on screen, and gave actors more experience (if only occasionally). Television also contributed to the pool of technicians and equipment, though it is important to emphasise the many differences between the two media. In all these respects, the next attempt of the late 70s could start several steps ahead, with the legacy of Pacific Films representing one of these steps.

Twelve years after *Runaway* Roger Donaldson produced *Sleeping Dogs*, the film that is regarded as a breakthrough in the development of a feature industry. Television had been screening, albeit spasmodically, increasing amounts of local documentaries and drama but little had been attempted at length. As Roger Horrocks pointed out, “Among the hundreds of 35mm feature-films that New Zealanders attended between 1966 and 1977 there was not a single local product.”¹² Geoff Murphy’s Acme Sausage Company had produced a boisterous one hour drama entitled *The Tank Busters* (1971) and the following year Rudall Hayward produced his last feature film on 16mm, *To Love A Maori*. Three years later Geoff Steven and a crew of alternative lifestylers produced *Test Pictures* an avant-garde 16mm feature-length that generated little interest among the viewing public. The interest generated in 1977 by the full-scale 35mm *Sleeping Dogs* had not been equalled since *Runaway*. Although unfavourably reviewed by some critics, audience response was positive. Unlike *Runaway* its content matched its publicity – a sexy, action adventure story, set in scenic Coromandel, with Kiwi humour and an overseas star Warren Oates. Although the film still betrayed many signs of being a learning experience for its crew and cast, Roger Donaldson had read the market well and given it a populist touch. His film was sufficiently successful to encourage the production of other feature films in the 1970s and beyond, but conceivably this new wave could also have petered out, had the government not established a New Zealand Film Commission (announced at one of the first screenings of *Sleeping Dogs*).

Michael Seresin “arguably New Zealand’s most successful export as a film technician,”¹³ had, after *Runaway*, taken his expertise overseas and continued his career in camerawork with considerable success. He returned to New Zealand as

Director of Photography for *Sleeping Dogs*. By that time his feature film credits had included *If* (film crew 1968), *Ragman's Daughter* (cinematographer 1972), *Attention Les Yeux* (cinematographer 1975) and *Bugsy Malone* (cinematographer 1976). His experience on the *Runaway* shoot had laid the foundation for a highly successful feature film career. As the only crew member with feature film experience his input into *Sleeping Dogs* was crucial. He provided a key link back to O'Shea's films.

Tony Williams similarly continued to develop his creative expertise in film production. The screening of his experimental film *Sound of Seeing* on local television had provided him with some initial success, but the opportunity to film O'Shea's two features appears to have been the crucial formative experience. Having then "gone overseas on one of the Arts Council's first two film scholarships, [he] returned ... to make a series of television documentaries that turned the conventions of the genre upside down."¹⁴ By 1975 Williams had directed over a dozen films, which were very important in the development of the new wave. As Horrocks has noted:

It was Williams's films that made the initial impact [of the new wave], though I should qualify the phrase "Williams" films by noting that many people associated with Pacific Films made a contribution to them, such as cameramen Keith Hawke, Rory O'Shea and Steve Loker-Lampson, Craig McLeod supervised sound recording and Ian John who had been Williams's editing assistant at the B.B.C. came out to edit his New Zealand films. Above all, there was John O'Shea, head of Pacific Films, whose expert knowledge of producing provided the necessary framework for all Williams's documentaries.¹⁵

In 1978 Williams co-produced and directed *Solo*, a feature film shot in New Zealand which he co-wrote with local actor Martyn Sanderson. Throughout this period Williams set an example as an independent film-maker who, in spite of creative and financial difficulties, produced a variety of innovative films, thereby playing a central role in inspiring the new wave. This continued until he moved to Australia where he subsequently directed a second feature and became one of the top Australasian directors of commercials. Some of these (such as the "Crunchie Bar", "Dear John",

and the “Bugger” commercials) have become icons of New Zealand television culture.

English-born William Johnstone played his first screen role as David Manning’s father. A stage and radio actor until *Runaway*, he has subsequently developed a major career as a TV and screen actor. He followed the part of Cousins in *Sleeping Dogs* with roles in Geoff Steven’s *Skin Deep* (1977) and later on a number of local television dramas, such as *Under the Mountain*. Like Johnstone, Clyde Scott went from *Runaway* to *Sleeping Dogs*. The screen acting expertise which Scott gained through his role in *Runaway* helped him to make a success of the demanding role of “Jesperson” in *Sleeping Dogs*. Also, prior to Donaldson’s film, Scott had directed some television commercials.

Colin Broadley, apart from a very small part in *Sleeping Dogs*, never acted again in a feature film. After *Runaway* he became involved in Radio Hauraki’s campaign to defy the authorities and begin broadcasting a “pirate” radio station from outside the then three mile limit. When the police tried to stop the Radio Hauraki trawler *Tiri* from putting to sea by ordering the lowering of the bridge to block the exit from Auckland Basin, Broadley gained national fame by shinning up the mast and pushing the tip under the descending bridge, thereby enabling the vessel to “escape” to the accompaniment of its cheering crowds of supporters. Unfortunately, a bad car accident on Auckland’s northern motorway was a major factor in curtailing his acting career. Based in his home town of Paeroa, he has continued to work on the fringes of the media, more recently helping local Maori to establish an iwi radio station.

John Graham, although bitterly disappointed with the screen interpretation of his script, collaborated in 1970 with 24-year-old director Geoff Steven (who, two years later founded the Auckland Film-makers’ Co-operative, Alternative Cinema) by scripting a short experimental film *But Then* (one of the first of the new wave films in New Zealand). The title “was taken from the director’s comment: ‘But then along came a young generation who took time out from society, who smoked pot and talked of alternative lifestyles’.”¹⁶ Following the meandering of two young men through the streets of Auckland, “*But Then* was like a stoned version of *The Sound of Seeing*.”¹⁷ Steven, for his part, went on to direct several feature films, and many documentaries,

becoming the executive producer responsible for the popular documentary strands on TV3 and TVNZ. *But Then* was, however, Graham's last direct contribution to the New Zealand film industry.

Runaway was written as a road movie traversing the country from north to south since O'Shea regarded New Zealand as having "great road potential."¹⁸ In 1981, Geoff Murphy directed *Goodbye Pork Pie*, a road movie so popular that it represented a major breakthrough for the new feature industry. Murphy's film owed much to *Runaway*. As O'Shea recalled, "Geoff Murphy paid me the ultimate compliment by saying, 'I put it in reverse'. It was all a joke. They steal the car and it is exactly the same story, but made with Geoff's ebullient good humour, and made 15 years afterwards ... Geoff's been quite honest about it, I'm honoured."¹⁹

It is interesting to compare the details of the two films, both because this is yet another link between O'Shea's films and the new wave of the 70s, and also because the differences of style and emphasis are revealing. The most obvious similarity between *Runaway* and *Goodbye Pork Pie* is that both films cover the length and breadth of New Zealand, in settings which are almost entirely based on the country's roads. Both also contain elements of escaping, of getting away, of trying to find satisfaction in discarding a conformist lifestyle and seeking satisfaction by constantly keeping on the move "in a journey which ... involves long distances where the open countryside offers freedom."²⁰ If a situation becomes unsatisfying, if things go wrong, one should simply pack up and leave. Yet, while Manning's journey is an angst-ridden quest, the three main characters in Murphy's film are on a daredevil, adventurous spree. Manning operates in an environment of quiet desperation while the other film abounds with visual and verbal humour. Writing about it five years later, Nicholas Reid saw *Pork Pie* as being typical of Geoff Murphy "with his flashy nose-thumbing pyrotechnics, centring films on dramatic or visual highpoints but often leaving the structure to look after itself."²¹ Such differences help to contrast the early 60s outsider with the post-hippie counter-culture. Both films were made on a shoestring, with the aid of much communal goodwill. Murphy's film became the first New Zealand production to recover its costs from the local market and [in 1985] "a staggering 1,516,000 viewers (50.3% of the total population over the age of five) watched *Goodbye Pork Pie* on television."²² Audiences empathised with the key

characters, enjoyed the New Zealand settings, the fast pace, the humour and the strong anti-establishment elements. For Reid there was “no need to look for profundities, despite the pretentious comments it drew from some local reviewers. Basically a car chase with flair and nose thumbing.”²³ Yet Murphy, like O’Shea before him, had also begun with a political message, deriving the premise of his film from the ideas of American political radicals such as Abbie Hoffman (author of *Steal This Book*), combined with a New Zealand anecdote about two car thieves.

