

MEN WHO MARCH AWAY

A REFLECTION.

The first question I had to wrestle with when I began thinking, seriously, about this screenplay was the time-honoured, yet crucial; what's it about? And wrestle I did, as I'll discuss later, but it was worth the effort, because I didn't get very far until I had resolved that question. Similarly, deciding what to include in this reflection proved troublesome, at first, because the influences and tortuous changes of direction which occurred in writing the screenplay frustrated my early attempts to construct any sort of a coherent history. Eventually, and with guidance, I was able to sort things into a semblance of order. Thus, this reflection will retrace key aspects of the writing process and then analyse the final text. Let me jump ahead for a moment and mention an outcome of that analysis which intrigued me. While analysing the narrative structure I detected a sub-text of abjection and a form of gender representation which I had not consciously or deliberately intended. I was rather startled to recognise this as a product of my own subconscious. I shouldn't have been, because I accept the view that these identity representations are often only revealed by reading against the grain of a text. Nevertheless, to be confronted by a product of my subconscious was a surprise and I will explore this later with the trepidation of a person conducting a self -psychoanalysis. I'll return now to the writing process.

Although Men Who March Away is the product of a process, that term may connote something far more neat and orderly than I actually experienced. I'm

not suggesting a chaotic experience, far from it. There were times when a particular activity predominated such that I could claim, quite comfortably, to have followed a writing process. That process was similar to one which Robert Neale saw as comprising the six, overlapping stages of; “invention, discussion, drafting, revision, proof reading and publication” (79). Except for publication, I went through all of the stages Neale identified but not as distinctly focussed activities. For example, I often revised, redrafted, and proof read at the same time. Discussion occurred, formally and informally, throughout the whole process and included tutorial guidance and criticism. All of those activities notwithstanding, my overall impression of the whole experience is closer to screen writing apostle Syd Field’s description of writing a screenplay as, “an ongoing evolving process that changes day to day” (62). In view of the ‘evolving’ nature of the process, and to order my reflection, I’ve reduced the process of writing Men Who March Away into two broad stages; invention, and drafting. By invention, I mean everything up to and including producing a treatment, and by drafting, everything that happened thereafter.

Although the invention stage marks the start of the process, it does not mean I started to write with a mental *tabula rasa*, even if there is such a state. I began the process in a psychic frame built on previous experiences so I will start with the most influential of these. I enjoy writing and I’m interested in texts as forms of cultural communication, thus, unsurprisingly I suppose, I included Film Studies, Script Writing and Creative Writing in my choice of papers as an undergraduate. I enjoyed them, especially Script Writing and Creative Writing. Minor successes came my way when a short screenplay, Moko, gained a

South Pacific Films scholarship and a short story, *Ki Te Mutunga*, was published. This recognition was strong motivation to continue and, in regard to a screenplay, complete a full length version, since *Moko* had to be short. The MFA (CW) was the ideal chance to pursue my interest and continue to develop my writing skills. On a more personal level, I, like many of my generation, was the child of a father who fought in the Second World War and the grandchild of a soldier of the Great War. Their aspirations for a future, the things they said as well as the things they never said, shaped my world. Some of their stories have been told in print, fiction and non-fiction, but I don't believe many have been told in film. Perhaps, a growing sense of my own mortality has influenced me, in some way, to reflect on their experience in the maelstrom that was World War 1.

The first seed for this story was planted in my mind by a remark from an ex-Army friend, many years ago. He told me about a book he'd just read on Travis VC (Victoria Cross) and how impressed he'd been by Travis' wartime exploits. I recall my friend saying that he thought the book would make a great movie and that everyone should know about Travis' story. I'd heard of Travis when I was an Army Officer. It's hardly possible to spend much time in the Army without hearing or being informed about 'our' VC winners. They are revered in much the same way as 'The Lives of the Saints' were at my Catholic secondary school. Eventually, I got a copy of James Gasson's *Travis VC* from the Wellington library and soon realised that Travis was indeed a remarkable person, even amongst the august body of VC winners. For a start, his reputation for fearlessness and dash arose mainly from solo actions,

