

STORY: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES OF ADAPTATION

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ABSTRACT

This work explores the history of war drama in film and prose; the availability of structural models to screenplay writers; and the possible application and usefulness of these filmic models in the early development of story for contemporary writers of novels.

Time was given at the beginning of the project in researching these possible filmic models. A *tandem narrative* design was chosen, which allowed my story to be told simultaneously from two locations (‘At Home’ and ‘In Foreign Lands’), over different time sequences (‘The Present’ and ‘The Past’).

Although this seems a complicated structure to select, once employed I found it simplified the story-telling process considerably. With a clear structure in my head, I never felt lost during the writing, and it gave me plenty of room to ‘pantsy’ my work within this framework. That is, to write by the seat-of-my-pants (or to follow creative prompts as they arose), which is something I like to do. It has been quite an adventure, and has opened my eyes to the time that can be saved by better planning, even if one is not interested in filmic models.

ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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STORY:

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES OF ADAPTATION

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

AIMS OF THE EXEGESIS

This exegesis examines the novel-to-film relationship, and the challenges it presents for the modern novelist. As my work is set during World War II, it also looks at the conventions of war drama in film, and shows how these influences are drawn through the story structure of my novel.

A filmic structural design has been employed to aid novel-to-film adaptability at a later date. This is achieved through the use of three acts, rising action, character arcs, and visual symbolism. A *tandem narrative design* is used, where ‘The Present’ (1947) book-ends ‘The Past’ (1939-1945). The story flows between ‘At Home’ sequences and ‘In Foreign Lands’ sequences during the war-time period.

An omniscient narrator effects transitions between these two worlds – providing essential historical and social context, and taking us in and out of the minds of the principal characters. I have tried to use the omniscient narrator subtly, to allow the reader to inhabit the characters’ spaces. We see and hear the story told primarily from the points-of-view of the mother and the son (Miriam and Sonny).

Atarangi, Sonny’s girlfriend, is like a younger version of Miriam, and her point of view is included as a minor character until her death. Some paternal wisdom and insights are also provided by Sonny’s father, Api.

Sonny is the protagonist of the story, and Miriam is Sonny’s mentor-antagonist. Atarangi is the object of Sonny’s desire, and the person to whom he is trying to return.

Who Disturbs the Kukupa follows the life of a young man who goes to war and must find his way home after he is left behind when his company retreats in the night. There are two main areas of focus: the 28th Māori Battalion and a remote rural community.

My intention was to write the inter-twined personal stories of both those at home and those abroad. Miriam shares her feelings of grief and loss, and her quest is to make sense of

events, in spiritual and cultural terms, to those closest to her. Sonny is a young man on a journey from innocence to manhood. He is the character who changes the most during this story.

In writing the novel I wanted to keep a filmic structure in mind (Aronson 2010), with the aim of bringing to the page something of the colour, sensation and action of war. My long-term aim was to write the novel, followed by the screenplay version the next year. Therefore, at the level of structural design, forethought about the eventual film was integral to the planning of the book.

SYNOPSIS

Who Disturbs the Kukupa is a story about the people of the Far North (in the fictional Māori community of Rangitakō). At the end of the war the quest of the matriarch, Miriama Wirima, is to piece together events after she reluctantly consented to her sons, Sonny and Tama, enlisting with the 28th Māori Battalion. Before he leaves Sonny promises to marry his childhood sweetheart, Atarangi, on his return.

At the Olympus Pass in Greece, Tama dies and Sonny escapes behind enemy lines. The Battalion chaplain returns to the field and mistakenly identifies ‘Sonny Wirima’ as among the dead. The (inaccurate) news that Sonny is ‘Killed in Action’ and Tama is ‘Missing believed Killed’, reaches the whānau. (The readers know the truth of what is happening at home and abroad, but the characters must take action based on false information).