What distinguished Murphy’s allegory from O’Shea’s was its anarchistic energy and sense of humour. It capitalised on the delight of viewers (particularly young adult viewers) at seeing the forces of law and order treated irreverently. Murphy was also something of an intellectual and nationalist in these days, but he was a decade removed from the earnest cultural nationalism of the 50s and 60s. His film had a similar success in New Zealand to *Easy Rider* in the United States 12 years earlier – its political undercurrents did not prevent it from providing a wide audience with a buzz of excitement. Its mix of “serious” and “populist” was still unorthodox but highly successful. Murphy’s film was a commercial success, overseas as well as in New Zealand. Even British reviewers responded to its energy. For example the London’s *Financial Times* reviewer joked that it “causes one to reel out of the cinema feeling in need of an oil-check and 6000-mile service.”²⁴ Although neither *Goodbye Pork Pie* nor *Runaway* won much serious attention overseas, the former was based more firmly on a recognised genre and was successfully sold on that basis. Would *Pork Pie* have enjoyed a similar success in 1964? Such a film was inconceivable for New Zealand in those pre-hippie days. For one thing, its sex, drugs and swearing would never have passed the Censor. By 1981 both the Censor’s Office and the New Zealand audience were ready to accept it. The reverse question is also speculative: would a film like *Runaway* have done better in 1981? Certainly New Zealanders had become far more accustomed to seeing themselves on TV and cinema screens, and a growing number of viewers, as the result of film festivals and film studies courses had become accustomed to European art films and could well have received the style of *Runaway* more sympathetically. O’Shea could well have tailored his film and its publicity specifically for that sophisticated market. But an increasingly worldly and cynical audience would probably have seen an air of innocence in the film. Between 1964 and 1981, a new idealism and optimism had come and largely gone leaving a

young adult audience as hedonistic, restless and disillusioned as David Manning but more knowing and more involved in the new youth culture. Curiously, though each film is so much of its era, both end with a human sacrifice – law and order must be re-established, though Manning’s death is admittedly only implied. Both films suggest that the country is simply not big enough for a rebel to get away with it for long. Murphy’s film is more high-spirited but an old New Zealand pessimism returns in the end.

Both films attempted to blaze new trails in a search for a new hybrid that would be a “New Zealand film”. Both were ambitious, both took chances. Murphy’s film was uncompromisingly “Kiwi” with its local accents and characters with which viewers could readily identify, but then O’Shea’s had paved the way for that localness. Ultimately, although *Pork Pie* seems in many respects the more successful film, one cannot help but feel sorry that the seriousness and European intellectual links of *Runaway* are today so much out of favour. *Runaway* survives as a reminder of the kind of alternative future that New Zealand film might have had. The Hollywood connections and thick-skinned cynicism implied by *Pork Pie* are today everywhere, often in a less good-humoured form. O’Shea certainly helped to create the 70s wave – the connections through film-makers such as Seresin and Williams make this clear – but one is struck by the fact that the industry which ultimately emerged is in many ways very different from that which he had hoped to establish.

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- ¹ John O'Shea, *Don't Let It Get You*, p104
- ² John O'Shea, interview, 5 February, 2001
- ³ Ibid
- ⁴ John O'Shea, "A Charmed Life", p 32
- ⁵ Ibid
- ⁶ Ibid
- ⁷ Roger Horrocks, "Alternatives: Experimental Film Making in New Zealand", *Film in Aotearoa New Zealand*, p 60
- ⁸ John O'Shea, interview, 5 February, 2001
- ⁹ John O'Shea, "A Charmed Life", p33
- ¹⁰ *Film in Aotearoa New Zealand*, Jonathan Dennis, "A Time Line", p 209
- ¹¹ John O'Shea, letter, 16 March 1967
- ¹² Roger Horrocks, "Directed by Tony Williams", *Islands*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 1977, p 472
- ¹³ Brian McDonnell, "John O'Shea: The Father of New Zealand Film", p92
- ¹⁴ Roger Horrocks, "Alternatives, Experimental Film Making in New Zealand", p 62
- ¹⁵ Roger Horrocks, "Surviving in Films: The Career of a New Zealand Film-maker", *Islands*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1977 pp140-141
- ¹⁶ Roger Horrocks, "Alternatives Experimental Film Making in New Zealand", p 61
- ¹⁷ Ibid
- ¹⁸ John O'Shea, interview, 5 February 1998
- ¹⁹ Ibid
- ²⁰ Barbara Cairns and Helen Martin, p37
- ²¹ Nicholas Reid, *A Decade of New Zealand Films*, p 21
- ²² Ibid, p19
- ²³ Ibid, p132
- ²⁴ Ibid

Chapter 20: JOHN O'SHEA: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.¹

“Going *far?*” - the title of this thesis - is the question put to David Manning by Laura Kosavitch as, uncertainly, he pauses at the crossroads where one road leads down to the Hokianga Harbour. Behind him a once-secure middle class career, and in front, an unknown future where his mettle will be tested as he sets out to see how far he can go. While there are distinct differences there are also parallels between O’Shea and his fictional character Manning. O’Shea had been offered an American scholarship likely to have led to a comfortable, successful academic career. In New Zealand, he could also have made a career in the expanding civil service. Instead he chose to see how far he could go in a field which had limited infrastructure and an uncertain future, particularly for an individual who chose the path of independent production. The journey was an arduous one where, when the personal and financial pressures mounted, he must have been tempted many times to return to the security of a more comfortable, less ambitious destination. David Manning also took the road less travelled but O’Shea, unlike his character, had a clear vision – to establish film-making as a dynamic part of the local culture. Furthermore unlike Manning, he was never inclined to turn his back on problems and trudge morosely away.

O’Shea’s journey and his determination were unique. To go as far as he did, he needed help from a variety of talented and supportive people, but his films would never have been made if he had not been a prime mover. He exemplified the Kiwi No. 8 fencing wire approach at its best - if the resources weren’t there, you found a new way through the problem. In the words of Bywater and Sobchack: “while granting that the production of a film is a collaborative effort, [the auteur theory] singles out the dominant personality who has made that effort cohere and whose force and creative vision have chiefly shaped the finished film.”² O’Shea’s modus operandi illustrates the complexity of the term “auteur”, but also its continuing relevance. As facilitator he was certainly the “dominant personality”. His auteurism was an individualism not only born out of necessity but also one which showcased the

multiplicity of his own talents. He contributed the cultural and technical knowledge, the management skills and the money (often from his own meagre resources). He was the writer, director, manager, editor, publicist and promoter. Others in his team had one or two of these specialist skills but not as wide a combination as O'Shea. At the same time he was prepared to provide creative freedom to some members of his team – notably cameraman Williams and music composer Maconie. Their artistic personalities left a clear imprint on his films, but the buck stopped with O'Shea. The films he directed were flawed but they bear the unmistakable stamp of his interests, values and strength of will. His self chosen role was that of risk taking entrepreneur, and the word “risk” is perhaps a key word for he provided a role model in risk taking, both creative and financial – a living example of what Allen Curnow admired as “the anti-mask of the comfort-seeking, never-get-hurt New Zealander of the Social Security State.”³

O'Shea and Pacific Films continued to push the boundaries. In 1974 he produced a landmark TV documentary series *Tangata Whenua – The People of the Land*. Directed by Barry Barclay and presented by Michael King, “the series broke new ground: it put Maori perspectives on the small screen, in most cases without Pakeha interpretation.”⁴ O'Shea's affinity with and concern for the Maori community, already apparent in *Broken Barrier*, *Runaway* and *Don't Let It Get You*, was further demonstrated in this series which Russell Campbell described as being “the closest New Zealand had ever come to a discourse originating from within the Maori community.”⁵ By now O'Shea had stepped back from directing and was concentrating on producing. To describe him as an “auteur” would not do justice to King's and Barclay's contributions, yet such a series owed much to his stewardship. Film has always been a complex medium involving effects of synergy (both positive and negative), and the role of the producer has seldom been well understood. O'Shea's career as producer after *Don't Let It Get You* provides us with a clear example of the many aspects of this role in his activities as facilitator, promoter, co-ordinator, mentor and experienced advisor.

As neither *Runaway* nor *Don't Let It Get You* had left him with enough money to invest in further features, he continued through the 70s to produce documentaries and TV commercials, and continued to bring in young film-makers as directors. In 1981,

with support from the New Zealand Film Commission, he produced the feature *Pictures* directed by Michael Black. Very much in the Pacific Films vein, *Pictures*, with its powerful opening sequence of captured and chained Maori prisoners, developed a strong anti-British, post-colonial perspective while raising the contemporary issue of the role of the artist in a democratic society. O'Shea co-wrote this with Robert Lord who in 1971 had been involved in Tony Williams's Pacific Films documentary *The Day We Landed on the Most Perfect Planet in the Universe*. The studio manager for *Pictures* was Eric Anderson whom O'Shea acknowledged as the "stalwart of Pacific Films."⁶ (Anderson had joined Pacific Films in 1952 as Roger Miram's camera assistant and went on to be involved in all the company's feature films until his retirement in 1992, playing a particularly important part in the financial side. In 1992 John O'Shea acknowledged that "Eric has been the prototype anchorman since the start. He has held our flighty company together, let us fly, but always made sure we had a safe landing.")⁷ Included in the cast of *Pictures* were well known local actors such as Kevin Wilson, Peter Vere-Jones, Ken Blackburn and Terence Bayler.⁸ 28 years earlier Bayler had played young Tom Sullivan in *Broken Barrier*. After completing that film, Bayler had continued his stage and film career in England, returning home to New Zealand in 1980 to play the role of John Rochfort. This traffic of personnel to and from New Zealand illustrates the internationalism of the film industry, and also is a key means by which experience is expanded and then brought home. Although O'Shea was unusual in remaining based in New Zealand, he retained close links with Europe, as shown by his subsequent co-productions.