usually at night, in no mans land, on the Western front in World War 1. This reputation was long established by the time he was awarded, posthumously, the Victoria Cross for actions in an attack by the Otago Regiment, just before the War ended. Then there was his self-imposed exile from his family, beginning when he left home at age nineteen, and the unexplained fact of him changing his name, on enlistment, from Dickson Savage to Richard Travis. His relationship with the commander of the New Zealand division, Major General Andrew Russell, was extraordinarily close. For a sergeant, Travis' rank at the time, to be on such friendly terms with a Major General was almost unthinkable. I was left with an image of a mysterious loner, neither unsociable nor unfriendly, but a loner nevertheless, who despite this trait found a niche for himself in, of all places, the army. He was a nomad. Much later, when I was researching this screenplay, his rural wanderings from job to job struck me as typical of a group of men identified by Jock Phillips as that "community of frontier bachelors (which) provided the core of male community culture in colonial New Zealand," (40). I noted then that whatever story emerged would include that motif of the 'frontier bachelor', the swag. Having read Travis VC, I agreed with my friend that it would make a good film and then forgot all about it. Travis surfaced again, briefly, when I was thinking about this screenplay but it wasn't until I got to know more about James Douglas Stark, Starkie, that a potential story presented itself.

I'd heard about Stark, briefly, from references to him in Phillips' A Man's Country and Jim Henderson's Soldier Country, which also has a photo of him but my interest was really aroused by Robin Hyde's Passport to Hell, a

biography of his early, brutal life and his exploits in World War 1.

My interest had grown into fascination by the time I'd read Hyde's novel, Nor the Years Condemn inspired by Stark's life and the social conditions after the War. I admired his fortitude, condemned his persecutors and laughed at his sheer *joie de vivre* which never deserted him, even in the most desperate circumstances imaginable. James Stark's real life story is one of a man at war, with something, ever since he was a child. In that respect, he and Travis were cut from the same cloth but there their similarities ended, or so it seemed. In these profiles I saw two remarkable and intriguing men, who lived turbulent lives and took part in the greatest war in history. The more I thought about them the more they seemed to disrupt a myth of New Zealand troops in the Great War which, according to Phillips, announced that "despite their temporary absence from the domestic circle and their membership of an itinerant band of males, were respectable family men who fought, in the end, not for themselves but the sake of their women and children," (168). Thinking about this lead me to see how Travis and Starkie's lives exposed what was concealed by another popular New Zealand myth articulated by historian Miles Fairburn as the, "common rural myth" (8). He asserted this myth was built on "three visions of arcadia -the suburban middle class, the middleclass Dickensian, and the lower class yeoman" (8). Travis and Starkie were anything but temporary absentees from the domestic circle, respectable defenders of families or lower-class yeomen. They were myth busters. I felt there could be a story in there somewhere.

My interest wasn't confined solely to the characters. I'm an amateur military

historian and once, in what feels like another lifetime, was a soldier. That means I'm reasonably well read about some of the major land campaigns of the twentieth century and for many years was an Infantry Officer in the New Zealand Army. This gave me something of an insight and a feel for the soldiers' life. Although creating characters with enough depth to sustain a full length film would be a new experience, I felt confident I could depict Army life accurately. Even though I was aware that whatever story emerged would, inevitably, be a war story, I was wary of replicating the flag-waving, death or glory, jingoism of the classic Hollywood combat genre. Those sorts of sentiments were invoked in other media to rally support for the First World War but I wasn't interested in any overt display of them in the story I was thinking about. Of course, the battlefield would be a primary site for my characters to interact but I didn't want them to mouth the type of propaganda which characterised Frank Capra's Why We Fight series which he made for the US Army in the Second World War. Battlefields have been coded by film analysts as contested spaces of meaning in narratives and I was beginning to feel that my characters had the potential to provide plenty of contest. I thought I would try to represent the battles in as neutral a way as I could to allow a free contest of meanings, whatever they might be. When the time came to get serious about a screenplay, I had my raw material.