Atarangi is distraught and Miriama proposes that her eldest son, Hemi, marries Ata in Sonny’s place. Winifred, Hemi’s girlfriend, begs Ata not to go ahead with the wedding. Ata is torn and confused. She argues bitterly with her elders and runs towards the sea cliff, where she slips and falls to her death. Sonny comes home on furlough to learn of the tragedy. Heartbroken, he declares he will return to the war. At the last minute Hemi decides to join him.

In Italy, the Māori Battalion is given the impossible task of seizing the railway station at Monte Cassino. A and B Companies are being slaughtered. Hemi is badly wounded. To save his friends, Sonny rushes at an exposed wall to throw in a well-aimed grenade. He is shot in the head, and dies instantly.

1947. The war is over and the last of the men have returned. Miriama is left with a broken community who turn to her to explain the devastating losses of the war, and what this

means for their future. She is called to assist with a birth. Hemi and Winifred tell her they want to name the twins after Sonny and Tama. Miriama returns to her cliff top garden to give thanks for the new life.

RESEARCH AIMS

Award winning historical screenplays, from *Gone with the Wind* (1939) to *Lincoln* (2012), are saturated in historical detail and social nuance. Steven Spielberg's *Empire of the Sun*, based on J.G. Ballard's semi-autobiographical novel, is another example. Although some of these details remain in the back-story, or are portrayed visually, audiences still expect authenticity.

This is not to say that every character and event of the story will be duplicated in complete accord with what historians have told us about the era. But, as Gore Vidal's sweeping American historical novels illustrate, an author's knowledge of the period, its institutions and people can place broad strokes on a canvas into which a reader might step, and experience a genuine sense of being there.

Who Disturbs the Kukupa involves scenes of military training, land battles and their aftermath, and civilian life. To write the story credibly I had to engage with the sources that would illuminate both the army life of the young men who enlisted, and the world they left behind. It was vital to clarify the time-line, and to be true to the cultural perceptions and likely feelings and responses of the characters.

I began to research this project privately in 2013. Since then I have undertaken a considerable amount of reading, a second visit to the National Library and Archives in Wellington, and a small amount of location scouting in the North. Reading the memoirs, unpublished diaries, and letters of contemporaries, has enhanced my insight into the experience of the soldiers and their commanders. Newspaper and newsreel accounts of events in military camps and on the battle fronts, and reports of social activities and recruiting, have also aided my understanding of community sentiments and individual attitudes.

While the tale and main characters are fictional, and some creative latitude has been taken, the work is firmly based on actual events and real locations. Some documentary elements will be detectable through the use of archival sources and historical studies of New Zealanders at war.

THE NOVEL-TO-SCREENPLAY DEBATE

In her book, *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* (2003), Kamilla Elliott casts back to eighteenth century debates on poetry and painting to examine the relationship between novel and film. It was here, she says, that ‘false and limiting paradigms’, placing words and pictures in opposition to each other, first appeared:

At the heart of the novel and film debate lies a particularly perplexing paradox: on one side, novels and films are diametrically opposed as “words” and “images,” at war both formally and culturally. J. Dudley Andrew, the most widely reprinted scholar of literary film adaptation, is one of many to argue “the absolutely different semiotic systems of film and language.”¹ On the other side of the paradox, novels and films are integrally related as sister arts sharing formal techniques, audiences, values, sources, archetypes, narrative strategies, and contexts² (Elliott, 2003, p.1).

‘If film words are not “cinematic,” then what are they, and where do they belong?’ Elliott asks (2003, p.83). William Phillips (1999) classified screenplays as ‘literary encroachments on film’. Screenplays belong with novels, short stories, plays and histories and the like, Phillips claims, whereas the language of film is visual and pictorial.³

If prose can paint pictures and film can embrace words, I find myself asking, how is this distinction useful? In his book *The Story Solutions*, Eric Edson postulates that movies and novels communicate stories in difference ways – movies objectively through what we see and hear; novels subjectively through inner monologue (Edson 2011, p.135). This binary subjective/objective distinction seems too forced to me, but it can serve an analytical purpose.