In spite of Maurice Shadbolt's unfortunate review of *Runaway* in *The Bulletin*, O'Shea bore him no ill-will and co-wrote a feature film adaptation of Shadbolt's short story *Among the Cinders*. This time O'Shea went off-shore for his funding – a process which he was to continue with the later features he produced. It is interesting to note that in all cases he found investors in Europe, never the U.S.A., thus maintaining his links with European-style film-making. Although there is little evidence of an actual antipathy to things American, his directing and producing career has suggested a desire to avoid American models, presumably in the belief that the power of Hollywood's commercial formulas would somehow compromise the "New Zealandness" of the films he was trying to create. However, as demonstrated by *Runaway*, he ran an equal risk of being dominated at times by European influences.

He remained hopeful that European investors would be more accepting of the kind of serious local film-making he had always sought to achieve. In practice, his European co-productions brought with them their own cultural tensions.

Among *the Cinders* (1983) was directed by German director Rolf Haedrich, with O'Shea as the producer. The film cast included Shadbolt himself in an acting role together with Yvonne Lawley and Michael Haigh among others. Martin Blythe has said of *Among the Cinders*: "as in *Runaway*, a film it often resembles, Maori culture serves as a possible solution held to liberal Pakeha pilgrims in search of a 'spiritual' (cultural) identity."⁹ Although *Among The Cinders* had some success, O'Shea recalled that "As early as casting, I thought disaster loomed. The young girls in the film were led along a distinctly European path by the director's misapprehension of the basic story. There was little I could do about it as Rolf had control of the German money."¹⁰ Two years later he produced the British-style feature about Katherine Mansfield, *Leave All Fair* (starring Sir John Gielgud), then *Ngati* the following year, and six years later *Te Rua*. Each film broke new ground, and each had a strong New Zealand basis. *Te Rua* was another German co-production, which unfortunately ended in three-way arguments between producer, director (Barry Barclay) and the German investors – but it also broke new ground in its treatment of Maori attempts to recover cultural treasures appropriated by museums. In 1993 Actor Wi Kuki Kaa expressed the opinion that had O'Shea "been a Maori he would have been a kaumatua years ago as he was the one person you could turn to when you're trying to make a film."¹¹

Always generous with his time and expertise when it came to helping young aspiring film-makers, both Maori and Pakeha, O'Shea is particularly warmly remembered by Jane Campion in that regard. Her family was friendly with his and she remembers him as being "a Daddy like my Daddy who believed in breaking a few rules to have some fun."¹² Some years after leaving school she made her first 16mm film at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School. She brought it back to Wellington and recalled: "I asked John if I could screen it to my family at his facility Pacific Films in Kilbirnie. Of course I could and he came to see it too, organising it all personally. It was after the screening that John, to my amazement, genuinely congratulated me and spoke respectfully, like a colleague who was actually impressed. His enthusiasm for

my little film was deeply moving and his continued vocal support and encouragement to me with successive films has been so generous and sustaining.”¹³

Gaylene Preston, one of the first New Zealand women to direct a feature film (the 1985 production *Mr Wrong*) was also considerably encouraged and influenced by John O’Shea. Vividly she recalled as a schoolgirl, being “herded into a space in the school that was too small for all of us (which was of course the experience of being in the baby boom in New Zealand in those years). It was a road safety film made by Pacific Films and it had a huge impact on me because the van that was being driven in this film was a Volkswagen Combi like my father’s. This man picked up Death at the crossroads – it was a figure in the rain. Then when the figure turned to look at him it was a skull. It’s very interesting because – as I say it – it sounds like *Mr Wrong*. It was so frightening and I have no idea what its message was because, for me, it was always raining in Greymouth, we were always stopping at the railway line. I was scared shitless.”¹⁴ The film was Pacific’s production *I Won’t Be Home Tonight* which O’Shea recalled as being “really creepy, for those times.”¹⁵ He also recalled that at the time Pacific Films were shooting *I Won’t Be Home Tonight* “it excited Lindsay Shelton so much [as a cub journalist] that he decided on devoting himself to film as soon as he could – hence [his long standing role as] Marketing Manager of the New Zealand Film Commission.”¹⁶ Some twenty five years later, Preston’s excellent thriller *Mr Wrong* contained chilling images of pouring rain at a railway crossing, recalling the scene she had never forgotten from the road safety film.

Preston has described herself as “part of a generation of women who have in some sense had to be their own role models [as] there were certainly no role models for [women] making films.”¹⁷ After graduating from art school at Canterbury University she spent seven years in Britain before returning to New Zealand. Unsure of what she wanted to do she knew that she “would function best as part of a creative group.”¹⁸ She recalled that “my sister bossed me out to Pacific Films. Drove me there personally. Deposited me on John O’Shea’s doorstep. He told me how the New Zealand film industry was in the doldrums and there wasn’t any work for anybody and that basically my timing was really bad. None of this has changed, note! He said, ‘Why don’t you go out and talk to them at Avalon?’ I just said, ‘No, I don’t want to have anything to do with institutions and that sounds like an institution to me.’ Little

did I know that John O’Shea wasn’t keen on institutions either, and the television network’s growing bureaucracy in particular!”¹⁹ Preston must have appealed to O’Shea as he followed up their meeting by asking her to be the art director for Pacific Films. She recalled that “I didn’t know what an art director did. I asked John, I said, ‘But John, I only know about looney bins really, you’d better put me on a month’s trial.’ He said, ‘It’s p-perfect training.’ Then I said, ‘Well, what does an art director do?’ and he said, ‘Nobody knows, it’s a s-secret profession.’ (John O’Shea has a slight stutter which he uses in conversation to remarkable effect.)”²⁰ Preston found that “the creative group that I joined at Pacific was what I needed [and] ... I was able to winkle in a film or two.”²¹ Although eventually made redundant when Pacific Films experienced another of its financial downturns, she struck up valuable friendships with “people like Barry Barclay, John Reid, Dell King, John O’Shea and Crunch [Craig Walters] ... Waka [Warrick Attewell] had been a member of Pacific and it was with Waka that I made my first 16 mm film.”²²

Helen Martin and Sam Edwards, in their assessment of *Runaway*, referred to it as “a film which had to be made if the industry were to expand into something more than the well-meaning country cousin cinema which had been so representative of the 1930s.”²³ Writer Alfred Flett, when commenting on O’Shea’s *Think About Tomorrow*, had suggested the idea of a common financial pool from which producers of local films could draw. O’Shea had, all his working life, been thinking about a tomorrow when feature film-making would receive government support, without too many strings attached. In spite of a lifelong suspicion of bureaucrats, he had a balanced enough view to realise that some form of government funding would be essential to underwrite the permanent establishment of a local feature film industry. His campaigning was based on the concept of a body that would comprise people who were sympathetic to the efforts of independent film-makers and who would be supportive without becoming domineering. In his 1989 interview with O’Shea, Brian McDonnell wrote that O’Shea “sees the commission (in a charming image) as a ‘mother ship’ supplying the ‘scattered fleet of little fishing boats’ that are our independent production companies.”²⁴ Writing 20 years after its establishment, O’Shea showed that, although pleased with the subsequent successes of the New Zealand Film Commission, he was unhappy about what he saw as its growing desire to call the shots. “Now established as a promising film-making country, New Zealand

has resumed its ride on the toboggan of the arts, like many similar State instrumentality's. It has failed to resist a bureaucracy that deludes itself by equating creativity with filling in forms. Independent film-makers attending the enthusiastic birth of the Film Commission have been suffocated by the weight of paper that accompanies every new venture."²⁵

The "birth" of that Commission had owed much to O'Shea, having its origins in a motion he had moved at a 1970 conference. In his words: "[a national] Arts Conference provided a first chance to propose publicly a National Screen Organisation originally planned to include both film and television which eventually became the New Zealand Film Commission."²⁶ With strong urging from O'Shea the conference "made two recommendations 'To foster creative activity in films for cinema and television; and create an archive for film'."²⁷ O'Shea then provided leadership to a committee which had various meetings in the early 1970s to draw up plans for a Commission. This culminated in a detailed report.²⁸ The report did not in itself persuade the government to act but it certainly helped to prepare the ground. The final catalyst appears to have been the making of *Sleeping Dogs*. The exact chain of events remains a matter of debate, but it seems likely that lobbying by Tony Williams was also influential. In 1979 O'Shea became a foundation member of the New Zealand Film Commission and three years later the ministerial nominee to the New Zealand Film Archive.

Accolades

The film industry has always been a challenging, competitive business, subject to the vagaries of politics and economics. Although many see it as glamorous and exciting, those who work in its many roles, while enjoying their work, are well aware of the day to day grind of maintaining technical standards, meeting deadlines, hustling for new projects, and performing under stress – all necessary to ensure some continuity of employment. Consequently accolades from within the industry itself are not bestowed lightly. For John O'Shea, the award of the Rudall Hayward Memorial Award for "exceptional contributions to the industry" on 15 July 1987 by the Guild of Film and Television Arts must have been a very satisfying experience. In describing the evening Brian McDonnell wrote,

Maori filmmaker Barry Barclay steps forward, describes the recipient of the award as a “kaumatua” who has helped “all our careers”. When O’Shea comes onto the rostrum, there is a standing ovation ... O’Shea, stammering slightly, talks of the ‘extended family’ at Pacific Films.

