



GAYLENE PRESTON

FILM RETROSPECTIVE

Gaylene Preston has been making feature films and documentaries with a distinctive New Zealand flavour and a strong social message for more than 30 years. Join us to celebrate her work ...

UC 
**UNIVERSITY OF
CANTERBURY**
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

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With fond memories of
Gaeme Tetley, colleague and creative
participant par excellence.

1942 – 2011

X GP

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Gaylene Preston herself, the inspiration of this homage, without whom...

Mary M. Wiles

GAYLENE PRESTON FILM RETROSPECTIVE

Sponsored by Cinema Studies and The School of Humanities at the University of Canterbury

In association with Te Papa Tongarewa, The Museum of New Zealand.

Screenings will be followed by a question and answer session with the director.

SATURDAY 22 OCTOBER

EARTHQUAKE

A documentary account of the devastating Napier earthquake of 1931.

11:00am / 44mins

Fundraiser for Christchurch earthquake recovery

Gold coin donation at the door

GETTING TO OUR PLACE

A fly-on-the-wall documentary about the lead up to the opening of Te Papa Tongarewa, the Museum of New Zealand, in 1998.

1:00pm / 72mins / free

KAI PURAKAU

A rare insight into the life of Booker Prize-winning author Keri Hulme.

3:00pm / 27mins / free

LOVELY RITA – A PAINTER'S LIFE

A documentary portrait of celebrated New Zealand artist Rita Angus.

4:00pm / 70mins / free

SUNDAY 23 OCTOBER

WAR STORIES OUR MOTHERS NEVER TOLD US

Seven New Zealand women – including the director's mother – discuss their wartime experiences.

11:00am / 94mins / free

HOME BY CHRISTMAS

A remarkable memoir of resilience, determination and love – based on the director's interviews with her father.

1:30pm / 95mins / free

'The Film Portrait of a New Zealand Storyteller: Gaylene Preston's *Home by Christmas*'

Dr Mary M. Wiles, University of Canterbury
3:30pm

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION: GAYLENE PRESTON AND GUESTS

A round table discussion with Gaylene Preston, Dr Bruce Harding, Dr Deborah Shepherd and guests, moderated by Mary M. Wiles.

4:00pm

BOOK SIGNING

Dr Deborah Shepard will sign copies of her recent book *Her Life's Work: Conversations with Five New Zealand Women*, which features Gaylene Preston.

5:00pm

MONDAY 24 OCTOBER

GAYLENE PRESTON MASTER CLASS

Join Gaylene Preston for a discussion about the film restoration and re-mastering of her acclaimed mini-series *Bread and Roses*.

1:00pm

BREAD AND ROSES

This moving epic tells the story of pioneering trade unionist, politician and feminist Sonja Davies.

2:00pm / 200mins

Fundraiser for the Sonja Davies Peace Award

Gold coin donation at the door

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INTRODUCTION

A pioneer in the world of New Zealand film, Gaylene Preston has produced a body of work over the course of four decades that draws on diverse traditions, from documentary portraiture to American film genres, from oral history to fairy tale and the fantastic.

This retrospective does not pretend to provide a comprehensive assessment of the Preston oeuvre but rather features a selection of Preston's films, focusing exclusively on documentaries and biographical drama. This idiosyncratic approach to the Preston oeuvre may reflect my own desire as an American film scholar to come to grips with what is peculiar to this Kiwi director and distinguishes her from others working within the international film community – creative use of the matrix of the family, the chronicling of distinctive people, places, and events within New Zealand, and the commitment to an indigenous and political focus. Gaylene Preston is a national treasure: it is thus entirely fitting that she be feted at the Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa.

Our programme opens with four documentaries, *Earthquake*, *Getting to Our Place*, *Kai Purakau*, and *Lovely Rita*, which prioritize the places and people of New Zealand and the events that shaped them. While *Earthquake* and *Getting to Our Place* document public events of national significance, Preston's meditative approach to the evolution of painter Rita Angus in *Lovely Rita* gives expression to her own deep interest

and early training in painting. Indeed, in those documentaries that focus on a singular individual such as *Lovely Rita*, Preston draws on the tradition of film portraiture, reshaping it to suit her own distinctive, nationalist agenda. Her work in this vein can be traced to the documentary short, *Kai Purakau*, and later evolves into epic drama form in *Bread and Roses*. These two films rework the portrait genre to showcase the lives and stories of important New Zealand women – Booker-prize winning author, Keri Hulme, and feminist politician, Sonja Davies. The next section of the programme pairs *War Stories My Mother Never Told Me* and *Home By Christmas*, two very different films that each bring to light New Zealanders' experiences of World War II. A documentary classic, *War Stories* provides consecutive portraits of seven New Zealand women, including the director's own mother, Tui. Tui's 'war story' of a secret love affair subsequently affords Preston with the opportunity to explore the differences between the female and male experience of the war in the companion work, *Home by Christmas*, a film memoir culled from recorded interviews with her father, Ed, in which he recounts his memories of active duty. The subtle disparities between female and male voices revealed within the two films form what the filmmaker calls, "a story net," that extends beyond the borders of the Preston family to the wider community of New Zealand and beyond. It is my hope that the choice to concentrate on nonfictional

and historical material in this retrospective exhibition of Preston's work will help to facilitate the interrogation of documentary form, the interplay of the personal story and the political film, and the use of film as a means to create an oral history.