Movie plot structure – that is: ‘the visual ordering of events to elicit the strongest emotional reaction from an audience’ – becomes central to a successful screenplay. However, as Edson observed, it has become increasingly popular among contemporary novelists to structure their prose to ‘closely echo the immediacy of screen story’ (Edson 2011, p.115).

To classify novels as only words, and films as only images, is to regard them as disparate in form and content, and essentially untranslatable. But in 1985 Joy Boyum⁴ affirmed that, while the ‘rhetoric of fiction’ and the ‘rhetoric of film’ are not the same, there are ‘analogous strategies whereby the one achieves the effects of the other’. This is where

¹ See Andrew (1984), as quoted in Elliott 2003, p.1.

² See Cohen (1979), as quoted in Elliott 2003, p.1; also Magny (1972); Chatman (1978).

³ See Phillips (1999), as quoted in Elliott, 2003, p.83.

⁴ See Boyum (1985), as quoted in Elliott 2003 p.184.

'the greatest challenge of adaptation lies'. Today, this analogical model strongly influences theory and practices of novel-to-film adaptation (Elliott, 2003, p.184).

Can we afford to segregate the written word from the visual? I don't think so. The best novels are often remarkably sensual and visual. Technology itself has bounded ahead of us on this issue – internet, texting, television advertising, computer graphics – mixing words and images with a new fluidity. Elliott proposes an 'interart' approach asking, what 'analogical affinities' or 'looking-glass' reflections can be found in the process of translation? (Elliott, 2003, pp.243-4).

The fundamental difference is that a film, unlike a novel, is rarely the product of one mind. Typically, it is the collaborative enterprise of writers, directors, cinematographers, editors and musicians. But shooting scripts and ancillary briefs often contain background and guidance on the characters, and the way in which certain lines are to be spoken and reacted to by actors.

Barring a difference in the way of telling, I see no unbridgeable separation between novel and film. I am aware screen writers compose in two languages: narration and the filmic rhetoric of image, mood, and atmosphere. Modern audiences read and interpret both successfully. Energy flows, one to the other, by a process of representation and analogy. The challenge to the contemporary author is how much of this can we communicate in our prose?

GENRE AND THEMES

While my aim was to build on war drama traditions, my intention was not to idealise my characters as heroes. Instead, it was to demonstrate the constraining influences surrounding them – to reveal who they are through the choices they make, how they treat each other, and how they view the world. Imagination has been crucial to achieving this aim, but it has been underpinned by an understanding of the traditions of this genre.

Dominion troops were often difficult to handle. Brought up to believe that leaders had to earn respect rather than inherit it as a privilege of class, there was a toughness and uniqueness in New Zealand and Australian soldiers which was recognised by their British and American commanders. Furthermore, there was a well-established Anzac tradition of mateship and brotherly support.

Māori troops had these qualities in spades. Those men who experienced the freedoms of a rural upbringing were often the most unruly. Their capacity for independent thinking,

and their skills at improvisation in the field, played a pivotal role in how the Māori Battalion was regarded by military leaders, and the consequential role of the 28th during the war. While the battlefields of Greece and Italy, and Sonny's interaction with Greek civilians during his escape, comprise the main action line of my story, equal focus has been placed on the relationship lines between those at home, and the psychological transformations of the characters during their time apart.

Many war films, especially those made since the Vietnam War, have had no qualms in showing the dehumanizing effect of war. After a century of literature, film, and protest movements, moral questions concerning war have become a part of the collective conscience. But presenting an argument against war, or providing a counterpoint to big studio collaboration in war propaganda, was not the purpose of this work.

Who Disturbs the Kukupa is neither a 'guts-and-glory', nor a 'courage-verse-cowardice' kind of story. It is more evocative and reflective than this. The work explores the customs and spirituality of Māoritanga – demonstrating how, in a short moment in time, this intersected with the ancient worlds of Egypt and Europe, through modern warfare.

