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**INFLECTIONS OF THE GOTHIC IN
NEW ZEALAND FILM**

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1998**

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This thesis examines a number of inflections of the Gothic in New Zealand film by looking at parallels and commonalities New Zealand film has with other artistic forms which incorporate elements of the Gothic style and form. It attempts this task by investigating three particular areas that share links with the dark nature of New Zealand film.

The first of these areas is traditional Gothic literature. I shall, in chapter one, examine stock Gothic features and devices of the literary style in relation to four New Zealand films; *Heart of the Stag*, *Trespases*, *Mr Wrong* and *Jack Be Nimble*. The second area is New Zealand literature. Here I will look at the links between traditional Gothic literature and New Zealand writers Ronald Hugh Morrieson and Janet Frame and exemplify some of their themes in *The Scarecrow* and *Trial Run*. I shall also, within this chapter, apply some literary theory concerning our national literature and apply this to New Zealand films, particularly the films *Pallet on the Floor*, *The Piano* and *Vigil*. I shall then discuss the importance of the landscape in producing the dark images in New Zealand film. The final section of this thesis is dedicated to investigating possible parallels between Hollywood films of the forties and fifties and New Zealand cinema, specifically *The Piano* and *The Returning*.

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INTRODUCTION

Sam Neill and Judy Rymer in their documentary *Cinema of Unease* (1995) vocalised what many have thought, which is that New Zealand film has a dark side to it. The film's subtitle is a "personal journey" taken by Sam Neill therefore it is obviously his point of view that is put across in the film's narration. In the documentary Neil and Rymer examine the images that they believe make up the "uniquely strange and dark" atmosphere of New Zealand films. Sam Neill states that there are varied feelings making up the dark tone; these are alienation, abandonment, horror, madness, fear and violence. He believes that what essentially encouraged the prevalence of these feelings in our cinematic texts was a growing distance between the colony and the "Motherland" and the gradual focus of New Zealand film on the less "sunny" side of American film that was produced in the fifties and consumed here. The way of depicting these images, he believes, was achieved in the dark and menacing (and sometimes isolated) natural landscape of New Zealand.

I am, in this thesis, suggesting a different explanation from Sam Neill and Judy Rymer's account for this "uniquely strange and dark atmosphere". In fact I think it is not unique but has much in common with an older tradition and style, namely Gothic¹. My suggestion that there is a significantly Gothic character to New Zealand film expands the range of this present study of national film because the amount of information and theory on Gothic is immense. The fluidity of the style has allowed it to cross over into many different genres of literature and film which again extends the range of possible parallels with New Zealand film. For practical reasons of scale, I have chosen just three aspects of the Gothic that I believe New Zealand film exemplifies. I shall begin with traditional Gothic literature and its themes and devices as a possible influence on New Zealand film. I shall then go on to look at other areas where

¹ I will be calling "Gothic" a style or form in this study because I believe that it has qualities that enable it to be adapted to different generic types. My discussion in Chapter Three is an example as elements of the Gothic style have been adapted to film noir and the paranoid woman's film.

the Gothic style is operating: New Zealand literature and its commonalities with the national cinema, and finally examine Hollywood film and explain some of its parallels with our comparatively small industry.

The Gothic literary genre began in 1764 with the publication of *The Castle of Otranto* and the popularity of this novel, and other similar novels, encouraged the style to develop and continue through into the nineteenth century and to emerge much later in the twentieth century in the new medium of film.

Because so much has been written on the subject of Gothic it is difficult to decide how to cover it all. Therefore in my first chapter I have chosen to focus on some key examples of what makes up Gothic literature. In particular I will focus on the Gothic “world” as separated into two spheres: the “diurnal” represented by the everyday and familiar, and the “nocturnal” or nightmare, the realm of the unfamiliar, and compare that literary device to four representative New Zealand film texts.

Chapter Two follows on from where traditional Gothic began to show a local development. Here the focus is on New Zealand literature, with particular reference to novelists Ronald Hugh Morrieson and Janet Frame. Both these writers have conveyed, in a highly Gothic manner, the puritanical nature of New Zealand society. They show that violence or madness is an attempt to cope with the overwhelming restrictive forces of New Zealand society. The chapter then goes on to look at different explanations for the inherently violent nature of New Zealand society. First is Patrick Evans’ description of the “slaughterhouse” environment’ (76). This pastoral economic environment has legitimised death and slaughter in our society. *Pallet on the Floor* is an excellent example for this discussion as the daily movements of the central characters revolve around the freezing works. Then I shall go on to look at the “landscape as more than a backdrop” because it plays an integral

role in the unfolding drama, playing a key role in many films. *The Piano* (1993) and *Vigil* (1984) both depict the landscape in this manner.

The third, and final chapter, refers to New Zealand film in terms of its parallels with Hollywood film of the forties and fifties. This chapter looks at two genres with different, yet similar, narrative styles; the paranoid woman's film, or female Gothic, and film noir, or what I shall be terming noir-romance. Each style conveys a dark and pessimistic atmosphere by focusing on the terror and alienation of the central characters. I shall be explaining why the New Zealand film *The Piano* (1993) is a descendant of this tradition, of which *Rebecca* (1940) and *Gaslight* (1944) are well-known examples. The second section of this third and final chapter is dedicated to the noir-romance genre of which, another Hitchcock classic, *Vertigo* (1958) and *Portrait of Jennie* (1947) are examples. Between them these films illustrate how the environment reflects the deteriorating state of mind of the protagonist as he falls into the downward spiral of madness associated with the femme fatale. *The Returning* (1990) is the New Zealand equivalent to this style.

The different areas these chapters cover with regard to Gothic inflections show that indeed New Zealand has a darker edge to its cinema. They show that it is the Gothic tone and atmosphere that prevails as its flexibility has enabled Gothic to vary and develop itself into many different forms from traditional literature through to the more modern medium of film. A close examination of this aspect of local films can therefore help throw light on important and central features of New Zealand's film history.

CHAPTER ONE

NEW ZEALAND FILM AND ITS LINKS WITH TRADITIONAL GOTHIC LITERATURE

To find parallels between New Zealand film and the Gothic it is necessary to begin with traditional Gothic literature as this is the obvious beginning of the style before it changed and developed through the years. The ability of the Gothic form to develop and change is evidence of the strength of this literary style that progressed from the mid 1700s and crossed over into the more modern medium of film in the twentieth century. Well known examples of this development into film can be found in films from the late fifties and seventies such as Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) and, beginning three years earlier, the *Star Wars* trilogy. Now the style frequents our screens as a wide variety of films take on board stock Gothic features and devices. Recent examples include *Single White Female* (1992), *The Haunted* (1997), *The Frighteners* (1996) as well as adaptations of classic Gothic novels such as *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1995) and *Jane Eyre* (1995). In this chapter I will be outlining enduring features of the Gothic and suggesting that some New Zealand films exhibit characteristics that are inherently Gothic. The films I will be focusing on for this specific part of my study are *Heart of the Stag* (1983), *Trespases* (1983), *Mr Wrong* (1984) and *Jack Be Nimble* (1993).

TRADITIONAL GOTHIC

There are numerous theories as to why the Gothic literary style arose. Many of these have developed from a study of the economic climate of Britain during the genre's origins in the mid 1700s and through to its peak in the early 1800s. David Punter's Marxist analysis in the Second Volume of his Gothic study is an example (196-198). The fact was that British society was not content and the resulting feelings of agitation were due to major social and economic upheavals, industrialisation being one example. In

reaction, writers began to look back to the medieval past for subject matter. The Gothic began to stand in opposition to the civilised values and regulations of established society (Punter, vol.1: 5). Where classicism was well-ordered, simple and pure, Gothic was primitive, chaotic, ornate and convoluted, representing excess and exaggeration (Punter, vol.1: 5). These qualities were then reflected in the literary works as the current style was prone to violent exclamation and stylistic features (Punter, vol.1: 9).

Gothic literature, because it was primarily for the female market can be read in a similar way as soap operas are today, an opportunity to escape the routine of everyday life. The Gothic literary narrative involved the reader emotionally and also gave writers a chance to react against the changing nature of eighteenth century society and yet confirm the societal positions of men and woman, the women were generally the passive victims of the narrative who only found true happiness with assistance of the hero at the close of the narrative.

Gothic can then be defined through the fact that it is a style that actively pursues and provokes a reaction from its reader, enabling them to escape into the pages of the novel². Therefore all the devices and features are designed to achieve this end. Charlotte Bunnell, in a discussion on the Gothic and its influences on some films, separates this characteristic into three categories. The first is the provocation of an emotional reaction whether it be one of terror, suspense, dread, pity, sympathy or fear. The events of the narrative are then designed to take the reader on an emotional roller coaster. Examples of emotionally charged events revolve mostly around the predicament of the heroine. Her plight and hopeful rescue by the hero from the clutches of the evil villain push the readers to their emotional limits as they fear for her and the hero's survival. But the disruption of the narrative caused by the villain's domination over the heroine is always resolved in such a way as to satisfy the audience and to affirm societal norms. The villain is punished for

² Horace Walpole began this tradition (that now has close affiliations with melodrama) with his novel *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764.

his evil ways and the hero and heroine, who have fallen in love during the drama, marry. Resolving the narrative this way uncovers the strong connection between Gothic, and the tradition of sentimental and romantic tales³. This reliance on emotional excess is only one example as the styles also share similar themes and characters (Hume 288). Indeed it is this shared primary commonality, an evocation of emotion in the reader, that has led the Gothic to be criticised because it is the *intensity* of the response not the experience that Gothic literature seeks to highlight (Napier 26). However the immense popularity of the style with the public has enabled it to continue on and progress over into other literary and, later, filmic forms.

This desire to evoke an emotional relation from the reader and draw them into the tale introduces the second characteristic of the Gothic. As explained above, Gothic tales, after disrupting the narrative in order to encourage reader involvement, restore the status quo. They do so after making a moral point for the reader. In short the reader participates in the story and undergoes a test of character (Bunnell 81).

The dual worlds of the text are symbolic not only of what is good and evil but what is familiar and known and unfamiliar and primitive. They are known as the light, or diurnal, and dark, or nocturnal. As the readers identify with various characters representative of each side of the dual world they are forced to confront their inner selves and the darker side of human nature that some of the characters espouse. Basically the dual worlds within Gothic literature exist as two polarities. From these two polarities the reader is offered a range of images that are either within or outside their realm of understanding and experience. This therefore defines what the reader determines to be either familiar and therefore good or mysterious and exotic and therefore something to be wary of which

³ The emphasis the Gothic has of drawing on the reader's emotions illustrates the commonalities between sentimental, or romantic fiction, and the Gothic. MacAndrew states that they all pursue a common purpose by presenting "representations of the human mind in a fiction directed at its reader's feelings" (36).

creates the terror that the reader experiences as the hero and heroine move between the two poles.

A third aspect of the Gothic style are its methods of intensifying the contest between the dual worlds of the text, and to do this, the Gothic relies on certain stock features. In the eighteenth century these features of setting were the ruinous decaying and bleak castles or monastery with hidden passageways and tombs. They hearkened back to the medieval past and emphasised the move away from the rigid rules of classicism that were resurging during this period. These features are then combined with a tortuous and fragmented narrative featuring mysterious incidents and life threatening pursuits. Prominence was also given to spectres, monsters, corpses, skeletons, monks, evil nuns, and fainting heroines (Botting 2). These features helped make up the dual world that Bunnell (81) discusses. The image of the castle serves as an example. The castle itself is a familiar object and part of the everyday but it is what lurks beneath the castle that transports it into the dark and primitive. Passageways and tombs underneath the foundations are sites of many terrors that the heroine faces as she is persecuted by the villain. Take *The Monk* as an example where Ambrosio drags Antonia along passageways to a tomb where she is finally murdered, or *The Castle of Otranto* where Isabella is trying to escape from Manfred.

The hero and villain characters are representative of the diurnal and nocturnal binary opposites. They distinguish between good and evil, each indicative of a particular Gothic realm, the light or dark. Their behaviour is an exhibition of this. They are polarised for the reader to accentuate the moral lesson to be gained at the resolution of the narrative. Good triumphs and evil (represented by the villain) fails and, sometimes, dies. *The Monk* and *The Castle of Otranto* are again two good examples. The villains are all punished. Manfred is removed from the throne he has usurped, Ambrosio dies a miserable and horrific death and the evil prioress is beaten to a bloody pulp by a frenzied crowd.

A more modern filmic illustration is the George Lucas box-office extravaganza *Star Wars*. Bunnell heralds this as an example of modern Gothic (79). It is also a clear example of the literal separation of the Gothic world into dark and light. The galaxy “far, far away” of *Star Wars* is divided into the dark and light side of the “Force” with the different characters forming an allegiance with the appropriate side. Darth Vader is the symbolic figure of the “dark side”. Dressed in black he is in direct contrast with the Resistance led by white-gowned Princess Leia. As typical with traditional Gothic, the light side triumphs with the destruction of Death Star. It could be argued that this is a film aimed at a younger audience which would make a Gothic reading not as clear to them. My point, however, is that *Star Wars* enables the audience, no matter how old, to distinguish visually between good and evil as traditionally black has always been associated with evil and the character’s actions only serve to reinforce this distinction.

The villain becomes everything that is feared and resented in society whilst the hero is morally good. It is his task to rescue the heroine (or like Luke Skywalker, in *Star Wars*, to save the world). As with the villain and hero, the Gothic tale would not be complete without the heroine for she provides the villain and hero with their tasks, to persecute or save her. She, like them, is a stock feature of the gothic tale. Her beauty and passivity place her on the side of the pure and innocent⁴. She is the embodiment of love and the guardian of the family which the villain seeks to destroy or usurp⁵.

The nineteenth century saw a variation in the treatment of the traditional Gothic hero and villain. The clear differentiation between good and evil that was apparent in the Gothic novels in the

⁴ In the new twentieth century Gothic this is sometimes varied as the heroine is given a more active role than the traditional woman such as Princess Leia in *Star Wars* and, as I shall explain later, Katie in *Trespases*.

⁵ The woman is not always the victim in the Gothic narrative. *The Monk* is an example as duplicity can be found in more than one female character. Matilda is the perfect example of an evil seductress. Once she is seduced by Ambrosio she abandons all of her previous feminine softness (MacAndrew 181).

eighteenth century was gradually blurred. The result was a protagonist portrayed with a tormented soul. He, or she, was split often exhibiting behaviour that could be likened to both the diurnal and nocturnal. Emily Bronte's Heathcliff is an example, he is torn between his desire for revenge and his love for Cathy⁶. The now less sharply defined villainous character was extended to take in scientists, madmen, criminals along with the usual husbands, and fathers (Botting, 2). The nineteenth century variation also featured a new monstrous double. This signified a split personality as the character repressed desires only to have them surface as a horror. Examples are *Frankenstein* and *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, not to mention the prime case of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. These figures assisted in the development of the Gothic tradition as an exploration of the inner mind and the darker nature of the dual world - an aspect which was of particular interest in the late nineteenth and now in the twentieth century.

Gothic literature of the nineteenth century also brought the terror closer to home for the English reader. The castle as a site of terror gave way to the home. The exotic landscapes of Spain and Italy, settings that were at a distance from the readers experience, were replaced by simple houses. This brought the nightmare on to the English reader's doorstep (MacAndrew 48). These variations showed that the Gothic had the ability to change and develop making the narrative more terrifying for the reader. The New Zealand films that I am choosing to look at are an illustration of some of these key features making up the Gothic. Not only do they apply the use of the stock features but they put them in a setting that is close to home as found in the later Gothic novels.

NEW ZEALAND FILMS AND FEATURES OF THE TRADITIONAL GOTHIC: *HEART OF THE STAG* AND *TRESPASSES*

This description of the Gothic literary form has been brief and

⁶ It has been argued, however, that the Bronte's novels are not of the Gothic tradition, they only use elements of it (Day 2). This is true but I believe the fluidity of the form has enabled it to cross over into different styles.

merely skims the surface of its nature and characteristics. However for the purposes of this study it is necessary to narrow down the definition to enable me to concentrate on a small area of Gothic that I believe some New Zealand films have taken on board. *Heart of the Stag* (1983) and *Trespases* (1983) are the two key films for this chapter. I shall be applying to them an examination of three stock features, the hero, heroine and contrasting figure or the villain. The second section of this chapter is an examination of the use of the supernatural stock features of the Gothic. *Mr Wrong* and *Jack Be Nimble* are films which concentrate on this aspect by featuring a haunted car and a woman with supernatural powers.

As mentioned above the Gothic polarises characters into good and evil. The villain, hero and heroine are the natural result of this separation. The villain is presented in the most dark and threatening form so he can stand as a warning of the dangers of social and moral transgression. This form usually involves physical dominance and a powerful and threatening presence over the weaker character, namely the heroine and victim. This enables the villain to act out his, usually sexual, desires. *The Castle of Otranto's* Manfred is an excellent example because he is an illustration of an archetypal Gothic villain. He steals the throne of Otranto, manipulates his wife, tries to marry his dead son's fiancée so he can continue his reign, and kills his daughter Matilda. *The Monk's* Ambrosio continues in this tradition but introduces a more severe behavioural trait. An abstract form of incest is suggested in Manfred's desire to marry his son's fiancée but Ambrosio is far from ambiguous in the rape and then murder of his sister Antonia.

Robert Jackson⁷ (Terence Cooper), if we use the above examples as a guideline, is the villain of *Heart of the Stag*⁸. MacAndrew (81-82) describes the villain as falling into one of three overlapping types. Firstly there is the reluctant villain who is torn between the

⁷ For a summation of the plot of *Heart of the Stag* and other films mentioned in chapters of this thesis refer to the contents page for the list of "plot summaries of main films discussed".

⁸ Stan Gubbins shares the villain's role with Katie's father. I shall refer to his role later in this chapter as it applies to the use of religion in the Gothic.

desire to be good or, instead, gain pleasure from what evil can offer. Victor Frankenstein is an example of such a villain. Secondly there is the figure whose function it is to stand in opposition to the diurnal light. MacAndrew uses author Ann Radcliffe as an example and her villains Schedoni (*The Italian*) and Montoni (*The Mysteries of Udolpho*). Finally there is the villain of pure unrelenting evil who confronts the reader.

Robert Jackson, in *Heart of the Stag*, is a villain of pure and unrelenting evil. There is no evidence to the contrary in the film though he does occasionally show some concern for his daughter. However even this could be read as in his own self interest as she is a convenient source for his sexual gratification. It is through sex that Jackson follows the role of the traditional Gothic villain and it becomes his source of power against his daughter, the victim of the narrative. His incestuous actions are the epitome of social transgression and moral repugnance. Such behaviour aligns Jackson with the dark side, in opposition to Daley the hero of the Gothic tale.

Jackson is lord of his manor and rules the farm and all on it with an iron hand and director Michael Firth uses the camera as a way of displaying Jackson's command over the other figures. The first shot of Jackson is an example. His sexual encounter is interrupted by Peter Daley (Bruno Lawrence). When Jackson gets up to answer the door he literally looms up to the camera and takes over the frame with his body. The image of Jackson as a large man is continued as he towers over Daley when he answers the door. His body blocks the light from the house and leaves the hero standing in the dark. Jackson has a physical presence that dominates all other men in the film. He is tall and solidly built, the epitome of the New Zealand working man. He uses his presence to control *his* farm and *his* property. As Jock points out "Mr Jackson doesn't like anybody touching what's his", and I imagine Jock would not dream of doing so as it would be impossible for him to defend himself against Jackson. The one time Jock does make an attempt is in a

vain effort to help Daley and Cathy escape. The whip he is brandishing is torn out of his hand and he is thrown to the ground in an example of Jackson's strength and power over the weaker man. Jackson has staked out his territory and is determined to protect it.