However, raw material doth not, in itself, a story make so it was time to face up to that crucial 'what's it about' question. I remember having had the importance of considering that question drummed into me in script writing lessons, as an undergraduate, and seeing it repeated in numerous books on

the subject. In one of them, Field asks, "Can you define it, articulate it in few sentences?"(62). I'll try. As the title suggests this story is about men and war, an ancient narrative recipe. In particular, two men who share some traits in common with their fellows but in other respects are unique. King and country mean little or nothing to them. They don't have a warm hearth-fire of home to defend. The First World War just coincided with the prime years of their life and appeared to them as a refuge from their personal and persistent torments. One of them, Richard Travis, is a troubled, but socially acceptable, loner, who assimilates easily into the Army and finds self-fulfilment on the battlefield. He is killed, becomes a hero and is awarded, posthumously, the country's highest honour, the Victoria Cross. The other is Douglas Stark, fugitive, vagabond and socially marginalised; the quintessential rough diamond. He resists assimilation into the Army, however, he does his bit on numerous battlefields, saves Travis' life but receives scant recognition. They're forced by circumstance into an uneasy alliance which makes them confront and alter their attitudes to each other and to their duty.

From the outset, I wanted to be true to my characters and not imbue them with any sense of answering an imperial call to duty as loyal sons of the British Empire. That jingoism, all-pervading at the time, washed over them. Nevertheless, I had to represent that social mood because it was intense, but only as a backdrop, not as something Travis or Stark emulated. Although they were largely unaffected by the rhetoric of the recruiters and the popular press, their attitudes to the war differed markedly. For Travis, soldiering was a job which he took to readily and to which he applied the same high work ethic

which he had applied to any job he had done. Stark was a different type altogether. Always one to do his fair share, he, nevertheless, wouldn't go out of his way to any more than was necessary to help his mates and, at the same time, to avoid attracting the attention of the authorities. I'm not saying he and Travis would be unaffected by the horrors and hardships they encountered, that would have been impossible for all but senseless automatons. I am saying they would not see themselves as part of a noble crusade against tyranny and would judge themselves and others according to their own standards of fairness and integrity. Also, I'm suggesting that the discontinuity between their pre-war lifestyles and the practices of war was less pronounced than for those who lived in a more genteel style. Thus, they were conditioned better to cope with the harsh realities of the war.

Travis and Starkie would fight in the Great War because, like a mountain to a mountaineer, it was there. To create that sense I would deliberately avoid any reference to the war's historical context, causes, aims, or grand strategy. War is a social phenomenon and abstracting it from the complex mix of political and social forces which make it runs the risk of reducing war to an entertaining spectacle. I thought that risk was less than that of getting sidetracked into a re-examination of the war itself. I would rely on my characters to mediate between the present and the past. I'd include just enough historical detail to make the story intelligible, credible and interesting. Credible because I was conscious that I was going to write a story inspired by real people and factual events and I would have to be sensitive to those realities. This sensitivity applied particularly in the case of the Gallipoli

episode. Gallipoli is a sacred New Zealand story. Some scholars believe it is where we began to 'see' ourselves as New Zealanders. That view is contested and, although I didn't want to highlight the debate, I decided to avoid the overt nationalism so typical of war films. I hope I've rendered the New Zealand part of the battle to its basics. If that exposes the futility of the enterprise, I will feel satisfied. Of course, this would be a New Zealand story and that would flavour the narrative however my protagonists would not be sharply differentiated from their English masters and counterparts as they were in Peter Weir's *bildungsfilm*, Gallipoli. In fact, the NZ Army was commanded, at the higher levels, mostly by English Officers and in many respects was an artefact of British military culture. I believe that whatever distinctions NZ soldiers, at Gallipoli or on the Western front, made between themselves and their allies would have been subsumed by their identification with their common lot as soldiers. I would try to represent that in the screenplay by representing most of Britain's Imperial allies in the two-up scene.