Film-making is, he claims, something akin to being on a trapeze. He defends New Zealand film in a passionate voice, saying we need to be “reminded of the country we *really* live in”. With no delay to bask in glory and attention, he returns to his seat.²⁹

O’Shea had commenced his production career at a time when the number of people who earned a living from film production would have been less than two hundred. His presentation, several decades later was made in front of an audience which, although large, was only a share of the thousands of people throughout the country whose employment was crucial to the functioning of an efficient and profitable film and TV industry - as actors, script writers, lighting gaffers, grips, continuity clerks, electricians, make up artists, costume and set designers, sound recordists, production managers, camera operators, stills photographers, wranglers, technical advisors, casting directors, dialogue coaches, special effects technicians, drivers, caterers, sound and vision editors, marketing and promotion directors and a myriad of other roles. McDonnell added that, “O’Shea is the true living father of the industry and it’s time he was acknowledged as such.”³⁰ The 1987 award was an acknowledgement by his colleagues but not at this stage by the country at large.

O’Shea certainly had many of the elements of a father-figure, having helped many “sons” and “daughters” to develop their own skills and abilities. Although warmly acknowledged by directors such as Gaylene Preston and Jane Campion for his skill and patience, he was also a father figure who was sometimes seen as difficult. His career was dogged by difficulties with colleagues with whom he fell out at crucial times. His bitter quarrel with John Graham was mirrored years later in a dispute with Barclay. In spite of a long acquaintance with Barclay (with whom he had produced a number of films including the *Tangata Whenua* series) they fought bitterly over their feature film *Te Rua*. O’Shea was reluctant to discuss any details of the quarrel but it would appear to be the result of a dispute over the editing of the film’s final

sequences. *Te Rua* failed at the box office being, as O'Shea recalled, "on screen locally for a few days only, [and] was booked almost nowhere and sold to no cinemas abroad."³¹ Interestingly his recent book *Don't Let It Get You* makes no mention of the quarrel with Barclay, only of their successful work together. Neither does he record his falling out with John Graham, although his two cursory acknowledgements of Graham's contribution to *Runaway* are less than adequate. *Sons for the Return Home* (directed by Paul Maunder) was also a troubled project. O'Shea's reputation in some quarters for being difficult is no doubt the result of his stubbornness and passion, qualities necessary to his solitary crusade, which inevitably could bring him at times into conflict with his collaborators.

McDonnell saw O'Shea as being "the equivalent in our film history of Allen Curnow in poetry and Colin McCahon in painting Like Curnow he was part of a generation that sought to turn away from clinging to Mother England's apron strings, and his chief preoccupation has always been the quest for a national (a local) identity. He has consistently sought to foreground the Maori component in our social mix and this, combined with his questions of identity, makes his films still highly relevant."³² Comparing artists who operate in different media is always difficult, but O'Shea did share with Curnow, who was a decade older than him, many of the cultural nationalist perspectives and the same personal commitment to staying in New Zealand to help build a serious local culture. Both men have a reputation in some quarters for being difficult and opinionated, but without their stubborn determination they could not have sustained such long and productive careers. Both men are better known to their colleagues in the arts than to the general public. But there are differences, too. In O'Shea's case he sought to express his country's culture through film, whereas Curnow hardly ever went to the cinema. Furthermore O'Shea made a concerted effort to incorporate aspects of Maoridom into his major productions whereas in the writings of many of the cultural nationalists of the 1930s such as Curnow the Maori received only peripheral consideration. O'Shea made some different choices from the nationalists of the previous generation not only by using the popular (and therefore, in the eyes of many writers, intellectually suspect) medium of film as his vehicle but also by anticipating the increased importance of bi-culturalism.

McDonnell's comments were echoed by local film archivist, historian and broadcaster Jonathan Dennis who, in reference to Pacific Films, has said that the company "almost single-handedly kept alive the notion of an independent film industry in New Zealand."³³ In terms of the *feature* film industry, Dennis's comment is accurate, particularly if one is considering the period from the 1950s through to the late 70s. Well known journalist Peter Calder has echoed with Dennis in his statement that "Pacific Films has been the crucible of much of this country's film-making."³⁴ Certainly, as this thesis has shown, O'Shea's Wellington-based company was an important training-ground for many aspiring young film-makers.

To the official endorsement of the industry has been added an academic accolade in recognition of O'Shea's intellectual as well as technical and creative skills. In 1978, 31 years after he had graduated from Victoria University, he returned to receive a honorary Doctorate in Literature. And in 1990 John Dempsey O'Shea was awarded an OBE. Both awards had special significance. The doctorate was an acknowledgement of his intellectual abilities and unique achievements in a field (film-making) which universities in New Zealand had only recently begun to acknowledge as worthy of serious academic study. "Literature" in the academic sense was used broadly to cover many forms of production. Generally, the degree had been used to honour a graduate who had written important books, and in New Zealand this was the first such award to a maker of films. The OBE was an acknowledgement by the wider community – or at least by politicians – marking a new level of public recognition both for O'Shea and for the medium he represented. In November 1993, as previously mentioned, he received a Lifetime Achievement Award at the New Zealand Film and Television Conference and then more surprisingly, in 1996 New Zealand Post included an image from *Broken Barrier* in a set of four stamps and postcards celebrating the centenary of cinema in New Zealand.³⁵ O'Shea is still far from being a household name in New Zealand but he and his work have gradually been moving towards icon status.

Asked to speak in November 1997 at the New Zealand Film Commission's 20th birthday celebration O'Shea said, "The idea of fostering and encouraging independent production has triumphed. Both New Zealanders and many interested in films world-wide know the names of Roger Donaldson, Geoff Murphy, Peter Jackson, Jane

Campion, Gaylene Preston and Lee Tamahori. These are ‘film’ names – no one from television. Six from a population of 3.5 million – not too bad eh ... and the Film Commission’s only been going 20 years.”³⁶ This was an excellent example of O’Shea’s generosity as a father figure in acknowledging younger directors rather than speaking of his own achievements. It’s noteworthy that both of the women named here have acknowledged his direct influence and support, while Geoff Murphy has acknowledged links between *Runaway* and *Goodbye Pork Pie*. There is, however, food for thought in the fact that four of the six are now expatriates – “New Zealand film” remains in some respects a precarious culture.

Runaway – genre and coherence

This thesis has been built around the following basic concepts: context, agency and authorship, industry, and infrastructure. These have served as the basic tools of my analysis of John O’Shea’s attempt to create a New Zealand film industry. Along the way I have sought to answer such questions as whether a justification can be found for the apparent incoherence of *Runaway*. Basically what I offer is an explanation rather than a justification. With notable ambition the film sought to reflect and critique the particular circumstances of its time – the strangely transitional, confused state of a society that was still finding its way out of colonialism. It succeeded in reflecting that confusion but failed to offer an adequate diagnosis. I have sought to show how and why *Runaway* gained its particular mix of ingredients, both its New Zealand content and its European style (reflecting O’Shea’s and Williams’s film interests at the time). While my account explains rather than justifies the film’s hybridity, I have suggested how a more sympathetic case could be made. A critic using postcolonial theory could argue that hybridity was a natural characteristic of any serious film made in the New Zealand situation, representing a local genre of which *Runaway* was the first example.

The issue of genre is obviously an important one for *Runaway* – is it a confused mix of overseas genres or a new kind of locally-specific hybrid? Stephen Crofts in his “Concepts of National Cinema” links genre with infrastructure when he argues that “a nation-state cinema’s capacity to produce culturally specific genres depends on whether it can sustain production in sufficient volume to support the requisite infrastructures and audience familiarity: on the power of its local cultural traditions;

and on how strongly these are articulated by film relative to other artistic practices. The generation and/or survival of local genres has been a gauge of the strength and dynamism of nation-state cinemas.”³⁷ I share this writer’s belief that genre, infrastructure and “audience familiarity” are key issues here but have a different sense of how they are inter-related in the New Zealand context. The localness of O’Shea’s films was not dependent upon the creation of genres, and I would further argue that New Zealand cinema has not developed “culturally specific” genres in any broad sense – rather, its distinctiveness has been a matter of nuance and inflection. There are strong economic pressures on New Zealand feature films to work within familiar international genres so that overseas (and for that matter local) viewers have ease of access, but this has not prevented film-makers from incorporating culturally specific details and nuances. For example, Roger Donaldson’s *Smash Palace* (1987) followed a genre that was familiar to local and overseas audiences – the marriage break-up and child custody battle – so much so that it was compared by several overseas critics to *Kramer vs Kramer*. Yet the film had a strong New Zealand flavour in terms of its setting, vocabulary, style of humour and range of characters. Similarly *Runaway* drew on overseas genres but was rich in local details.