Given the necessarily restrictive focus of this retrospective, I have chosen to include essays in the catalogue, specifically Deborah Shepard's 'A Decent Sense of Outrage: Gaylene Preston – Film Director,' and Bruce Harding's 'Agonistic Gender Psychodrama, *Angstlust*, and Sympathetic Insight in the Work of Gaylene Preston, *Bricolage* Cineaste and Documentarian', which address Preston's purely fictional work (notably *Mr Wrong*, *Ruby and Rata*, and *Perfect Strangers*). Shepard's essay offers a warm and lively account of her relationship with Preston and an overview of the director's life and career. Shepard not only touches upon both fiction feature films and documentaries, but also provides us with her own behind-the-scenes insight into what makes the director tick – describing Preston's experience in London, her start in film and video production, her interest in and empathy with her subjects, her inspiration, and the often intensely personal nature of her work. Harding's essay looks at Preston's work as a reflection of time and place, examining influences and intertextual references in both her fiction and documentary work. Harding explores the impact of feminism in her work, unraveling the thread of connection between fiction features, *Mr. Wrong* and *Perfect*

Strangers, and the documentary short, *Kai Purakau*. He stresses the importance of landscape in both *Kai Purakau* and *Perfect Strangers*, which were both filmed on the director's 'home turf' of the West Coast of the South Island.

Without dismissing the impact of her work in fiction, Harding concludes that Preston's real strength as a filmmaker lies in her documentaries, citing films such as *Lovely Rita*, *Kai Purakau* and her recent 'faction' (fact-fiction) feature *Home by Christmas*.

I also have included an interview with Preston that I conducted in 2010, "'A Quiet Voice in a Noisy Room': An Interview with Gaylene Preston," which complements the perspectives expressed in the two essays, providing the director's own perceptions on – the profound influence of her family, her early career path, her roots in documentary filmmaking, her relationship with other New Zealand filmmakers, her work with actors, her methods of filming, the production history of *War Stories* and *Home by Christmas*, and her future plans. The medley of different perspectives offered in this catalogue must be understood as the mere opening gambit to a larger conversation about the director's work. I am hopeful that both our retrospective exhibition and this publication will prompt further debate and study of those films that have not been shown or discussed in the context of this event.

Mary M Wiles



EARTHQUAKE (2006)



This highly compelling short feature delivers an honest and moving insight into the risks of living on the 'shaky isles' of Aotearoa—New Zealand. It was produced to record oral testimonies of survivors of the devastating magnitude 7.8 Napier earthquake of 3 February 1931. There are nine participants – including Hana Cotter, Audrey McKelvie (née Hunt), John Clayton and poet Lauris Edmond – who remember and reflect on their experiences of that tragic and terrible

period of New Zealand history. Preston is not constructing a geotechnical science-fact documentary but, rather, a powerful subjective account of subtly orchestrated and emotionally resonant recollections of, for instance, excavating corpses from the rubble of fallen buildings (Cotter), a parent photographing the total destruction of Napier (McKelvie), environmental effects on a farm (Clayton), and the perceptions of primary school children (Edmond), and five other

survivor stories. These are artfully intercut with newsreel footage and monochrome stills, and underlaid by a careful mix of reflective piano music (Plan 9) and foley sound – including the unsettling audio soundtrack of violent earth-shaking, which now makes a disturbing parallel between this and the more recent seismic upheavals experienced in Christchurch and Canterbury. **Harding**

GETTING TO OUR PLACE (1999)

Filmed between 1995 and 1998, *Getting to Our Place* is a startlingly frank fly-on-the-wall exposé of the planning process and compromises made on the often difficult journey to the opening of Te Papa Tongarewa, the Museum of New Zealand, in February 1998. From the construction site itself, to planning, staff and board meetings, Preston and her fellow director Anna Cottrell ensure their camera accesses all areas and introduces us to some of the key players on 'the way to Our Place.' This forthright, talented and dedicated group includes founding CEO Dame Cheryl Sotheran and the Te Papa Board. We also meet national historian Jock Phillips, the remarkably talented artist Cliff Whiting, chief architect Pete Bossley, and a clutch of Museum consultants, the strategy team and bureaucrats. As political, ideological, creative and commercial considerations collide, we see the sparks fly. This is an honest, gutsy and gripping 'insider's take' on the debates surrounding corporate sponsorship, a bicultural vision and the central, educative role of the Treaty Exhibition, reflecting Sotheran's desire to avoid a boring 'curricular' museum and to create a provocative visitor experience that explores 'this funny, quirky, difficult kind of nation.' We share aspects of Sotheran's angst about the depressing battles with an entrenched, cost-obsessed bureaucracy, as well as the sense of uplift of bringing to fruition Whiting's stunning marae design (which is the aesthetic and spiritual heart of Te Papa). This film celebrates that final sense of arrival and high accomplishment.

