

Vincent Ward's Taranaki War: Battle, Captivity and Romance in *River Queen*

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Perhaps such days have always been a dream rather than a reality, a phantasmagoria of loss generated by modernity itself rather than its prehistory. But the dream does have staying power.

(Andreas Huyssen, 'Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia')

The end of Tītokowaru's war in south Taranaki was indeterminate and its political consequences debatable. In *River Queen*, Vincent Ward gives sharper definition to events and reaches a more distinct conclusion by focusing on a relatively short period in the campaign and by incorporating into his account a second narrative, an invented, personal history. The latter threads through the public history, lending it colour and offering easy access to its action and participants. An introductory screen-note briefly details the larger historical situation – the mid-nineteenth-century period of the New Zealand Wars, when imperial and colonial government forces battled Māori tribes over land and sovereignty. Similarly, the final action of the film is to credit the historical figures whose lives provide models for the film's central protagonists, the fictional Sarah O'Brien, questing for her son, and Te Kai Po, the chief who here leads Māori resistance to the colonial confiscation of land. These framing screen texts appear to define the film's work as quasi-documentary, representing an historical moment. Since Sarah bears witness to the equivocal conclusion of this military campaign, she – the unhistorical heroine – becomes the agent by whom this important, real-world history is first set down.

Ward's film, we might then say, illustrates Pierre Sorlin's familiar judgement – "Historical films are all fictional" – in redrafting the historical record as an invented text, trimming public affairs to the dimensions of personal experience. "It is very seldom," Sorlin says, "that a film does not pass from the general to the particular, and arouse interest by concentrating on personal cases" (38). The scope of the film narrative in *River Queen* is drawn in fact from romance, at least to the extent that the

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history it brings to the screen begins with the heroine and lasts long enough for her to succeed in her maternal quest, but also, in its course, to discover love, suffer and finally settle into a generically determined happy future, following the collapse of Te Kai Po's resistance. In that case, this Taranaki history comes to a conclusion that it knows nothing of; invention, we might say, completes the historical record. Flagrantly. One way or the other, Vincent Ward's Taranaki war might be described as driven less by colonial politics than by Sarah O'Brien's need for a good ending. As Sorlin argues, regardless of whether the historical film presents historical events or tells a story that asks to be credited by reference to them, the passage to the personal fails history, at least in so far as it necessarily presents a "distorted image of society" (42). The personal becomes the true politics.

In the case of Ward's film, if we acknowledge his emphasis on the fictional dimension – which goes all the way through to inventing characters, but also to new names for characters who do have a place in history – we might feel that the director's licence might take the form of Peter Carey's stark defence of his rewriting of Ned Kelly's history: "I made it up." Ward, however, denies himself such freedom; instead, in the credits honouring Riwha Tītokowaru, as model for Te Kai Po, and Caroline Perrett and Ann Evans, as models for Sarah O'Brien, he claims intimacy with but also distance from an established historical past. In this paper I test this claim, especially in relation to Perrett and Evans, with particular regard to the history that these tributes suggest, the captivity narrative in the context of New Zealand's European settlement. Captivity is the crucial form of Ward's romance; it also grounds his film as a work of cultural fantasy.¹

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The historical past favoured in 'cinematic history,' as in other forms of cultural memory, seems to be the well-framed period, already imagined as a character,

¹ The place of romance and the captivity narrative is noted by Bruce Babington in his fine, brief essay, "What Streams May Come: Navigating Vincent Ward's *River Queen*," but given very little attention. For other critical commentary on Ward's film see Lacey (85–9), which follows Babington in reading the film as a "complex fantasy of bicultural adjustment," finding the most powerful argument for doing so in the anamorphic, prophetic vision that links Sarah O'Brien and Tītokowaru. See also recent essays by Olivia Macassey and Annabel Cooper in *New Zealand Cinema: Interpreting the Past*, ed. Alistair Fox, Barry Keith Grant and Hilary Radner (Bristol: Intellect, 2011); I have not yet been able to view these essays.

and often speaking of origins – a kind of cultural home, despite staging difference.² So, the colonial period – the moment depicted in *River Queen* – seems to offer the possibility of immediate but also deep engagement with an adventurous past. The most striking instance of this modern desire to engage, perhaps, is our interest in different forms of historical re-enactment, stretching from popular television programmes to elaborate, quasi-theatrical performances. These different forms of re-enactment, as Jonathan Lamb says, “supply the demand for particularity, immediacy, intimacy, pain, domesticity, and sympathy by focusing on real people who have volunteered to inhabit reconstructed dwellings of the past” (241). The terms of this description are peculiarly instructive in stressing sensation and experience, history gaining the feel of truth by taking this affective turn.