Most readers understand that war is chaotic and violent. They want to see what defines us as human beings in the midst of this chaos. Is it valour in the face of death, or a willingness to die for family and friends? Can we show compassion when we are tempted to seek revenge – a soldier spares a life, an officer limits the carnage, a company leave behind supplies for starving civilians? Similar incidents and dilemmas confront Sonny Wirima, or are observed by him in those around him.

This is a tale of ordinary people in extraordinary times, and of how war can shape, as well as devastate individuals and their communities. Recurring themes include issues of love and loyalty, family unity and community spirit, personal and ethnic pride, and grief and survival. Central to this, is the emphasis upon the connections between people of similar backgrounds. Such powerful social influences may support the characters in their journeys to foreign places. Conversely, they may come into conflict with other values they encounter or, in seeing similarities, may find them confirming.

STORY AS METAPHOR

'Story is metaphor for life', wrote Robert McKee. He advised storytellers to abstract life 'to discover its essence', to provide the rhythm of 'life-as-lived'. In the process of our assault-

on-the-senses modes of commercialisation, there has been a tendency to over-structure and over-complicate. With some distaste, McKee points out that: ‘Every decade or so technical innovation spawns a swarm of ill-told movies, for the sole purpose of exploiting spectacle’ (McKee, 1999, pp.24-25). Fifteen years later this point is even more valid.

If producing tales that bear little resemblance to real life is a common fault of commercial novels and films, this is not an entirely new phenomenon. Over 100 years ago it was *The Prisoner of Zenda* and *King Solomon’s Mines*, escapist novels, which inspired romantic film adventures. From the 1930s, and particularly during the war years, audiences rushed to the movies to escape the realities of poverty, hardship, and personal loss.

While Computer Generated Images (CGI) may carry audiences to new heights, the creation of visual illusion has been a recurring element in the history of entertainment. Skilful cinematography, CGIs, and other media bling provide new opportunities to enhance a good story (*Avatar*, *Lord of the Rings*).

When CGIs are motivated by a strong story, such as *Forest Gump* or *Men in Black*, the effect vanishes behind the story it’s telling, enriching the moment without calling attention to itself...lasting entertainment is found only in the charged human truths beneath the image (McKee, 1999, p.25).

Whatever razzle-dazzle commercial story-tellers employ today, most will want to ensure that the truths they seek to communicate also go out with the package.

SECTION 2: CONVENTIONS

HISTORY OF WAR DRAMA

War drama has a long and varied history grounded in epic poetry and literature as far back as Homer’s *Iliad* – a fount of inspiration for numerous novels and films, most recently Wolfgang Petersen’s *Troy* (2004).

Tolstoy’s nineteenth century saga, *War and Peace*, provided a quarry from which a succession of films was made. King Vidor and seven other writers crammed the action into 208 minutes. Sergey Bondarchuk needed another 219 minutes. One of several subsequent mini-series stretched out to 890 minutes.

These successive efforts demonstrate the enormous complexity of translating sweeping historical events and a multitude of characters for the screen. Similar issues are confronted in the mammoth docudramas (*The Longest Day*; *A Bridge too Far*; *Flags of our Fathers*), all based on non-fiction books.

The silent film *Birth of a Nation* (1915), about the American Civil War, cast the mould in war film conventions. This was followed by a series of documentaries and propaganda films shot during the First World War.

In the 1920s the invention of long-form cine-drama created considerable public excitement and, as silent films passed into the talkies in the 1930s, there were some notable and increasingly spectacular early American war films – *The Big Parade* (1925); *What Price Glory* (1926); *Tell it to the Marines* (1926); *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930); *The Dawn Patrol* (1930, 1938); *The Road to Glory* (1936).

There was a strong current of anti-war sentiment in the films of this period, and the novels on which some of them were based. In fact, there had always been more ambivalence in American society about the ‘Great War’, which they joined belatedly in 1917.