I've mentioned my wariness about conforming too closely to the structural dichotomies of the classic Hollywood combat genre film. I stress 'too closely' because genres confer coherence on a story, in terms of audience expectation (which they help to create), as well as satisfying commercial and production imperatives. For those reasons, I would include such generically specific scenes as, boot camp where civilians become soldiers, preparations for battle and battle itself. Oedipal rivalry, in various forms, is another part of the stock and trade of the war film genre and I intended to make this explicit

by Travis' violent encounter with his father and his subsequent discovery of a new paternal figure in the form of the Division's commander. However, despite these generic conformities and what I saw as an essentially linear individual drama, I believed Travis and Starkie had the potential to disrupt some of the structural oppositions of the classic combat genre. The genre typically exalts individual acts of bravery up to the point where they threaten team cohesion thence the protagonist has to be subdued. Travis' acts are an exception in that, despite their audacity and individuality, they're encouraged and they contribute to the *mana* of group and win its admiration. Starkie bears the signification of 'other' as the ill-disciplined soldier, fugitive and, of course, as non-white. His presence in the story draws attention, covertly perhaps, to racial discrimination which was often omitted from the genre and official discourses. Further disruptions seemed possible by diluting some of the other common dualities of the genre. For a start, home would not be an idealised as a heaven thus dulling the contrast with the hell of war. The Military Police brutality against Starkie, the mob attack on the German butcher and the lack of a demonised Turk or German, would blur the boundaries between friend and foe or good and evil. I thought a lot about the role women would play in the story. The narrative setting required them to be cast in the traditional role of domestic guardian, caregiver, life giver, bearer of emotional pain and provider of sex. In doing so, I realised they would, as Belton puts it, "pose a variety of threats to men in war films," (168). He saw this threat surfacing when their appearance in film, "introduces and emotional element that is often realised in terms of man's essential vulnerability," (168). I thought Travis would bear the brunt of identification with 'man's essential vulnerability,' a

point I'll elaborate on later. Disrupting generic conventions was fine to think about but it was beginning to disrupt my vision of a coherent story which was as good an indicator as any that it was time to put pen to paper and write a treatment.

The final draft of the screenplay differed quite markedly from the original treatment, a fact which I found rather comforting as I'd heard that this happens frequently in the professional script writing business. However, writing a treatment was invaluable as it forced me to organise my ideas and provide a structure for the screenplay and to identify some of the key points in the storyline. These are, according Field, "your beginning, your ending plot point 1 and plot point 2," (51). Travis' epic ride of Wild Pilgrim lent itself to visual representation and an attention grabbing beginning. I was encouraged, in a tutorial, to dwell on this episode to capture the full extent of this mighty struggle between man and beast and to show, at the outset, the grittiness in Travis. I had determined, quite early in the process, that plot point one would be the moment when Cornelius Savage enlisted in the Army as Richard Travis. This chameleon like act would be the crucial moment which altered the direction of the story and led directly to act two. Plot point two took some identifying but when I realised it had to be another fateful decision by Travis, then it felt right to centre this on his demand to be returned to the front, after being wounded. This action would raise the curtain on act three. Although I was conscious of not becoming too biographical, it seemed that Travis' death would be a fitting ending, given that Lieutenant Bryne was moved to record that, "the death of no other soldier could have stirred men to such deep

sorrow or caused such an acute sense of real loss, "(319). Another important lesson to come out of the treatment was that of avoiding visual clichés. I had written sex between Travis and Lizzie but when asked to consider the whys and wherefores, came up short, except, to say, rather unconvincingly, that adolescents would have done it then as they do now. With that feeble reason in mind and keeping Travis and Lizzie's respective characters to the fore, I rewrote their relationship to try and portray mutual sexual attraction unfulfilled as a result of Travis' pursuit of a vague dream. Depicting a stereotypical relationship between a hospitalised Travis and his nurse drew a similar criticism resulting in a rewrite. My tutorial discussions and the subsequent ponderings which accompanied this stage drove home the importance of that writer's adage 'know your characters.' Questioning character motivation became something of a mental catch cry for me and only when I felt I had a satisfactory answer would I submit my work to scrutiny. I think I had answered that question, sufficiently to engage and hold an audience, by the time Travis and Starkie landed on Gallipoli.