Getting to Our Place is dedicated to the memory of Leni Apisai, the sole construction worker who lost his life during the building of Te Papa.

Harding

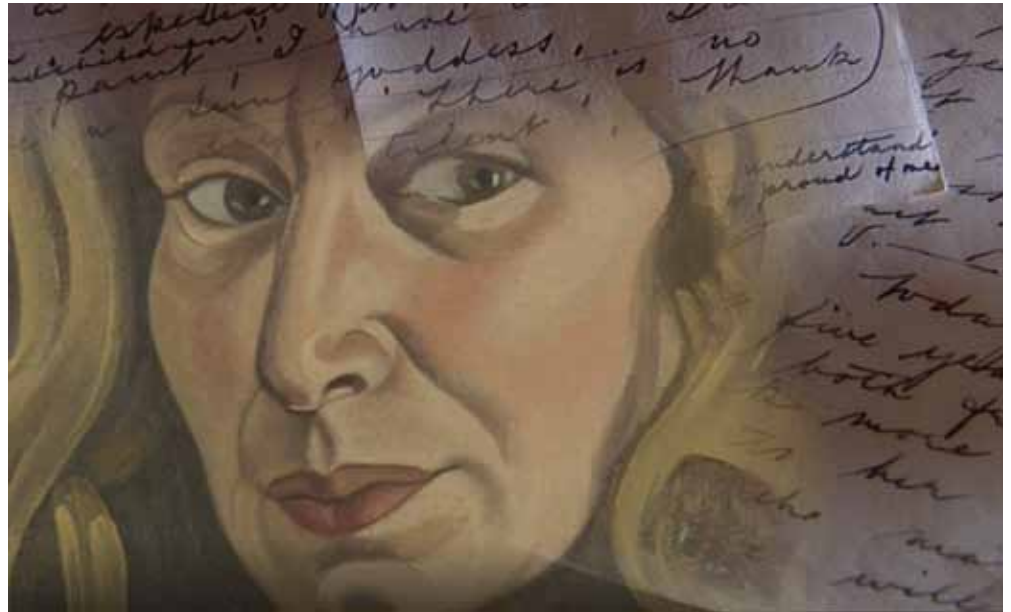


LOVELY RITA

– A PAINTER’S LIFE (2007)

Renowned New Zealand painter Rita Angus (1908–1970) lived and worked at a time when to be a full-time artist was highly unusual, especially for women. Angus’ letters to composer Douglas Lilburn and the insights of her biographer Jill Trevelyan illuminate this documentary portrait, alongside commentary from family, associates, and others – including designer Vita Cochran, publisher Christine Cole Catley, artist Jacqueline Fahey, photographer Marti Friedlander, actor Sam Neill and artist Grahame Sydney. Visual pleasures beyond Angus’ paintings further enrich the portrait: Alun Bollinger’s evocative cinematography, actress Loren Horsley’s sympathetic portrayal of the artist, and a story about the blouse Betty Curnow wore when she sat for ‘Portrait of Betty Curnow,’ in 1942.

Evans



KAI PURAKAU (1987)

In this richly evocative documentary, Gaylene Preston provides an informal, almost glancing portrayal of the reclusive whitebaiting 'dream-catcher'—writer of *Okarito* (South Westland), almost as though cinematographer Leon Narbey is tracking Keri Hulme in her native habitat.

Hulme achieved stellar fame for being the only New Zealand author to date to have received the prestigious Booker Prize, for her novel *the bone people*, in 1985. In this sensitive portrait, Preston uses her creative freedom to document the texture of everyday life during whitebaiting season at the entrancingly scenic Okarito Lagoon. She packs a huge amount of content (both emotional and visual) into this short film, and the sense of intimacy and sharing is quite startling and unexpected for a television profile.

Preston's unobtrusive direction really captures her subject, as she tracks Hulme's singular female odyssey on the South Island's West Coast and explores some of her struggles – including her account of building her own home, which overlooks the frequently tempestuous Tasman Sea. In addition, we get to hear Hulme's own extraordinarily lucid exposition of *matauranga* Māori values as they

relate to her own life and her sense of place in the world.

In keeping with the director's habitat focus, Preston talks to a clutch of unnamed 'Coasters,' one of whom, a stray whitebaiter, doesn't actually know Keri but declaims convincingly on the author's reclusive and quiet personality. Some cheeky local boys get their 15 minutes of fame. And, best of all, Hulme's beloved next-door neighbours (the Minehans) add authentic touches about their famous, but modest, friend. These sequences recall the late filmmaker Merata Mita's profound point that moving pictures allow resurrections into the world of light (*Te Ao Marama*), as the gregarious Bill Minehan has, alas, since died.