Reality television, in particular, has provided any number of opportunities for mass audiences to participate in time-travelling fictions of this kind: *Frontier House*, *1900 House*, etc.; in Australia and New Zealand, *The Colony*, *Colonial House*, *Outback House*, *Pioneer House* (West, passim). As this list suggests, the colonial moment, apparently, possesses a peculiar gain for our age, since it is impossibly distant, exotic, but simply the day before yesterday. For all the suspicion of nostalgia, colonial re-enactment, whatever its form, undoubtedly houses a desire to sense the past, offering an embodied knowledge that supports emotional affiliation. Vanessa Agnew underscores this point: “Reenactment . . . emerges as a body-based discourse in which the past is reanimated through physical and psychological experience” (330). This emphasis on the body, I suggest, tends to support an argument for viewing historical film as a form of reenactment. In a telling illustration of this embodied engagement with the past, Ward notes the intense involvement of Māori extras in *River Queen*’s production:

Many of the extras I cast in fact had great-grandfathers who fought on either side during the wars. Being an extra in these battles meant so much more to them. They were in some sense dealing with a part of who they were and where they “belonged” – and in so doing echoed the themes that the film explores – identity and belonging. They not only looked like their great grandfathers – Māori and Pākehā – but they were acting out their grandfathers’ battles. (‘The Inspiration’)

² George F. Custen likewise observes in American film culture “a tendency to limit the presentation of history to a few periods,” noting that “there is no shortage of films set on the American frontier” (92).

Like re-enactment, I suggest, film may promote the kind of experience Paul Ricoeur seeks in the historical text, where audiences participate, as they “imaginatively ‘enter’ a reconstructed past world as an attempt to grasp the feelings and decisions that instigate historical events” (54).

There are obvious problems with this bridging of historical situations and immediate personal experience.³ Nevertheless, there is no necessary loss of a critical dimension if one allows to the modern film a capacity to conduct – by its own narrative means and conventions – a replaying of situations and events, within a period, that gets at that period’s “structure of feeling.” Such play may not be best academic, historiographical practice, but it can call familiar interpretations of the past into question and draw attention to unnoted centres of sympathy. In this respect, the modern film may do more than give action its scene; it may trigger perception. So, in *River Queen*, the coupling of history and romance is demonstrably complex: before it proves to be the generic vehicle for a familiar passion, romance catches into itself other attachments and other, more dangerous histories.⁴ Romance here, as quest, first spells out the struggle to recover a lost child, a troubling antipodean tale, in fact but also in fiction.⁵ Even the love story must negotiate the ambivalences of the captivity narrative, which interweaves history and fiction, in the most complex fashion. *River Queen*, furthermore, by virtue of its generic inventiveness, may indeed call a privileged historical account into question – the grand narrative of colonialism, and its privileged practices – in line with the textual activity registered by Linda Hutcheon in what she calls historiographic metafiction.⁶

³ Note Sorlin: “The historical film is a dissertation about history which does not question its subject” (38); see, too, Rebecca Schneider on the absence of the critical (95). Robert Brent Toplin argues, however, that popular films “do not bring closure to descriptions about history, but they do have the potential to open them” (134).

⁴ See Strehle and Panizza, “History and romance trope each other” (xxv). For film, see White: “if it turns out to resemble a ‘historical romance,’ it is not because it is a narrative film, but rather because the romance genre was used to plot the story that the film wanted to tell” (1195).

⁵ For discussion, see Pierce, xi–xii, Part 1 (on nineteenth-century history and fiction) and the section on film versions, 151–78; the first historical example of a lost European child occurs in 1803; the first major example in fiction occurs in Henry Kingsley’s *The Recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn*, 1826.

⁶ See Hutcheon, 105–121; she argues that “Historiography and fiction ... constitute their objects of attention; in other words they decide which events will become facts” (121). See also Amy Elias’s revisiting of Hutcheon in *Sublime Desire: History and Post 1960s Fiction*, where metafiction expands – and splinters – into varieties of “metahistorical romance”; especially Chapter 5, “Western Modernity versus Postcolonial Metahistory” (181–220).

Much of the violent combat that makes up the film's spectacular action between colonial aggressor and indigenous occupier, British and Māori is worked by reference to the Whanganui – Te Awa Nui – as a contest that ranges upriver and downriver. At no point, it should be said, did Tītokowaru in fact fight the colonial troops on, or along, the Whanganui, as Ward's film requires us to believe, any more than the colonial forces were garrisoned at Castlecliff, at the river's mouth.⁷ Film economy and film interests demand that the contest be relocated. They also require that the contest be made to relate immediately to the young woman, Sarah O'Brien (Samantha Morton), who grew up in a frontier garrison, on the river, at the point where Pākehā and Māori meet – and separate. According to the film's brief prehistory, Sarah falls in love with a Māori boy and gives birth to a son who never knows his father, since he dies of the "choking sickness." When history begins, as war breaks out, Sarah hunts for Old Rangi (We Kuki Kaa), the tattooist and her lover's father, who has just captured Boy (Rawiri Pene), her seven-year-old son. From the colonial settler point of view, Sarah puts herself at risk of slaughter or violation, when, in order to continue her search for Boy in territories that would normally be barred against her, she employs her notable nursing skills to treat Te Kai Po (Temuera Morrison), the Māori chief and war-leader. She crosses, that is to say, the border between Māori territory and Pākehā. In consequence, the warring isn't all about land and sovereignty; since there is no checking Sarah's maternal quest, it also makes an issue of the woman. If this plays with the familiar trope by which the woman's body figures the colonial domain, it plays first with the coloniser's horror of going 'bush'. Major Baine (Anton Lesser), commander of the colonial forces, describes women who, in time of war, take Māori husbands as committing treason, in effect. Sarah's actions, that is to say – invented, the stuff of romance – call into question the legitimacy of the colonial government's initiative, but also expose the racist antipathies that undergird it. This colonial war is shown to be no civilising mission.