The New Zealand films most successful in box office terms have operated within the boundaries of an overseas genre, such as *Goodbye Pork Pie* (road movie), *The Piano* (historical romance) or *Braindead* (horror), but have still given their genre an innovative, New Zealand slant. Other important films have taken a highly complex or parodic approach to genre – e.g. *Utu* (historical drama/parody western) *Desperate Remedies* (camp historical romance), or *Mr Wrong* (feminist revisionist thriller). While Maori culture is unique to New Zealand, it would be a misleading simplification to see all “Maori” or “bicultural” films as representing a local genre or even cluster of genres. O’Shea was involved with films as diverse as *Broken Barrier*, *Ngati*, *Te Rua*, and the *Tangata Whenua* series, in addition to the bicultural scenes of *Runaway*, *Don’t Let it Get You* and *Pictures*. The very diversity of O’Shea’s films seems in itself a valuable achievement – particularly today when the success of *Once Were Warriors* seems likely to lock Maori feature films into a single genre, associated with gangs and violence. In short, an argument can be made that a diverse, exploratory *attitude* to the traditional ingredients of cinema is more healthy for a film industry such as ours than the development of a few “culturally specific genres.” It is

also a more useful concept than “genre” if we seek to justify *Runaway*. It implies that the complexity of O’Shea’s work was not necessarily a weakness, though it admittedly made his films more risky in the market place. Their success lay in demonstrating the idea that within the nation, and within the Maori community, there were many different types of story, implying a complex rather than stereotyped approach to identity. This diverse, exploratory attitude implied that New Zealand culture, or Maori culture, was not a known essence waiting to be packaged and marketed but was still in the process of being discovered and created, and film provided an ideal vehicle for that search.

Infrastructure

While admiring the serious, experimental quality of *Runaway* I would still conclude that not all of its oddities can be justified in those terms. But what can not be justified can at least be explained in terms of the early 60s context – not only by the state of New Zealand culture but also by the many gaps in its film-making infrastructure. O’Shea’s creative energies were compromised or diluted by his need to perform so many functions. Much of the thesis has been devoted to documenting this process. Of the five dimensions of the infrastructure listed in my “Introduction,” O’Shea had particular difficulty with (1) technical (film-specific) aspects, (3) financial aspects, and (5) larger social, cultural and political contexts (such as the receptivity of the audience).

The method of infrastructure analysis developed in this thesis could be applied to other periods of New Zealand film-making and to overseas national cinemas. Detailed analyses of that kind lie beyond the scope of my thesis but I shall give two examples as a brief demonstration of the applicability of its theoretical apparatus. First, one may ask why *Sleeping Dogs*, *Goodbye Pork Pie* and the other films made a decade or so after *Runaway* and *Don’t Let It Get You* were successful in establishing a New Zealand feature film industry? My way of explaining this would be to point to the strengthening of the three weakest links in the infrastructure. The first and perhaps most crucial change was the expansion in technical (film-specific) skills. From the end of the 60s a number of new film makers emerged and developed their skills over the course of the 70s by making short films. The fact that *Sleeping Dogs* (1977) was the first feature film for 11 years meant that the project involved a steep

learning curve for everyone involved; nevertheless, its script writers, director, actors and technicians had been preparing themselves for five or more years by making short dramatic films. Also, director Roger Donaldson could turn to a highly experienced D.O.P. for advice since Michael Seresin, who had first learned his craft as camera assistant on *Runaway*, had gone on to become an important cinematographer overseas and was now willing to return to assist the new wave of film-making. As for script writing, a weak link in the case of *Runaway*, there were now more New Zealand novels to draw from and more talented writers interested in the film medium. *Sleeping Dogs* was based on a novel by C.K. Stead and a script by Ian Mune and Arthur Baysting. The results were still uneven and the original script was far too long but it had strengths that *Runaway* lacked such as a strategic use of humour. In general Donaldson did not need to spread his energies as thinly as O'Shea and he could more fully demonstrate his talents as an auteur, for example by giving his film a strong sense of pace. In scripting and direction, *Sleeping Dogs*, *Goodbye Pork Pie* and other 70s films achieved a more effective combination of popular and "art film" elements. Despite their occasional awkwardness they succeeded generally in catering for both serious and populist tastes – an important balancing act in a small market like New Zealand. Arguably Donaldson and Murphy's choice of the American rather than the European tradition as model also helped to make their films more accessible.

In terms of "larger social, cultural and political contexts," the 1977 project had some important advantages. 17 years of television had helped to familiarise the audience with New Zealand accents and actors. Television had also provided the film-makers with more production experience (though the rise of the film industry was driven to some extent by frustration over the limited number of commissions television was prepared to offer). More generally, the cultural revolution of the late 60s and early 70s had created a new interest in local creative work in all the arts. The cinema audience had shrunk since the arrival of television but it had a greater appetite for local films and it was primarily a younger audience that welcomed films displaying a spirit of rebellion. (*Sleeping Dogs* was based on a novel associated with protest against the Vietnam War.) O'Shea himself regarded the difference in audience attitudes between the 60s and 70s as a key factor.

The one remaining weak link in the infrastructure was the shortage of funding. If Donaldson's film had been a serious flop the establishment of a new feature industry might have been in danger. As it was, the film did well by New Zealand standards, though it failed to recover its budget. The decisive factor was the government's decision (announced at the first Wellington screening of *Sleeping Dogs*) to establish a Film Commission with a small but at least regular supply of money to keep production going. This was the final link that did more than anything to help the 70s film makers to succeed where O'Shea had failed in the 60s.

Yet in emphasizing the infrastructural differences we should not overlook the need for strong individuals, illustrated in the case of *Sleeping Dogs* and *Goodbye Pork Pie* as much as in the case of *Runaway*. Each of them had a strong individual as director - even *Goodbye Pork Pie*, which was made by a group that shared hippie communal ideas. Indeed, none of the three films could have been made on their limited budget without a strong communal or cooperative spirit among actors and crew. It is a paradox of the auteur theory that a strong creative leader can fully realise his or her vision only with the help of teamwork. Such complexities suggest that while infrastructure is important, it is not the whole of the story. Any analysis must also take account of personal qualities such as dedication and persistence (with a strong director as the driving force behind each of these three films) and teamwork (the synergy that can occur when a group of people commit themselves to a common cause). Again, both the 60s and the 70s films were energised by a shared passion for the local and a spirit of cultural rebellion (against inauthentic versions of the local). Less tangible factors of this kind clearly influence the extent to which the available infrastructure is able to realise its potential.

Such an analysis could be applied again today as the New Zealand film industry appears to have advanced to a new level with *The Lord of the Rings*. In analysing such an evolution one needs to look at funding - the huge amount of overseas investment in *The Lord of the Rings*, and the Government's decision in May 2000 to establish a new \$22 million Film Production Fund as the first significant increase in public funding for film since the establishment of the Commission in 1978. Recently *The New Zealand Herald*, under the headline "Earnings from Films Tipped to Nudge \$1 billion," cited "the latest survey by the Screen Producers and Directors Association

[which] shows earning from the production of films, TV programmes and commercials will top \$307 million to March 2000 – up to 50 percent on the 1998-99 fiscal year.”³⁸ Granted, the lion’s share of this income comes from servicing off-shore productions and debate continues whether this has created a distortion. In terms of technical infrastructure, the evolution of production skills and special effects in this new digital era of film making would also offer a fascinating study. It remains to be seen whether this hugely expanded infrastructure can be sustained after *Rings*. As for “larger social, cultural and political contexts” the attitudes of the local audience appear to have shifted towards a more globally inflected style of nationalism, a pride in New Zealand’s connections with projects that are highly international. In all these respects the infrastructure appears to have entered a new stage, but again one must not underestimate the catalyst that has been provided by a few leading creative figures such as Richard Taylor, Fran Walsh, and above all Peter Jackson (a determined innovator in the O’Shea mould).

The same type of analysis could also be applied, say, to the emergence of the Australian feature film industry parallel to ours. It involved a similar process of cultural decolonisation and the building of a support structure. It happened a few years earlier in Australia (assisted by the establishment in 1971 of the Australian Film Development Corporation, six years before our Commission), but on both sides of the Tasman the pieces of the jigsaw could have come together differently. For example, if O’Shea and Mirams had been able to capitalise on the success of *Broken Barrier*, the New Zealand industry might have taken off before the Australian.

There are many parallels between the two histories. The dominance of American features was similarly lamented by Australian artists, writers and aspiring filmmakers. As early as 1919 an unsigned article in *The Picture Show* asked, “Why should we be contented with the deeds of American cowboys when we have our own stockmen to show us their remarkable skill?”³⁹ John Grierson was called to both countries in 1940 to advise their governments on the establishment of national film units. Certainly more features were produced in Australia than in New Zealand – 15 between 1947 and 1968 in contrast to O’Shea’s total of three - but that was hardly a spectacular figure for a country with a much larger population. Writing in 1968, Australian Ken Hall could still ask the question, “Why is there no Australian film

industry?”,⁴⁰ pointing out that although there was an increasing amount of studio space and facilities for television it was “not being used for film production.”⁴¹

Apart from starting a few years earlier, the subsequent growth of the Australian feature film industry closely parallels that of New Zealand, with the emergence of its own key figures such as Peter Weir and Tim Burstall. It too grew out of the cultural upsurge of the late 60s and early 70s which included a heightened cultural nationalism. By 1981 Ivan Hutchinson could write: “One of the important changes in film viewing habits in Australia over the last decade has been the acceptance of indigenous films. Once an anathema to the Australian public as a whole, the local film industry has been reborn in the last decade.”⁴² Another thesis would be needed to interpret such a complex cultural development adequately, but the takeoff of the industry in the 70s was clearly facilitated by the technical infrastructure reaching critical mass; by firmer (or less distracted) directing; by better scripting that made more confident use of Australian traditions (as in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*); by a stronger sense of audience; by a greater public appetite for local films; and by a growth in government and private funding.