The camera impressively captures the rich trove of local flora and fauna, including a rare glimpse of the legendary kotuku (white heron) and wiggling whitebait trapped in a net, while the soundtrack is enhanced by a number of soulful *waiata* written and performed by Keri Kaa.

A final point: Keri Hulme loves this gently paced and revelatory film, which has to be its ultimate accolade.

Harding



FROM KERI HULME

I didn't know of Gaylene Preston **w a a a y** back then, 1984. My first, cherished, long gestated novel had been published by Spiral Collective #3 – and this person who I didn't know, wasn't part of that women's collective, but who had at least the credentials of being a Coaster (I'd delivered mail to Prestons during my career as a postie) had offered me \$10.00 for the film rights after she'd read the book. She did it with totally good will, thinking maybe I was an innocent 'bushie'. And – this is totally part of her character – she could be protector/mentor of such.

FAST FORWARD to 1987. Gaylene had been commissioned to make a programme for Thames TV for part of a series on six women writers (the only thing I remember about any other writer was that Barbara Taylor Bradford put in an extremely large account for her make-up. I didn't put in an account for anything).

Anyway – Gaylene, and her baby, and the nanny; and Leon Narbey and Alun Bollinger (and his son), and the lighting guy, and the gofer all arrived in Big O.

They had rented a place here, for the week.

My mother, Mary Miller, was staying with me. I've been a TV director: I was intrigued by

Gaylene's directorial style. For *Kai Purakau*, she laid out what she wanted for her script – but she was quite open to suggestions from her crew.

And for things that just – happened.

She had a very easy, laid-back, collegial style which – no surprises eh! – also happened to turn into a definite "this way" on occasion. Leon was very attuned to her directorial style, and added suggestions that I found truly intriguing ('facets of light, faces and shadows'). I knew, from my experience, that you garner the images & the sounds and then – everything happens in the editing booth.

I missed, from 'Te Kaipurakau' (I gave it that title), my mother reading quotations from letters I'd received. But – otherwise (excepting me rowing a dinghy round for no point whatsoever) enjoyed the finished film.

Gaylene & crew were abstemious – until the last night. Some locals came in to join the party. Gaylene had brought a crate plus of Lindauer. When I saw that loaded into my octagon, I went out and tucked a couple of bottles of Stolitchnaya into my deep freeze – tee dee tee dah. We had plenty of good food – but then people got stuck into the Lindauer. And I, evilly, brought in the Stolly.

Take a glass of bubbles, chase it with the syrupy shot of Stolly.

You get drunk really fast.

Gaylene was breastfeeding Chelsie still (I think). She was abstemious. Leon was poured into the car next earlier morning plaintively asking "Where are we? Where am I going?" Gaylene drove them all away. My mother sat in my big armchair, looking green. She decided to go back to sleep in my bed for a few hours, before heading over the hill to CHCH.

I knew about mixing champagne & vodka shots.

I went out whitebaiting the 7am tide.

Nahaku noa nā

Keri Hulme



BRUCE HARDING

WAR STORIES

OUR MOTHERS NEVER TOLD US (1995)



War Stories Our Mothers Never Told Us is a documentary and oral history that presents consecutive portraits of seven New Zealand women: Pamela Quill, Flo Small, Tui Preston (Gaylene Preston's mother), Jean Andrews, Rita Graham, Neva Clarke McKenna, and Mabel Waititi.

In *War Stories*, Preston's static camera transforms the role of traditional portraiture and lifts normal women – albeit with extraordinary stories – from the ranks of the everyday; they achieve momentary celebrity as contemporary versions of, antidotes to, the patriarchal regime of war heroes. Seated alone against a blank black backdrop, each woman directly addresses the unseen interviewer (Judith Fyfe) and the audience to describe, with startling candour and humour, how World

War II affected her life. The well-lit frontal composition focuses full attention on each woman's face and hands as privileged means of expression, and contemplative long takes are periodically interrupted by black-and-white family photographs, letters or documents that help illustrate their stories.

We watch as Pamela and Flo recall the exhilaration and passion of young love followed by tragic loss, grief, and social isolation. Tui's story segues to that of her husband Ed revealed in *Home by Christmas*. Her untold story of a secret love affair not only testifies to the loneliness and separation she faced in her husband's absence, but also offers a glimpse of the lure of a sexual freedom hitherto unavailable to women. In her interview, Rita confirms the war was a 'period of secrecy,'

and confesses that her husband's status as a conscientious objector was viewed as a dirty secret, a source of fear and shame for the family. Others, such as Jean, Neva, and Mabel, recount stories of female empowerment in the face of adversity and hardship: Jean shelters young American soldiers in her home in Paekakariki; Neva enlists and serves overseas in Egypt and Italy; and Mabel drives a school bus and manages the family transport business. Newsreel clips from the National Film Unit's *Weekly Review*, complemented by an officious male voice-over, create a jarring juxtaposition to the women's intimate stories, which detail the personal and domestic toll the war has taken. *War Stories Our Mothers Never Told Us* was named best film at the 1995 New Zealand Film Awards.