The film tracks events in the armed conflict that erupted following introduction of imperial and colonial government policy in New Zealand, in the mid-nineteenth century, when, for a variety of motives – law and order, ostensibly, but

⁷ The Whanganui is immediately recognizable to New Zealand viewers, who must build its significant history into an understanding of the events Ward describes. Presumably the garrison shadows Camp Waihi, strategically sited close to the Waingongoro, facing Ngaruahine territory, the heartland of Tītokowaru's power.

especially the insatiable colonial appetite for land – the British government sought to extend by military force its dominion over territories that belonged to the Māori. Ward’s romantic protagonist, Wiremu Katene (Cliff Curtis) – the only one of the central characters to carry his name with him into the film – warns Major Baine against slaughter; there would be “hell to pay,” since sooner or later the Māori “is going to want his land back.”⁸ Ward’s fictionalised narrative of a campaign along the Taranaki coast against Tītokowaru that spanned the best part of a year, from May 1868 to February 1869, abbreviates and intensifies the conflict. Likewise, Ward’s Baine compresses into himself Tītokowaru’s Pākehā opponents: Von Tempsky; Thomas McDonnell, who forced the government to support a campaign against Taranaki Māori and led it, with some success, until the humiliating defeat at Te Ngutu o te Manu in October 1868; and his immediate successor, Whitemore, who was defeated by Tītokowaru at Moturoa, but who then profited from his inexplicable retreat from his new pā at Tauranga Ika, February 1869.

Tītokowaru was an extraordinarily able war leader, as Vincent Ward appreciates, credited with developing sophisticated techniques for pā fortification, but also remarkably skilled at attack and counter-attack across the bush terrain that was his primary defence. Colonial forces were based at various sites during the course of the campaign – from Camp Waihī to Wanganui – moving up and down the Taranaki coast in their effort to contain Tītokowaru’s threatening advance towards Wanganui itself. At each point in this advance Tītokowaru constructed notable defences. Some of this activity we see when Sarah O’Brien is taken up river to treat Te Kai Po’s influenza – from which, of course, Tītokowaru may actually have suffered at this point, early in the campaign. During her sojourn at Te Ngutu (presumably), Te Kai Po draws a quick sketch map in the sand, defining the defensive structure of the pā’s “palisades” and “trenches,” and predicts the shape of an imminent British assault, setting up, as Tītokowaru did before him, what Baine realised too late was a “trap.” However, while in fact Tītokowaru advanced south, setting up his southern-most pā at Tauranga Ika, from which he eventually retreated into the deep bush to the north, Te Kai Po remained at Te Ngutu, trading insults with the colonial forces before retreating into the bush, when the tribal alliance upon which he depended fell apart. In effect,

⁸ In fact Katene made the remark to the British officer Walter Gudgen; see Belich, *I Shall Not Die* (45).

Ward compresses a nine-month campaign along one hundred kilometres of Taranaki coast into skirmishes lasting days, taking place at the one site. As I have noted, it is then given to Sarah to offer possible explanations for Te Kai Po's retreat: his predatory desire for the comfort of women, which offended his main allies and provoked them into abandoning him, or the conviction – derived from his vision of a river of blood – that “defeat” was preferable to the slaughter of his people.⁹ Sarah also extends the conflict, however, in her person, by becoming the object of the British campaign at this point, as they hunt her down, in line with the demands of romance invention.