During the 1940s the British film industry produced influential war films combining documentary techniques with fictional stories – notably Noel Coward’s *In Which We Serve* (1942) and *Millions Like Us* (1943). If the flood of war films, which came from Britain and America from the late 1940s through the 1950s, were not all propagandist, they were sure to carry a message of some kind. Some of these were comedies. Others like *From Here to Eternity* (1953), based on James Jones’s debut novel, were serious explorations of human relationships under stress.

After Pearl Harbor, ‘Hollywood went to war with gusto’ wrote Koppes and Black (1987, p. vii), bringing the spectacle of war to the big screen. But not all films extolled the heroics of America and their Allies during the Second World War. Some, like *Mrs Miniver* – based on Jan Struther’s novel and British middle class characters created for magazine stories before the war – were more microscopic, showing family life and the social problems experienced by civilians. These two traditions – sweeping docudramas and vignettes of those affected at home – have continued.

Progressively, through the 1960s to 1980s, audiences were exposed to tougher images and more challenging truths. Mike Nichols struggled to bring Joseph Heller’s eccentric satire,

Catch-22 (1969), to the screen. Robert Altman's *MASH*, made the same year was more successful, perhaps because it did not have to suffer comparison with a best-selling novel.

Post-Vietnam films reflected the divisive tumult and confrontation of the first 'TV war' and revelations of the Pentagon Papers on how warfare is made worse by deceiving politicians, lying generals, unjustifiable causes, and drug-induced corruption of the troops – (*Taxi Driver* (1976); *Apocalypse Now* (1979); *The Deer Hunter* (1978); *Platoon* (1986).

A much praised semi-autobiographical novel written by ex-marine Gustav Hasford, *The Short-Timers*, was the source for Stanley Kubrick's film, *Full Metal Jacket*. The book was broken into three novellas (only two of which were brought to screen) and was written in the present tense with three different writing styles. An approach I was not tempted to emulate.

Audience interested in this genre has not waned over the last two decades. Today, questioning commentary may appear in the voice-overs ('Where does this evil come from?') and there are moments when the enemy is shown on more equal or even compassionate terms – *The Thin Red Line* (1998); *We Were Soldiers* (2002); *The Water Diviner* (2015). The commercial success and accolades received by recent war films signify a growing sophistication in the quality of screenplays and in their production; as well as a maturing conscience in better educated, more well-read, and less naive audiences (Clarke 2006; Slater 2009).⁵

Part of the evolving subtlety of story-telling and character delineation, and the accompanying response of audiences, must be attributed to the longer story arcs and intimate style of mini-series made for television – like *Band of Brothers* (based on Stephen Ambrose's book), and *The Pacific*, which was followed by a companion volume by Hugh Ambrose.

War novels and memoirs of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and the films based on them, have raised moral conundrums for audiences to think about, have fascinated them with history and obsolete technology, have amazed them with the spectacular, and have connected them to the time and place of the people of that era (*Enigma*; *Schindler's List*; *The Pianist*; *Atonement*; *The English Patient*; *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*; *Empire of the Sun*; *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*; *The Book Thief*; *The Imitation Game*).

⁵See Belton (1991) pp.165-171; also Kane in Wes D. Gehring (1988) pp.90-91; Basinger (1986) pp.14-75; Lawrence (2002) p.748.

THREE RELEVANT EXAMPLES

One type of war drama reveals the personal trials of small bands of soldiers or individuals (*The Desert Rats*, *9th Company*, *Kokoda*, *Only the Brave*, *Overlord*). Two of these were of particular interest because of their similarities – the US, 100th Infantry Battalion/442nd Regimental Combat Team in *Only the Brave*; and the Australian 39th Battalion ‘chocos’ in *Kokoda* – to the circumstances of the New Zealand 28th (Māori) Battalion.