Wiles





HOME BY CHRISTMAS (2010)

In *Home by Christmas*, Gaylene Preston creates a film memoir culled from 15 hours of recorded interviews with her father, in which he recounts his memories of World War II. In a memorable performance that relies on both improvisation and recollection, Tony Barry – in the central role of Ed Preston – retells Ed's story before a camera that meticulously records the subtlest nuances of facial expression and gesture. Periodic close-ups recall moments from Carl Dreyer's silent classic *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), in which the unadorned face of actress Renée Jeanne Falconetti serves as a mirror to the

soul. The story Barry tells is framed as a flashback, beginning in 1940 in the West Coast town of Greymouth. Young and impulsive, Ed Preston (Martin Henderson) joins his mates as they all enlist in the New Zealand Army on their way home from rugby practice. When he tells his wife Tui (played by the director's daughter Chelsie Preston-Crayford), who is pregnant with their first child, she is understandably distressed. Ed cavalierly dismisses her concerns, envisaging 12 months away and 'a free holiday.' With the lure of an army rehabilitation loan firmly in his sights, he reassures Tui that he'll be 'home by Christmas.'



Flashbacks allow Preston to explore the intersection of history and memory. Shot in 16mm, with split frame lenses, they trace the imagined life of Tui after her husband's departure. She weathers years of loneliness, grief, and uncertainty after receiving notification that Ed is listed as missing in action. She finally succumbs when she falls in love with a handsome young photographer who awakens in her the first inklings of romantic love, offering her the warm companionship and sense of security she had lost when Ed left. While the story at home unfolds in heightened prosaic colours,

black-and-white archive images illustrate Barry's ambling narration, which chronicles an ordinary soldier's tortuous and, by turns, tedious trajectory through battlefields in the Egyptian desert, incarceration in an Italian prisoner-of-war camp and final escape into neutral Switzerland. The bittersweet reunion of Ed and Tui at the Christchurch train station and their long journey home with their young son marks the end of the wartime era – and the audience is left to imagine the difficult period of readjustment into family life that lay ahead for them both.

Wiles

BREAD AND ROSES (1993)

Conceived as a suffrage tribute to the women of New Zealand, *Bread and Roses* is based on the autobiography of social activist and feminist, Sonja Davies (1923–2005). The film was originally made as a four-part television series, but it also received a cinema release. It traces Davies' personal and professional evolution, focusing on those formative moments that shaped the political awareness of the emergent activist.

Davies takes her title 'Bread and Roses' from the poem by James Oppenheim. Penned to celebrate the nascent American women's rights movement, the slogan was adopted by striking textile mill workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1912, who walked out in protest against pay cuts brought about by the reduction in maximum working hours for women and minors. Many of the striking women workers reportedly carried banners proclaiming, 'We want bread and roses too!'

With a screenplay written by Gaylene Preston and the late Graeme Tetley, this adaptation of *Bread and Roses* focuses not only on Davies' struggles, but also reflects the social and political history of New Zealand at the time. It moves swiftly through Davies' early years – her troubled childhood (born out of wedlock, Davies spent the first seven years of her life with her doting grandmother, until moving in with her mother and a stepfather with whom she was never reconciled), an early marriage and divorce, her nursing training, illegitimate child, and long battle with tuberculosis – and the film chronicles the events that led to her political activism. Davies first came to public attention in 1955 as a ringleader of a protest sit-in on a rural railway line threatened with closure. The film ends at the beginning of her political life, with her election onto the Nelson Hospital Board in 1956.

Wiles



FROM EDITOR PAUL SUTORIUS

I first worked with Gaylene on *Ruby and Rata* and found out very quickly what an amazingly talented person she was. Not only talented, but also extraordinarily generous. An example of this was when I asked her if I could rearrange the rough cut of the film as I thought it might work better my way. She allowed me about four days of editing time (no computers then!) to do so. When we looked at it we decided that no, it wasn't better, so I changed it back, except for the first scene. Since then we have worked on numerous films together and every time it just gets more and more enriching. The heart that she brings to her films and the performances that she allows her actors to give is amazing. She brings out the best in me too, I believe, and she also allows me to enter her loving family for which I am forever grateful.



‘A Gentle Voice in a Noisy Room’

– AN INTERVIEW WITH
NEW ZEALAND FILMMAKER
GAYLENE PRESTON

Mary M. Wiles
Cinema Studies,
University of Canterbury

This interview first appeared in online journal *Senses of Cinema*, Issue 56, October 2010. Reprinted with permission.