In the course of these hostilities, despite their inevitable defeat, Māori demonstrated the prowess and tactical intelligence that supported their reputation as a warrior nation (Belich, *The New Zealand Wars*, passim, but especially 291–335). At much the same time, elsewhere, this kind of mythic investment developed into fetishism of black bodies, as with the Zulu.¹⁰ In Ward's film, this fetishism is re-staged, after a fashion, in cinematic passages that show off Māori bodies, in battle and in battle challenge – the haka. In effect, as ritual re-enactment, the haka re-enacts itself, from performance to performance – very clearly in Ward's film – but it does also anticipate and memorialise the battle to which it relates. The contradictory pull of sympathy and terror created by the camera's attentions to Māori bodies, especially the menacing bodies of the warriors – always tracking them, never granting the opposed government forces any such fascinated attention – drives an audience into sympathy with Māori resistance. The film constructs a scene that demands judgement on colonial aggression, yet, in its unceasing screen business of showcasing the relentless murderous hostility, it gives scope to settler terror, even if settlers are almost entirely off screen. Terror finds a sensational focus in the Māori chief, at the centre of this conflict, who taunts his opponents with the most fantastical, horrendous fate:

⁹ For discussion of the uncertain reasons for the historical Tītokowaru's abandonment of his *pā* at Tauranga Ika, in particular the sudden breakup of his alliances because of loss of *mana*, see Belich, *I Shall Not Die* (242–6); the story is attributed in essence to Kimble Bent, who fought for Tītokowaru throughout this war.

¹⁰ See Gail Ching-Liang Low, 'His Stories?: Narratives and Images of Imperialism?'; also *White Skins/Black Masks: Colonialism and Representation*, especially chapters 2 and 3. Lydia Wevers notes William Towers Brown's discovery of a near-fetishistic picture of Zulu attacking the British “in a Māori hut in the wilds of New Zealand,” causing him to reflect: “The illustration must come home to the war-loving hearts of the Māoris. I wonder with which side they feel most sympathy. They are friendly enough with us, but the Zulus are more a people after themselves” (167–8). For white interest in black bodies in Australia, see Maynard (129–37).

“I have begun to eat human flesh and my throat is constantly open for the flesh of man. I shall not die; I shall not die. When death itself is dead I shall be alive.” (in Belich, *I Shall Not Die*, 57)

Tītokowaru *issued* this warning on 25 June 1868. When it is *re-issued* by Te Kai Po, it charges the postcolonial moment with the full force of its original mix of violence and apprehension.

Ward has spoken of his interest in investigating such historical passages as sites of resistance to imperial power in territories that Europeans sought to dominate in the late nineteenth century, from Africa to America. This was “a volatile time, full of unique contrasts” (‘The Inspiration’). Tītokowaru’s war was just such a time, complicated not least by alliances that saw some Taranaki iwi support Tītokowaru, while other tribal groups (Wanganui and Arawa), *kūpapa*,¹¹ opposed his ambitions, supporting instead colonial efforts to bring about his destruction, presumably in the belief that thereby they might retain final possession of their land. Wiremu Katene, ally of both Tītokowaru and Te Kai Po – and eventually Sarah’s lover – participates in the partisan shifts between the battles staged in the film, just as he did in fact. In this truly volatile political situation, Wiremu, even more than Tītokowaru, compresses into himself the divisions that make him the kind of character in whom Ward, by his own account, has become particularly interested – caught between cultures, fashioning and refashioning a problematic identity. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that his prominence in the film has less to do with his undisputable place in the history of Tītokowaru’s war than with his capacity to serve firstly as the representative of an idea.

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If Tītokowaru’s war backs the film’s narrative – offering it at least the apparent coherence of a campaign – its longer, less decided history was equally important. After his extraordinary retreat from Tauranga Ika up the coast towards Waihi, then through dense bush to Kawau, Tītokowaru eventually returned towards the Waimate plain and finally to Parihaka. This move, for all that it cost him capture, trial and imprisonment eventually, also involved a return to his former commerce with

¹¹ These Māori allies of the colonial forces often outnumbered government troops in this campaign; see James Belich, *I Shall Not Die*, passim. See also Ward’s notes, briefly arguing that the Wars saw, in the mass, Māori fighting Māori, rather than Māori tribes battling colonial government.

the settlers. This later period in his extraordinary life was not without incident, as Ward reminds us in the film credits. He fell ill and called on the services of an English woman, Ann Evans, who had been a nurse before migrating to New Zealand, settling in Waihi; she was brought to him, up the Waingongoro, blindfolded. Ward couples this event to a second, unconnected tale, concerning the abduction of an eight-year-old European girl, Caroline Perrett, and relocates this new history to the very centre of the action, twisting it into the campaign history as the intense, personal narrative of Sarah O'Brien's quest (Belich, *I Shall Not Die*, 281).

River Queen becomes most interesting at this point: epic modulates into romance, and national history gives way to local legend. More to the point, military history gives way to a captivity narrative, represented in effect by the diary that opens and closes the film (Bentley, 219).¹² Perrett's story, as captivity narrative, connects Sarah's romance quest for her son to a frontier genre that had gained tremendous currency in the New World, especially in America. Such stories begin with capture of the colonist by the indigene and conclude in his or her rescue – sometimes successful, sometimes not. From its first moments, this genre mixed historical fact and fantasy; it also involved telling acts of publication that derived their authenticity not from verifiability but from their realisation of a tradition in which rescue demonstrated the virtues of white settler society.¹³ More to the point for this essay, a captivity narrative combined macro- and micro-narrative, “the large-scale, panoramic and global, with the small-scale, the individual, and the particular” (Colley, 17). The consistency of such differences of scale across the mass of these narratives serves to explain in part the interlocking campaign and quest histories in Ward's film. Like other captivity narratives, this one is an intimate history, but grounded in the larger, political and cultural story of the imperial power and its colonial agents. To that extent, it may also work as metonym, as a foundational fiction for an emerging nation.