Auteur

In Australia no less than in New Zealand, the growth of the industry depended not only on the technical and financial buildup but on cultural motivations and exceptional individuals, and that seems the most relevant point on which to end this thesis. The existence in New Zealand in the early 60s of a multi-skilled, creative individual with the potential to be an auteur – an individual with the imagination, drive, knowledge, leadership and entrepreneurial skills necessary to get a feature film made – was the precondition for *Runaway*. O’Shea’s main motivation was cultural rather than commercial and his success was of the same kind. As Helen Martin and Sam Edwards have commented: “in hindsight what *Runaway* really offered was an indication that film-making in New Zealand was inexperienced rather than inept, that there were creative talents with great potential, that while the influence of Hollywood’s melodramatic realist narratives was clear, they could be adapted in new and original ways”⁴³ (and, one might add, complemented by other national traditions as models). Or as Jonathan Dennis put it, “O’Shea’s tenacity, idealism, literacy, formidable wit and generosity nourished and sustained the local film industry for

nearly fifty years.”⁴⁴ His influence extended beyond the industry to the surrounding film culture. He devoted much of his life to the activities of film making, writing, organising film screenings, lobbying, teaching and training. O’Shea’s personal journey, in which he set out to see how far he could proceed down “the road less travelled,” was as dramatic as any of the journeys described in his films. Many others have followed and have been grateful for the signposts, warnings and encouragements he left along the way.

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- ¹ Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken", *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, (ed.) Edward Connery Lathem, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969, p105
- ² Tim Bywater and Thomas Sobchack, *An Introduction to Film Criticism*, White Plains, Longman, 1989, p 53
- ³ Allen Curnow, *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, Christchurch, Penguin, 1951, p53
- ⁴ Merata Mita, "The Soul and the Image", *Film in Aotearoa New Zealand*, p46
- ⁵ Russell Campbell, "Eight Documentaries", *Film in Aotearoa New Zealand*, p106
- ⁶ John O'Shea, *Don't Let It Get You*, p 141
- ⁷ Stephen Upston, "Pacific Films: The Role of Eric Anderson", *The New Zealand Film Archive*, No. 30, August 1992, p5
- ⁸ Since *Broken Barrier* Bayler has built up an impressive array of film and television credits including roles in *Macbeth*, *Monty Python's Life of Brian*, *The Remains of the Day*, *A Picture of Katherine Mansfield* and *Lipstick on Your Collar*.
- ⁹ Martin Blythe, *Naming the Other Images of the Maori in New Zealand Film and Television*, New Jersey & London, Scarecrow Press Inc, 1994, p 224
- ¹⁰ John O'Shea, *Don't Let It Get You*, p148
- ¹¹ *Breaking Barriers*, Bryan Bruce Productions
- ¹² John O'Shea, *Don't Let it Get You*, p7
- ¹³ *Ibid*
- ¹⁴ *Film in Aotearoa New Zealand*, pp 163-164
- ¹⁵ John O'Shea, interview, 17 August 1998
- ¹⁶ *Ibid*
- ¹⁷ *Film in Aotearoa New Zealand*, p164
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp166-167
- ¹⁹ *Ibid*, p167
- ²⁰ *Ibid*
- ²¹ *Ibid*
- ²² *Ibid*
- ²³ Helen Martin, Sam Edwards, *New Zealand Film 1912 – 1996*, Auckland, Oxford University Press, 1997, p54
- ²⁴ Brian McDonnell, "John O'Shea The Father of New Zealand Film", p 92
- ²⁵ John O'Shea, *Don't Let it Get You*, p88
- ²⁶ *Ibid*, p25
- ²⁷ *Ibid*, p88
- ²⁸ *Towards A New Zealand Motion Picture Production Policy*. The report included the comment that "we want to encourage an industry within which talented New Zealanders can earn a regular living and which will enable them to achieve some of their aspirations as film-makers". Wellington, Interim Film Commission, February 1978, p8.
- ²⁹ Brian McDonnell, p92
- ³⁰ *Ibid*
- ³¹ John O'Shea, *Don't Let It Get You*, p166
- ³² Brian McDonnell, p 86
- ³³ *Ibid*
- ³⁴ Peter Calder, "Legend Behind the Lens", *New Zealand Herald*, 28 November 1992
- ³⁵ Appendix 21
- ³⁶ John O'Shea, *Don't Let it Get You*, p 191
- ³⁷ Stephen Crofts, "Concepts of National Cinema", in J Hill and P Church Gibson (eds) *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, p 388
- ³⁸ *The New Zealand Herald*, 10 February 2000
- ³⁹ Ed Albert Moran and Tom O'Regan, "The Last Picture Show", *An Australian Film Reader*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1985 p22
- ⁴⁰ Ken Hall, "Strategies for an Industry – Television and Co-production" *An Australian Film Reader*, p158
- ⁴¹ *Ibid*
- ⁴² Ivan Hutchinson, "Movies", *Australian TV: The First 25 Years*, Eds Peter Beilby and Thomas Nelson, p101

⁴³ Helen Martin and Sam Edwards, *New Zealand Film 1912 – 1996*, p54

⁴⁴ Jonathan Dennis, *Film Show*, 1 August 1999

APPENDIX***Runaway*****The following appendices provide samples of background material**

1. First page of letter from Betty Curnow to John O’Shea, 4 November 1962
2. First page of *Lest We Resemble*, Act 1
3. Press clipping, *Lest We Resemble*, *New Zealand Herald*, circa November 1962
4. First page of letter from John Graham to John O’Shea, circa February 1963
5. First page of *Runaway* Synopsis
6. *Runaway* script, p 7
7. *Runaway* script, p 29
8. *Runaway* script, p 31
9. *Runaway* script, p 44
10. *Runaway* script, p 55
11. *Runaway* script, p 69
12. Front page of *Runaway* music score
13. Robin Maconie’s notes for “Organ Finale”
14. First page of “Organ Finale”
15. Invitation for *Runaway* World Première
16. Letter to John O’Shea from Prime Minister Keith Holyoake 6 October 1964
17. Telegram from Nadja Regin, 19 October 1964
18. Letter to John O’Shea from Rudall Hayward 19 October 1964
19. Letters to the editor *Timaru Herald*, 24 November 1964 and 26 November 1964
20. Letter to Pacific Films from P.D.L. Von Sturmer and Ramsay, 13 March 1967
21. Postcard issued by New Zealand Post to commemorate century of cinema in New Zealand.

13 Herbert St
 Takapuna
 Nov 4th.

Dear John

On Saturday
 I went to see John
 Graham's play at
 the Art Gallery. The
 clippings enclosed
 from Herald Star.
 What is prompting
 this letter is that
 it is the first N.Z.
 play I have seen
 which to me (a !!
 public spirited NZer)
 which could be
 a film or perhaps
 I should say

Act I

The curtain rises on the brightly painted cellar of a vineyard. It is Sunday morning and the sun streams through the open doorway which opens onto a backyard and the vineyard beyond. Ivan, a short but massively built Yugoslav in his early seventies, is filling bottles from a barrel of wine. Born in the gumfields of the North, he has had little education and speaks in a broken English. There is a gentleness and tolerance in him in most matters except those sometimes relating to his son. Mary, Ivan's wife, enters and helps to take the bottles he has filled and labels them.

Ivan It's nearly empty (He taps the barrel with his knuckles) It says to fill me up again before I rot. (Tapping) How many times have I filled it Mary? Thirty times in thirty years, and once more soon. I wonder! Once more before it rots, and cracks and holds nothing anymore! (Holding up a bottle and looking at it against the light) I get better. We get better don't we Mary? You and me, ^{y the wine} we get better every time. This time we beat Ulrich in the Show, eh. This is the year.

Mary Yes Ivan.

Ivan We'll bottle this other one and then that is enough for today.

~~Tony~~ Mary Tony will help you when he comes back.

Ivan When he comes back! And that might be next week or some day, or maybe he doesn't come back ever. What do you think of that? Maybe never. And then it's all for nothing.

Play's local setting



John Graham's play "Lest We Resemble," to be given its stage premiere on Saturday night, has a familiar local setting — a Henderson vineyard.

Above are Delphine Hodge, Lorenz von Sommaruga (centre) and Kym Edwards, three of the principals in the production by Chris Cathcart for the New Independent Theatre.

The play will be seen at the Art Gallery as part of the gallery's "A November Season for the Arts," the small-scale festival which has been organized for the coming fortnight.