This interview was conducted with Gaylene Preston at her home in Wellington, which also serves as her production studio. As Preston led me back towards the kitchen, obviously the central gathering place in her modest home, I was struck immediately by the array of black and white family photos lining the walls of the hall corridor, showcasing family members who have become vivid, memorable characters familiar to film audiences around the world. The bedroom had been converted into an editing suite, the front living room into an office where papers and documents lay unopened. I had caught Preston in transit; she had just returned home from the 2010 Cannes Film Festival, where her recently released film *Home by Christmas* (2010) had been screened as part of a selection of Antipodean films. While abroad, she had learned of the unexpected death of her long-time friend and collaborator, respected Māori filmmaker Merata Mita, with whom she had worked on the landmark documentary *Patu!* (1983). Preston was en route to the Sydney International Film Festival the next morning. At Sydney’s State Cinema, *Home by Christmas* was voted third most popular film in the Audience Award category. Fifteen years earlier at this same Festival, her documentary *War Stories Our Mothers Never Told Us* (1995) – which in many respects can be considered a companion work to *Home by Christmas* – had not only been voted the Most Popular Film, but also Best Documentary.

ABROAD AND AT HOME

Can you describe how your interest in filmmaking evolved; where and when you first decided to become a filmmaker; your early experiences as a woman forging a film career within New Zealand?

I’ll summarise for you. I studied painting at Ilam School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury ...

Do you continue your painting at all today?

No, I do a bit of drawing occasionally. I studied for three years. I did not graduate. In fact, I would be one of the better known ‘failures’ from the Art School. I took the first job available in Christchurch

in 1969 – early 1969 – and I got a job at Calvary Psychiatric Day Hospital. I found myself in a very progressive environment at that little day hospital. I was a nursing assistant and because I had a background in drama and the visual arts, and it was the open minded place it was – nine months later when I had to fill in ‘Occupation’ on my passport, I wrote ‘Art Therapist,’ a term I thought I had made up, but when I got to Europe I found that it was a very well established discipline.

Anyway, when I got to Cambridge in the UK, the first job that I got was as an assistant librarian at Fulbourn Psychiatric Hospital and I sort of found my community there. Part of the assistant librarian’s job was to direct the hospital Christmas pantomime every year. Using that as a platform, over three years with a small multidisciplinary group, I managed to establish drama therapy across the hospital, and we also managed to lobby to get an art therapist position set up.

So we were doing improvisational drama therapy, and we could see how useful it was for institutionalised patients. They thought they were getting ready to perform a play. A play institutionalises the performance. You have to learn your lines, and you have to learn your moves, and you repeat them over and over. The problem these patients had was that every day was the same as the day before, and every week was the same as the week before, so we were trying to de-institutionalise them. All over Britain hospitals were being closed down. These institutionalised patients were on the brink of being shut out and shunted off to bed sitters without real support. Anything that could be done to help them reclaim their sense of spontaneity was crucial. Anyway, I had a bunch of mates – I was in a small experimental theatre group in Cambridge called Whole Earth. We were a theatre group that was political. We were interested in forging a fusion of acid rock and Brecht, and we were constantly rehearsing; we did very few actual performances.

Anyway my Whole Earth mates, they came out to the hospital, and one of them had an 8mm camera, so she said, ‘Oh yeah, we’ll make them a film. A film is great. Every take is fresh.’ And then my friend who was shooting the film eloped, and I got left with a little pile of film cans on the dining room table when I came in one night. I had to solve the

problem of making a film out of the material we had shot so far, so that we could screen it to the patient group. And I didn’t even know that you cut it up – you know – you could take the bad bits out and cello tape together the best bits. So I made this silent film. Then we needed to make a sound track. I borrowed a tape recorder that was probably about as big as this half of the table. It was a big green thing. I thought it was fantastic because it had two tracks. Two separate tracks! And if you pushed the tape recorder and projector buttons at around about the same time, you could play the film, and it nearly achieved a weird synch. So my first films were made as silent movies with a sound track added, because once I made that film I then moved to London, and I started working in drama with West Indian kids at Brixton College of Further Education. I started making films with deaf kids. It was fantastic for them to be able to actually say a line of dialogue because you can record each word one at a time and then cut it together and make it a sentence. So anyway, my interest in film grew out of doing that community therapy based work.

Were you at all interested at that time about what was going on in the film world? It must have been a very vibrant time in Europe with people working in the post-New Wave period.

It was – it was amazing. I was part of the London Women’s Film Group. We met every Wednesday in the Women’s House in Earl Street, and there were woman in that film group who had jobs in the industry. They just seemed to me to be really upset most of the time. I gradually realised that if I stayed in the UK, then chipping away at the edifice was pretty well what I was going to get to be doing. Most of the people that I was involved with in London outside my actual job were people who were campaigning for sexual politics and progressive politics, often within the large monolithic unions because, you know, the left was very hidebound in those days in Britain. I pricked up my ears when I got messages from home because there seemed to be more possibilities. I heard about this bus that was going around doing concerts for kids using film and performance. So, though I was living happily in Britain, I started to get a bit homesick. Around this time, my friends in London took me to see *This is New Zealand* – the now quite famous three-screen