In Ward's invented version, captivity is largely obscured, despite the note pointing to Caroline Perrett, since Ward refigures it as the quest of a mother for her

¹² Ward notes Caroline Perrett's nick-name, 'Queenie'; he also has Te Kai Po, inside the film, invest Sarah with Caroline's nick-name, after she has cured him. In doing so, he connects Sarah to the riverboat that travels up and downriver, the 'River Queen.'

¹³ Linda Colley notes that these narratives took different forms of publication: “But the most complex and comprehensive testimonies of overseas capture ... [were] substantial accounts usually written in the first person and completely or in part by a one-time captive, but sometimes dictated to others” (13).

lost child. Sarah's quest begins with her being ferried upriver, blind-folded – like Ann Evans en route to treat Tītokowaru – which robs her of freedom and places her in the power of a boatload of Māori warriors, coupling powerlessness to romance agency. Above all, of course, the blindfold marks her passage across a border that is both territorial and cultural. In the dominant American tradition, at least, the genre tends to find its most sensational examples in the experience of white women captives, which raises testing questions about the substance and significance of cultural assimilation. Male captives might engage in sexual and familial alliances with women among their captors without causing significant problems for white society; women captives who took this course were relatively few, and generally condemned. Sarah clearly belongs in this company. Her continued dealings with Te Kai Po, Wiremu Katene and Boy incidentally put war-faring Māori tribal society on display; captivity narratives, including Caroline Perrett's, frequently offered quasi-ethnographical observation like this. The sexual threat that is often experienced or imagined in captivity narratives is also present, although represented obliquely; in her time in Te Kai Po's pā, Sarah's interest in Wiremu Katene is aroused – and indeed noted, even by her son. When the two war-hosts turn to taunting each other – in a marvellous display of a down-under slanging match – Sarah has become Wiremu's "white woman." In so far as the film is justified as a more or less public history of warfare, romance is clearly visible under the narrative skin; if we account Sarah's romance as the real history, however, we necessarily detect beneath its surface the darker, transgressive narrative of captivity.

Captivity clearly changed in significance, most notably in its American history, pointing up different issues as the new American order shifted from Puritan New England to the West, towards which the nation pushed across the great American plains.¹⁴ Expansionist ideology derived support from these narratives, where earlier their ideological beneficiary was the Puritan foundation of New England. Captivity history itself was not just retold, in different versions, but in effect transformed into different orders of fact, as the narrative was called on to take account of new cultural needs and fashions. In these culturally loaded histories, however, "facts" worked deceitfully to set in place a necessary "truth" that consistently left white, male

¹⁴ For a succinct statement of this development, see Annette Kolodny, 'Among the Indians: The Uses of Captivity' (187).

authority supreme.¹⁵ Nevertheless, these narratives often seem to have delivered a different story altogether. Despite the fact that women were often victims, or colluded with a dominant patriarchy that prescribed their form and their message, narratives of their capture do collectively turn their gaze on women who occupy centre stage. As the New Zealand historian Trevor Bentley puts it, describing nineteenth-century accounts of captivity by Māori:

White women are not just present, they are at the centre of the stories. Most significantly, female captives were not just central in the printed material, they were at the centre of events (15).¹⁶

In this, perhaps, we discover the well-framed experience that may have prompted Ward to see an heroic woman's story where women, on the face of it, were subjugated, suffering loss of community and family upon which they normally depended, and which conventionally gave them value. In these histories, furthermore, they achieve at times an exceptional status by acceptance of cross-racial marriage or sexual alliance.

For all its radical importance in American culture, the captivity narrative also surfaced in texts composed at the frontiers of other colonial societies, where settlers were similarly locked in conflict with indigenous peoples. The Australian 'Eliza Fraser' history, for instance, is just as complicated in its detailed content and in its publication history – including film and stage versions – as any of the dominant American stories.¹⁷ More to my purpose here, however, some one hundred and forty cases of captivity were recorded in New Zealand, several finding their way into narrative accounts (Bentley, 11). Vincent Ward may in fact have needed no more than the problematic example of a filmed captivity novel like Michael Mann's *The Last of*

¹⁵ See Schaffer and Randall on these narratives as “cultural artefacts that helped to produce rather than reflect asymmetrical hierarchies of gender, race and class” (109). See also Rebecca Blevins Faery.