His wife and daughter are part of the territory he has staked out and he treats them as he chooses. Part of this involves commanding their movements. His wife he locks away like a mad woman and his daughter, it appears, is restricted to the farm house and surrounding gardens and sheds. Each of them is kept away from the farm hand and Daley. Jackson steps in before Cathy or Mrs Jackson can reveal the true goings on at the farm. An example is when Daley is talking to Mrs Jackson. Her confinement to a wheelchair allows her to be wheeled away without resistance by her husband. It is this sort of interference that Jackson avoids and he also tries to maintain some distance between Daley and his daughter so she remains under his control.

Jackson's size and strength are his source of control over the men of the farm and his wife while the sexual abuse of his daughter serves the purpose of keeping her in line. Each of the sex scenes features him on top of her with only her face visible beneath his large back. From her expressions she is obviously not enjoying herself. However at this point we are unaware that the woman is his daughter. These scenes are then Gothic in two senses. The first, relating to the unrelenting evil nature of Jackson, I have already mentioned and the second relates to suspense and audience involvement. Not disclosing the relationship of Robert and Cathy makes the audience assume the norm, that Cathy is Robert's wife, or at least has them guessing. The positioning of the audience in this way allows Firth to ignite an emotional response from the audience when it is revealed that the relationship is one of father and daughter, and therefore incestuous.

Jackson, in his treatment of his daughter, is acting out one of the cardinal sins. His actions allow the film to broach the subject of the

“taboo”. In Volume Two of his Gothic study David Punter explains the concept of taboo as an implication of what is unclean and sacred. The areas he refers to are those which “resist conventional explication” and in doing so are simultaneously shunned and yearned for because of their “fatal interest” (190). Through the subject matter the reader summons up a dialectical emotional reaction where the mind oscillates between attraction and repulsion (Punter, vol. 2: 79). This emotional response is integral to Gothic fiction as it is this that makes it so appealing. Jackson for example becomes both fascinating and repulsive, holding the audience’s attention as the ultimate in evil. The culmination of this evil, I believe, is when Jackson introduces his daughter to Daley, and to the audience. Unlike Daley we have already been privy to their private lives but were unaware of their familial relationship. Jackson, at this moment, is threatening the viewer by announcing his daughter and their relationship as legitimate, daring a challenger to step forward.

In most texts and or, films the woman is the usual controller of the domestic sphere. Her position tends to be at the head of the house and with this it is said she upholds, and is a role model, for behaviour deemed appropriate in society. Jackson, however, has taken control of the home through his domination of the women in it. He has subverted the traditional role of the maintainer of the domestic sphere as the angel and protector of the home. Incest becomes the key to his subversion of the norm. The fact that Jackson has decided they “don’t stand on ceremony” within the house seems to serve as an explanation for the reversal of roles within the domestic sphere and is his justification for flouting the moral codes.

Whether Jackson has actually violently taken control of the home or not is questionable. We are privy to a flashback of one episode in the relationship between father and daughter. The mother seems to have decided how to act with regard to the situation and that is to close the door on it, choosing to ignore and deny that such a

relationship exists. Her behaviour could then be read as her relinquishing her role to her husband. Further evidence in the film shows that she is now incapable of gaining that place back again. She is left weak and powerless against her husband because of her stroke. This has left her unable to communicate and one simple push from her husband kills her.

The home in this film then takes on a contradictory image. It is traditionally envisaged as a place of safety as it keeps the evil out through maintaining the structures of society. However in *Heart of the Stag*, as commonly observed in the early Gothic literature, the home becomes a site of entrapment and terror. The Jackson home is no longer a haven and fortress but a prison for Cathy and her mother as Robert Jackson prohibits any movement beyond the homestead.

Broaching the taboo and subverting the societal norms allow the audience to experience emotions not normal in the everyday and builds on the effect of the Gothic as an emotional roller coaster. The audience can identify with the victim, Cathy, and through that feel both pity and sympathy for her plight and animosity toward her assailant - her father. The home being the site of the transgressions only heightens the emotional reaction because it is part of the familiar.

Sex and violence are closely linked in the Gothic. This is evident in *Heart of the Stag* as Jackson's relationship with his daughter is based on violence and thus reveals qualities inherent in Gothic literature. As with early Gothic narratives, sexual desire is a key element. Because society determines that this desire should be repressed, the repression manifests itself in violence because of the overwhelming fear of sex (Napier 114). We have already seen the result of this in *The Monk* where Ambrosio is torn between fulfilment of his celibate role as a monk or releasing himself to his desires and ravishing Antonia. Incest is the focal point of the narrative of *Heart of the Stag* and the reasons for Cathy's positioning as the victim.

With the arrival of Daley this changes as Cathy becomes more willing to disobey her father and ward off his advances. The scenes become more violent as she resists. The culmination of her resistance is her father physically attacking her and killing her mother.

Jackson's relationship with his daughter is not the only link that can be made between the antagonist and violence. Guns and hunting also play an important part in his lifestyle. He is depicted cleaning, making bullets for his rifles, recounting stories that led to the catches on his walls or mimicking the sounds of his prey. His obsession with the killing of deer and his weapons becomes clear when he is entertaining Daley. His guns are lined up in a cabinet in his study and date back to a Hawkins his grandfather used to bring down a rhino. In telling a story of one of the heads on his wall he takes one of his guns and appears to go into a trance as he remembers the moment. Part of his face is illuminated and the same light makes the gun visible in his grasp. As Daley leaves in disgust Jackson leans down towards the gun and caresses it with the side of his crazed face.

The scene I have just described serves the dual purpose of showing Jackson as the villain through his obsession with his weapons while also presenting him as coming from a long tradition of similar men, his grandfather was also a hunter. Therefore there is a suggestion that Jackson's behaviour is linked to both his past and present situations. The farm has been in the family for three generations and unlike the wandering hero, Daley, Jackson has been stationed in one place. Campbell warns that this is dangerous for the New Zealand male and believes that being settled in one place can equate to violent and suspicious behaviour (20).

Religion becomes another way of revealing his ties with the past. His religion is indicative of the family traditions. Particularly the Catholic religion which is the Jacksons' denomination. Catholicism was a way for early British Gothic writers to illustrate something

exotic and different to their readership to remove the events from the reader's everyday experience. Catholicism was something alien and mysterious to Protestant England (Duncan 23-24). It represented something dark and unfamiliar because it was so outside the understanding of Protestant England. It was for this reason that some Gothic novels incorporated the Catholic religion into the narrative through the character of an evil nun or monk. *The Monk* is the best example of this as it includes both, each seeking to destroy the heroines Agnes and Antonia. But even they are terrified by the Inquisition which features as an all prevailing force, particularly for Ambrosio in the final chapters before his trial. Catholicism also portrays a male dominated world that is steeped in tradition and ritual. The fact that Jackson is Catholic plays on all the generalisations about the Catholic religion as he uses it to maintain his place at the patriarchal head of the family, saying grace in Latin at dinner. It seems out of place in the situation and pauses the conversation between Cathy and Peter at the table.

Not only does the Catholic religion assist in depicting Jackson as settled and traditional but within the *Heart of the Stag* it appears to shelter him. Cathy's priest refusing to believe her is an example. Instead of inquiring into her situation, he treats her as the sinner. Her punishment is saying three Hail Marys and having to wash her mouth out with soap. The priest who should be a protector of the innocent and weak has chosen to side with Jackson and assist him in retaining patriarchal domination over his family.

This issue of religion now makes appropriate the introduction of the film *Trespases*. *Trespases* also portrays religion as a patriarchal dominating force, in this case through the characters Fred Wells and Stan Gubbins. Katie's father, like Robert Jackson presides over his daughter. He stands upright and maintains his position as a moral pillar to guide his daughter. In an effort to keep Katie pure and innocent he shelters her from the outside world making her long for other company. Like the Catholic religion in the *Heart of the Stag* Wells' own puritanical religion exhibits similar qualities. It too is

severe and restrictive.

Gubbins also takes these qualities on as shown in the way he maintains control in the commune. He promotes it as one of freedom and love which appeals to Katie as it is in direct contrast to her father. It is in fact no different and Katie leaves one patriarchal power only to be confronted with another. Gubbins merely takes over from Fred Wells and promotes, instead, a different form of freeing oneself from sin.

Though the two men can be held in contrast through their different approaches to religion, or faith, they share violence as a means of promoting and maintaining order within the faith. Wells, in a desperate attempt to cleanse his daughter of her sins, kills Gubbins. Then, when Katie rejects his God the only way for him to deal with it is to lock her away then try to kill her. This encourages the understanding that he is unbalanced and this idea is pushed to the fore in the final scenes when he is finally taken away by the police. Gubbins uses rape as a means of terrorising the heroine and keeping her under his control. With this action he shows Katie what it means to be "one of them". She is told she must reject the outside world and all those in the commune are now her brothers and sisters. His rape of her places him on a similar level to Jackson as Gubbins has metaphorically taken the place of her father, also seeking to dominate her.

Like Robert Jackson, Wells and Gubbins try to command their domain by terrorising the heroine, the victim of the drama. They do so through a show of sexual strength or through the support of their religion which is used against the victim to terrify her into keeping up her image of virginal innocence and purity. Their actions keep the villain on the nocturnal side of the dual world because their behaviour typifies what it means to transgress the moral code of society.

The heroine is textually polarised against the villain in an aim to

emphasise the villain's straying from goodness. Both *Trespases* and *Heart of the Stag* feature this type of character with Katie and Cathy. However they both have a different way of coping with the barrage of attacks from the villains a tactic which leads to Katie demonstrating behaviour that is not typical of a Gothic heroine.

A traditional and stereotypical Gothic heroine is passive, beautiful, quiet and terrified. She is unable to act for herself and is the victim of masculine rage and violence (Day 103), a perfect image of female suffering and loss. Cathy fits this image as she is the "selfless victim of deceit and scheming, trapped by the villain, rescued by the hero but never empowered to effect her own rescue" (Briganti 191). Daley is the hero who acts for Cathy and enables her to effect an escape. Gothic narratives rely on such traditional roles assigned to men and women. Men act and women are to be looked at and admired but never to hold an active role (Berger 45-46). Because of this positioning women have no active role within the tale. The Gothic narrative is instead shaped by the mystery that surrounds the male antagonist and villain and not by the drama surrounding the woman. It therefore becomes a question of what will he do next that provokes her reaction, namely screams, fainting and escapes (Briganti 191). The heroine's role is purely a display of terror at her situation. It is the hero who removes the heroine from the terror. This is the role that Daley has inherited as all the action in the final scenes of the film can be attributed to him. When Cathy is trapped in her bedroom and Jackson realises she is attempting to leave, it is Daley who suggests they use the window to get out. Then, when Jackson follows them to the "tops", it is again Daley who takes the active role. He orders Cathy to wait in the trees and he sets off as a decoy for Jackson, leading him away from Cathy.

Katie shares some of Cathy's characteristics as the Gothic heroine. She too is passive and stands by as two men fight over her, or submits to Gubbins without putting up as much of a fight as one would expect a woman in her situation to do. However she does take a stand on her own that Cathy could never have done without

the support of Daley. She leaves her father's house for the commune, confronts Gubbins after she finds she is pregnant with his child and then denounces her father's God. I believe the reason Katie is endowed with so much strength is the fact that she, unlike Cathy, is not provided with a successful hero character, in the narrative, whose task it is to rescue her. The closest *Trespases* comes to putting forward such a character is Albie.

Albie is Katie's boyfriend, or that is how it appears in the opening scenes of the film. He stands up for her when she is picked on by another member of the commune and appears to be her knight in shining armour, hearkening back to the romantic and sentimental influences that exist in the Gothic. This is, however, the only time that Albie proves to be successful which supports his positioning as a failed heroic figure. He tries to confront Gubbins twice, failing each time by either being too late or too weak to save Katie. The steam room is an example. Instead of rescuing Katie from what becomes a rape he chooses to walk away. To emphasise just what a failure Albie has been he is then rejected by Katie for his faults. In direct contrast Peter Daley's active role clearly posits him as the hero in *Heart of the Stag*. He is the wandering hero so typical of romantic narratives who stands up against the villain of the tale to save the heroine.

Peter Daley's arrival at the Jackson's farm foreshadows the effect he will have on the relationship between Robert Jackson and Cathy. The first meeting of the two men is evidence for this as Daley's knocking on the door interrupts Jackson's abuse of his daughter. At this point the size difference between the men is accentuated, as explained above, with Jackson towering over Daley. The differences between the two men centre on the traits that define Jackson as the villain. Daley is a wanderer and rejects violence and confrontation until provoked by Jackson.

Daley's "gypsy" lifestyle is mocked by Jackson. He moves from place to place looking for work and it is by chance that he finds a job

at the Jackson's farm. What influences Robert's decision to hire Daley is his ruggedly self sufficient "man alone" image. Jackson is impressed when he witnesses Daley use the tractor to hoist his car. This image, of the rugged man alone, is not shared with Jackson. The "man alone" is one who is able to live freely. Jackson is unable to do this because he is tied to the land. Daley's position as a wanderer does not make him susceptible to the dangers associated with being settled, the resultant behaviour being that which we witness in Jackson. Daley instead happily moves his premises while living on the farm from the shearing quarters to the cottage by the lake. Its peaceful setting supports Daley's non violent image. He drifts on the lake in the punt, soaks in an outdoor bathtub and takes photographs of the stag. It is in this last image that Daley is directly contrasted with Jackson. Both men are stalking the same stag but for different purposes. Daley is doing so only for a photograph unlike Jackson who has his gun primed, ready.

The tranquillity of the lake-side cottage is another way of illustrating that Daley is on the side of the light and familiar. The Jackson home in contrast is dark, the domain and lair of Robert Jackson. The two locations can be read as representative of the two men. The first scenes of the Jackson home are dark and the atmosphere indicates that something evil exists or will occur, particularly when the woman in the wheelchair is listening at the door of a bedroom from which moaning can be heard. Daley is instead associated with the outdoors and idyllic settings. He could, in some ways, be held to be similar to the Hollywood Western hero who, like Daley, is frequently a wanderer passing through towns doing good. Daley works on a farm, the New Zealand equivalent to the ranch, and spends his time herding sheep down from the "tops". It is in these scenes that he can be more closely compared as even the music takes on the tones of a Hollywood Western as he herds the animals down.

The tendency in nineteenth century Gothic literature towards more relativist characters has no effect on *Heart of the Stag* and *Trespasses*. The villainous and heroic characters represent an

absolute moral stance with their polarisation of good and evil. It therefore becomes easier for the reader/audience to identify with the appropriate morally correct character when there is such a clear demarcation between good and evil. The audience is taught a moral lesson which the earlier Gothic tales espoused through character identification and emotional intensity. But not only can the audience learn a lesson they can also experience, through identification with the villain, and indulge in fantasies and desires without actually acting them out (Day 69). The character becomes the Mr Hyde alter ego of the viewer, the side that they would rather keep in the dark.

The double or mirror opposite is an example of how the viewer or reader can experience transgression without actually doing so. The personality of one character is transposed on to another allowing behaviour which society deems necessary to repress a chance to expose itself. This is also a clear illustration of the dual world concept. One side of the personality is part of the recognisable world while the other is the dark and unfamiliar. Characters in another New Zealand film, brother and sister, Jack and Dora, of *Jack Be Nimble* also illustrate the separation of two characters in a similar manner. They have been described as two halves of the one personality by *NZ Film* (vol. 49, 1993: 4). Jack is the character indicative of the darker half. He enacts revenge against all those who rejected and hurt him and his sister, for example his family and their birth parents. Dora is the moral voice and character who tries to calm the irrational side channelled through Jack. Her psychic powers are a way of doing so as they forewarn danger. *Jane Eyre* bears a similarity to *Jack Be Nimble* in the characters Jane and Bertha Mason. Jane is representative of the figure of the repressed woman. She has passions and desires that must be repressed because she is a woman. Her desires that are repressed are transposed into another character, Bertha Mason/Rochester. Bertha is the "madwoman in the attic". She enacts all of Jane's so called illicit desires of lust, restlessness and anger which make up her destructive nature of madness, hatred and vengeance. Jane is kept

in line by Bertha's ghostly presence as she is heard, or her actions revealed, after Jane has a subversive thought. Like Bertha, Jack is punished for his transgressions and socially repugnant behaviour. He takes the blame for actions that his sister, it is suggested, subconsciously desires just as Bertha is the voice of Jane's inner thoughts. Jack's demise provides the viewer with their moral lesson; a balance must be found between the so called dual worlds of which Dora and Jack are representations.

DOMINANCE OF THE SUPERNATURAL: *MR WRONG* AND *JACK BE NIMBLE*

Ghost figures or supernatural occurrences, stock Gothic features so common in some Gothic literature, are an extension of the double figure or mirror opposite. The spectre, like the double, is a shape into which societal fears or a character's fears can be projected. The figure becomes both what is feared, whether known or unknown, and a way into exploring the subterranean landscapes of the mind (MacAndrew 8). This feature is apparent in some New Zealand films and *Mr Wrong* and *Jack be Nimble* are good examples⁹. Whilst conforming to the requirements of Gothic by featuring a frantic heroine and brave hero these films employ a ghost figure as a feature of the narrative, or some supernatural, and or unexplainable events.

The plot of *Mr Wrong* concentrates on the heroine Meg and her car, a Mark II Jaguar, which has been previously owned by Mary Carmichael who, unknown to the character and audience, was murdered and stashed in the boot. Like Stephen King's *Christine*, the car is haunted by a previous owner and for Meg this becomes her own nightmare experience. For example when Meg first hears the raspy breathing (presumably Mary's dying gasps) she turns the light on inside the car. The breathing then stops. However as soon as the light is turned off the breathing starts up again. I have spoken of the separation of the Gothic "world" into two and this is an

⁹ *The Returning* also bases its narrative on the story of a ghostly woman and her haunting of an old homestead and its inhabitant but I shall be discussing this in chapter three of this study.

example of how the supernatural marks the edge between the two realms. The switching on of the light takes Meg back into the everyday and diurnal but when the light is switched off and the breathing starts, it is clear that the nightmare has begun again with darkness. In the early Gothic novels the night was the place of hauntings as with the story of the "Bleeding Nun" in *The Monk*. Bertha's maniacal appearances, and Jane's preternatural dreams in *Jane Eyre*, and the walking portrait that appears to Manfred in *The Castle of Otranto*, all occur at night. Meg, like Jane, has dreams which foretell events in the narrative, for example Meg dreams of Mary Carmichael and her own escape before it actually happens. The dream is set on a typical traditional stormy night as it contributes to the brooding and terrifying atmosphere that Gothic novels pursue. For this reason many of the terrifying situations that face Meg in *Mr Wrong* are set at night as it is the time when people's worst fears come true.