installation by the NZ National Film Unit. The way that they took me to see it was unusual. They said, 'Right, we're taking you on a magical mystery tour for your birthday, so what time are you home from work?' And I said, 'Oh, I'll be home at 4 o'clock.' 'Great.' And I walked in at about half past four, and suddenly they grabbed me, blindfolded me, shoved me into the car with a joint in my hand, and off we went. We drove for 20 minutes. They guided me across big wide streets blindfolded, and they're not worrying too much about me because we are now late. We are having to nearly run with me, still with the blindfold on, and we walk into what I think is a big ferry building. It sounds like a big building. Then they take the blindfold off, and I am standing with my nose just about one inch in front of these two black vinyl doors, and on the doors is a big sign white-on-black that says, 'This is New Zealand.' And I pushed open the doors and I walked into the dark where a film was just beginning – it was just that moment after the lights have gone down, and the film hasn't started yet. We hustled into front row seats, sat down, and up it came – this three-screen blast. The Southern Alps, we are flying over Aoraki, and I just thought, 'Oh, I have to go home. They can make films there!' That film really brought me home, which was not the result my friends were looking for.

It did the opposite.

Yeah, it did the opposite. So with difficulty, I left my lovely life in London where I had it pretty good; like I had three days a week well paid part-time down at the College of Further Education, and four days a week off to do whatever I liked. I had a badge that said 'Einstein was a Part Timer.' I mean it was a very creative time for me, all of that period. Anyway, I came home.

Was the transition hard?

Very. I don't actually think that I really, really, really arrived home until *Perfect Strangers* (2003).

Maybe you identified with your father to some degree – I mean the person that went away and then came back and had to face a great deal of adjustment.

Well, I don't know ... I think the way that my father dealt with it was actually the opposite to me. He

just came home from the war and went, 'I'm never going back there again' – and never did. He wasn't going one millimetre out of New Zealand – he would eventually go to Australia much later in his old age. He didn't talk about it but he stayed home. Whereas for me, ever since I came back in 1977 I've always had to head out on a regular basis. In a funny way when I finish a film, I need to still go and sort of set my compass – I set my compass over there in the Northern Hemisphere.

Different from other filmmakers like Jane Campion though, you've chosen to stay here in New Zealand. I think you said at one time it's important to make films for New Zealanders because no one else will do it if you don't.

That's right.

So did you ever cross paths with Campion?

Only at parties. See, as I arrived in New Zealand, Jane left.

So, you were like ships crossing in the night, and she never really came back to live.

Well, she is back here occasionally – down south, but there has not been a conversation there. I would have liked there to have been, I like conversations with other directors, but we have never really been in the same place at the same time.

It would seem to me that New Zealand offers a kind of safe haven in many ways for voices like yours, so that you're not just completely subsumed or overwhelmed by everything else that's going on around you.

Yeah, because you need a bit of quiet to hear the inner voice. I think if you were summing up my films you could say that they are quiet – they don't easily fit a sort of political filmmaker profile. I think that they've got really strong politics in them, but they've also got ... there's an interest in fantasy and whimsy that sits around the ideas. I think I've got a gentle voice, and the film room is noisy ...

Did you become, when you came back to New Zealand, less prone to identify with movements like the feminist movement or other film movements, or did you still feel connected to certain aesthetic

traditions? It seems like in Britain you had this period where you were identified with certain movements and you enjoyed that collective spirit – did you find yourself more isolated here?

No, I found myself very involved, because here was a new industry emerging and there was this maverick urgency. But there was also a very sophisticated discussion going on, particularly among those of us who were making documentaries. There was a bunch of people in Wellington during 1978/79/80, they came and went, but there was a core group who were having an intense conversation about what film was for, and what change could be achieved using film – which side was the camera on and what were the ethics of tax payer funded filmmaking. That's how *Patu!* happened. During the Springbok Tour of 1981. That was an extraordinary piece of collective filmmaking – *Patu!*. We all went out; we stole film stock, we shot extremely dangerous situations, we ...

Were you part of the cinematographic crew on *Patu!*?

My credit on *Patu!* is 'middle New Zealand co-ordinator,' – it's an in-joke. Basically the collective stood alongside Merata, and we made sure that all of the independently shot footage went in one direction – it all went to Merata to make a feature film. One film for the cinema, because we saw that as the liberating space, not television which was pretty locked up here. There was a real feeling that independent filmmakers – it flowed out of Pacific Films to a degree – that the independents were the filmmakers of the people; we reflected local concerns and I felt like I was part of a small community of activist filmmakers, progressive thinking people, who were politically sophisticated – many of them Māori – most of them gone now.