¹⁶ Bentley estimates that 21 of the 140 Europeans captured by Māori were female (11). See also June Namias (23) for American experience.

¹⁷ See especially Schaffer's rich history of Fraser's captivity, *In the Wake of First Contact*. Schaffer describes the Burstall/Williamson film *Eliza Fraser* as a “bedroom farce” from the outset that both “betrays history” and “reifies myth” all the way through to its epilogue, which notes that Eliza Fraser and her last husband eventually settled in New Zealand and “lived happily ever after” (210–16). See also Dixon for other tales, including Rolf Boldrewood's fictional captivity, *War to the Knife* (1899), set in New Zealand during the New Zealand Wars (53–8); Boldrewood was influenced by Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*.

the Mohicans,¹⁸ but he clearly did discover the exemplary, local, captivity histories of Ann Evans and Caroline Perrett, and may have come across other New Zealand instances, several of which include enforced marriage of some kind.¹⁹

In her history, then, Sarah O'Brien is supported by generic and gendered colonial anxiety that accompanied efforts to rescue the white captive; she is both rescuer and captive, as her seven-year quest unfolds. When she eventually finds her son, moreover, he has come to identify so fully with his Māori family that he adamantly refuses to return to his mother's Pākehā world. In due course, Sarah herself does enjoy a successful rescue, but in fact contradicting conventional expectations, she is freed not by but from the colonial forces; the inversion of the generic rule underscores her decision to join Māori society, in order to maintain her family. Ward demands, by making an issue of it, that we give attention to Sarah's refusal to accept white society's expectations of white women with regard to love, sex and marriage. Captivity traditions back up this move.

The most interesting of the New Zealand stories of this kind, perhaps, concerns Betty Guard, the wife of a whaler, who was captured along with others when their ship was wrecked on the Taranaki coast in 1834. Her husband, released in order to obtain gunpowder as ransom, managed instead to secure support, in Sydney, for an armed rescue of his wife and children, although it took some months before this could be carried out. The tale of that rescue, accompanied by a massacre of Māori at Waimate pā where Betty was held, is told by William Barrett Marshall, including Betty's brief, first-person narrative, demonstrating she had been treated largely with "kindness and deference."²⁰ On the other hand, despite his sympathy for Betty and his exceptional outrage at the violence with which her captors were eventually treated, Marshall clearly construed the whole event in terms of the imperatives of Europe's civilising mission. Others told her story rather differently, in ways that suggest the

¹⁸ See Brantlinger (15–30) on Cooper's echoing the "countless captivity narratives," but also Mann's film, where sentimental racism disappears in a blitz of whiteness.

¹⁹ He may have found Perrett's story in the useful anthology by Bentley. He could have found this kind of narrative in reduced form in nineteenth-century fiction like Boldrewood's *War to the Knife*, or H. A. Forde's *Across Two Seas*, where the four-year-old daughter of a settler family is abducted by a Māori band, but returned to her family, stripped of her Pākehā clothes and wearing instead a Māori mat; not long after, a local chief proposes marriage between young Daisy and his nephew.

²⁰ In his 'Personal Narrative' of Two Voyages to New Zealand on H.M.S. Alligator.

peculiar attraction the captive woman held for her white rescuers, both in herself and because of her suspected sexual relations with the native other. Even Marshall notes the impression she made when she was rescued, dressed in “two superb mats” but “barefooted”: she “awakened, very naturally, universal sympathy by her appearance.” In her time in captivity Betty lived under the protection of the chief Oaoiti, perhaps as his wife; according to Edward Markham, another of her early chroniclers, she may have become pregnant by him, since, before leaving Sydney, “she was brought to bed of Twins, and they were rather dark” (Bentley, 81–103).²¹

The last of the New Zealand captivity stories, Caroline Perrett’s, was shaped differently, but to the same end (Bentley, 212–35). Caroline, lost in the bush in 1879, was abducted in fact by a Māori tribe, apparently in revenge for her father’s desecration of Māori burial sites (as in *River Queen*). She was not rescued until 1926, when family recognised her, more or less by accident. In effect, she had lived her entire life as Māori, possessed a Māori sense of her difference from Pākehā, and married Māori husbands, with whom she had several children. In the event, she too was by no means willing to give up her Māori life and family. Caroline Perrett’s story survives in a lengthy first-person narrative told to the editor of the Auckland *Sun*, J. R. Sheehan, in 1929. It is clearly prompted by his questions and organised by him into thematic sections; it describes the character of Caroline’s daily experience, including the chatter, laughter and song between the women and children as they washed clothes in the river, her pleasure in her first pair of boots, her dislike of smoking and her refusal to countenance tattooing. When she is asked whether she had been happy with the Māori, she replies that, looking back over a long life, she thinks yes, adding simply, “Hard work has roughened my body, but it has strengthened me inwardly” (Bentley, 221–33). My guess is that Ward will have been struck by this judgment and made it the firm ground of his own captivity romance.