If the ghost figure is representative of society's or an individual's inner fears what would those fears be? Charlotte Bronte in *Villette*, a semi-Gothic novel, employs the ghost figure as a metaphor for the central character's, Lucy Snowe's, fears of sexual intimacy and neuroticism. The ghost in *Mr Wrong* expresses a similar attitude for its heroine. Meg is quiet, matronly, not particularly good looking and quite dissimilar to her flatmates who are portrayed as women typical of Meg's age, leading busy social lifestyles. They are outgoing and involved in relationships while Meg appears quite happy sitting at home watching television eating her meal by herself. It is also revealed by her flatmate and herself that she is neurotic and nervous of everything, just as a traditional Gothic heroine is.

Jack Be Nimble too employs the use of dreams and night scenes as a way of emphasising the supernatural. Dora and Jack, brother and sister, are separated when they are adopted out. While Dora finds herself in a happy-middle class family Jack is placed in a family with four daughters, an alcoholic father and mad mother. Jack's story is

like a Grimm's fairy tale as he is tormented and beaten by his family, provoking him into an act of revenge by killing his parents before he goes in search of Dora. Dora while happy has supernatural powers, particularly an ability to hear voices, which she inherited from her mother, in her head warning her of dangers. This links her to the hero Teddy (Bruno Lawrence) who shares her ability. With Dora's persuasion Teddy helps her search for her brother. The supernatural, as represented by Dora's powers, becomes the "other" as it stands outside the realm of the viewer's experience.

The cathartic scene of *Jack Be Nimble* is a prime example of the use of the supernatural. While we were given prior titbits through the sister's supernatural powers there is never as complete a release as in the final scenes of the film. It is at this point that *Jack Be Nimble* could be said to fit more successfully into the horror mould than Gothic. The four sisters largely contribute to this horror image and especially their splatter-like deaths. Even Garth Maxwell admits his film is hard to categorise "... it is a psychological thriller, but it's also a serious horror movie, a dark fantasy, and a popular entertainment which deals with the deepest human emotions"¹⁰ (*NZ Film*, vol.48,1993: 5). The film cuts across what I describe as horror Gothic to straight out stereotypical Hollywood horror as Jack seeks revenge for injustices, followed in turn by his adopted sisters who seek their revenge on Jack for killing their parents. The sisters move as one unit all similar in appearance with their long dark hair and stone-like looks on their faces reminiscent of an American Gothic horror story. They surround Jack with axes and knives ready to enact their revenge only to be prevented from doing so by a wind brought by Dora, so strong that it kills them all.

Mr Wrong and *Jack Be Nimble*, while both conveying elements of the supernatural in their narrative, depict a different atmosphere through their varying foci. *Mr Wrong* features a strong element of terror involving the passive and weaker heroine, Meg. However

¹⁰ This comment is a direct illustration of how the Gothic focuses on the inner state of the antagonist developing and projecting the side of human nature that is kept hidden because of its terrifying qualities.

Jack Be Nimble introduces an atmosphere more indicative of horror as both Dora and Jack share the role of victim. Hume, in his description of different Gothic categories makes it clear that while a set of narratives may be a part of the Gothic style it is possible for them to vary and converge in different forms.

In a discussion on Gothic Robert D. Hume separates the style into three varieties (282-283). These are the sentimental Gothic, terror Gothic and historical Gothic. *Jack Be Nimble*, I believe, adds a fourth category of horror Gothic. The film contains the features and devices that exist in traditional Gothic but has a more graphically violent edge that could be likened to the type of horror that has come out of Hollywood, such as the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series. Following Hume's categories for the Gothic, a large portion of New Zealand film can be positioned in one of the three (or including my added category, four) categories. *Mr Wrong* I believe is of the terror Gothic. The figures who vanish mysteriously and nightmares that foretell events in Meg's life all act to terrify, not only the protagonist, but also the audience as they are left in suspense trying to decide whether the figures are actually ghosts or real. The third category belongs to a film I have not dealt with in this chapter but shall in Chapter Three. The sentimental Gothic, Hume describes, is a style which utilises ghosts and a gloomy atmosphere to enliven the sentimental-domestic tale. *The Returning* is a film that is a part of this style of Gothic. The narrative tells the tale of a man, who having moved into an old homestead is suddenly introduced to the beautiful ghostly figure of Charlotte Hetherington. He falls in love with her and drowns himself to be with her. It is essentially a domestic tale as it is set in the home but the ghost does energise the narrative as Charlotte creates mysterious winds and turns lights on and off by themselves. Hume's final category, the historical gothic, again belongs to a film that I shall examine in the third chapter, *The Piano*.

In this chapter I have focused on the stock elements and devices of Gothic literature that I believe feature in, and are the basis of, some

of New Zealand's films, namely *Heart of the Stag*, *Trespases*, *Jack Be Nimble* and *Mr Wrong*. These features exist as an expression of a dark and unrelenting Gothic world that remains distant from the everyday and outside the reader's (or in the case of the films, the audience's) experiences. The hero and heroine become a means of introducing the audience to the Gothic world that they inhabit through identification with their characters. They represent the diurnal Gothic world. But to counteract this is the opposing side of the dual world which the villain and the supernatural inhabit. They offer a place in which the fears of other characters, and those of society, can be transposed. Through these characters the audience can learn not only a moral lesson, as some characters are punished for their subversive behaviour, but also experience the fantasies and desires that they hold but must repress because they are deemed unsuitable behaviour by society. Gothic, therefore, is a restatement of societal norms, not a deviation from them, as behavioural roles are reaffirmed. Women as heroines remain passive, weak and inactive while the male characters, both villains and heroes, are allowed a full active role of terrifying or saving the heroine.

New Zealand film re-enunciates these Gothic devices as the character Cathy becomes the atypical Gothic heroine whilst her father, Robert Jackson and Mr Wells are employed to exhibit the qualities of the villain. The father is the figure of terror and his daughter is the object on which the violence is unleashed. The films therefore share qualities very similar to Manfred in *The Castle of Otranto*. The site of terror is brought into the home because it is the head of the family who is the cause of the horror and fear. It is only with the outside assistance of the hero figure, the third side to this triangle, that the heroine can be saved, as we see with traditional Gothic literature. The importance of this character as a source of strength for the heroine is emphasised throughout Gothic literature as he is the only alternative to the villain, to use the phrase coined by *Star Wars*, the "dark side of the Force". The hero's ineptness can then define the heroine. *Trespases* is an example

of this as Katie does not fully comply with the traditional role of a passive and helpless victim because she takes an active part in her own defence in response to Albie's inability to successfully defend her.

CHAPTER TWO

COMMONALITIES BETWEEN NEW ZEALAND LITERATURE AND FILM

Exploring links with traditional Gothic literature is not the only fruitful source of comparisons with New Zealand film. The New Zealand literary tradition is another way of understanding just why, and how, it is that our national film industry has accumulated such a dark and bleak, Gothic, atmosphere. Though the range of New Zealand writers is large and many touch on a darker side (such as Frank Sargeson and Jean Devanny) I have chosen, for reasons of space, to concentrate specifically on Ronald Hugh Morrieson and Janet Frame who each offer a similar point of view but from different perspectives. They both write of the puritan nature of New Zealand Pakeha society and the resultant repressive forces that quash desires and dreams, leaving in turn a society that is inherently violent because of this puritan moral scheme. It is this notation of repression leading to violence that has been adapted into New Zealand film and the films, following the literary influence, account for this societal feature in two ways. Firstly there is the "slaughterhouse" mentality and secondly the visual image that stems from the slaughter trade - the man with the axe. Each has become symbolic of New Zealand as a supposedly new utopian colony which is fresh in comparison with the industrial hardships of Britain.

Novelists Ronald Hugh Morrieson and Janet Frame, whilst presenting a vision of New Zealand as restrained and puritanical, have also employed features and devices that are very similar to the traditional Gothic outlined in the first chapter. It is therefore necessary to reintroduce some of these themes as they are important in establishing just how Morrieson and Frame have used them to depict puritanism in New Zealand.

“BOY’S OWN GOTHIC”: RONALD HUGH MORRIESON

Ronald Hugh Morrieson is one New Zealand writer who includes Gothic trappings and devices similar to those that first appeared in the eighteenth century. It is the appearance of these devices that led to the label “Taranaki Gothic” being applied to his work (Simpson 40). *The Scarecrow* and *Predicament* are two novels in which the influence of the traditional Gothic has been the strongest. These novels are a conglomeration of a boy’s adventure story, psychological thriller and small town saga due to the imaginative natures of the novels’ protagonists, Neddy and Cedric, and their diet of Hollywood films and pulp fiction of the time (Simpson 11). They introduce a montage of events and characters that cross genres just as the traditional Gothic borrowed from images and themes of romance and horror.

Both boys have an obsession with adventure, crime stories and films of the 1930s period. As the dramas unfold it appears as if their adventures have escaped straight off the pages and screen and become a part of their lives¹¹. The dramatic events involving the boys consist of rapes, necrophilia, murders, blackmails, bootlegging, pursuits, escapes, apparitions and mysteries of the nocturnal world which Neddy and Cedric seek to unravel. Neddy investigates the mystery surrounding the murderous Salter while Cedric contemplates Marvin’s involvement in the suspicious death of his father as well as getting himself further into trouble with Marvin and Spook. These mysteries become the things that terrorise or delude the two boys and must be explained and revealed in the narrative .

Morrieson’s novels, particularly *Predicament* and *The Scarecrow*, between them contain the stock Gothic elements of a villain, hero, heroine, and ghostly occurrences in a familiar setting but one that has the undercurrent of a nightmare realm existing simultaneously

¹¹ The fact that Salter’s first victim was Daphne Moran, a theatre usherette, allows us to think that Salter stepped straight from the silver screen (Simpson 29). Neddy’s narration supports this as Salter takes on the qualities of a stereotypical evil villain.

within the familiar.

Salter, in *The Scarecrow*, is an example of one of Morrieson's villainous characters and he bears a close resemblance to Lewis's Ambrosio in *The Monk*. He is a lecherous, murdering, raping, necrophile. Like Ambrosio he is linked with the devil but instead of being in cahoots with him as was Ambroiso, Salter, as seen from Neddy's point of view, takes the shape of the devil himself personifying evil: "The face was owned by a phenomenally tall man and the devil himself could not have conspired with the street lamp to cast a longer shadow." (*The Scarecrow* 34).

This villainous character enables the reader to witness the splitting or doubling that is so common in Gothic literature, melodramatic and romantic works. Salter becomes the figure into whom characters can transfer their own fantasies and lust that are denied in a puritanical New Zealand society which is represented in the story by the small town of Klynham. He is the double for both the town and the central character Neddy (Jones 208). Through him the community experience the sensation of transgressing the standards set by society. This in turn is shared by the readers as they gain an abstract form of gratification from witnessing the grotesque acts of Herbert Salter.

Salter, as the villain, also motivates the narrative. It is his act of killing Daphne Moran that begins the tale and his arrival in the town develops the narrative. Salter's actions represent the terror and subterranean forces in Klynham, those that threaten the true virginal Gothic heroine Prudence Poindexter and encourage the heroes, Neddy and Constable Ransbottom, to save her.

But perhaps a more truly Gothic novel is Morrieson's lesser known *Predicament*. This novel has the largest foundation of stock Gothic features and devices. The narrative involves escapes and pursuits with Cedric facing numerous terrifying situations with Spook, Marvin, the Witch and Blair Bramwell as he delves into blackmail

and an investigation of Marvin's father's death. The situations he finds himself in can be compared to the position of the heroines of such novels as *The Castle of Otranto*; the difference is Cedric is more active in his own defence unlike the passive and weak traditional Gothic heroine:

He lifted his head from the pillow, vaguely aware that some sound had awakened him. Had he been dreaming, he wondered? Then, a few yards along the hall from his bedroom door something slithered down the wall and hit the floor with a muffled thump. Immediately afterwards a floor board creaked and then another under what were unmistakably slow, measured footfalls. The eerie, deliberate strides continued and Cedric's hair rose from his scalp as they seemed to stop directly outside his door. But it was only the long pause between the steps that gave the impression of each being the last. The zombie-like walker paced the full length of the long hall until at last the awful footfalls faded away somewhere in the heart of the great house.

(*Predicament* 134-135)

Setting the scene for the novels dramatic action is a highly Gothic, though ramshackle, tower with a ghostly figure that wanders the top (Copland 261). This "kiwi" makeshift tower replaces the decaying ruinous castle or monastery that frequented the literature of the eighteenth century. The decay of this New Zealand castle, or tower, suggests a similar message to that espoused in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The state of the family, or patriarch, is reflected in their premises. Therefore it refers to the decline of Cedric's family and particularly to his father. He built the tower and is known as the local eccentric, and this is reflected in the home's ramshackle state¹²

¹² *The Castle of Otranto* and Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* are both eighteenth and nineteenth century examples. In each case the family home literally falls to the ground.

Unlike traditional Gothic where the focus is predominantly from the female point of view, Morrieson relates his tales from the view point of a young adolescent male. Though they contain the traditional features and devices, they never the less conjure up excitement and anticipation in a different way because of the male and not female focal point. The novels therefore read more like comic action adventure stories rather than the eighteenth century tales of romantic terror.

SOCIETY AS THE VILLAIN: JANET FRAME

Janet Frame stands in contrast to the "Boys Own" adventure stories of Morrieson by revealing a woman's point of view. Like Morrieson she creates a tense and unrelenting world with prevailing subterranean forces by depicting a Gothic atmosphere that can be seen as a result of the pressures on women in a New Zealand society that is narrow, bourgeois, puritanical, Philistine, boring and materialistic (Brown 350). The novels referred to, *Owls Do Cry* and *A State of Siege*, deal with the traditional theme of an entrapped heroine, remaining in line with the traditional Gothic form, but instead here it is society that plays the role of the villain terrorising the heroine. Pressure from an oppressive and judgmental society has created an atmosphere that is menacing and threatening, leading critics to describe her work as unreservedly dark and something that you could not approach for light entertainment (Delrez 126). *A State of Siege* gives this dark atmosphere visual description through the character of artist Malfred Signal. Her obsession with shading and the separation of her life into dark and light allows Frame to explore the dual worlds of the Gothic and exhibit her Manichean belief in a world of darkness coexisting in a world of light (Maltewe 124)¹³.

The separation of Malfred's world into two proves to be the cause of the dark atmosphere as she grapples with a past that has come back to haunt her after a life in which she denied herself love and

¹³ Charlotte Bunnell also posits this.

compassion. The two locations of the novel are an example of the separation of light and dark. The place name Matuatangi means, in Maori, father, or parents, and death while Karemoana is to desire ardently and ripple or sea (Maltewe 123). Each is representative of a particular state of Malfred's mind and a point in her life. She leaves Matuatangi with a desire to escape her desolate past and the repression she experienced and associations with these years is epitomised in the fernhouse scene with her lover Wilfred. The light and peace that she was hoping for is denied her at Karemoana as her repressed nature reemerges in the form of the unnamed element terrorising her. Malfred's nightmares become a visual expression of her inner thoughts while at the same time revealing her past for the reader, making the reader search for an explanation for the knocking on the door.

As another way of projecting the dark and threatening atmosphere Frame seems to echo the images of the mad women like those making an appearance in earlier Gothic novels such as *Jane Eyre*. Frame uses the label of "mad", as Bronte does, for women who are deemed by society as incapable of conforming to expected behavioural norms. The lives of Daphne Withers (*Owls Do Cry*) and Istina Mavet (*Faces in the Water*) become Frame's Bertha Mason. They have been labelled, judged, excluded and confined to the modern day equivalent of the attic - a mental institution. As a result, their imaginations become the only form of escape from a judgmental society and the only way they can retain a sense of their own voice. Frame asserts her analysis of society through these images. Society labels women as mad because it can not tolerate women's femininity or difference. Madness therefore becomes a means of demonising women as horrific.

The atmosphere, created by images of madness exude terror, helplessness and both literal and actual entrapment as the individual is separated from the rest of society. Frame pursues this fear when Daphne's father and brother visit Daphne before her operation. Toby's safety is jeopardised after he has an epileptic fit

and Mr Withers' belief that Toby may not be waiting when he returns is an example of the institution depicted as a relentless vacuum that could suck anyone in whether they are sane or insane. It is difference that determines who should be admitted and who should not and this is governed by an individual's ability to conform or not: "Bob Withers was afraid. He had heard of people disappearing inside these hospitals, and then, when they said they were visitors no one would let them out, and no one believed them. Why, anything could happen in a hospital like this, after all, it was still the dark ages." (*Owls Do Cry* 198)

Frame argues against conformity. It is in *Owls Do Cry* that she outlines, through the character Chicks, that a denial of one's imagination as representative of one's unique voice results in a person becoming figuratively imprisoned in their own mind creating a life of "emptiness and pretence" (Mercer 35). Chicks has denied herself her imagination and instead has adopted behaviour that she believes will establish her firmly in the "proper" social circles and enable her to lead a successful and fulfilled life (Rutherford 46). To achieve this she reads the right books and prepares an evening's conversation which will allow her to naturally introduce her new found knowledge into the conversation. However Chicks has been deluded by societal expectations. Frame creates an ironic picture to establish this point when she reveals in the novels epilogue that the doctor, who Chicks found it so necessary to befriend in order to progress in her social standing, has murdered his wife. A fate she will also share with the doctor's wife, as is made apparent in the final chapter.

The conclusions of Frame's novels play an important part in defining her point of view. She denies the reader the cathartic release that made the traditional Gothic form so popular (Delrez 126). While Morrieson perpetuates the typical type of melodramatic resolution of order, Frame chooses to ignore it. Instead she desires to shock the reader by ripping the carpet out from under their feet with some evidence that reveals the eternally hopeless and tragic

situation of the central character, as in *Owls Do Cry*. Daphne after years of institutionalisation has been let out but it becomes obvious that her imaginative and natural voice has been quashed. She has conformed and therefore isolation is no longer necessary. Society it appears has turned her into an automated unthinking robot and the result of her assimilation back into society is her joining the monotony of a factory assembly line. Malfred's death at the end of *A State of Siege* is another example as Frame has made her situation inescapable, death therefore appears to become the only option.

A VIOLENT SOCIETY

As explained in Chapter One, in *Heart of the Stag* and *Trespases*, New Zealand film has taken on board some traditional Gothic influences. That chapter however was limited to the influence of the stereotypical Gothic villain, hero and heroine. As explained above some New Zealand literature shares the link to traditional Gothic literature by creating a dark and bleak environment whilst including those stock features and devices of ghosts and mysterious goings on. But there is more to the national literature than simply a reference to traditional Gothic devices and it is for this reason that I have included Frame in this discussion with Morrieson. They both thrust forward a view of New Zealand society as conformist, intolerant, and too often small minded (Bertram 9). Living in such an environment encourages the repression of any desire that such a society finds illicit and therefore evil. Sexual repression is a key aspect and it is its link with violence that draws together the two mediums, literature and film, creating the dark atmosphere of some of our films.

This peculiarly New Zealand violence has two explanations. Firstly it can be argued that violence is a consequence of our puritan nature which has sought to repress any illicit desires and lusts, as mentioned above. Any desires and expressions that are non-conformist lead to the isolation or destruction of the individual, as

we have seen already in Malfred and Daphne and Morrieson's Salter. Such repression has an outlet only of violence. An alternative explanation for the source of our violent society is put forward by Patrick Evans who writes of our "slaughterhouse" environment. He explains it as resulting from the nature of our economy which grew due to the frozen meat trade. The systematic industrialised destruction of the pastoral image of the lamb destroyed the arcadian myth and revealed the rustic shepherd as a calculating butcher (Evans 76). The image of the man with the axe, I believe, is a reaction to the fracturing of the pastoral and idyllic picture and has become a feature of New Zealand film and a way of portraying the violent nature of our society. It is this form of violence that is indicative of the New Zealand version of Gothic, creating a dark tone as the man holding the axe turns his frustrations on to a weaker and more helpless victim - the heroine.