Though the play has not previously been staged, it has been heard on radio. On this occasion the remainder of the cast will include Anna Soutar, Mary McRae, Archie Boermel, Brian Fisher, Gary Down, Graham Laws and Kevin O'Shea.

26 Bond St.
 Desombert,
 Auckland.
 Wednesday.

Dear Glen.

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 one, have you forgotten this, are you going to ignore that," and so on. Unless one generalises 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 view of

SYNOPSIS - "RUNAWAY"

David Manning, tempted by the expensive tastes of his girl friend, Jan Bryant, manipulates an account in his office to keep up payments on his sports car. When he falls further behind with payments, he tries to explain to his father, but is not given a hearing.

His parents remain unaware of his defalcations. When he tries to borrow money from his sister, his brother-in-law, an earnest school teacher, refuses help.

Plucking up his courage, he decides to confess to his boss and seek his help and forgiveness. But, as he works in an accountant's office, mishandling of money is unforgivable - and he is told he must go. In time, he must repay the £120 he has taken from the firm.

Knowing he must escape from the atmosphere of city life that has led him into this trouble, David sets out for the north. At Rawene, a small and predominantly Maori town, he gets employment as a Post Office telephone linesman.

Working with a young Maori, Joe Wharewera, he relaxes and becomes friendly with Joe's sister, Isabel. Isabel works in the local Post Office. She has lived in Auckland herself, but has chosen to return to a Polynesian environment where she can be more at ease. His friendship with her deepens into love on his part, but Isabel keeps him at arm's length. She senses that he is under strain and urges him to resolve his conflict with city life - for which he seems more suited. Her own Maori boy friend, Tana Hohira, aloof, proud and withdrawn, makes no concessions to David and is jealous and resentful of the interest Isabel shows towards him.

His blond good looks and natural charm attract a rich young woman, Laura Kenyon, while he is working near her family's plush beach home at Opononi. Blatantly and vigorously, Laura attempts to bring him under her sexual control. But she is unsuccessful.

It is only when Isabel rejects him finally and again urges him to reconcile himself with his city life that David succumbs to Laura's offers. But she too much resembles Jan, the girl who started his troubles. Her insensitivity and rudeness to Isabel lead him to assault her violently.

Aware now that he has transgressed the limits of the law and that Laura's parents will set the law onto him, he recklessly

7.

He goes outside.

75. ~~CS David turns~~ ~~unhappy~~ ~~by motor mower which~~ moves away from ~~GAM~~ with Alex ~~guiding~~ it. David waits for him to reach end of row.

76. M2S David and Alex.
Throughout the scene, David is tense and anxious. Alex is absentminded about David, but intent on his mower with which he keeps fiddling.

David turns away.

77. MCS David who turns back to his father.

78. MS David and Alex who has bent down to take grass out of mower.

Alex looks up at him and turns mower ~~down~~ (down)

79. CS David - silent brooding.

80. MS David and Alex

Alex tunes motor up.

Turn motor off.

DAVID: I want to see Dad.

SARAH: Anything wrong?

DAVID: Nothing - where is he?

SARAH: Out in the garden I think.

(Mower starts up Yes, there he is, Why - what's wrong

DAVID: Nothing. Nothing at all.

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

ALEX: It's not as good ^{as the} ~~as~~ the ~~one~~ ^{one} (he listens to it's noise

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

ALEX: What? What doesn't matter?

DAVID: Well (pause) I want your help.

(Dialogue so far above noise of mower)

ALEX: Any time. How can I help you (David pauses)

Well, what is it? Sandra treating you badly again?

Too much work?

DAVID: It's not that.

ALEX: Played a round of golf with Bellamy last week. Says you'll be appointed (pulls at grass) a junior partner in the firm next year.

ALEX: What's wrong.

DAVID: I need some money.

ALEX: Don't we all?

DAVID: Can't you turn the damned thing off. Listen to me.

ALEX: Alright, alright. How much?

29.

289. MS Detail of the exterior of church. David looks at it. Inferior Maori carving - painted rafter pattern - all a little decrepit.
290. MS Joe - embarrassed ~~JOE: You like the carving, eh?~~
291. David says nothing and looks awkwardly at Joe.
292. The marae - a long shot. There is none of the elegance or "spirit of Maoritangi" evident. Long shadows. Someone lights a feeble fire.
293. Sea birds hover over mudflats, but do not settle.
294. Looking from mudflats to boarding house. ~~ISOBEL: Enjoy the day~~
295. ~~Mr. at house~~ Corner of boarding house. DAVID: ~~The tide's low. Low's~~ David's window. He stands by ~~live been it.~~ window and speaks to someone in room. He turns inside room.
296. David turns from window DAVID: Let's go for a walk.
297. Isobel ~~sits up in bed.~~ ISOBEL: Another time.
DAVID: Another country
ISOBEL: What
DAVID: Nothing
ISOBEL: When are you going away from here.
DAVID: I'm not. I like it here.
298. MCS David - he sits hown beside her, ~~caresses her skin.~~ ISOBEL: You must go away. Don't you see?
Isobel now in CS DAVID: I don't see and I don't understand you.
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
299. M2S favouring David.
David stands up and moves away from her.

31.

~~She looks up at prompt~~

The robb'd that smiles
steals something from the
thief,
He robs himself who...

~~SEARLE:~~ The robb'd that smiles
steals something from
the thief:

~~He robs himself THAT spends
a bootless grief.~~

~~ACTOR: The robb'd that smiles
steals something from the
thief:~~

He robs himself THAT spends
a bootless grief.

~~304. Jim and group, with actor
speaking last line. Jim
stands up and dismisses them.~~

JIM: Well, as long as you can
remember it that's fine.
Really sounded as if you were
getting the hang of the story
That's all for tonight.
Tomorrow at eight.

~~He walks over to Julia.
She has started to read letter
again.~~

JIM: I wish you wouldn't keep
reading that letter.

JULIA: David needs someone to
help him.

JIM: It's his own lookout. He's
not a child.

JULIA: Dad's paid back the money
but....

JIM: He's brought it on himself

JULIA: We could've helped him.

JIM: If he wants to run off the
rails, there's nothing we....
Goodnight, Mr. Searle.

SEARLE: You think it's going well

JIM: Yes it's fine - goodnight.
Will you lock up please.

~~Julia stands up and goes to
door.~~

JIM: Look, Julia....

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

~~He hurries after Julia.~~

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

~~305. Outside hall. Jim stops
Julia~~

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

~~306. CS Julia over Jim's
shoulder~~

44.

429. CS Morton

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 - and you can't even enjoy the nonsense unless you've got the wherewithal.

430. M2S They drive on in silence.

431. IS countryside - car speeds past.

432. M2S - silent. Morton yawns.

Leans over and takes packet of pills from dashboard pocket. Takes one pill out and swallows it. Looks apologetically to David.

MORTON: The old ticker isn't what it used to be. The bloody desert euchred me. You're lucky you missed that lot, boy. Taught me a few things though. Taught me how to be tough. When I came back I started in a shed. Haven't looked back since. If you're prepared to work, you can't go wrong.

433. M2S favouring David who eyes him with the cold boredom of youth at the sound of "old dig" stories.

~~delete~~
MORTON: It's good to have someone to talk to on a long trip.

DAVID: Passes the time, I suppose

MORTON: Married?

DAVID: No.

MORTON: Stay clear of it until you get on your feet in this world.

DAVID: That's true.

MORTON: I've a daughter about your age. Couldn't advise her anything, though. Won't settle down. Doesn't think much of her old man (laughs) ... only his money. Not that I see much of her, though --

CTET.

55.

548. Celia, with bag of food, leaves store - pauses - goes into phone box.

549. David cannot rest. He stands up wearily, looks in mirror.

550. Celia in phone box - she looks in direction of Cabin 6.

551. David goes to window - he draws curtain, looks out.

552. Celia, ~~in a manner reminiscent of Isobel~~, walks back across concrete court to cabin with food.

553. David stands in reverie at window, looking out. He hears Celia/~~Isobel~~ come into room, but does not react. Celia puts parcels on table in f/g. CELIA: Hope you'll like what I've got for us, ~~Isobel~~.
.... ~~Isobel~~
.. David
Relax, David, relax. You must be tired. Food soon.

- he turns round ~~in a sudden~~
~~from~~ *Tensely*.

- she moves to kitchen.

554. Celia at stove. David comes and stands behind her.

David
DAVID: ~~Celia~~, do you know what you're doing? With me, I mean.

CELIA: I'm sure ^{going to make us a cup of coffee} the proprietor would approve a wife ^{making} cooking her husband's ~~deal~~ ^{coffee} in an ideal kitchen in an ideal motel. We're going to the Coast tomorrow and you're going to show me what it's really like. I rang ^{ed my Mum!} ~~her~~ and ~~told~~ her not to worry about me.

- David's anxiety is unrelieved

Don't do that
DAVID: You what? When? When did you do that.

CELIA: You're hurting my arm.

DAVID: You said you were at the shop

CELIA: I was at the shop -- let go -- I phoned afterwards.

My mother ends in shop, I wish
DAVID: Did you say where we were?

CELIA: No -- and I didn't mention we.

DAVID: I'm sorry.

- David seizes her arm TR

69.