Caroline Perrett also warns her reader that “too much romance” had been made of her life. It is worth noting that fantasy is clearly evident in some surviving narratives; Maria Bennett’s memoir, for instance, is clearly shaped by someone’s acquaintance with American captivity tales, and, indeed, with the history of Eliza

²¹ For analysis of the turns taken by Betty Guard’s story, see Gniadek (581–600), also Wevers (107); Wevers includes a brief, suggestive reading of Marshall’s *Personal Narrative* (ibid 104–8).

Fraser (Bentley, 150–63). It is also worth noting that, however imperfectly, many narratives seek to authenticate themselves by claiming to be or to report first-person narrative. Arguably, when Vincent Ward grants Sarah O'Brien the role of diarist, framing the film by presenting her diary as event, as performance, he responds acutely to the peculiar character of the captivity narrative as micro-narrative – as cultural reflex, but also as a defence against society, an equivocally private, hidden story.

The history of women captured but choosing to live with their captors, taking lovers and husbands from among them, not only provides a novel structure for Sarah O'Brien's history, but clearly supports the final turn in her story, when Sarah chooses a Māori family and takes a Māori lover. Nevertheless, this conclusion clearly works after the fashion of romance and perhaps for related purposes. In his influential work on formula fiction, John Cawelti notes the power romance draws from that which resists it: "The moral fantasy of romance is that of love triumphant and permanent, overcoming all obstacles and difficulties" (41–2). This emphasis identifies the importance of a radical change in circumstance, in values or status, even if it does not demand that this be shown in marriage. So it is with Sarah O'Brien, for whom the consummation of her love for Wiremu Katene arrives, quietly, in the final moments of the film – although not before she has survived battle and endured the violent harassment of colonial troops, as she seeks to quit European society.

Romance, that is to say, installs a different order of historical experience than that which New Zealand social or military historians might tell. On the other hand, the romance that takes over at this point to bring both the military campaign and the adventurous plot to a fitting conclusion gets pressed into performing exceptional business, well beyond the customary reach of the genre. Pamela Regis – a leading scholar of popular modern romance, for whom the centrality of the woman character and her eventual marriage are essential, generic components – notes that final happiness is often preceded by what she terms "ritual death," where a tragic conclusion threatens but is defeated by romance's larger comedic drive, bringing love into permanence. Sarah O'Brien's romance sees her suffer something close to death in *fact*, not in *figure*: she is shot while fleeing from colonial troops and tumbles into the Whanganui. Supported by the genre, however, this death does prove "ritual": to fall into the great river is not to die, but to be borne into a second life – and permanent

love. Sarah is borne downriver, to Castlecliff, where in due course she takes up a new life, invisible to Pakeha society, adorned with the *moko* that marks her out as both renegade and Māori by adoption. The film, then, closes its history of battle and bloodshed summarily, however oddly, in granting Sarah her romantically satisfying future, from a point in that future where its permanence is assured. Our last sight of Sarah herself is in a familial embrace with Boy, now grown up (and making his way in this world as an entrepreneurial tattooist), and her lover, Wiremu Katene, Boy's uncle. Regis notes the highly typical inclusion of a wedding or some such comedic celebration where society and the couple are partners in the formation of a new sense of community (38). There is no wedding ceremony in *River Queen*, but that final embrace – on the shore of the sea – does have something of a wedding's ceremonial force, clearly marking a “new community.” Sarah bears a *moko*; neither her lover, nor her son, displays the facial tattoos that signal Māori identity. The defining signs of ethnic identity, then, are employed in the film's final moments to establish connections, but also to free this small community from their original social bonds.²²

Whatever we make of the film's conclusion – love, miscegenation, ideology of empire, postcolonial nostalgia – its backwards-looking but future-oriented gaze redirects a narrative of settlement along lines that correlate with the historical perspectives and romantic vision of genres associated with frontier culture. So, Wiremu Katene might well serve not so much as the “volatile” tribal leader, in accordance with Ward's myth of self, but as the last of the antipodean Mohicans; more likely, on the sea shore, lacking the facial tattoo, he proves as white as the next man and inherits the new world. Romance-adventure, then, creates a hero, but also offers an epic investment in delivering this antipodean society to a new and distinctive future, perhaps figuring the arrival of Aotearoa New Zealand, where whiteness is an equivocal virtue, a blank page, cancelling difference.