All of the units in these films were relatively small (the Māori Battalion being split into four rifle Companies of about 125 men each). Each was given special combat roles during World War II, placing them at the spearhead of battle. These forward venturing ‘bands of brothers’ endured catastrophic casualties and, in the American and New Zealand cases, were the most highly decorated sections of their infantry.

The Māori Battalion’s involvement in the famous Battle of Monte Cassino – Sonny’s last stand – was calamitous. Of the 200 men of A and B Companies at Cassino, 128 were killed, wounded or captured. By the end of the war 3,600 men had served with the 28th; of these 649 did not return and 1,712 were wounded (McGibbon 2000, p.311).

Four techniques employed in these films have relevance to my work:

1) A tightly written framing (book-end) narration, with a story in the present and a story in the past, which ties together these difference in place and time. (For instance, as Miriama gathers together the threads of the story);

2) The use of archival footage and other documentary material to assist in the envisioning of war settings (as held in library and archival collections);

3) The thoughts of soldiers extracted from letters and interviews, which can enhance authenticity of experience. This is especially true of the British film, *Overlord*, which was produced as both film and book by the Imperial War Museum.

4) The use of flash-backs and dreams – linking scenes, past and present – to position readers into the ‘real time’ of the story and the character’s psychological landscapes (such as Sonny’s flash-back to pig hunting in Autumn, and his later dream of being the one hunted by German dogs; or the spiritual portents and warnings Miriama sees in nature regarding the impending war and her sons’ safety).

SECTION 3: STRUCTURE AND DESIGN

A FRAMING STRUCTURE

A framing structure set in 1947, book-ends my story. In a brief sequence of flash-backs Miriama depicts the ‘normal world’ of her three sons growing up in a Māori community just prior to World War II. Passing moments of boyhood and youth are linked into the main story at the locus of Miriama’s kitchen in 1939, where the family gathers around the radio to first hear that New Zealand is at war.

TANDEM NARRATIVE DESIGN

I chose a tandem narrative design for my novel (Aronson 2010). The Second World War scenes (1939-45) unfold in ‘real time’ and events are played out simultaneously in two locations:

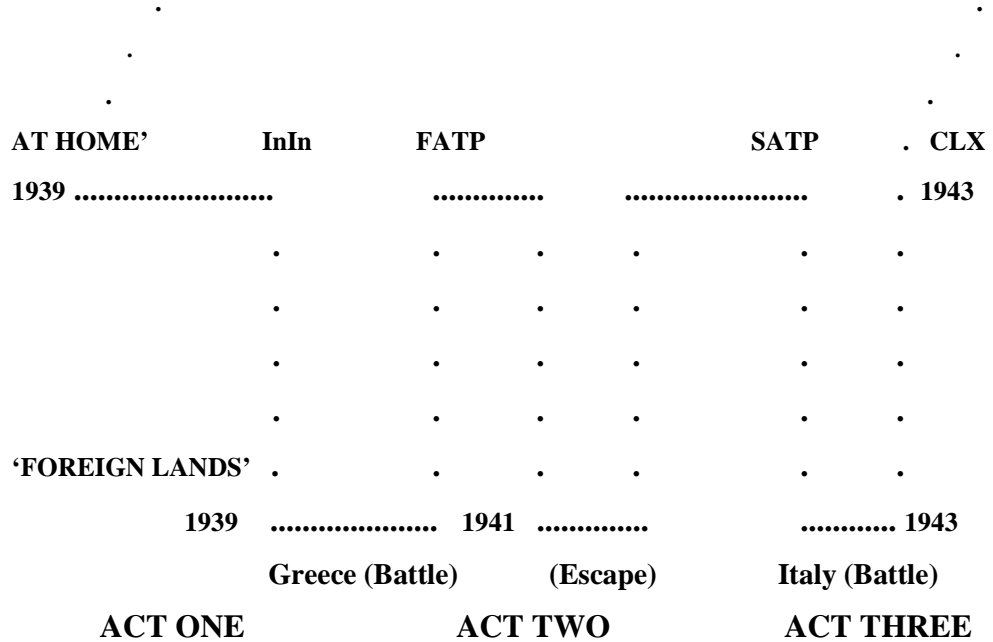
‘At Home’. War disrupts the social order and economy of a small rural community. A traditional woman tries to hold a community together, after a generation of young men volunteer to join the army.