I've mentioned already my interest in Stark's life and times and this must have shown in my writing because it was pointed out that he had become more engaging than Travis. I agreed readily and my agreement created a dilemma. Tempting as it was, I felt it was too late to write a whole new story based on Stark (I might succumb to that temptation one day) so I sought to build more depth in Travis and to make his contrast with Stark more marked than it had been. Whilst I think I overcame the immediate problem of balance, I never felt completely sure that I'd solved the Travis v Stark dilemma. In fact, I came to

like Stark and his mates and enjoy their antics. I think traces of this remained in my writing. I found it easier to write dialogue for Stark than for Travis, an issue that persisted throughout the whole writing process .

Initially, I began the drafting stage by writing short sections for tutorial review. This was useful as the discussions inevitably centred on questions about what was driving the characters which, in turn, kept the need for conflict to the forefront of my thoughts. I realised I had neglected the conflict between them and solving this required some rethinking and writing. Originally, Stark didn't reveal what he knew of Travis' dark secret until near the ending and this was criticised because it took the tension out of much of their earlier relationship. In response, I brought them face to face on the troopship and had Starkie let on that he knew something of Travis' past. And so it continued, a change in one scene leading to alterations to those before and after. At one point, I felt that progressing in sections followed by a review was making me micro-edit and lose sight of the general story line, even though the story was shaping up quite differently, in places, to the treatment. So, it was agreed that I'd just write the whole screenplay to the end to see what it looked like. I did, and although more amendments followed, at least it was easier to see the consequences of change to the whole story. A significant change, identified at this stage, was to reconstruct the ending. Originally, I had Travis venturing into no mans land to rescue Starkie but this didn't quite work as I hadn't established a plausible enough reason for; a, Travis to take this risk and, b, for Stark to be in no mans land in need of rescue. Rectifying this meant rewriting large chunks of script to keep Starkie behaving as the reluctant hero, which he'd become, and

believing he could still get some material advantage from his knowledge of Travis' past. After much tinkering, I felt satisfied that their relationship remained complicated and credible until Travis' death. In fact, Travis was killed in a trench by German shell fire the morning after the Rossignol Wood battle. It was while checking this fact that I noticed in Bryne's account of the Otago Regiment returning to the front line after Travis' funeral that, "the soldiers of English regiments came out of their billets and cheered them, " (320). This event gave me the idea for the final scene.

It was now time to re-write the screenplay. Actually, this wasn't exactly what happened but I did read the whole thing from start to finish, in one go. I hadn't done that before and I was surprised to find I'd actually forgotten about some early scenes. Although no major changes came from this review I did make several refinements in dialogue and scene descriptors. In this reading I tried to get an overall impression of how I would see it on a screen. I had tried throughout to represent the troglodyte existence of the trench dwellers as well as that neutral killing strip, no mans land. The trench and no mans land have become iconic symbols of World War I and have been invoked in all sorts of discourses ever since. I had in mind that the trench would be for my story what the submarine had been for Wolfgang Petersen's, Das Boot. It was hard to conclude if I'd achieved a feeling of claustrophobia with only mental pictures for evidence, however, I felt there was sufficient repetition of trench and no mans land scenes to convey something of the essence of those spaces. Another outcome of re-writing was my decision to change the working title from The Big V to Men Who March Away'. The Big V had come from an

earlier nascent idea about investigating the nature of courage or why some soldiers got the VC and others who performed comparable acts of bravery did not. Obviously, I didn't pursue that idea but on reading the whole first draft it became clear the original title didn't fit properly. I had written a story essentially about men who went to war, and Thomas Hardy's Song of the Soldiers came to mind. The only line I remembered, from days far off, was /What of the faith and fire within us/, (53). I read the poem again and, although it is a call to action and I had taken care to ensure my characters did not have Hardy's /faith and fire/ within them, they, nevertheless, did /march away/ to a rousing national chorus which credited them plenty of /faith and fire/. For their own reasons, Travis and Starkie joined the men who marched away to the Great War and would be remembered as part of that body.