Nevertheless, in *River Queen*, while passion directs history towards its obscure conclusion, the film's romance-determined gaze mostly tracks not Wiremu Katene but Sarah O'Brien, crossing and re-crossing borders, questing for her son, finding a lover. This unusually active heroine, however, is not simply an epic agent, crafted out of

²² For Ward's aliveness to tattoo, see *The Past Awaits: People, Images, Film*, especially 124–30. Both Boy and Wiremu have leg tattoos that register identity.

memories of two women's extraordinary lives. The traditional heroism of the woman in romance, her strength to suffer, especially for her children, is consistently the countenance love wears in this much refracted history. The agency that the heroic woman of romance finds in resisting impositions laid upon her by a man or by patriarchal society does not constitute the sum of her romantic potential. More is involved; the children that the heroine might expect to mother also figure. In her exemplary emotional strength, then, this kind of romance heroine embodies a primary community, modelling larger social harmonies – and offering the hope that such perfected relations may arrive in the not-so-distant future. In the case of *River Queen*, we are surely driven to recognise this desire as the film ends, even if we detect in its promise a cultural fantasy that speaks not just of the dream but also of the oppressive reality for which it compensates.²³

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In line with the affective turn in historiography, when historical narrative takes the form of romance, for all its limiting concentration on a singular set of characters, it constitutes an argument for a specific, but also intensely engaged apprehension of the past. Film, furthermore, which tends to frame history by recourse to romance, clearly does offer an historiography that has a power and effectiveness academic history cannot match. It does large-scale action extremely well – in the case of *River Queen*, battle; it also puts place on show – the fields of battle, but also mountain ranges, bush-clad slopes and perilous river gorges.²⁴ It can also deliver intimacy, which seldom finds its moment, let alone authentic expression – or legitimate analysis – without the support of fictional and/or filmic frames. Whatever one thinks of its conclusions, *The River Queen* offers these access routes to the past, perhaps composing what Pierre Nora calls “living history,” which correlates with memory – a more or less public, but personally felt history (7–24).

But I'm not sure that this will do. *River Queen* often seems to touch past moments that are bound into present experience in ways that do injury it cannot properly notice, in part because this kind of enterprise – as in *Last of the Mohicans* –

²³ See Heng: “[A] nationalist imaginary at key junctures requires figures of maternity and family to instantiate concretions of feeling and thought” (207–8).

²⁴ Robert Rosenstone: “Film lets us see landscape, hear sounds, witness emotions as they are expressed with body and face, or view physical conflict between individuals and groups ... altering our very sense of the past” (1179).

never gets off the ground without significant investment in local cultures and communities who are the guardians of the history in which the film would trade. The production of *River Queen* involved a history of painstaking efforts to secure and maintain working relationships with iwi in Taranaki and on the Whanganui. Nevertheless, the success with which the film did *not* tell the history of these people in its novel construction of Tītōkōwaru's war – more or less guaranteed by Ward's discovery of his real story, in which Caroline Perrett becomes Sarah O'Brien – dismayed many Māori, sometimes to the point of outrage.²⁵ In this case, while it is probably necessary to acknowledge the force of Sorlin's claim that "Historical films are all fictional" and to take the force of James Wood's emphatic insight that works of fiction do not "ask us to *believe* them (in a philosophical sense), but to *imagine* them (in an artistic sense)" (178–9), it is also hard not to be troubled by the flat, uncompromising assertions of a very different perspective in comments made by historians in Australia's recent history and fiction wars. History, for Mark McKenna, raises the greater political challenge, since "it cannot be pushed behind the curtain of invention or make-believe" (187). Invention obscures the precise uncomfortable fact. Affective writing may give priority to the sympathetic, privileged audience at the cost of the recalcitrant other whose history it takes up. Inga Clendinnen cautions us about the claimed cultural value of empathy; while appreciative of, say, the power of Grenville's novelistic fiction in *The Secret River*, Clendinnan asserts that Grenville did not realise the "full enormity" of what she had done.²⁶

If there is a way out of this critical impasse, which is peculiarly important for the relatively small number of texts that look not just to contest established historical narratives but also to deal with the contested narrative of the indigene, it may lie in the position taken by McKenna: the historian needs to make his or her presence visible in the text, thereby making clear the angle of the work and acknowledging where it cannot go. Arguably, Ward does do that in *Rain of the Children*, the film in which he most nearly undertakes strict, historiographical business. There, he looks into the past in his own person, however imperious that looking may be. Here, in *River Queen*, the very prominence of invention gives Ward, as writer and director,

²⁵ See, for instance, the 2006 "eHui forum," posted online.

²⁶ Clendinnen is quoted by Jane Sullivan in 'Making a fiction of history ...' in *The Age*. See also Mitchell (253–84).

precisely the kind of visibility in the text that his historiographical ambitions may demand, as a safeguard against ideological confusion. After all, what his film does, finally, is to glamorise a very dirty phase of European settlement in Aotearoa New Zealand, even while it resists the views that this settlement has normally employed in its own justification. It also works affectively, getting at the ‘structures of feeling’ in colonial culture as it struggles – then and now – to come to an accommodation with those it has bullied and oppressed into European ways. Even so, the kind of history Ward offers cannot help but be, at best, an anxious, Pākehā story.

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