‘In Foreign Lands’. Māori soldiers are thrust onto the world stage after joining the 28th (Māori) Battalion and fight fiercely in Greece and Italy. A young man, believed dead, must make his way home to his sweetheart and family.

TANDEM NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

‘THE PRESENT: 1947’

‘THE PRESENT: 1945-7’



- InIn – Inciting Incident;**
- FATP – First Act Turning Point;**
- SATP – Second Act Turning Point**
- CLX – Climax**

The narrative spikes between these two locations, each story progressing chronologically. Readers see how events in one location affect the lives of characters in the other location. When Sonny comes home on leave the two stories collide, then split apart again when he returns to the war. Creative works of similar structural design include the films *Titanic*, *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*, and *The Bridges of Madison County*.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Sonny Wirima, the protagonist, is a young man on the cusp of adulthood. He is softly spoken and respectful in the presence of his elders, but riotous and joyful around his friends. His bush skills make him handy in a crisis. Sonny, who lives through his body and craves physical activity, grows naturally into the ‘Protector/Gladiator Character’ (Schmidt, 2007, p.105-138). Sonny’s heart belongs to his childhood sweetheart, Atarangi.

Miriama Wirima is Sonny’s mentor-antagonist. As his mother, she has a strong influence in moulding the man and warrior he later becomes. Miriama’s mana and authority is attributed to her knowledge of the traditions and her connection with the spiritual world. She is the teller of stories, the transmitter of customs, and the interpreter of events for the community. During the war she struggles with the weight of these responsibilities. Miriama is the ‘Matriarch/Mystic/ Messiah Character’ (Schmidt, 2007, pp.59-82; see also Vogler 1988; Campbell 2008), and shifts between these roles.

Atarangi Tahiri, Sonny’s girlfriend, is a fragile soul and potentially Miriama’s protégé as community seer. Atarangi is the ‘Maiden Character’ (Schmidt, 2007, pp.83-93), who depends heavily upon her mother and ‘the aunties’. She becomes unstuck when she feels the older women are working against her. Fractures appear in her psyche after she hears of Sonny’s death. Like Mercutio, Atarangi dies at the Second Act turning point.

RELATIONSHIPS AND GROWTH ARCS

When we enter a story we respond to the people we meet there. We empathise, approve, or judge them. There are important markers which hint at who they are – their home lives, their friends, the masks they wear. Clues arise from physical descriptions, dialogue and action. Imagery employed by the writer may symbolise their inner states. We want to know whether they are reserved, gregariousness, or conservative (Croft and Cross, 2004, p.17).

From characterisation, questions about relationships arise. What aspect of womanhood does Miriama represent, and how does she interact with young Atarangi? How do the personalities of the three brothers differ? How would they show opposition, or handle something of importance to each other?

Growth arcs map relationship struggles, especially those the protagonist is having with the physical world or his/her antagonists. *The known* (family, society, environment) is

juxtaposed with *the unknown* (new allies, new enemies, new locations). There are inner and outer battles to chart.

Sonny joins the Māori Battalion as an inexperienced country lad, with few blemishes on his soul and everything to prove. In tracking his story, we see him mature into manhood. There are difficult moments in this journey. Too many of his cousins and friends are killed in action. He is unable to save the life of Tama, his younger brother. He is lost, captured and escapes behind enemy lines. Sonny's immediate goal is to re-join the Allies so he can fight another day, but his ultimate quest is to be reunited with his sweetheart.