Seen in this way repression of individuals is a result of the puritan moral vision developed in New Zealand during colonisation. What Chapman describes as a "moral scheme" did not begin in New Zealand but extends back to the growth of industrialisation in Britain during the Nineteenth century (34). It began due to the social stress created by industrialisation that prompted many British citizens to emigrate to New Zealand and other colonies in an effort to escape the hardships of unemployment, depression and famine (Simpson, 1997: 99-101). To counteract the hardship and misery found with a sudden change in expectations and situations, the working classes' disorientation spread to evangelism which in turn gave them hope and a direction to which they clung (Chapman 34).

On arrival in New Zealand, religion was modified to fit the new environment "work, deny yourself and you will be prosperous and saved" (Chapman 36). It was a struggle for survival in the new land and the new motto was fitting, suiting the working class immigrants as their desire was to better themselves in the new land, which was not tied down with the traditions as in Britain (Simpson 1997: 130). Religion was transformed into a moral scheme and became a

feature of New Zealand life (Chapman 34).

TRIAL RUN: A FILMIC REPRESENTATION OF JANET FRAME'S THEMES

Frame, in her novels, portrays the puritan ethic as particularly restrictive on women because it restrained their imaginative and creative nature by determining how they should act and behave. Melanie Read's *Trial Run* (1984) can be described as a filmic representation of Janet Frame's novels particularly *A State of Siege* within which it has many parallels.

Like Malfred Signal, Rosemary Edmonds (Annie Whittle) of *Trial Run* has chosen to live alone in isolation, except her reasons are a new career opportunity - writing a chapter for a wildlife book. The subject of Rosemary's chapter, the yellow-eyed penguin, has left her no choice in her location. On the face of it Rosemary is abandoning her family for her own needs and desires, and the events that follow can be read as her punishment for this attitude which goes against what society condones as appropriate behaviour for women, particularly those with a family. Her stay at the cottage becomes a nightmare similar to that experienced by Malfred Signal. It has already been suggested that the cottage may be haunted by the previous owner because she died there, so this invites a superstitious nature to run riot. Rosemary's does, and her nightmares feature the owner. We share Rosemary's point of view and experience the dream with her so the separation of dream and reality is blurred. It is only when she tells Frances of the nightmares that the distinction is drawn.

Just who is frightening Rosemary remains ambiguous until the final scenes of the film. Until that time the identity of the assailant is left open. It could be Mr West, her female neighbour or even Frances¹⁴. But revealing the identity of the attacker, while necessary to achieve

¹⁴ After the windows are shattered a close-up of Frances' feet reveal she is wearing shoes which she explains away by saying she went outside to have a look. As we now identify with Rosemary and the attacker is still a mystery everyone appears guilty, as showing Frances wearing shoes indicates.

some semblance of restoration in the narrative, is not as important as the reasons for the attacks. These could be read as one of two reasons. Firstly it is either her son's own selfish desires that encourage him to frighten Rosemary back into her position as his mother and housekeeper, or secondly it could be society asserting itself through James, frightening Rosemary home so she can reassume her role as the head of the domestic sphere, the required role for women. A position which she could be losing to Frances. The suggestion of an affair between Frances and Rosemary's husband indicates that among the dangers women face when leaving home and pursuing their careers is the fidelity of their partners. Flashbacks from Rosemary's point of view provide more than enough material to suggest this interpretation and her husband's explanation for having flowers for Frances, forgetting that Rosemary was not at home, is also indicative.

The images of abandoned women are strong in *Trial Run* and this coincides with the way women are positioned within the Gothic generally and in Janet Frame's novels in particular. The terror women face while alone heightens their sense of abandonment creating a nightmare world. For this reason the climax of *Trial Run* comes at night and, like Frame, Melanie Read offers no cathartic release for the audience, just confusion and disappointment. James is revealed to be the mysterious assailant in a series of flashbacks. But no explanation is offered as to why he was terrorising his mother and none can be as James is either dead or unconscious. We can only assume that it was a bizarre attempt by him to get his mother to run the fastest she had ever run in her life. The ending of the film is then very similar to Frame's defiance against a satisfactory narrative closure delivered in many of her novels.

As I have explained earlier, in New Zealand writers have traditionally criticised what they saw as a restrictive society. Sexual repression has been depicted as a key feature in the settler society advocating the new moral scheme. Writers, such as Ronald Hugh

Morrison, have protested against it by emphasising that violence is a result of pent up frustrations. The themes Morrison incorporates into his novels are captured, and made visual, in the filmic adaptations which enlarge and emphasise the violent themes. *The Scarecrow* (1982) and *Pallet on the Floor* (1984) are two of Morrison's novels that have been adapted for the screen. Between them they examine the violent nature of New Zealand society.

SEXUALITY AND VIOLENCE IN NEW ZEALAND FILM: *THE SCARECROW*

Each of Morrison's novels examine a different aspect of developing sexuality. *The Scarecrow* is a study of puberty, *Predicament*, with the character Cedric takes sexual awareness one step further to adolescence, *Came a Hot Friday* examines the lusts and frustrations of young manhood and finally *Pallet on the Floor* explores marriage and approaching middle age (Simpson 8). Morrison creates an outlet for the lust and desires each character experiences. The filmed version of *The Scarecrow* is no exception, it continues this theme through Herbert Salter in whom Neddy's preadolescent fears and desires, and those of the local community, are projected.

If we follow the descriptions above of New Zealand as puritanical then Klynham is an archetypal small town in puritan New Zealand. This is symbolised by the Salvation Army band playing outside on the streets. Salter immediately sets himself up in opposition to the values advocated by the band. Jesus may be "the life" for the towns-folk singing along but Salter is Death. His long figure is partly in shadow and he becomes the ghoulish figure of a nightmare. A shot of a cloud passing across the moon further supports the images associated with a nightmare and creatures of the night which is what Salter is set up to be. His emerging from the shadows echoes the subterranean origins of the novel. He has vampire qualities that are accentuated by his living amongst the

coffins in the funeral parlour and also through the insinuation that he comes out only at night to terrify the town virgins Prudence and Angela, and to murder and rape (McDonnell, 1986: 215). The obvious fact that he gains sexual pleasure from the dead not the living, as seen in his necrophilic act with Mable Collinson, adds to this allusion. Salter, because he is passing through Klynham, enables the town to release all its pent up sexual frustrations that are only comically suggestive through the Lynch gang and in particular Peachy.

The Lynch gang frequently harass Angela Potroz and Prudence making lewd suggestions. But it is Peachy who gets the most excited by the girls but even he is cut down by Victor for his childish and sexually explicit suggestions and actions. If anything the episodes are humorous and harmless which allows the Lynch gang to continue on in the town. The real danger comes from the outside and this allows the darker side to remain removed from the everyday events of Klynham. The horror Salter brings with him can therefore be exorcised with his destruction (Jones 208).

In the film Klynham may be set in opposition to Salter but Ned is aligned with him before he even arrives. The older Ned who narrates, tells the audience, while the young Ned is leaving town with his father, that he was fast approaching the crossroads of this life and they lay dead ahead. It is at this point that Salter comes into view standing on the crossroads. More than a casual link is made between the two characters and not merely for the purposes of narrating the tale. Ned's sexual awakening is linked to Salter's sexual depravity as he acts out Neddy's subconscious fantasies (Simpson 24). Neddy finally gets to live a portion of his fantasies out when he and Les meet the twins. It is the destruction of Salter that makes this possible, clearing the way for Neddy to have a legitimate relationship.

In each case there is a link between sexuality and violence which Salter aptly conveys. He combines his sexually depraved acts with

violence through murder, rape or necrophilic acts. When he confronts Prudence in the Poindexter home the connection between sexuality and violence is at its height. The knife he holds against Prudence's chest and his penis become one in the same thing, and he desires to penetrate Prudence's "lush, and virginal body", presumably with both (McDonnell, 1986: 218). It is this knife that we can assume has already penetrated Daphne Moran and Angela Potroz and from which Prue just escapes.

Pallet on the Floor shares in, and develops, the violence begun in *The Scarecrow*. It too follows the theme of sex and violence as intrinsically linked but looks at it from a different vantage point. As I have stated Morrisson places his novels at different stages of sexual development. *Pallet on the Floor* is no longer looking at sexuality from the view point of a preadolescent but from approaching middle age. Reality seems to then take hold of the narrative because Sam, his wife, and his friends are no longer lost in an imaginary world of Hollywood films and boys' adventure stories as was Neddy Poindexter. Instead the events are grounded in the realities of employment, marriage and financial worries. For this reason there are no longer imaginary qualities that distinguish the violence from reality, as were apparent with Salter and the characteristics he shared with Hollywood's vampires and zombies. Instead the violence is a reflection, and a part of, the society in which they live.

Sexuality and violence, in close combination, are also aired in other New Zealand films namely Alison Maclean's *Crush* (1992) and her short film *Kitchen Sink* (1989). In these films Maclean has been described by Roger Horrocks, in Milo Bilbrough's interview with the filmmaker, as combining an ambivalent mix of repulsion and horror with sensuality (Bilbrough 9). For example in *Crush* the characters Lane and Colin kiss while Lane is holding a pair of open scissors. The image suggests a subtle volatility in their relationship and the danger Lane is to Colin as she seduces him, leading him into a tumultuous relationship. In *Kitchen Sink* it is the grotesqueness of

the relationship and danger of the unknown that encourages a violent reading. The creature the heroine encounters has literally come from the kitchen sink and actress Theresa Healey develops a sick fascination with the hairy mass. However it is not until their first sexual encounter that the danger arises and the result is the creature's death when Healey pulls at a hair on the back of its neck. The outcome is quite ironic as through the narrative the audience is under the impression that Healey is the one in danger. It is in fact the creature who dies.

The violence in *Pallet on the Floor* escalates into what is described with regard to the novel as a "pornography of violence" which, like the film, concludes after four murders, one suicide and blackmail (Jones 209). The violence is pushed forward into the audience's faces as the narrative attempts to legitimise the deaths that have occurred by letting us believe that the culprits had no alternative. The viewers are led to believe that it is a result of the environment they live in and therefore must be accepted as necessary for survival in New Zealand culture. The fact that the violence is begun with an act of revenge allows the audience to sympathise with the characters' predicament. The audience's visual identification with Sam and his friends enable them to see Voot as the enemy, particularly after the incident at Sam and Sue's wedding. Voot's death then provides a cathartic release for the audience as they witness him getting what he deserves.

Patrick Evans relates that the origin for this violent nature is linked to the image of the slaughterhouse which successfully destroyed the image of New Zealand as a pastoral paradise after the introduction of the frozen meat trade. With its introduction it established what Evans describes as a second mythology, a reverse of the original rural and tranquil image. The previous picture of the rustic shepherd was destroyed and revealed to be a "systematic and calculating butcher" and the grazing lamb was transformed into a carcass (Evans 76). Instead of the industrial mills of Britain, New Zealand created its own 'satanic' version in the freezing works

(Evans 76). The culture from which the immigrants fled was returning to haunt them with an atmosphere more steeped in blood and exploitation than the one they had left.

New Zealand literature has developed these images of animal slaughter as indicative of our culture and something by which we are both disgusted and yet fascinated. The men taking turns looking through a peep hole at the lambs being slaughtered in *Pallet on the Floor* is one example. But the fascination may not necessarily extend to the mass slaughter of animals in a freezing works. It can be a singular incident which is what Katherine Mansfield picks up on in her short story *Prelude*. The Burnell children watch a duck have its head chopped off. The event she describes shows how the incident can become terrifying yet simultaneously fascinating as the children watch the duck walk around with its head missing: "Even Lottie, frightened little Lottie, began to laugh and pointed at the duck and shrieked: 'Look, Kezia, look'." (Mansfield 46).

Frank Sargeson in his short story *Sale Day* allows the reader to experience a reaction similar to the Burnell children through the character Victor. It is with amazement and fascination that we read of Victor dropping Elsie's cat into the stove fire. The act itself is so offhand that it is hard to imagine that it has taken place as the only comment Elsie makes is a calm suggestion that Victor look for another job. *A Great Day* features another random act of violence as one friend vents his jealousies on another by leaving him to drown in the in-coming tide.

This fascination with death that is encountered in our national literature has been carried over into film. Characters desire to see a dead body (*The Scarecrow*), watch lambs being slaughtered (*Pallet on the Floor*), or themselves participate in the death of animals or humans (*Jack Be Nimble* and *Pallet on the Floor*) and it is the slaughterhouse environment that is used as an explanation for this fascination and acceptance with death and destruction.

It is suggested that the actions of the men are in reaction to their environment. They act against and show hatred towards the system and individuals who maintain it and lead them to feel trapped (Simpson 49-50). *Pallet on the Floor's* depiction of the freezing works, where Sam and his friends are employed, illustrates this point of view as the value structure which it exists in is ruthless and unforgiving. The opening scenes make this clear as a distinction is drawn between the tranquillity of the open beach and sheep being herded off cattle trucks into the slaughter house. This is followed by a closeup of the offal and blood being swept into a drain as the men on the chain remove the innards from the carcasses. There is little talking between the men and when there is an exchange the sounds of the works are escalated so the audience is not privy to the conversation. This has the effect of distancing the goings on in the freezing works from the actual lives of Sam and his friends. Outside their employment the situation is different with conversation flowing freely and audibly, a contrast to the stifling "works" environment. The film is trying to say they are not as bad as the fellow employees which is how they try to see themselves¹⁵. However they fail to rise above the images of death and repetitious images of legitimised slaughter as their murder of the Voot brothers and Stan and Miriam prove. They view the terrible deeds as simply necessary acts to save them from a sticky situation.

Jack Be Nimble shares in the presentation of the slaughterhouse environment by emphasising its influence with a contrasting lifestyle. Dora and Jack were separated when they are young and sent to different families and it is the different home conditions they experienced that dictated their behaviour as we see it on the screen.

It becomes obvious that Dora has been more fortunate than Jack in her placement. The camera follows her adoptive parents at eye level when they arrive to pick her up. Jack's parents are juxtaposed

¹⁵ The peep hole to watch the slaughter of the lambs is an example as Sam and O'Keefe's reaction tells the audience they do not share the other's fascination with the slaughter.

against the “normality” of Dora’s. Instead of an eye level shot the camera is positioned at their feet which shows them striding purposefully over to Jack in their sturdy and sensible shoes. The camera takes their point of view as they loom up over Jack cowering in his pen. It is clear from these images that Jack is not going to be as comfortable in his new home as his sister.

While Dora is living in the suburbs, Jack’s life is on the farm where the slaughter of animals is the primary activity and provides the back-drop to the characters’ lives and emotions (*NZ Film*. vol. 48, 1993: 9). There are a series of inter cut shots linking the slaughter of a pig to young Jack. As his father drags a squealing piglet by its ear Jack is also dragged, squealing, to watch by his four sisters. His father, smiling, holds up the knife and slits the piglet’s throat. Jack’s reaction is one that can be contrasted with the Burnell children in *Prelude*. Instead of an excited cry the camera holds on his face showing his disbelief and pain. The camera draws back to show the piglet hanging by its feet with the blood dripping into a bucket beneath it¹⁶. The bucket of blood cuts to a red round birthday cake for Dora’s eighth birthday. One life is surrounded by death and the other associated with the celebration of birth. This image has been repeated in New Zealand film as the innocent, young and weak (more often than not women and children) continuously share this reaction.

The example I have used, of Jack’s father enthusiastically slitting open the piglet, enables me to introduce an image that is synonymous with the theme of the slaughterhouse and the violence that has developed with this tradition and that of the pioneer man.

As explained, one of the reasons for immigration was the desire to better oneself. For men this amounted to a desire to exhibit and increase their physical strength, show courage and experience life in the raw. Essentially it meant rediscovering the traditional image of manhood that they had lost in Britain with the increasing use of

¹⁶ This scene foreshadows Jack’s actual death when his sisters sew his eyes and mouth up and leave him hanging upside down.

machinery. Life in pioneer New Zealand was not for the faint hearted or office man (Phillips 5). For those who settled in New Zealand the chance to show their strength came with the need to tame the land, and in doing so they gained respect from their colleagues. One way of feeling this power was with the axe. Phillips quotes from E. W. Elkington who describes the sensation of working with axe in hand:

I like to get my axe swinging nicely and feel it slipping into the wood, and see the chips flying right and left. It may be that my bump of destruction is abnormally developed, but it makes the life-blood tear through my veins and I feel that there's something in me, after all - which is not an unpleasant sensation in these times of keen competition (17).

It is the fact that Elkington feels he may have an abnormally developed "bump of destruction" that I wish to draw attention to. This element of pleasurable destruction that comes with holding an axe I believe connects male figures in film and to the latent violence equated with their presence ¹⁷.

Within my study are four films that feature a man wielding a knife or axe in a manner that is connected with the destruction or maiming of another being, human or animal. These are *Trial Run* and the character West who is depicted at one point skinning a sheep carcass, Clarrie, of *Jack Be Nimble*, who gains obvious pleasure from slitting a piglet's throat, Alistair Stewart (*The Piano*) and Ethan (*Vigil*). Each of these men are threatening to the central character and the cause of some of the terror, or threatened terror, they experience. But it is through the last two characters, Ethan and Stewart, that the image of the man with the axe is treated as more violent and threatening, particularly against the younger and weaker characters.

¹⁷ I am referring only to the image of the Pakeha pioneer male.

Vigil's (1984) Ethan is an example of such a threatening image imposing on a weaker character - Toss, the small girl who lives on the farm. The audience witness the apparent threat of Ethan on Toss in the docking sequence of *Vigil*. The camera assumes Toss's position moving in towards him as he sharpens his knife. Such a subjective shot enables the audience to experience her fear as Ethan towers above her. Then, as he slashes at the lamb's tail the camera gives the viewer Toss' reaction in slow motion. All that can be heard is her breathing and the lack of any other sounds allows the audience to concentrate on, and subjectively experience the event with Toss. The blood from the lamb squirts on her face, then she backs away towards the camera turning into a close-up which reveals her shock. But it is not the experience of the lamb docking that terrifies Toss. I believe it is her fear of Ethan that is the cause of her reaction as she associates him with death, both her father's death and the murder of goats which she witnessed just prior to her father's fall. The scene of Ethan inflicting pain reintroduces this association.

However *Vigil* does not take the the violence associated with the "axe" any further, unlike *The Piano* (1993). For Stewart (*The Piano*) it is his means of expressing himself and dominating his surroundings. Like the true pioneer it is his constant companion and he is indicative of this tradition described by E.W. Elkington. He is a man who seeks to achieve success through the acquisition of land and a suitable wife and he bargains with the local Maori and Ada's father in an attempt to achieve this. It is when he is unsuccessful in accomplishing some semblance of control over what is his property that he lashes out, and when doing so the axe becomes his weapon and fulfils its violent role as the tamer.

It is the pioneer tradition that has determined Stewart's behavioural characteristics. Phillips' comments, mentioned above, have particular relevance to Alistair Stewart as he sets out to define himself by the land he can obtain and transform from a wilderness

into the manicured lawn of Ada's home in Scotland. Control over the land in its wild state is difficult and therefore not as attainable as he believed, as his unprogressive bargaining with the local Maori shows. His ideas and dreams of land acquisition are fast diminishing. So to retain some sense of dignity he seeks to assert his control over something he assumes to be less unpredictable and wild: his wife. The axe, that he would normally use on the land, is the only way in which he knows how to assert some semblance of control. Therefore when Flora reveals the key to him which she was to deliver to Baines the first thing he picks up is his axe.