New Zealand remembered them on ANZAC Day and at that time Stephen MacDonald's play Not About Heroes was staged in Christchurch. I would have gone to it anyway but, obviously, it held a special interest on this occasion. The play was inspired by Siegfried Sassoon's friendship with Wilfred Owen following their meeting in Craiglockhart Mental Hospital. The protagonists although from different social backgrounds were highly literate and sensitive men, emotionally scarred by the horrors they had experienced and disillusioned by their sense of the futility of the war. Their response was to force language to reflect or capture these feelings. Language resisted and their struggle to overcome this was evident in the fascinating scene where Sassoon edits a draft of Owen's Anthem for Dead Youth and together they transform it into Anthem for Doomed Youth. As they hurled fragments of

language between each other, hoping for a strike, it seemed as if they too were being hurled about by the effort. Meaning seemed to flicker in their dialogue like sparks which quickly burnt out. Sometimes one would strike the tinderbox of their imagination and take hold, thus did 'doomed' catch fire and extinguish 'dead'. Thinking about this scene afterwards, I wondered if I had witnessed a metaphor for battle itself. If in the onomatopoeia, I had heard the boom of gunfire or heard words whizzing about like shrapnel, as sentences exploded. Was this a play about Derrida's 'play' of meaning. Certainly, I realised I had seen an example of the fragility of language as a structure of meaning. Whatever the answers might be, Sassoon and Owen were clearly grappling with a problem seen by Fussell as the war's, "utter incredibility, and thus its incommunicability in its own terms," (139).

I was struck by the apparent difference between the poets' response to the war and that of Travis and Starkie who had witnessed and experienced similar horrors and yet did not seek anything meaningful from it. Unlike Sassoon and Owen, they had not felt compelled to communicate their experience to those for whom such horrors would be inconceivable. I called this an apparent difference because the more I thought about it the more I realised the war poets and the combatants (and Sassoon and Owen were both) faced the same problem of 'incommunicability'. Veterans tend to speak of their experiences only to those who shared them and when that occurs one or two words speak volumes. Climbing out of a filthy trench and plodding, heavily-laden and sick with fear through deep mud into a storm of bullets and shrapnel could be reduced to 'a stunt', 'going over the top,' or 'jumping the

bags.’ This was not insincere or modest understatement. Such terms were the only ones available to them and thus their reliance on them became a vernacular that united them and distinguished them from those without who could not speak it. They did not have access to the range of motifs, themes and leitmotifs available to the literary scholar. The vast and complex German war machine became ‘Fritz’ just as some twenty years later it would become ‘Jerry’ and for the Germans the foe would be, ‘Tommy.’ This cryptic code was the soldiers’ verse. It worked on as many layers of meaning as the verse of Sassoon or Owen. What united poet, literary artist and soldier was the experience of pain which according to Scarry, “does not simply resist language but actively destroys it” (4). Perhaps that had something to do with Sassoon and Owen’s compulsion to return to the front and find, ironically, solace with the soldiers. No doubt they were subjected to a range of complex and corrosive forces none the least of which would have been the trauma of the war. The play impressed me and I decided to see if some of the effects I’d seen and felt could be applied to my screenplay. This investigation led me to shorten some of the scenes leading directly to the climatic battle, to foreground the confusion and explosiveness of impending action. I shortened some flashbacks, in act three, to achieve a similar effect and I realised that I had already achieved something of what I was intending by depicting them in black and white. I thought my dialogue was sparse enough and Travis and Starkie’s struggle with language already explicit. My interrogations of the sub-textual layers of my screenplay and my reflections on Not About Heroes alerted me to other meanings which could be lurking in its depths. Sure enough, I detected traces of what I suspected were gender representations

and abjection and I'll attempt now to expose these.

I'm interested in texts and the way they work so I'm aware that, as a theatrical stage, war is often a context for a particular set of representations of gendered subjects. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Army, like the society it reflected, was a bastion of patriarchy, and the battlefield, a prime site to reinforce the prevailing versions of masculinity and femininity upon which patriarchy was built. Rose Lucas has argued that representations of war "embodies the patriarchal narrative *par excellence*," (148). There is much in Men Who March Away which would define it as a patriarchal narrative. These structures include; the dominance of the masculine subject, male bonding and male power holding and exercising, the privileging of aggression and the merging of the masculine body of the soldier with that larger enclosed, self-sustaining body, the Army. The latter point is reflected in boot camp montage in act one which begins with troops marching out of step and ends with them drilling in unison, as single body. Ironically, war destroys bodies, of individual soldiers and in the Great War especially whole battalions (the symbolically sealed body) That which is not encompassed within patriarchy's structures such, as woman, home and domesticity, is coded 'other', thus opposite or feminine, and consigned to the margins of social importance. Travis, in many ways, epitomises the patriarchal warrior. He is physically strong, aggressive and totally assimilated into Army culture. His need to excel and master his domain is excessive and borders on paranoia. For all that, he fears or, at least, distances himself from threatening 'others,' in this case, Lizzie and Starkie (I'm glad he isn't around now because he'd thump me if he