Sonny suffers from the psychological challenges and guilt of many returning soldiers, with the added blow of having lost his future with Atarangi. But by working the land alongside his family, he pulls free from his emotional paralysis.

At the heart of him, Sonny is a fighter and a protector. Towards those he cares about he is passionate and sometimes avuncular. He discovers that soldiering is something he is good at, and he feels he cannot abandon his brothers-in-arms still out there. This loyalty, and his inner conviction that he must avenge the deaths of Tama and Atarangi, draws Sonny back to the battlefield.

Miriama is the enigmatic outsider – her character is unchanging. She is one of a dying breed, an echo from the past, the focus of custom and cohesion in community. But Miriama has a fundamental vulnerability. Tradition obliges her to maintain Rangatira blood-lines, and she wants one of her sons to marry into the high-standing Tahiri lineage. In the contemporary wartime setting this ambition ultimately fails. At the end we see a strong and noble woman broken by accumulative tragedy, and by her inability to restore harmony to the universe:

Miriama gazed at the stand of native bush on the hill and sighed. Why were the wood pigeons so restless? She had heard the beat of their wings over several nights now. This land she so loved, spoke to her now of violation and danger. 'Who disturbs my kukupa will answer to me,' she said, her breath misting the pane (from *Who Disturbs the Kukapa* pp.34-5).

In his book *Story Trumps Structure* (2014), Steven James urges us not to fret about whether our stories are character, plot, or relationship centred. 'All stories are *tension-driven*,' he claims:

A story isn't driven forward by events happening but by tension escalating...Stop trying to decide if your story is "plot-driven" or "character-driven," and focus instead on your protagonist's unmet desires regarding his internal questions, external problems, and interpersonal relationships (James, 2014, pp.10-11).

In seeking to balance the different aspects of story-telling and characterisation, I have taken this as sound advice.

EMOTIONAL TRUTH AND SYMBOLISM

In his article, 'Benevolent Soldier, Rotten War', Fred Turner observed that war stories are not just about specific historical moments where one soldier tries to take the life of another 'under the influence of particular national myths, and at the behests of national leaders'. They do more than 'commemorate particular men in a particular battle' (Turner 2002, p.B16). Emotional truth may emerge through many different moments.

Whether readers or audiences embrace these truths will depend upon the war depicted, the extent to which the collective feels that war was justified, and the skills of the storyteller when speaking about the political, social or personal implications and consequences.

Who Disturbs the Kukupa could be seen as a metaphor for the loss of innocence and the battering effects of social change (a close-knit ethnic community is shaken by world turmoil, and must dig deep to find the resources for survival and recovery).

Images symbolising inner forces, and foreshadowing future events, keep recurring. They are seen in the land (behaviour of birds, darkening sky, whipped winds, brooding landscapes); they are seen in the restless sea (giver and taker of life, bringer of change, linking us to an ever-intruding outside world):

'I belong to this country,' she shouted to the wind. 'And so do they!'
The sea answered – surging, thumping, grasping and scraping back at the shore.
'Nay, I have spoken,' said Tangaroa. 'I am ready and I shall take them.'
(from *Who Disturbs the Kukupa* pp.41-2).

Miriama is a sensitive – she reads violation in the land as the enemy approaches. For her the spiritual world is always present (connecting people, providing guidance, giving warning). The central metaphoric image of this story is the dark figure of an old woman on a cliff-top, staring defiantly out at to sea. Ultimately, it is the matriarch who sends her boys to war to protect the land she loves.

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As a final comment, I would like to say that to have outlined my intentions in the exegesis, and to have analysed the structural, contextual, and historical questions inherent in the work prior to starting, has proven extremely useful. Had I not done this, I expect this project would have taken me eight years to complete.

It is important to note though, that this novel is written in three acts (four parts, with the second act being twice the length of the first and third acts, in the filmic tradition). I present only three of the four parts here. Due to the ongoing research required, my writing has been slow. Several more months will be needed to complete the work.

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