His first move is to put his axe through her piano. With visual references Campion has explained the connection between Ada and her piano as representative of Ada's self expression. So when Stewart puts his axe into her piano he is effectively putting the axe into Ada¹⁸. This he literally does by dragging her out to a stump where he "clips her wing" by chopping off her finger. In doing so he is further distancing her from her voice - her fingers on the piano's keys. Ada's reaction bears a resemblance to Toss (*Vigil*) and Jack (*Jack Be Nimble*). She shares the same shocked and bewildered look, as the other vulnerable characters, and we again see the same spray of blood over the young girl, in this case it is Flora¹⁹. This is her punishment for her part in the event when she betrays her mother and gives Stewart the reason for his attack. The extreme measures that Stewart has taken are emphasised by Campion as she highlights the scene by removing all sound (very similar to *Vigil*) except for the fall of rain and Michael Nyman's piano soundtrack, which is broken only by Flora's cry. It is within this silence that Ada sinks into the mud, her dark clothing making her appear part of the morass she drops into, as the camera distances itself. In doing so she appears smaller and more fragile which further accentuates the ferocity of Stewart's actions against a weaker individual.

¹⁸ Like Salter the axe (or knife) is a metaphor for penetrating the woman's body. Stewart also wishes to consummate a relationship, obviously not quite the same way that Salter does, but the reference to violence in both cases introduces a parallel.

¹⁹ The earlier example is the spray of lamb's blood across Toss's face.

It can easily be argued that these images are characteristically European. The pioneer tradition was something the Europeans brought to New Zealand and the frozen meat trade was a result of the agricultural base of our economy. *Pallet on the Floor* expands this by indicating that the inherent violence associated with this mentality is uniquely European. The film then suggests that a traditional Maori lifestyle is a means of escaping this and finding peace and tranquillity. A life back on the “mat” becomes the means to escape the rat race that Sam and his friends experience while living in European society and the character Basil Beaumont-Foster suggests this when he says “deep down all of us would like a pallet on the floor”. Life on Wainongoro pa is representative of this lifestyle and also of the dual worlds that the Gothic puts forward. Pa life is the diurnal world in contrast to the nightmare of the freezing works environment.

THE LANDSCAPE AS MORE THAN A BACKDROP

The fact that the pa is part of nature introduces the importance of the natural landscape in New Zealand film. *Pallet on the Floor* indicates the importance of the land and associates it with peace and harmony but it can often take subjective overtones as it becomes representative of a character’s state of mind²⁰. The landscape can then be both simultaneously beautiful and harsh depending on the character’s emotional state. This is how it appeared to the early immigrants to New Zealand. It was a South Pacific pre-lapsarian paradise, a utopia in comparison to the industrial towns they had just left. For these reasons they thought it would be a South Pacific paradise. Instead, upon settlement, they found a country they believed was in need of taming, cultivating and transforming into a replica of what they had left behind. The landscape however fought back and the rugged bush and cliffs became an enduring feature of our country.

²⁰ I also discuss this in Chapter Three.

The Piano (1993) and *Vigil* (1984) are two films that I wish to concentrate on as I believe they exhibit the qualities mentioned - the landscape becomes more than simply a backdrop for the unfolding drama and both films are examples of the unique quality that New Zealand films have developed with the use of the natural landscape which at times takes centre stage²¹.

The landscape in *The Piano*, as Wevers and other critics have aptly described it, is brought into perspective through the presence of the piano on the beach. The presence of an object so associated with culture, civilisation and rules, indicative of the society Ada McGrath and Alistair Stewart have emigrated from, is polarised by the overbearing presence of the landscape. The landscape signifies all that is wild, threatening, natural, not cultured and uncivilised (Wevers 1-2). The piano is not a part of this environment but belongs back in the dark Victorian hallways of Ada's father's home. It is the change in scene that has drawn these distinctions as it stands out surreally against the new habitat. On one side huge waves break on the beach with the backdrop of a menacing black sky and the occasional shot of lightning streaking across the sky. On the other side are huge cliffs which preside over the beach. With long shots Campion accentuates the dominance of the landscape over the figures who appear like small black ants roaming across a barren wasteland, their possessions scattered around them and engulfed by nature which foreshadows its oppressive disposition.

Ada's journey to her new husband's cottage and its surroundings are examples of this oppression as the rain and mud make movement difficult and progress slow. Close-up shots of their feet in the mud emphasise the difficulties they have in moving and this is accentuated by the soundtrack as it picks up on the sounds of the mud squelching. Feet drop deep into the muck and grime leaving everything dirty and uncomfortable which expresses Ada's feelings after being thrust into this situation after an arrangement between

²¹ This is shared with Flannery O'Connor and is particularly obvious in the short story *A View of the Woods*. The surroundings seem to further emphasise the emotions that are building up in the narrative between Mary Fortune and her grandfather.

her father and her new husband where she was married off to a man she had never met.

While these scenes are all at ground level, with the over-head shots which Campion incorporates further enhance the feeling of claustrophobia and restrictions that the mud brings to the film. An aerial shot reveals just how tight the bush is as the forest floor is not visible. All that can be seen is the dense and tangled nature of New Zealand native bush: beautiful, but restricting and confining. Campion quite often uses shots similar to this to show the nature of the bush as tangled and confining. The attempted rape scene with Ada is an example as the vines impede her escape from her husband. These vines are also later silhouetted on the screen. They appear flat in the frame with the only depth coming from the mist which reflects the natural light of the bush.

It is of course this tangled wilderness, as illustrated above, that Stewart seeks to tame²². The sequence involving Flora carrying the message to Stewart is an example. We are given a long shot of the hillside on which Flora's tiny form runs across the landscape which looks almost like a Colin McCahon painting. Campion then draws the viewer into the scene as Flora clambers up an almost vertical incline covered in white stumps and tree branches. From a distance the hillside looks smooth but on closer inspection, as the camera draws in, there is an abrupt and dramatic change when it is revealed to be a hillside littered with dead tree branches partially impeding small Flora's movement. It is this hillside that Stewart is trying to fence off and the degree of the slope makes the job far from easy. The camera emphasises the slope by either a low position angled upwards, or from a higher point with the point of view looking down towards Stewart and Flora. Because of the camera's position the figures are yet again dominated by the landscape as it takes centre stage. At one point the characters are literally pushed out of the frame and into one small corner. The scene appears unbalanced which creates a feeling of "unease"²³, in turn predicting

²² As I mentioned earlier it is with the axe that he does his taming.

²³ I use the word "unease" as a direct reference to Sam Neill's *Cinema of Unease* (1995).

the danger that the dominance of the landscape in this particular shot indicates, foreshadowing the following events: Stewart's attack on Ada.

Vigil uses the landscape in a similar way. It there emanates from the narrative as an oppressive force that dominates over the family in the valley, threatening to fall in on them and drive them out of their home.

Tony Mitchell describes Vincent Ward's film *Vigil* (1984) as an exploration of isolation and human experience at its most reduced, and primeval level (37). I believe it is Ward's use of the landscape that enables him to be so successful in depicting the experience of isolation on the small New Zealand farm as the landscape comes to reflect the subject's state of mind (Mitchell 37). *Vigil* explores the imagination of Toss/Lisa who is a young girl growing up in isolation, away from social influences of television and radio (Mitchell 38)²⁴. The landscape is used by Ward as an internal representation of Toss' imagination and a reflection of her point of view.

Therefore it is through Toss's subjective point of view that we see the valley and the hills surrounding the farm on which she lives and plays her games. An old car wreck in the middle of a desolate maize field is the site of her imaginary games. The open spaces and expanse of the farm gives a feeling of isolation to the farm and in particular Toss. The landscape takes on the qualities of childhood imaginings and they have something of a horrific tone. She is in a limbo between girlhood and womanhood. Her menstruating at the end of the narrative is a way for Ward to show Toss as stepping out from this limbo.

As Jane Campion did in *The Piano* (1993) Vincent Ward uses the landscape of *Vigil* as a presence rather than simply a backdrop for the action. The figures are insignificant within the frame as the hills and skeletal trees and stumps loom up over Toss and her father.

²⁴ Toss in is in direct contrast to Ned Poindexter whose imagination is governed by the pulp fiction and popular media of the day (Simpson 24).

The site at which her father falls is an example. When Toss goes back to the crevasse and the camera pulls away Toss vanishes in the shadows of the cliff face. The overall image of the valley and the outlying areas is one of decay and rot. Skeletal trees poke out of the steep hillsides and their dead branches and stumps create images of ghoulish faces in the rotting wood. The images of the landscape are representative of Toss' imagination and of the declining state of the family. They know they have to leave and the steady deterioration of the farm suggests this. The homestead and farm buildings, like the dead trees, show the state of the farm with paint chips and an appearance of a time long gone. This fits with the overall picture of the farm as there is no indication as to what time frame the narrative is set.

The use of the landscape within these films takes the place of the dark castle or monastery usually portrayed in Gothic literature. The desolate beaches or open spaces of the farm land, combined with the tangle of native vines and skeletal rotting tree stumps, reinforce the dark mood that the narrative espouses. It helps in encouraging the feelings of the audience, pushing them towards sharing the central protagonist's emotions whether they be loneliness, desperation and terror, such as felt by Ada, or the feelings of bewilderment and confusion experienced by Toss. The landscape provides an environment that can hold the violent images that New Zealand literature, and the theory that has followed, has put forward and that have been carried over into film. It is this violent nature that enables the reading of Gothic inflections in New Zealand film as the fear and terror that the violence, due to the puritanical nature of New Zealand society, instils in the characters is like that experienced by the many heroines and heroes of Gothic literature. Each is running from an evil character. In the case of New Zealand Gothic the villainous character is holding an axe (or knife) and has grown accustomed to the legitimisation of slaughter.

The images of the landscape, of both these films, accentuate the dark and pessimistic lives of the characters. The landscape

depicted by *The Piano* and *Vigil* therefore becomes a key character in the drama as it adds to the dark atmosphere and tone of the films. The tone that I have described in this chapter is due to the influences of our national literature. New Zealand film has visually represented the themes espoused by some writers. Ronald Hugh Morrieson and Janet Frame are two that I have chosen to examine with reference to New Zealand film as they convey themes that have been continued on into film. *Trial Run* and *The Scarecrow* are examples. They continue in the Gothic tradition by depicting the terror from either an identifiable and mysterious source. This terror in New Zealand film and literature is a result of what is described as our inherently puritanical society that encourages us to repress any illicit desires or behaviours. In order to experience such illicit urges a figure is introduced into the narrative enabling the audience to experience first hand and learn the results of transgressing. This figure, as illustrated in *The Scarecrow* with Salter, is punished for transgressing and behaving in a manner that society has determined as inappropriate. Rosemary Edmonds, though not a villain, is punished for her apparently illegitimate behaviour - abandoning her family. *Trial Run* continues Janet Frame's themes begun in *A State of Siege* where women are threatened and then defined as mad, a theme also consistent with Gothic literature, when women failed to conform to societal expectations. The fact that it is New Zealand society enforcing behaviour positions it as the villain. Society becomes an overwhelming force for characters, particularly those of Janet Frame's writing. This repressive force is continued on into film, which like the literature, suggests violent behaviour as the only outlet for repressed emotions and desires. It is this inherent violence that makes New Zealand film so dark and bleak. Film has captured this state in the landscape, as mentioned, and also with the axe-wielding man who exercises his manhood and pioneer spirit on weaker and innocent character's. At times carving them up like animals. The axe is the man's way of achieving some semblance of control and Stewart is a good example. He uses the axe as a means of dealing with his frustrations and imitations and his wife is his primary target. Part of what makes such an action

seemingly acceptable is what Patrick Evans terms as the slaughterhouse environment. This environment, steeped in blood and death, has, it is suggested, legitimised such behaviour and as *Pallet on the Floor* suggests the only solution is to escape to the mat.

CHAPTER THREE

PARALLELS BETWEEN *THE PIANO* AND *THE RETURNING* AND FILMS OF HOLLYWOOD

This is the final chapter in my study. After examining possible influences on, and parallels with, New Zealand film from traditional Gothic and New Zealand literature the focus in this chapter will be on Hollywood film, particularly films of the forties and fifties, as a possible influence on our own relatively small industry.

There are two genres of film to be discussed in this chapter. The first is female Gothic, or what Mary Ann Doane describes as the "paranoid woman's film". This style of film relies heavily on the romantic, Gothic tradition as the narrative concentrates on the love interest and romances of the heroine which have terrifying consequences. The new lover or husband is a man who can not be trusted and the heroine's growing paranoia with regard to the true nature of her husband is reflected in the style of the film. The films of the paranoid woman incorporate expressionist techniques similar to the film noir genre to convey to the audience the terror that surrounds the heroine. They seek to draw the audience into the narrative so they too can experience her fear. The result is a dark, and at times terrifying, atmosphere which is a visualisation of traditional Gothic literature. *Rebecca* (1940) and *Gaslight* (1944) are a part of this tradition. Both films aptly convey the feelings of fear and distrust the heroine has towards her husband. *The Piano* (1993) is a descendant of this tradition. It too conveys the inner state of mind of the heroine. But instead of featuring the inside of a dark Victorian manor, *The Piano* utilises New Zealand's natural landscape in order to symbolise Ada's feelings within her new surroundings in which she is portrayed as a variation on the traditional heroine within the narrative scheme of a paranoid woman's film.

The second area for study in this chapter is film noir and its reflection in New Zealand film. The areas that I shall be examining, with regard to this genre, have many similarities with the paranoid woman's film. The psychology of the two styles, paranoid woman's and film noir, remain the same: the only difference is the focal point of the narrative. Because of this film noir could be read as a paranoid man's film, dispersed within a Gothic romantic narrative. *Portrait of Jennie* (1948) and Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) are two good examples of the romantic-noir style referred to. The central character here is male and the narrative, while noir in style, is essentially based on the romantic interest of the protagonist. The hero is caught up in his obsession with the enigmatic female figure, who, representative of the fantastical and nocturnal Gothic realm, draws the male figure down into a symbolic underworld after he rejects reality in order to be with the woman. This rejection of reality by the protagonist is achieved symbolically. The hero turns away from the nurturing woman in favour of the femme fatale who is depicted in direct contrast with the sensible and domesticated woman standing as a link between the hero and reality. By refusing to accept the values she stands for, the hero's only alternative is to face the downward spiral which is represented by his going insane or dying, punishment for his refusal to conform with society. John Day's *The Returning* (1990) is a New Zealand equivalent to this narrative and visual style. Its protagonist Alan Steadman shares qualities with earlier romantic-noir male heroes. He is torn between two worlds which are illustrated through the two women in Alan's life, Charlotte Hetherington and Jessica Scott. One is representative of the realm of the fantasy and the other reality, and it is from reality that Alan has escaped. His inability to function anymore in the real world is indicative of the noir hero. He therefore chooses fantasy as an escape and is lured away by the femme fatale creature into madness and eventual death as punishment for his transgression.

THE PARANOID "WOMAN'S FILM": *REBECCA* AND *GASLIGHT* (1944)

As discussed earlier, Gothic literature has generally been defined as woman's literature but the style of film that incorporates aspects of the Gothic has not consistently been labelled as "woman's film" (Doane 125). Mary Ann Doane believes these films avoid the need for such a label because though they deal with excessive emotionality it is fear, violence and aggression, not love and sacrifice as in a traditional romantic narrative. This comes to the fore in the recurrent theme of "don't trust your husband" (125).

This narrative theme, of paranoia, fear and distrust running through Gothic woman's film is believed to have peaked during the post war period as women tried to reacquaint themselves with their returned husbands who had become strangers during their years away at war. It is also largely due to the techniques and style of film noir. The style of this genre, due to the influence of German Expressionism, was one of contrasted lighting, dark shadows, twisted camera angles and a domineering environment that conveyed a sense of helplessness and unease for the audience. These techniques foretold impending doom and served to represent the torment of the inner mind of the central character, usually a woman. The audience can then again, as with the traditional Gothic literature before it, experience the narrative through identification with the central character giving female viewers an opportunity to vent their fears. The style was women's answer to film noir. In this respect female gothic, or paranoid woman's films, can be read as a reversal of film noir because the paranoid focal point is maintained but replaced by a woman's point of view. *Gaslight* (1944) and *Rebecca* (1940) are both good examples. They were both produced during the height of the genre's popularity and each conveys the techniques and style that connotes the state of mind of the heroine as her fear of her husband, father, or another male figure distinguishes these films and places them in the realm of the

gothic²⁵.

Gaslight's Paula, played by Ingrid Bergman, and the heroine of *Rebecca*, Joan Fontaine, comply with the characteristics of the archetypal Gothic heroine, they are both passive, weak and under the control of a male, or pseudo male figure. The opening of each film has the wedding of the heroine to an older and apparently wiser man. They are then moved into new surroundings (9 Thornton Square and Manderley) and it is here that the illusion of marriage, begun with their honeymoon, is destroyed. Gregory begins his plan to drive Paula insane and the new Mrs Maxim de Winter is terrorised and intimidated by her new home, Manderley, and its evil housekeeper Mrs Danvers.

The paranoid woman's gothic film has only one interpretation of its heroine and that is that they are passive and weak. To achieve this the women are presented as having child-like characteristics. They possess an over active imagination whilst the men are provided with qualities of design and purpose. This is achieved in *Rebecca* by introducing the heroine as child-like and incapable of looking after herself. Maxim de Winter, the nameless heroine's love interest and then husband, takes on the role of father to Fontaine. He goads her into eating her lunch like a "good girl", wearing a coat because "because you can't be too careful with children" and proposes marriage in such a way that she thinks he is offering her a job. Maxim corrects her, but labels her a "silly fool" in the process.

The images of Fontaine as a child are further illustrated in her naivete, dress and clumsiness. She has an innocence about her, shown in her eagerness to please her husband. One evening she appears "dressed" for dinner in an attempt to appease Maxim but he rejects her sophisticated image. It is his expressed desire that she remain child-like wearing the ribbons in her hair like "Alice in Wonderland", never turning thirty or wearing black satin and pearls.

The interior of Manderley is designed to accentuate Fontaine as a

²⁵ The fear of the father, or patriarchal figure has been outlined in chapter one as a characteristic narrative trait of Gothic literature.

type of "Alice in Wonderland" after she has drunk the "drink". She is dwarfed by the huge expanse of hallways and large doors. Even the doorknobs are placed at shoulder height for her to appear even more like a small and frightened child (Modleski 82). Fontaine's clumsiness also continues to maintain this image of someone who needs to be cared for. She knocks over the vase at her lunch table and smashes a Manderley treasure in the morning room. In each case Maxim comes to her rescue to deal with her problems.

Fontaine's meekness, due to her child-like nature, has her constantly denying the role she married into. Now mistress of Manderley she has more power than she is accustomed to as her domestic sphere was previously dominated by her employer Mrs van Hopper. Fontaine handles the situation by returning her newly acquired position back to the dead Rebecca. In a telephone conversation she verbally denies her own existence and the fact that she is now Mrs de Winter. In doing so she remains the nameless heroine with no identity of her own. Instead she assumes roles that other people have given her. For Edythe van Hopper she was the "paid companion", for Maxim she is his wife who should never grow old, and for herself she tries to assume the role of Rebecca thinking it will please her husband. Of course she is mistaken, as Gothic (and romantic) heroines are.