Celia picks up some driftwood and busies herself with fire.

677. David unwraps blankets.

678. Clarrie ^{now alone in boat.} is making a pile with his whitebait tins. He is sealing them off. He looks along river towards hut.

679. ~~Plume of smoke rises from chimney of hut.~~

680. Inside hut, The door opens - ~~and~~ man with gladstone bag on rope and bedroll enters. He takes their presence for granted. Drops his swag on floor.

681. Celia is disturbed by his entry.

682. David takes it unconcernedly.

DAVID: This your place.

683. CS Clarrie - he goes about getting food from his gladstone bag.

CLARRIE: No, ~~it's~~ nobody's place.

684. MS Celia and David, fav. David

DAVID: I thought it might belong to someone.

685. CS Clarrie

CLARRIE: Nothin' belongs to no one round ~~these~~ ^{ere} parts. Some jokers think things belong to them. ~~Nothing belongs to no one. Things just belong to the world, and that's all.~~ ^{But the don't} 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. Same as them nets and the rest of it.

686. MS group

686 → DAVID: It's alright if we stay then.

CLARRIE: OK if you don't mind me.

CELIA: Would you like something to eat.

686a → CLARRIE: Don't eat food. ~~that kind. No one should~~ ^{That kind of food don't}

687. CS Clarrie - he has taken out ~~of his bag a cloth tied at four~~ ^{by a cut line and tied around} the corners which he is undoing. He spreads it out on his lap and begins to eat - fern roots, herbs, dried fish.

688. David and Celia eye him curiously.

MUSIC SCORE

for the Pacific Films Productions

"RUNAWAY"

Music composed 1964 Robin Macome

© A.P.R.A.

Instrumentation

Bb Clarinet

String Quartet (2 Viol. V₁ + V₂)

Piano (grand)

For the 3th sequence also:

Trumpet in C

Tenor/Bass Trombone

Large Gong

For the 5th sequence alone:

Grand Organ

This score was composed in Vienna between the 28th and the 30th August, 1964.

3) The organ finale This piece must sound like Bach. The chorale
 (wrote it's modelled on is Durch Adams Fall which every good organist
 know, as Nigel Holmworth would say. Manual R.H. upper: reedy penetrating sound
 R.H. lower: flutes etc a softer textured full sound. Upper octaves on both. Left hand
 manual should have brass stops, ^{tr Cornet, Clarinet, etc} & contrast with 2 R.H. manuals (assuming that
 the R.H. can manage 2 manuals: if it can't make it flute etc with stop & ve stop)
 The pedals should be very low: brass and all. When the pedals come in everybody
 should be shocked. This means the other parts should balance the pedals. It possible
 don't let the organist use swells for the tutti passages. It's not in the
 style. At the very end only the unison D's should sound. When you cut it, Tony, if
 you must, don't fade. I would prefer that ~~you~~ if there is an end limit to
 the piece, that you work backwards from it with the piece and fade in after the
 2nd. Better still, get the organist to shape his performance to fit.

Sequence D. David alone in the mountains.
Improvisation on the Prelude for Grand Organ.

Toto

Man.

Ped.

Hiatus

Out for silent
passage in film

In the distinguished presence of
*Their Excellencies The Governor General and
 Lady Fergusson*

Pacific Films

in association with Amalgamated Theatres and New Zealand
 Film Services,

has pleasure in inviting

to the World Premiere of

"Runaway"

at the PLAZA THEATRE, Wellington at 8 p.m.

on Thursday, 22nd October, 1964

and to a supper party after the screening at the
 Caltex Lounge, Lower Taranaki Street.

DRESS: BLACK TIE.

To enable ticketing, if you are able to accept this invitation, please
 complete and return to Pacific Films, Box 2040, Wellington,
 15th October

Address for Tickets:

We will be able/unable to attend
 supper after the screening.



Prime Minister
Wellington
New Zealand

6 October, 1964.

Dear Mr O'Shea ,

Thank you so much for the invitation you have so kindly extended to Mrs Holyoake and me to be present at the World Premiere of "Runaway" on Thursday, 22 October, at the Plaze Theatre, Wellington.

Much as we would like to come, I regret that we cannot have that pleasure as Parliament will be in session that evening and it is always difficult for me to be away from the House on a sitting day.

I should like a representative of the Government to be present at your Premiere and have asked the Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon. J.R. Marshall, if he could do so. Mr Marshall will be pleased to attend, and it would be appreciated if you would be good enough to get into touch with his Private Secretary to make the necessary arrangements.

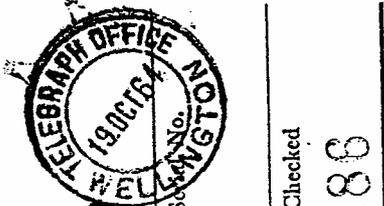
May I take this opportunity of offering you my warm good wishes for the film's success.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith Holyoake". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Mr John O'Shea,
Producer,
Pacific Films Ltd.,
G.P.O.Box 2040,
WELLINGTON.

DATE STAMP



19 OCT 1964
 AIRPORT
 CO. LTD.
 D. 56280
 N. 79144
 By

Checked 3886

ZWD622 LGC23 PLG29 NZWN
 LONDONLG 42/40 19 1000
 LT JOHN O'SHEA USSELL HARRIN & R.A. USMAR &
 KENT HOUSE,
 WELLINGTONZ BOX 1194 WELLINGTON.

Rec'd
 By *9/28/64*



OVERSEA

TELEGRAM

Tel. 139. 20,000 pds/10/60-30195 M

WISHING YOU LOTS OF SUCCESS STOP REGRET NOT
 BEING ABLE BE WITH YOU ON THURSDAY TO SHARE
 THE EXCITEMENT OF THE DAY MY LOVE AND WARMEST
 WISHES TO EVERYONE IN THE UNIT

YOURS NADJA REGIN

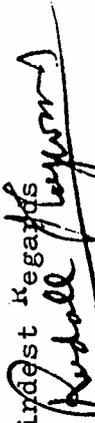
55 Esplanade Road
 Mt. Eden, AUCKLAND.
 Oct. 19th. 1964.

Mr. John O'Shea
 Pacific Films Ltd
 P.O.Box 2040
WELLINGTON

Dear John,

Many thanks for your kind invitation to be present at the premiere of "Runaway" at the Civic on Friday next.

We will both be there on this most important occasion, and hope you will break a house record. You seem to have whipped up a vast amount of interest, and could get a lot of your money back in the first week. The splash release looks like a worth-while policy. This thing has got to go, or feature production in this country will return to limbo.

Kindest Regards

 Rudall and Ramai.

NEW ZEALAND FILM

Sir,—On behalf of the mothers of New Zealand who have sons and daughters of an age to compare with those depicted in "Runaway," we would like to register our disapproval of the film. We feel it gives a wrong impression of the character and conduct of the youth of New Zealand.

We hope this film will not be shown overseas.—We are, etc.,

Two Mothers

NEW ZEALAND FILM

Sir,—I should imagine that not only mothers, but all sections of the community would not so much disapprove but be utterly disappointed in "Runaway." With little to recommend it except Barry Crump and some of the scenery, it is painfully paltry in theme and consequence. With nothing subtle, romantic or courageous in the limp story and insipid dialogue, the whole production verges on the ridiculous. Promiscuity and absurdity increase with every situation, from the antics of the wool-buyer's mistress at Hokianga to the feline behaviour of the travelling city girl with never a hair out of place in the mountains of Westland. There is much in our way of life from which adventure, humour and love could be evolved without having to resort to such a sordid and worn-out theme.—I am, etc.,

Barbara Harper

P. D. L. VON STURMER & RAMSAY

BARRISTERS & SOLICITORS

P.O. BOX 33-248 TAKAPUNA
TELEPHONES: 299-182, 293-109

PAUL DAVIES LEIGH VON STURMER, LL.B.
IAN ALEXANDER RAMSAY, LL.B. (N.Z.) B.C.L. (ONON.)

IAR:CMR

1ST FLOOR, STRAND CHAMBERS,
HALL'S CORNER,
TAKAPUNA, AUCKLAND, N.Z.
13th March, 1967

The Manager,
Pacific Film Productions Ltd.,
3 Cruikshank Street,
WELLINGTON

Dear Sir,

re: J. GRAHAM

The above named has instructed us in the matter of the sum of at least £200 owing by your company to him for his work on the screen play of "Runaway"

This letter is to inform you that our instructions are that unless we receive payment of the above amount of £200 by Thursday 23rd March we are to institute court proceedings for the recovery of the same.

Yours faithfully,
P.D.L. VON STURMER & RAMSAY

Per: *J. a. R.*

I.A. RAMSAY

**A WHITE BOY...
A MAORI GIRL**

*Facing the
challenge of
prejudice !*

BROKEN BARRIER

Featuring

**KAY NGARIMU
TERENCE BAYLER**

PRODUCTION OF THE NEW ZEALAND FILM COMMISSION
7 AUGUST 1966

NEW ZEALAND
80c
BROKEN BARRIER
1966

PRODUCED IN NEW ZEALAND BY ROGER MIRAMS AND JOHN O'SHEA...

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Photographic Acknowledgements

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