knew I'd associated him with the feminine). Starkie, despite his otherness, has much of the warrior in him and performs well in combat which reminds us of the instability of rigid identities. His treatment in the hands of the Military Police, and the existence of a Military Police force, show us the extreme measures the 'system' is prepared to take to repress threats to its existence. The sight of Starkie's battered body in jail moves Travis to break his own codes of behaviour and testify on Starkie's behalf. Patriarchy rests on maintaining a rigid juxtaposition with that which it is not. Protecting its borders is a constant struggle to disavow or expel the 'other.' It is the elements of this struggle in my screenplay which alerted me to a sub-text of abjection.

Julia Kristeva's Powers of Horror, theorised abjection as that process of forming a subjective identity which entails divorcing oneself from the maternal, pre-linguistic state which precedes the symbolic, hence linguistic, patriarchal world of the speaking subject. Her theory draws heavily on Jacques Lacan's 'mirror phase' by which the subject recognises itself as a discrete entity separate from its parents. This coincides with the acquisition of language and entry to the symbolic, Lacan's Law of the Father. For Kristeva, to become the subject "I," a male child must break away from or abject all that is 'not I'. This means repudiating the child's undifferentiated relationship with its mother and keeping maternal representations at bay because they constantly threaten identity. The undifferentiated, maternal realm, is the place of our primary pleasure and pain 'drives', an emotive space she calls the 'chora,' an objectless space. Through abjection its contents must be deemed repulsive, and abjected in order for an identity to be formed. However, the abject,

although repulsive, also compels attraction, it never lets go by virtue of its being the cradle of our emotions. This isometric tension may be underscored in the attack versus counter-attack rhythm on the Western Front. The abject's association with the maternal also connotes the fluid, pre-natal space which, in turn, links abjection to bodily fluids such as blood, urine and vomit. Fluids which we expel from our bodies. Blood is a motif in Men Who March Away and is linked visually with the women who perform the nurse role. Lizzie's first physical contact with Travis is to bind his bleeding hands after the epic ride of Wild Pilgrim. This combination points to the abject. In Lacanian terms Travis' entry into the symbolic was marked by a violent confrontation with his father and he literally fled his mother to forge a new identity in the world beyond home. A satisfying identity eludes him, keeps him on the move. He is drawn to Lizzie but flees finally coming to rest in the Army. Could no man's land be interpreted as his abject? It is a liminal, repulsive space between two opposing forces which constantly prowl within and on its borders threatening to extinguish each other. It is a place of darkness and death where all meaning collapses. Travis is drawn to it, in darkness, albeit for sound tactical reasons. It becomes his personal arena, foregrounded by his battle in arena in the showgrounds, where he confronts and conquers that which would destroy him and, eventually, is destroyed.

As I said earlier, those questions arose on a critical reading of the text. They were not consciously inscribed. Perhaps the questions are more interesting than the answers. All texts are multi-layered and detecting sub-surface meanings is part of the pleasures of reading against the grain. This

screenplay is just part of the process of making a film. Actors, directors, mise en scene etc add other layers of meaning, influence audience's responses and help make visual language accommodate the incommunicable.. My aim was to tell, visually, a set of imagined experiences of characters at war. This mode of story telling had its particular challenges, especially since the protagonists were engaged as much with in a psychic battle with themselves as they were their physical foe. Susan Hayward highlighted this challenge when she asserted that, 'all wars remain remarkably difficult to 'talk' about in films-unless they are the jingoistic films we associate say, with John Wayne (Green Berets)", (409). Men Who March Away is my attempt to avoid jingoism and represent authentically the experiences of a few characters in the Great War.

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