Fontaine's passivity and lack of control over her environment is again made apparent as her surroundings begin to preside over her. Objects push their way into the foreground of the frame assuming more power than the heroine (Place and Peterson 68). This filmic technique is recognisable as part of the expressionistic style, also a great influence on Alfred Hitchcock, gained through his interest in German silent film (Hurley 172). These techniques influence scenes in *Rebecca*. Fontaine's arrival at Manderley as the mansion towers in front of her is an example. Also as she looks at the painting of the de Winter ancestor on the landing at Manderley. Impending doom is suggested in both scenes when Fontaine is dwarfed by her surroundings and this is confirmed in the

narrative. Particularly in the second example given including the portrait of Lady Carolyn de Winter. Yet again the heroine is provoked into a hysterical state by Danvers when she is tricked into wearing a costume for the fancy dress ball that had been worn by Rebecca on a similar occasion. Seeing the heroine dressed identically gives Mrs Danvers another opportunity to express her distaste for Maxim's new bride.

Both *Rebecca* and *Gaslight's* settings within the domestic sphere insinuate that both heroines should have some control over their environment. However in each case the house is either "intensely redolent of the presence of another woman" or controlled by a domineering and fearful figure (Gallafent 85). It is this presence that causes the fear and terror of the heroine creating a world of claustrophobia and paranoia.

Fontaine becomes entrapped in a home which was previously inhabited by the late Mrs Rebecca de Winter, Maxim's first wife. Rebecca's presence is kept alive by the housekeeper, Mrs Danvers, who worshipped her late mistress with an almost homosexual reverence (Higham 5). Because Hitchcock never shows Danvers walking or appearing in motion she embodies ghostly ever-present qualities of Rebecca giving her a haunting presence over Manderley. She materialises standing perfectly still, forever reminding Fontaine of Maxim's dead wife (Modleski 35). It is Danvers who lays out the napkin with "R" embroidered on it and the letter writing set, all in an attempt to deny Fontaine's position in the home. Her maintenance of Rebecca's room as a shrine to her late mistress is a further example. Danvers taunts Fontaine with the mystery surrounding the west wing and then with relish reveals all the items belonging to Rebecca from her underwear and fur coats to her lace nightdress. Fontaine is played like a puppet as she is forced to listen to and watch Danvers retell with passion the hours they spent in the room together. The room seems to close in on the heroine as the camera moves from wide and mid shots to a close-up of Fontaine as Danvers taunts her by saying she will never be

like Rebecca who was afraid of nothing, in clear contrast to Fontaine, the clumsy child.

Similarly intense claustrophobic scenes are included in *Gaslight* as Paula is literally restricted to 9 Thornton Square after her marriage to Gregory. Prior to the marriage she is able to move freely however Gregory's careful manipulation of her has left Paula incapable of even stepping outside. Being restricted to the inside of the Victorian home has heightened the dark and desperate atmosphere.

In *Gaslight* the inclusion of expressionist techniques, such as contrasted lighting and oblique camera angles, transfers the feelings of terror and confusion Paula experiences on to the audience, allowing the audience to indulge in perverse feelings of pleasure associated with such terror. Shadows play over the interior of the house which has the effect of closing down the space around Paula and emphasising her entrapment. For example when Gregory can be heard pacing around in the attic the light of the gas actually dims and casts shadows across Paula highlighting her terror by illuminating her face.

It is characteristically the male figure who is the cause of the heroine's fear. *Rebecca* and *Gaslight*, though similar in their representation of the paranoid woman, deal with the source of the fear, the male character, differently. Gregory is the archetypal villain terrorising his wife to achieve his goal - the recovery of Alice Alquist's jewels which he failed to retrieve after he murdered her. Through a series of deceptions he leads Paula to believe she has lost or misplaced valuable items making her believe she is losing her mind. The difference in *Rebecca* is that the evil tormenting character is not a man. Mrs Danvers plays the "pseudo male" villain role in *Rebecca* and employs techniques similar to Gregory²⁶. She makes it her task to emotionally destroy Fontaine, even pushing her towards suicide, and seems to have taken over this role from the heroine's previous employer, Mrs van Hopper. Both women are

²⁶ Mrs Danvers playing such a role is not uncommon in Gothic literature. Women often appeared as similar characters. A good example is the evil prioress from *The Monk* who terrorises Agnes.

joined in their belief that Fontaine will never be able to take the place of the late Rebecca. Maxim in contrast believes that his new wife is a perfect replacement simply because she is everything Rebecca was not. However this is only revealed mid way through the narrative. Up until Maxim declares his hatred of his dead wife the audience, like Fontaine, are under the impression that the marriage is a failure and Danvers and Mrs van Hopper were right. Therefore it is Danvers' not Maxim's terrorising of Fontaine that leads the audience to believe her husband is not in love with her. Fontaine's desperate attempts to try and please her husband and prove Danvers wrong create the paranoid atmosphere. Maxim is only a confused and tormented individual who is himself terrified, terrified that the truth about Rebecca's death will be revealed.

Gregory and Danvers, and Maxim until his true nature is revealed, are filmed in similar ways that serve to illustrate their evil inner states, or supposed evil states, of mind. Shadows and tilted camera angles successfully portray their power over the heroine and the characters are often framed in shadow with their faces illuminated grotesquely. In the scene where Danvers and the heroine first meet, Danvers' positioning is designed to intimidate the heroine as she appears to tower over her. She stands straight and upright looking down over Fontaine who is literally cowering below her. Her intimidation proves to be successful as the heroine in her nervous state, clumsily drops her gloves .

THE PIANO AS A DESCENDANT OF HOLLYWOOD'S WOMEN'S GOTHIC TRADITION

Rebecca and *Gaslight* are part of the tradition of film paranoid woman's film which has its origins in the Gothic and romance novel and play where the central focal point of the narrative is the female character and her plight (Krutnik 194-195). *The Piano* does not stray far from this formula. Ada, like Fontaine and Paula, is a newly wed and the narrative follows her move from Scotland to newly

colonised New Zealand and a husband she has never met. Ada is an image of the entrapped and persecuted heroine. While literally imprisoned within her home, similar to Paula, *The Piano* uses the landscape in combination with Ada's clothing, muteness and physical presence, instead of an old Victorian home, to enhance her entrapped and persecuted situation. Her husband Stewart, similar to Gregory, plays a pivotal role in the narrative. But unlike Fontaine and Paula, Ada has been endowed with twentieth century qualities of strength, self knowledge and will power that were foreign to the early Gothic heroines (Bruzzi, 1995: 257). Ada, therefore, while appearing similar to Fontaine and Paula, is a variation from the traditional figure of the heroine.

Jane Campion describes her film as a Gothic exploration of the romantic impulse (Bruzzi 6). Gothic, I believe, because it shows the darker side of human nature released when taken from familiar surroundings, as settlers were upon their arrival in New Zealand. Adjustment is necessary and the difficulties of doing so invoke the dark tone. The Gothic style is a way of expressing the fear and disappointment the settlers felt in New Zealand upon realising that the promised land was no better than the one they had left²⁷. In her article in the *New York Times* Caryn James refers to Thomas Kenneally's explanation for the advent of Gothic in Australia. He believes that it is a result of a distortion, of the settlers' sense of God and spirits, by the landscape (James 13). Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975) is a good example as the landscape, a common feature of New Zealand films that I mentioned in Chapter Two, comes alive and has a supernatural and scary quality. Though he is speaking of Australia, the feelings could be said to be the same for New Zealand settlers. *The Piano* captures this feeling as the environment plays an important role within the film by portraying the inner states of mind of the central characters.

Ada is dressed as any Victorian woman would have been during this period. Her hoops and skirts have taken on a dual role of

²⁷ Also see Chapter Two.

protectors and inhibitors. Twice for Ada her petticoats and hoops protect her, firstly on the beach upon their arrival in New Zealand when she and Flora shelter under them in a make-shift tent, and secondly when Stewart makes his first attempt at raping her (Bruzzi, 1995: 263). Stewart's advances are impeded by the layers of under-garments. His struggling to find a way under them all is matched by Ada's struggling to escape. Her garments are far from suitable for the environment and this becomes more than apparent as she crawls through vines with her heavy skirts holding her down. It is only when Ada and Flora are not constrained by the black dresses that there is freedom in their movements, for example as they play together in their bedroom and when Flora cartwheels along the beach. In Nelson the carefree ways expressed by Flora are also reiterated in Ada when her usual plain black dress is changed to one with flowers which blends into the garden in their new home.

The clothing is indicative of the entrapment Ada encounters upon arriving in the new settlement. It impedes her movements because of its unsuitability to her new environment, the mud, rain and vines, combined with her long wide skirts, make progress a struggle. Flora and Ada sludge their way across boards that fail to achieve their purpose with their skirts and boots trailing in, and getting stuck in, the mud. Emphasising the landscape this way embellishes Ada's position as victim as it restrains her, as her forebears Fontaine and Paula were restrained, and comes to represent the claustrophobia, isolation and loneliness Ada is feeling.

The bush, like Ada's clothing, works to heighten her entrapment. It counteracts the isolation of the open spaces of the beach by promoting feelings of claustrophobia. An aerial shot of the bush emphasises just how dense, tangled and impenetrable it is. Likewise when Ada is on the ground no sky is seen through the trees. The bush is all encompassing and takes the place of the old Gothic Victorian mansion in which heroines such as Paula were

trapped²⁸ .

Unlike the early Gothic films *The Piano* never allows the audience an overview of the entire area. In *Rebecca* numerous shots of Manderley, its grounds, and the surrounding environment are revealed to the audience. Likewise in *Gaslight* and 9 Thornton Square where the neighbourhood is shown. But in *The Piano* the layout of the small settlement can not even be imagined. No clues are given to the audience as to where the homes are situated. The town hall, Stewart's home, the minister's (Ian Mune) and Baines' home are all isolated from one another. The purpose is to leave the viewer disorientated and under the understanding that the new settlement is chaotic, unorganised and far from the tidy life that Ada has left. The audience can therefore experience the physical sensation of loneliness which is begun when Flora and Ada are balanced precariously on the shoulders of the sailors who bring them ashore.

The images of the beach are good examples of how Campion captures Ada's isolation and loneliness. On their arrival she and her daughter appear as only small and insignificant objects on a vast and empty beach. Their meagre belongings are scattered around them. On both sides the environment dominates and presides over them - this is the west coast just before a storm with a raging sea, black skies, lightning and cliffs covered with dense native bush. The scene suggests feelings of despair for Ada's position. Her isolation is further highlighted when the piano is left behind on the beach. The importance of the piano to Ada is highlighted from this opening sequence as it is her voice keeping her from absolute silence. When her piano is left by her new husband she is forced into silence, unable to express herself. She is further marginalised because of this action. Ada is in a foreign country, with a man she does not know and now one of her only means of expressing herself has been denied her. This foreshadows other sacrifices she is expected to make in her new

²⁸ Stewart's home does, however, become a prison for Ada at one point when he locks her in as punishment for her transgressions.

marriage.

Campion incorporates a series of shots that imply Ada's regret at having to leave her piano behind. As she leaves the beach for the settlement Ada looks back down to the piano. The camera is positioned over her shoulder giving the audience her point of view and literally becoming her eye. The building storm depicted in this shot becomes representative of Ada's depression. The rain sliding down the window pane can then be read as a metaphor for the tears that Ada contains within her. This is followed with a cut to the piano on the beach and her isolated and depressed state is highlighted, she is the lonely object on the beach.

An important aspect of *The Piano*, for the purposes of this study, is the treatment of Ada by the male characters. In her relationship to the male characters she is both similar to, and yet can be distinguished from Fontaine and Bergman, traditional romantic heroines of the 1940s. Ada is still playing a traditional female victim but unlike the earlier heroines she does make a stand for herself.

From the beginning of *The Piano* it is clear that men have determined Ada's actions. Like Fontaine and Paula, Ada is told what to do by men in authoritative positions. She also appears like a child who needs to be directed. Her father marries her off to a man she has never met in a country miles away from home. Then Stewart tries to carry on the role of her father by issuing commands and asserting his opinions. He decides that the piano must stay on the beach because to a sensible man as himself the piano has no practical purpose, unlike the linen and clothes she has in other boxes. Like the land everything must have a purpose²⁹ and all must make sacrifices, though Ada is the only one doing so. He seeks to control Ada as he would a piece of property. Part of this entails literally restricting her movements to the inside of their home when he discovers her with Baines. By this action Stewart steps into the role of an archetypal Gothic villain following in Gregory's footsteps.

²⁹ Stewart wants to buy Maori land and can not understand their refusal to sell because they are doing nothing with it. It is in fact their burial ground.

He barricades Ada inside so she becomes the epitome of the trapped Gothic heroine.

The relationships Ada has with the men in the film, particularly Stewart, place her in the position of being excessively degraded and punished unlike other heroines before her (Hardy 9). The result is the audience's growing resentment for the male characters. Ada's stature contributes to her position as victimised Gothic heroine. Like Fontaine she is physically small and therefore appears vulnerable. Ada is, as Stewart describes her, "stunted", small and lacking in the presence that is granted the male characters. Her size enables the male characters to treat her accordingly. She becomes like a rag doll to her husband as he physically dominates and abuses her. His aggression turning into physical violence. The rape sequence is an example as Stewart attacks Ada. He pulls at her legs as Ada clings to a vine, pulling her off the ground so she is suspended in mid air. Stewart's presence often manifests itself over Ada and his chopping her finger off is another example. Like Danvers and Gregory, Stewart looms up over the heroine, startling her. Again Ada becomes like a rag doll for Stewart to toss about and command as he drags her through the mud towards the chopping block. Stewart's actions in this sequence lead to the final image of Ada as she leaves the settlement. It is here that she appears the most vulnerable and firmly in line with earlier images of Joan Fontaine in *Rebecca*. She is small, pale and bandaged standing quietly amongst those moving her belongings out. Stewart has finally beaten her down as the defiance that was evident on her arrival is gone.

Though I believe Ada to be a variation on the traditional Gothic heroine it is this scene, mentioned above, that questions this theory and implies that Ada is, after all, only another traditional Gothic female victim.

Ada has been physically abused, an obvious difference from the paranoid woman who is only terrorised. As she leaves Stewart's

cottage she appears to have conformed to Stewart's earlier description of her as "stunted". She is pale and silent, her usual hand gesticulations nonexistent and even Flora is quiet by her side. The position she finds herself in can only be attributed to the fact that she did not accept the traditional, quiet, demure and accepting role. She therefore has turned full circle into the role of a victim because her independent stance was met with stubborn and violent opposition, namely her husband. Yet again, the now passive heroine, must be rescued from her situation and Baines is the character to do so, just as Joseph Cotton was for Paula in *Gaslight*. This ending therefore complies with a typical paranoid woman's film and countless other romantic narratives, as the narrative confirms that Ada can find love. Ada has found some suggested happiness with her new lover and leaves behind the mulch and mud that surrounds Stewart's cottage³⁰. Yet again the decision with regard to her future has been made for her as Stewart gives her to Baines. Or was it the strength of her inner voice that directed Stewart's decision?

Her muteness in the face of the barrage against her from men works for and against her and emphasises her position as a variation on the traditional Gothic heroine. Ada's muteness means she is unable to express herself clearly and to do so she relies on her daughter, and the piano, as extensions of her inner voice. These are either turned away from her or taken from her. The piano is given to Baines in exchange for land by Stewart and even her own daughter, Flora, forms an alliance with Stewart when she calls him "Papa". Something she said she would never do. The removal of these emphasises Ada's weakness as a Gothic heroine because she becomes more susceptible to terrors. *The Spiral Staircase's* (1946) heroine, Helen is an example. Women with disabilities in her district are being murdered. Her disability, her muteness, makes her a target (an easy one at that) and heightens the tension felt by the audience when she is unable to scream out to save

³⁰ McDonnell describes the surroundings of Stewart's cottage as reminiscent of a World War One battlefield. The cottage sits in on barren land of stunted smoking skeletal tree stumps (McDonnell 8).

herself. Ada's silence can also have a disquieting effect and serves to heighten the fear the audience holds for her. The two climactic scenes in the film are silent apart for the soundtrack, the rape and when Ada loses her finger. In each instance her silence increases the tension and paralysis the audience feels. She appears powerless and is unable to scream or yell out. These feelings are projected on to the audience.

However an alternative reading of Ada's muteness is that it is a sign of her strength. It was her willpower that made her stop talking. A will that is so strong it frightens Stewart and gives her a second chance at life after she is dragged under the sea by the piano. Ada's silence, while an exhibition of her will power, one example of the twentieth century characteristics she has been endowed with, allows her to keep her own voice. This is the voice we hear inside her head that introduces and closes the narrative. Therefore if language can be said to exist within the masculine domain then Ada has avoided it, at least until she has found a man who can understand her. Because of this she shows evidence of an independence and strength that was missing in the heroine of *Rebecca* and *Paula*.

The Piano is a film that balances precariously between the paranoid woman's film and the Gothic tradition. It incorporates elements of both with Ada positioned as the heroine in a narrative that is dark and terrifying that follows Ada's plight with her husband in New Zealand. A narrative so similar to, but not quite that of, a paranoid woman's film enables Ada to be positioned as a variation on the traditional victim-heroine role exhibited in the earlier films, *Rebecca* and *Gaslight*. The differences between Ada, Fontaine and Paula arise through the fact that Ada is endowed with twentieth century qualities that enable her to show her independent spirit. It is this that places Ada in the position of victim, because she denies Stewart the passive and accepting wife he expected on her arrival, and in doing so creates the dark, claustrophobic and terrifying atmosphere so common in Gothic literature, and paranoid woman's

films, because Stewart fights back, with violent consequences, against her. To convey such an atmosphere the landscape plays an integral role. It is used by Campion, as was the old Victorian mansion in *Rebecca* and *Gaslight*, to illustrate the entrapment and isolation of the heroine. The beach and bush scenes are representative of this as they dwarf, or swamp, Ada. Her clothing contributes to her positioning as it works with the environment to consistently inhibit Ada's movement, working like Gregory in *Gaslight* when he drives Paula into thinking she is going insane and will not leave the house. It is through Ada's muteness that the balance between her modern characteristics and the traditional Gothic literature is best shown as she is both victim and independent woman. Being speechless Ada becomes an easy target for abuse, similar to Helen of *The Spiral Staircase*, and this is levelled at her frequently by her husband. But she manages to retain her own sense of voice because she has chosen not to speak. Therefore she avoids the emasculation of her discourse. It is only when she is truly satisfied with her life that she decides to rejoin the speaking world.

MALE GOTHIC ROMANCE: *VERTIGO* AND *PORTRAIT OF JENNIE*

This brings me to the final section of this chapter which bears many similarities with the paranoid woman's film. Film noir can be read as a reversal of the paranoid woman's film. The psychology of the central character remains the same but there is a gender change. In each case the central protagonist is paranoid and in some form of emotional conflict, or turmoil. But it is the romance within the film noir narrative that is essentially what connects the two styles. Particularly with reference to the films I shall be discussing which are *Portrait of Jennie* (1948) and Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). Without the romantic element the narrative would only be another crime or detective story. Like the heroines of *Rebecca* and *Gaslight*, the heroes of *Portrait of Jennie* and *Vertigo* are involved with a mysterious figure who, like Gregory, turns out to be dangerous

when the protagonist becomes entangled with them. Unlike the female characters Eben and Scottie seek to understand the enigma, the woman of their obsessions, thus taking more of an active role. However they still fail to understand her. This is what creates the dark atmosphere, that was associated with terror and paranoia in the woman's film. The protagonists are balanced precariously, during the narrative, between two opposing forces - reality and fantasy represented by two women. As the protagonist's grasp with reality is already dubious he chooses the femme fatale character over the more sensible and realistic alternative woman. When fantasy wins out this way the heroes grasp on reality is destroyed and he begins the downwards spiral towards madness and, or, death. The hero's retention of reality dissipates and the presentation of the film is a way this is reinforced. The immediate surroundings of the hero seem to rise up and dominate over him and the frame may, also, be organised to allude to his disorientation. *The Returning* (1990) is a New Zealand film that can be compared and contrasted with *Portrait of Jennie* and *Vertigo*.

Because film is not produced in complete isolation, many genres intermingle or exhibit trans-generic capabilities (Krutnik 14). This enables film to move between diverse generic ranges, for example the gangster, western, crime and woman's film. Gothic film, like the literature before it, is no exception as its fluidity has enabled it to adapt and change through time and various mediums whilst picking up and incorporating different generic styles including romance, and most notably horror, woman's film and, as mentioned above, film noir.

One link between the two approaches, gothic and film noir, is the influence from German Expressionism. Much of gothic literature has had a Germanic influence which Losano (21) describes as a harsh style in comparison to the softer romantic British gothic. This style is evident in novels similar to Lewis's *The Monk* where the tone is darker and more horrific than Gothic novels with an emphasis more on romance and passion, with only a touch of the

supernatural³¹. Film noir captures this darker mood visually and narratively, representing a specific time frame and societal state of mind of the time, just as Gothic literature did when it first appeared. This specific point in time referred to is post-World War Two, a time of disillusionment for the returned soldier (Schrader 53). The disillusion experienced by the returned service man is displaced onto the male protagonist of film noir and it is through his point of view that the film takes on characteristic moods of claustrophobia, paranoia, despair, and nihilism with the noir hero desiring the past because of his inability to cope with the future or present (Place & Peterson 65). When Hollywood turned to the darker look the German expatriates, who had infiltrated the American film industry in the twenties and thirties, had the most experience with this expressionist model³². The filmmakers were capable of portraying, visually, the disillusioned and dislocated emotional state of the protagonist. Presenting a subjective representation of reality that was distorted, communicating the inner feelings and emotions of the hero as he was torn between good and evil, hinting at adversarial forces and conflicts between good and evil, fantasy and reality which the protagonist must balance (Hurley 170).

THE FEMME FATALE VERSUS THE NURTURING WOMAN

The separation of the narrative into dual worlds, which the protagonist moves between as he battles the villain in the underworld and saves the heroine, can be traced back to early melodramatic gothic literature and this, in turn, has been a large influence on film. *Vertigo* and *Portrait of Jennie* both depict two dimensions in the narrative by focusing on the mental state of the protagonist as he balances precariously between what is real and everyday and the fantastical.

An enigma is one of the causes of the protagonist's disorientation.

³¹ *Wuthering Heights* is an example.

³² Robert Siodmak, Fritz Lang, Max Ophuls and Douglas Sirk are some of the influential German expatriate filmmakers (Schrader 55).

His task to understand the enigma and his inability to do so amplifies his confused state of mind. The enigma could be a crime, or mystery, but it usually involves a woman, as is the case in the three films examined in this section (Smith 6). It is through this female character that the hero is tossed between fantasy and reality as one woman comes to represent a past era and another the reality of the present day. Two women then feature in each film to illustrate this distinction and show which way the protagonist is directing himself. Firstly there is the domestic and nurturing woman who can provide a safe haven for the protagonist in the here and now. And secondly the duplicitious woman, or femme fatale, whose origins are unique to film noir (Smith 6). She is the siren that men desire and fear, an enigmatic figure that they fail to understand and as a result suffer for their failure.

Gothic literature also used woman in a similar way to illustrate coexisting dual worlds or good and evil. The woman became, as I explained earlier with reference to *Jane Eyre*, doubles or mirror opposites of one another. Matilda and Antonia are both good examples from *The Monk*. Each woman represents a side of Ambrosio's emotional struggle between good and evil. Antonia is indicative of the nurturing, domestic woman and in direct contrast is Matilda. She is the evil seductress and literally, like a siren, lures Ambrosio to his death as she involves the monk in black magic and by persuading him to deal with the Devil.

It is the use of the women in the narrative as mirror opposites that exposes the Gothic nature of the films and influences of film noir. Jennie and Madeleine, in *Portrait of Jennie* and *Vertigo*, draw out the weakness of the male characters, Eben Evans and Scottie, like true noir femme fatales. The male protagonist is lured unsuspecting into a relationship with the woman who eventually becomes an obsession for the hero. The result is noir qualities of alienation, instability, a preoccupation with the past, disassociation with reality, and an obsession with death as the protagonist concentrates solely on the other-worldly figure of his desire (Calabrese 52).

The women that fascinate the protagonist are true gothic figures: ghosts. Jennie is a girl who mysteriously appears to Eben in the park, and Madeleine, not a ghost herself like Jennie, but possessed, according to her husband Gavin Elster, by her long dead great-grandmother Carlotta. They are women representative of a by-gone era, a detail which appeals to the protagonist because of his inability to cope with reality; Jennie is said to have a timeless eternal quality within her and Madeleine draws Scottie back in time with her dreams and trance-like states, taking him to places of the past such as the graveyard, The Palace of the Legion of Honor and San Juan Baptista.

Both Jennie and Madeleine are given ethereal features, appearing both substantial and insubstantial in the same shot which emphasises their being as something not of the present time. They abruptly appear or disappear from view and are kept at a distance from the audience who share the same point of view as the protagonist and this dictates the limited understanding of the enigma. Jennie often appears and leaves Eben from a source of light. The scene at the ice rink is an example. The camera is angled up towards the sun and the city sky-line Jennie glides into the frame with the sun spread out behind her like a halo, her figure a silhouette against it. She appears as a dark human shape but as she moves out from the light and calls Eben's name her form becomes recognisable as Jennie. When she leaves Eben she skates back into the sun and gradually disappears in the blinding light and vanishes from view. The camera is angled upwards in such a way that could have you believing she is heading back to her place in the heavens, or to some other realm.

Lighting is a way of establishing Jennie and Madeleine as figures not of this world. Both films at various points use the colour green over the film, or as a light invading a room, as a means of positioning the enigmatic figure in the realm of the mystical and supernatural. It is the meaning that has been associated with the

colour that is important for the understanding of the films and the other worldly nature of the two female characters. Various critics have held it to symbolise anything from life and fertility to spirituality. Hitchcock, in an interview with Truffaut, describes the use of green in *Vertigo* as a recycling of Victorian melodrama's use of the colour to coincide with the appearance of ghost and villains (Wollen 16). The final scenes of *Portrait of Jennie* feature a green tint adding colour to the black and white film and is a direct, and perhaps influential, link to Hitchcock's *Vertigo* as the use of the colour green over the black and white film coincides with Jennie's ghostly appearance³³. Eben is stepping into the mysterious timeless void that she had talked about³⁴. In *Vertigo* the colour green also conveys the ghostly characteristics. In this film it is Madeleine, and the colour also provides an illustration of the vital links between Madeleine and Judy.

As explained earlier Madeleine is not a ghost herself like Jennie but is believed to be possessed by the ghost of Carlotta. The use of green in this film is, as the narrative reveals, to depict the illusion that Madeleine inhabits a past time, similar to Jennie. Madeline is first seen by Scottie wearing a green shawl over her cocktail dress, she drives a green car, and finally in a trance like state jumps into the green waters of San Francisco bay. After her death Scottie wanders around to the places he had followed her to believing, in his confused state, that women he sees in these places are Madeleine. It is when he spots Judy that the connection is made. She resembles Madeleine but is also, as Madeleine was, wearing green on the first sight of her. Judy's apartment is also infiltrated by the green neon light of the Empire Hotel creating a green haze within her room. Hitchcock uses the light to accentuate the illusion of Madeleine in Judy. Scottie waiting for Judy to appear from the bathroom after she has undergone a transformation in her clothing and hairstyle is an excellent example. Scottie turns as Judy opens the bathroom door and from his point of view the audience sees

³³ The change from black and white film to green comes with the beginning of the storm in which Jennie's dies.

³⁴ "Time has made an error" which has allowed them to be together.

Judy, a replica of Madeleine, walk towards Scottie through a green haze. She, like Jennie on the ice skating rink, appears insubstantial at first glance. Then as she walks towards him, and finally falls into his arms, she is substantial. Upon her appearance the similarities between the two women are no longer in doubt, she *is* Madeleine³⁵. Judy has again become an illusory figure, this time to pacify Scottie. In doing so she is again taking on the role of a woman who does not exist. For Gavin Elster she had to play his wife, a woman who was haunted by dead Carlotta. Now for Scottie she becomes the illusion he fell in love with, the now-dead Madeleine, yet again performing a role designed for her by a man (Tomlinson 102).

In direct contrast to the illusory and ghostly figure of Madeleine the protagonist is given another choice of woman³⁶. As I mentioned earlier this is domesticated nurturing woman who stands in opposition to the enigmatic female figure whose object is to lure the male figure into the deception. In *Vertigo* this character is played by Midge, Scottie's old college friend and ex-fiance. Midge is all that Madeleine is not. She is sensible, practical and independent and is established firmly in the real world. Midge, unlike Scottie, does not believe that Madeleine is possessed by Carlotta and this becomes a joke to her³⁷. Where Madeleine is sophisticated and stylish, Midge is simple and comfortable, choosing to flout such protocols as wearing a hat. She also wears her hair down which makes her appear younger and childish. The fact that Madeleine and Midge never appear in a scene together has the effect of keeping the worlds they represent separate. The closest they come to sharing a scene is when Midge is driving to Scottie's and witnesses Madeleine leaving after he had rescued her from the bay.

Both Eben and Scottie's fascination with the women is due to the fact that both represent an illusion of a better time. Because of this

³⁵ The audience is already aware of this as revealed with Judy's attempt at a letter to explain her role in Elster's plan.

³⁶ Mrs Spinney plays a similar role in *Portrait of Jennie* but she is not a romantic option for Eben. She plays more of a motherly, nurturing role fostering Eben's talent.

³⁷ Her caricature of Carlotta with her own head is Midge's way of making a joke out of Scottie's assignment.

the protagonist rejects the alternative, and possibly more appropriate woman. The hero, after making this choice, then begins a downward spiral led by the femme fatale into a world of fantasy, illusion and deception.

Like the noir male protagonist Eben and Scottie are suffering mentally. Eben is experiencing a winter of the mind which is worse than material poverty, a feeling of the world's indifference in which he is alienated and lonely. Scottie has given up his job as a detective after he discovers he suffers from vertigo. For both men the women become something for them to desire so they can forget their present situation and feelings of alienation and ineptitude. Jennie becomes Eben's inspiration and fascination and Madeleine gives Scottie employment followed by obsessional love. Their desire to be with the woman is so strong that they suffer. Eben struggles to find inspiration and Scottie goes mad.

Scottie is a good example of the effect the femme fatale figure has on the protagonist's mental state. Though he is already suffering from a mental disability, vertigo, his mental state is not near the severity it reaches after Madeleine's death when he fails to save her. From this point he begins a downward spiral and the dream he experiences is a forewarning of this decline and admittance into a mental asylum³⁸. Scottie's choice is Madeleine, and a fantasy romance, over the reliable and sensible Midge. It is from this point that Midge, the stable character in his life, leaves the narrative as indicated by her slow walk down a long corridor of the hospital. With her departure the two worlds the women offered are gone leaving only one, fantasy, and with this insanity. Scottie then declines even further as he develops more severe mental problems and complexes as he tries to recreate a dead woman in Judy, an almost necrophilic act. Judy does, however, offer herself up to Scottie, denying her own existence, like Fontaine in *Rebecca*, because she does not care about herself anymore. She becomes like a mannequin "to be clothed with the man's fantasies" (Chankin

³⁸ Spirals are a feature of *Vertigo* and feature in the opening titles by Saul Bass, Scottie's dream and the stairs at San Juan Baptista where Madeleine and Judy meet their deaths.

32).

Scottie's mental state places him far from the typical concept of a hero. A hero traditionally saves the girl and they live happily ever after. Scottie, twice, fails to save the girl. He becomes an anti-hero driving around in a modern-day version of a white horse, his car, suffering from vertigo, acrophobia, melancholia and a severe guilt complex (Calabrese 51). Filmic techniques are employed to accentuate the fact that Scottie is not a typical hero of a melodramatic romance but an alienated and confused noir hero.

The visual environment often dominates Scottie as it did the heroine of *Rebecca*, Joan Fontaine. The purpose of Scottie being superseded by his surroundings serves the same purpose as it did in *Rebecca*, suggesting impending doom. But because Scottie should traditionally be the strong male hero it shows him up as the opposite, weak and incapable of taking control. Examples of this occur while he is following Madeleine. As he watches her walk into the McKittrick Hotel behind him looms an old Gothic-styled cathedral which dominates the frame. Then as the camera cuts to Scottie walking up to the old Victorian Gothic hotel this building takes the place of the cathedral. The trees in the redwood forest play the same role as the cathedral and hotel, that being to dwarf Scottie. This scene also has strong Gothic connotations as it appears to be straight from a fairy tale as Madeleine and Scottie enter a dark forest like Hansel and Gretel. These scenes give the appearance of the protagonist being encroached upon and therefore heightening the fatalistic mood of the noir hero. The New York sky line has a similar effect on Eben, especially when combined with his subjective voice-over relaying to the audience his feelings of desolation.

Camera angles and vertical lines splintering the screen to accentuate the psychological state of the protagonist and this technique often occurs in *Vertigo*. An example is when Scottie follows Madeleine to a florist shop and he stands behind the door

watching her. The door literally cuts the frame in two establishing a bizarre frame composition, positioning a mirror reflection of Madeleine on one side while Scottie watches on the other side of the door. This scene is a good example of a visual presentation of Scottie's precarious balance between the world of a fantastical underworld that Madeleine represents and reality. The door operates as a dividing line between the two.

For Eben the drift to the underworld of the Gothic is shown by camera angles and lighting. When he meets Jennie for the third time the camera is angled sharply down towards him making him look small and lonely. The scene itself is dark, lit only by a solitary park light near the bench where they meet. The single light causes oblique shadows to be cast across Eben's face as he watches Jennie walk towards him. These shadows suggest a hint of the unknown which is what Eben finds fascinating in Jennie. Though he knows her name and where she is from there are no logical explanations for her existence.

THE RETURNING: NEW ZEALAND'S MALE GOTHIC ROMANCE

John Day's *The Returning* (1990) is evidence of the fact that male Gothic romance exists in New Zealand film. Elements of film noir and the male romantic tradition, as witnessed in *Portrait of Jennie* and *Vertigo* are expressed through the central character Alan Steadman and his relationship with Jessica Scott and the mysterious Charlotte Hetherington. Like Scottie and Eben before him Alan is torn between the two women and what they represent. Jessica, Alan's girlfriend, is the Midge of *The Returning*. Jessica is indicative of the secure and nurturing figure, a mother herself with helps to successfully convey this image. In contrast is the ghostly Charlotte Hetherington. Charlotte, a femme fatale like Jennie and the possessed Madeleine, inhabits a fantastical world from which she lures Alan to his death. She is the enigma that fascinates him

and leads him to reject reality in favour of a more desirable return to the past. The rural setting therefore becomes a way of indicating a return to the more pleasurable past as Alan escapes from the corruption and crime associated with the city³⁹. The Hetherington home and open fields are set in direct contrast to the busy Auckland city streets and skyline.

Like Scottie, Alan is shown at work or at least driving to work in the opening sequences of *The Returning*. Whilst Scottie was a detective Alan is a partner in his grandfather's law firm. Like Scottie Alan sees his job as representative of the corruption that is indicative of the city, a quality that film noir specifically seeks to illustrate⁴⁰. The city as a site of carnage and deception is emphasised through the two villains of the drama, Mr Spiggs (Frank Whitten) and Mr Steadman Senior, Alan's own father (John Ewart). They are filmed in an expressionistic style that reveals their true evil natures. The first example is when they are having a conversation with regard to the trust fund that Alan's dead grandfather has left in Alan's name. It is Spiggs and Steadman Senior's aim to get their hands on the fund. As they plot in front of the camera the backdrop for their conversation is a window through which the city can be seen. This clearly links their deceptive behaviour together with the city. Their shadowy profiles serve to link them to the noir city underworld. Expressionistic techniques such as the tilted camera angles further enhance the villain's evil natures. This is employed when Steadman Senior and the corrupt Doctor seek out Alan to try and get control of the trust with force. As they enter the Hetherington homestead the camera is tilted to one side creating an odd composition which serves to disorientate the audience. But more importantly it draws the disorientation that is associated with the city and the villainous characters into the country, where Alan is now living.

The inhabitants of the small rural town, where Alan now resides,

³⁹ Within the film noir narrative the city is often established as a site of corruption and crime (Portino 78).

⁴⁰ *Out of the Past* (1947) is one example.

share Alan's newly awakened distrust of city folk, particularly Donoghue and George. For Donoghue, the man acting as the local Catholic priest, the city is representative of his fear of being discovered as an illegitimate priest squatting on the land. After Donoghue discovers Alan's occupation his caution turns to disgust as lawyers epitomise the corruption of the city for him. He even goes to the extent of having a trusted local check out Alan before he imparts to Alan the information he seeks. George on the other hand seems only to resent the city and the business people who dwell in it because he sees them as part of the cause of the destruction of the forests. These beliefs are what encourage Alan to hand over his control of the trust fund to George prior to his death. The trust fund, originally operated by Alan's grandfather, is aimed at protecting the environment. It is for this reason that Spiggs and Steadman Senior want to take control as they see the cause as worthless.

To avoid constant confrontation with Spiggs and his father, Alan escapes the confines of the city after his grandfather's death. He does so by driving into rural New Zealand in his car. The country is hereafter depicted in direct contrast to the claustrophobic atmosphere of the city. There are none of the shadows associated with corruption and deception and Alan is confronted only with wide open spaces where little else is seen to move but Alan's car along the highway. The claustrophobia and restrictions of the city with traffic jams, people and buildings, as seen in the opening scene, have been replaced by a vast expanse of empty landscape.

But while standing in contrast to the city the rural landscape dominates Alan and this is particularly obvious when he drives into the country. Like *Vertigo*, and the dominance of the environment on Scottie, it is the first suggestion of Alan's slow mental decline. The setting sun and haunting soundtrack dramatises the scene and a feeling of loneliness and desolation pervades which the audience experiences alongside Alan, the landscape becoming a metaphor for Alan's psychological interior.

The Hetherington homestead that Alan stumbles across becomes a part of the rural setting and is in contrast yet again to the concrete towers of the city. It is surrounded by empty fields and is a typical Victorian gothic building, deserted, decaying and bleak (Botting 2-3). It too has some of the haunting qualities that were visible in the landscape when Alan drove into the area. As Alan walks up to the homestead, the mystery that surrounds the house is foregrounded and his approach is filmed in a similar fashion to that of a horror film. The camera is angled down on him from the roof of the house. The camera becomes the invisible eye that watches the approach of the helpless victim, Alan, looking menacingly down from a position of omniscient power. Yet again, as established earlier with the noir protagonist, the presence normally associated with the hero is lacking. Alan is aligned with the anti-hero Scottie as the Hetherington homestead, like the rural landscape, dominates the frame and dwarfs Alan and in the process reducing him to a weak and helpless object.

Earlier foreshadowing, as suggested above, of some kind of disruption to Alan's life is illustrated in his increasing inability to keep in touch with reality and he gradually goes mad. The source of his mental decline can be directly related to Charlotte Hetherington, the ghostly woman who appears to him at night, and it is suggested she was also his childhood imaginative playmate. Charlotte initially appears only as an erotic dream which the audience are privy to by being positioned alongside Alan's subjective view point. Gradually Charlotte becomes more than a dream figure as Alan builds an unhealthy obsession with her which leads him to seek to find out all he can about her assuming the role of detective that Scottie and Eben also played. He questions the older members of the community and Donoghue becomes *The Returning's* version of Pop Liebel (*Vertigo*) and old Sam and Clara (*Portrait of Jennie*). Through a reluctant Donoghue Alan learns of Charlotte's fiancé's death, her murder of her child and her own suicide.

Charlotte is representative of the fantasy world that Alan looks towards as an escape from the everyday that he previously inhabited. She is the enigmatic female figure, or femme fatale, and also a ghostly Gothic being who inhabits the realm of the nocturnal. She is the creature who haunts the homestead and the river on the property by putting Alan in trance-like states, slamming doors, causing strong mysterious winds and turning lights on and off. Like other femme fatale's characters before her Charlotte is an erotic figure giving her control over the male character. Alan and Charlotte's relationship is therefore highly sexual and erotic, she even comes to Alan while he is sharing a bed with Jessica. As a result his sexual relationship with Jessica suffers, he can no longer perform. Scottie suffers a similar fate as he is also unable to experience intimacy with Judy until she becomes an exact replica of Madeleine.

Jessica is more than an illustration of the sexual differences between herself and Charlotte. She is firmly, like Midge of *Vertigo*, grounded in the real world and is indicative of the nurturing, domesticated female figure. Jessica is a mother and holds a job as a partner in the city based law firm Alan previously worked for. A telephone conversation that Alan and Jessica have illustrates just how different the two worlds they inhabit have become. Whilst Jessica is in her kitchen feeding her daughter, Alan is leaning against his bedroom wall and the lighting of each scene contrasts the other. Jessica's kitchen is lit in a realistic manner unlike Alan's location. He instead stands in a room surrounded by a blue haze that has a dreamy and almost romantic quality to it. His room invokes a romantic and dreamy atmosphere that relates to his obsession with Charlotte and the fact that he is lost in a romantic dream world.

There is a suggestion that Charlotte may have been an imaginary childhood playmate of Alan's. The narrative insinuates that Alan is an identical replica of Charlotte's dead fiance and therefore their being together could be read as something that Charlotte was

directing all along. Much of his behaviour, his mother reveals, relates back to when he was a child. He acts out the actual death of Charlotte's fiance and repeats these actions through the film. For example we hear from Mrs Steadman that Alan tried to kill himself numerous times by either trying to drown himself in the bath or throwing himself out of a tree. Within the film Alan nearly drowns in the river and spends a crazed night naked up a tree.

But what this information also suggests is that Alan may not have been all that balanced before he moved to the country and started living in the old Hetherington homestead. Alan follows in Scottie's footsteps as he also has it is suggested, that he also has a mental illness that was dormant in the beginning of the film and was awakened during the narrative. Alan could have been, like his mother, developing symptoms of paranoid schizophrenia. This is openly suggested by his father when he is searching for ways to take the trust fund from his son. Visual links between Alan and his mother are further evidence of this theory. When Alan's mother tells us of his escapades as a child it is watched on video tape by Alan. A blue tint pervades the sterile room from which she is interviewed. This same light, or tint, is apparent when Alan is in the homestead and particularly in his room, and coincides with the appearances of Charlotte. The blue haze, as in the example of the telephone conversation between Alan and Jessica, is a way of distinguishing the real from the fantastical. The haze could also be representative of Alan's madness through the link with his mother again distinguishing between what is real and fantasy.

Alan's physical appearance is another way that his madness is accentuated. This is a quality that he does not share with Scottie or Eben. Once the image of a corporate lawyer with slicked back hair, blazers and polo shirts Alan has been transformed into a crazed, unshaven and unkempt individual as he slips further into the fantasy world. His behaviour corroborates his appearance which becomes more bizarre as the narrative progresses. He climbs trees naked in the dead of night, sees lights flashing mysteriously in his home, his

burns miraculously heal, hears the sounds of a child crying and almost drowns in the river, after presumably being entranced by Charlotte.

I have used the term male Gothic romance in relation to the films discussed in this section because they seem to combine elements of both the romantic tradition as well as film noir. They follow the themes of the paranoid woman's film, or female Gothic by featuring a strong romantic theme which is the central focus of the narrative. The psychology of the film remains the same with the only difference being the transference of the feelings of paranoia and alienation on to the male character. This is not seen in film noir narratives where the romantic interest of the hero is a sub-plot to the unfolding drama. *The Returning* complies with this narrative style following in the footsteps of *Portrait of Jennie* and *Vertigo*. Alan continues this tradition by being positioned as the central figure of the narrative like Scottie and Eben before him. It is therefore from his point of view that the story is unveiled and his character becomes the figure with whom the audience identify. Alan's inner state of mind is then visually exhibited, as the characters before him, allowing the audience to experience Alan's gradual alienation from society as he steadily grows more mad. Alan's physical appearance, the landscape and lighting, particularly the blue tint, of *The Returning* is how this is achieved. Each has the purpose of distinguishing between the real and the fantastical. Like Scottie and Eben, Alan is also torn between the two worlds that are Gothic in their nature. While the lighting and landscape distinguish between the two worlds, the two women of each film, particularly evident in *Vertigo* and *The Returning* with Midge and Madeleine and Jessica and Charlotte, also accentuate this distinction.

CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt that the New Zealand films examined in this study are inundated with Gothic inflections; dark, pessimistic, bleak and frightening images, of which this thesis has only taken a small bite in this brief look at some of New Zealand's films. In the three areas examined (traditional Gothic literature, New Zealand literature and Hollywood films) there is evidence that New Zealand film has parallels and commonalities with each.

The relationship New Zealand film has developed with Gothic is possible as the style is fluid and flexible having, as described in chapter three, trans-generic qualities. It is an adaptable form and because of this it can move across genres and incorporate itself in with other styles. As mentioned, the paranoid woman's film, horror, romance and film noir are some areas where the Gothic style continues to be prevalent. Fred Botting writes "Gothic is a mobile and specific form. For the images and figures that are reiterated constitute a place where cultural fears and fantasies are projected. Thus similar figures have different significances, depending on the culture that uses them. Indeed, this is the pattern of Gothic as a genre that, in generating and refracting diverse objects of fear and anxiety, transforms its own shape and focus." (20).

Traditional Gothic literature was the beginning of this dark, Gothic atmosphere, and it is from this that other styles, with Gothic overtones, have stemmed. New Zealand literature and Hollywood film of the forties and fifties, the paranoid woman's film and film noir, or what I have termed male Gothic romance, are examples of how the Gothic style has carried over into different cultures and genres. New Zealand film exhibits parallels and commonalities with each of these areas.

However, it is the third area of this thesis, outlined in chapter two, that is the most important in explaining the taste for Gothic in New Zealand film. I am putting forward that these Gothic inflections have

become entrenched in our culture and society and therefore as a reflection of our society they are pushed forward in our national cinema. Ideas put forward by various theorists and cultural critics have proved useful in forming these assumptions. Film, as explained, did not begin these images but has developed them visually from literature and Ronald Hugh Morrieson and Janet Frame and two examples illustrated in this thesis. The writers were protesting against the puritan moral scheme that was extended to this country by the immigrants. They left Britain under the impression that they would better themselves in the colony and have the opportunity to prove their manhood, something that was missing in the growing machinery dominated environment of England's industrial towns.

As a result of the puritan work ethic and moral scheme any desires and fantasies deemed illicit by the restrictive society were repressed, and the emotional climate of New Zealand became frustrated. The new moral code was a part of this problem, but frustration also arose because the images the settlers had of New Zealand as a new utopian paradise were dissipated the longer they experienced the dual nature of the landscape. Whilst appearing beautiful from a distance it was instead revealed to be harsh and restraining just as society was. The image of a pastoral paradise was further destroyed with the growth of New Zealand's economy due to the frozen meat trade. The lamb, while previously bouncing on the green hillsides was now a carcass and the shepherd the cold and calculating butcher (Evans 76), he became the man with the axe. As a result the mood changed and the writers reflect this in their works. Violence became a natural result of the repression, and denial, that puritan New Zealand enforced. The slaughterhouse environment only encouraged and legitimised this violence. Gothic, therefore, is an apt way to convey the dark feelings of New Zealand society. The parallels with the Gothic style and tone explain this.

The natural landscape and butcher environment become the overwhelming force that presides over the characters and whilst the

puritan moral scheme is in existence, the landscape plays the role of restraining the characters, and depicting their psychological turmoil due to social restraint or another drama of the inner mind. I have shown *The Piano*, *Vigil*, *Jack Be Nimble* and *The Returning* to be good examples of this. As in a sub heading in Chapter Two the landscape is "more than a backdrop". The landscape and environment surrounding the characters becomes an integral player in the drama. It is the drama that has a narrative with traditional Gothic tendencies but the portrayal that is New Zealand's way of showing the dark edge associated with the fear of the narrative. The butcher environment is a way of conveying the inherent violence associated with repressed New Zealand society and the slaughterhouse imagery, that has legitimised such violence, and of which the man with the axe is representative of. He is a symbol of New Zealand's repression and an example of what that repression is capable of doing. The landscape ties in with the images of violence that the man with the axe and the slaughterhouse provide. It may appear beautiful from a distance, but up close it is not. The harshness of the landscape bears down on the characters and the cliffs, empty beaches, wide open fields and tangle of vines and mulsh and mud create claustrophobia and fear that are a part of the Gothic world but a uniquely New Zealand way of showing it.

PLOT SUMMARIES OF MAIN FILMS DISCUSSED

CHAPTER ONE

Heart of the Stag (1983)

Peter Daley's (Bruno Lawrence) ute breaks down and he gets help from Robert Jackson (Terence Cooper), a near by farmer. Jackson offers him work on his farm. Daley slowly builds up a relationship with Cathy (Mary Regan), Jackson's daughter. She is a mousy terrified girl who takes care of her crippled mother and the household. Cathy confides in Daley and tells him of her father's incestuous relationship with her. Daley encourages Cathy to leave the farm and when they try and escape Jackson tries to stop them. This leads to Daley killing Jackson.

Trespases (1983)

Katie (Emma Piper) and her father Fred Wells (Patrick McGoohan) live on an isolated coast. Katie's father practises his own religion and enforces it so strictly on his daughter that she leaves home to live in a commune with her lover Albie (Andy Anderson). Stan Gubbins (Frank Whitten) is the leader of the commune and uses all the women who live on the commune as his concubines. He rapes Katie, initiating her into his harem. Katie escapes and spends some time with the MacIntyre family who pick her up when she is hitchhiking. She then discovers she is pregnant with Gubbins' child. She returns home to her father. Gubbins is murdered and when Katie goes missing Albie is a suspect. It is revealed that Fred Wells is the culprit and he has Katie locked away ready to kill her if she does not repent. Katie eventually escapes and her father is taken away.

Mr Wrong (1984)

Meg (Heather Bolton) purchases a used car, a Mark II Jaguar. One night while driving she hears moaning and crying from the back seat and further mysterious instances lead her to think the car is haunted. The car, it is revealed, was owned by Mary Carmichael (Perry Piercy) who was murdered in it by 'Mr Wrong' (David Letch). Mr Wrong stalks Meg and terrorises her. It is Mary that saves her when her ghost traps Mr Wrong in the car and sends it burning, down a hill, where it crashes into flames.

Jack Be Nimble (1993)

Jack (Alexis Arquette) and Dora (Sarah Smuts-Kennedy) are brother and sister and are separated when they are adopted out to different families. Dora leads a happy life while Jack is ridiculed and abused by his parents and four adoptive sisters. In an act of revenge Jack invents a machine that hypnotises his family and enables him to kill his parents. Jack then goes in search of Dora. Dora, who with the help of her love interest and fellow psychic Teddy (Bruno Lawrence), finds Jack. Jack's sisters then track down Jack and Dora, run them off the road, and kidnap Jack. Dora finds Jack and unleashes her psychic powers on the sisters, killing them to save her brother.

CHAPTER TWO

The Scarecrow (1982)

Salter (John Carradine), a murderer, rapist and necrophile, enters the small town of Klynham. Salter is drawn into Ned's (Jonathon Smith) life when he is befriended by Ned's Uncle Athol and his friend Charlie Dabney. Prudence (Tracey Mann) and her friend Angela Potroz become his next victims as he has a penchant for young girls. Anglea is murdered by Salter and then Prudence vanishes. She is found by Ned and Constable Ransbottom in the funeral parlour. Salter has vanished but it is revealed that the reason for this is that Ned's brother, Uncle and Charlie have accidentally killed Salter and buried him in the town rubbish dump.

Trial Run (1984)

Rosemary Edmonds (Annie Whittle), a former middle distance runner, leaves her family to study the yellow-eyed penguins on an isolated coast for a chapter in a book she is writing. She watches the birds and continues with a training programme that her son gave her. But she is terrorised by mysterious goings on around the cottage. There are fires, flowers cut, angry dogs jumping at her, stones thrown through the window and strange noises outside. In the final stages of the film her son collapses at her door and she runs for help at the telephone box. She makes it to the phone-box but a car that comes around the corner knocks someone over. In a dramatic twist we see that it was her son that was hit. In a series of flashbacks it is revealed that it was James who was terrorising her in a bizarre attempt to improve her running.

Pallet on The Floor (1984)

The film opens with Sam's (Peter McCauley) and Sue's (Jillain O'Brien) wedding. Jack Voot (John Bach) makes a move on Sue, his ex-lover, at the wedding where Sam's friend O'Keefe dies of a heart attack. Jack Voot attacks Sue and attempts to rape her only to be stopped by Sam and his friends who accidentally kill Voot. Miriam Breen sees all of this and her, and her husband, blackmail Sam to get his land. On the way to the lawyers Basil (Bruce Spence) drops Sue off at the marae and takes Sam and the Breen's on. In a gorge, part way there, Basil asks Sam to get out then drives over a cliff, killing himself and the Breens.

Vigil (1984)

The narrative is set on a remote farm where young Toss (Fiona Kay) lives with her mother (Penelope Stewart), father and grandfather (Bill Kerr). Within the opening minutes Toss's father dies in an accident. Ethan (Frank Whitten), a poacher killing goats on their farm carries the body down and ends up working on the farm. Toss must learn to cope with the death of her father and the new arrival, Ethan, who develops a friendship with Toss's mother, and also her growth into womanhood.

CHAPTER THREE

Rebecca (1940)

While working as a paid companion for a Mrs van Hoppe, the heroine (Joan Fontaine) meets Maxim de Winter (Lawrence Olivier) while holidaying in Monte Carlo. He asks her to marry him and then takes her to his home, Manderley, where he lived with his wife Rebecca. Rebecca went missing one night and was found washed up dead on the coast. The innocent and naive heroine is intimidated by the house and its housekeeper, Mrs Danvers, who was Rebecca's confidante. On the night of the fancy dress ball a ship is seen capsizing so the guests go out to assist. During the recovery of the wreckage Rebecca's small boat is found at the bottom of the sea. Maxim reveals to his new wife that he accidentally killed Rebecca when she taunted him with the fact that she was pregnant with someone else's child. In an inquest into her death it is revealed that she had cancer and therefore it is assumed she committed suicide. Maxim is cleared and he and his new bride can live happily.

Gaslight 1940)

Paula (Ingrid Bergman) and her lover Gregory (Charles Boyer) are married in the opening stages of the narrative. They then move in together to 9 Thornton Square, a home that Paula inherited from her murdered Aunt Alice Alquist. There Gregory slowly drives Paula insane by making her think she is losing her memory and misplacing items. With the help of Joseph Cotton's character Paula discovers that Gregory murdered her Aunt and is searching for the jewels that he never found after he committed the earlier crime.

The Piano (1993)

Ada McGrath (Holly Hunter) and her daughter Flora (Anna Paquin) arrive in newly colonised New Zealand to meet Ada's new husband, Alistair Stewart (Sam Neill), whom her father has married her off to. Stewart decides there are not enough people to carry Adas piano back to the settlement so they leave it on the beach. Stewart then exchanges the piano for some land with Baines (Harvey Keitel), a neighbour, without Ada's permission. Baines then asks for piano lessons from Ada. The lessons end up being a chance for her to earn the piano back by trading sexual favours for a series of black key on the key board. A romance gradually develops between Ada and Baines. Stewart, when he discovers this, takes measures to prevent the two continuing with their meetings. Eventually, Stewart, unable to cope with the fact that his wife does not love him, gives her to Baines.

Vertigo

Scottie (James Stewart) retires from his job as a police detective because he is no longer able to work after he discovers he suffers from vertigo. Instead he takes up a small investigative job by following an old college friends, Gavin Elster's, wife. Gavin tells him that his wife, Madeleine (Kim Novak), is haunted by her great-grandmother Carlotta. Scottie follows Madeleine around San Francisco city and has to save her when she throws herself into the harbour in

an apparent trance-like state. From this point Scottie becomes fascinated by her and falls in love. When visiting the mission of San Juan Baptista Madeleine runs off and falls to her death from a bell tower in the old mission. Scottie, unable to cope with the fact that she is dead and that he could not save her, goes mad. Upon recovering he goes out to all the places he went with Madeleine and eventually meets Judy (Kim Novak) who looks very similar to his dead love. Scottie changes Judy's appearance so that it is identical to Madeleine's and it is revealed to the audience, and then to Scottie, that Judy was impersonating Madeleine, part of a plot of Gavin Elster's so he could kill his wife. Scottie takes Judy back to the old mission tower and Judy, surprised by the sudden appearance of a nun, falls to her death from the bell tower.

Portrait of Jennie (1948)

Eben Evans (Joseph Cotton) a struggling artist meets a mysterious girl, Jennie Applegate (Jennifer Jones), in the park. He sketches her picture and sells it to a dealer. Having her as his inspiration encourages Eben to go in search of Jennie again. The next few times he sees her she seems to be getting older each time. He searches for information on her and finds out that she would be, if alive, very old. Then a nun in the convent where she was schooled tells Eben Jennie drowned when a freak wave washed over her when she was holidaying near Land's End. Eben believes he can save her as it is drawing near to the anniversary of her death. He goes out to Land's End light to warn her of the wave but is unable to prevent her death.

The Returning (1990)

Alan Steadman (Phillip George) is a lawyer in the city. He leaves after his grandfather dies and buys a country homestead. The house is haunted by a ghost who comes to Alan at night. Alan becomes obsessed with the ghostly woman, Charlotte Heatherington (Jenny Ryken), and his relationship with Jessica (Alison Routledge) suffers as a consequence. Alan is eventually lured to his death by Charlotte when he drowns in the river.

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