Unlike the UK, the politics in New Zealand suited me because it's little. There's not enough of us to form factions. Actually, the 1981 Springbok Tour protests were a really good example of that. On one end of the spectrum you had the churches marching, you know, ladies from Thorndon, and on another end of the spectrum you had the gangs getting involved. There was a sometimes very fraught conversation going on between all of them; but somehow these factions were able to agree to disagree on fairly basic things and take action on



what they did agree on. And that was about racism in sport. On the 1st of May 1981, more than 300,000 people marched to ask the Government to stop that tour. Now in a country of just over three million people, at the time, that amounts to around 10 per cent of the population hitting the road across the country to state, really clearly, a heartfelt view. I always think that for every person who is actually on the street in any protest, there are two or three that aren't there but support the cause, so it was an overwhelming phenomenon. Did the Government stop it? No. So we stopped protesting and picked up cameras and stood with the anti-racist movement often in the middle of the line, staring down the police batons rolling film we had begged, borrowed, or stolen.

I didn't make *Patu!* – Merata did – but I certainly played a part, along with Martyn Sanderson, Waka Attewell and Vanguard Films and others, recording that extraordinary moment from a very different point of view from the other footage that was shot during the tour. We didn't shoot from on top of buildings; we shot down among the protesters, and all of that footage was put in one place, which was with the independent un-vetted voice of a Māori woman filmmaker who was able to go away – pretty well into hiding – and make her film with total creative control. We decided that, and we stuck to it. That remains an extraordinary thing to me, because filmmakers get very attached to their footage. Especially if they have the raw stock!



I agree. Do you find that that spirit, that kind of community spirit and political spirit, is still alive today in New Zealand?

I think among documentary filmmakers most certainly.

Obviously what you're pointing to is a strong tradition of women activists and filmmakers who have enjoyed long, very prolific and successful careers. Merata, of course, serving as the mother figure, in many respects, of that particular documentary tradition.

You see, that tradition of documentary filmmaking is deeply rooted in independent work. If you look at the films of Barry Barclay, if you look at the way Vanguard Films have just carried on making their movies, that's the old guard. And I have played my part one way or another. I was making films that reflected my concerns. In *All The Way Up There* (1978), about a disabled 21-year-old who climbs Mt Ruapehu with Graham Dingle, the centre of that movie is the interview with Bruce Burgess whose disability is quite extreme aphasia, which has a huge impact on his speech. It takes him a while to say what he has to say, and we had to subtitle it. The commissioning editor at TVNZ said, 'Whatever

you do, don't interview him. Go away and get some good wallpaper footage, and then put a commentary over it.'

But making a film where the audience are brought to that interview and feel able to sit comfortably and wait to hear what he has to say, no matter how laborious, that's the reason for making that film. It's all about changing attitudes.

I feel like *Titless Wonders* (2001) continues in that spirit, where again you're focusing on women who have been invisible, whose scars, whose experiences have been not spoken about publicly.

That's an overriding interest. When I came back from the UK, I felt that our kids, our teenagers, were extremely invisible. I came back to New Zealand and felt like everybody was asleep; that there was this big wave of unemployment about to hit, and nobody was prepared for it, least of all the kids who were going to be the ones that wore it, which was exactly what happened. *Learning Fast* (1980) was a way of revealing that process. That took two years to make. So I suppose by choosing the less obvious political subjects, but choosing to focus on the personal political, that's where my work sits, always has, you know, all of it. Political filmmaking for me is to make consciousness-raising films that screen in prime time or at the movies. They're actually masquerading, if you like, as mainstream populist movies. All of my work's been around that idea. So today we've got *Home by Christmas* having done a million bucks at the movies, and actually, it's an anti-war film, masquerading as a nice old codger entertaining you. But actually, it's got a very clear – I mean I'm reflecting my father's opinion – but it's got a very clear anti-war theme.

I was thinking of how you grew up – obviously you went abroad, and this had a great deal to do with shaping you professionally and personally. But really, you came from a typical Kiwi family with typical Kiwi parents. Did they play any role in forming you as an artist? Did they give you that impetus to speak your mind or to have a unique personal vision? It seems like a lot of your films are generated from within this family.

Yeah, which is interesting, isn't it? I grew up in a participatory culture. First of all in Greymouth and

then in Napier, and in both of those places, like most little towns in the 50's in New Zealand ... you know, everybody would say, 'Oh, we made our own fun. We entertained ourselves.' So if you could sing or dance or were the slightest bit precocious, you kind of got pushed on stage. So that meant I was in the Sunday School concert at the age of three and from then on I was an entertainer. My mother, who was very shy, was quite appalled at this, but supported me. And as far as the arts are concerned, my generation got fast-tracked – we got an art based, play based education – big time. When we walked into our primary schools, we were handed a big fat paint brush into our chubby little mits and confronted with big easels and paint pots, and there was a sandpit and this scary lady who played the piano, and we all had to learn to folk dance and sing harmonies. A whole generation of us, who were working class kids got put through to university – educated far beyond our parents' wildest dreams – for free. I'm a part of that, and through that time I found not a single New Zealand story on our bookcase at home.

But all this education became a source of conflict eventually, because I got interested in a much larger world and wanted to leave home to go to art school. I was kicking over the traces wearing black tights and big jerseys and black eyeliner and white lipstick – that wasn't what I was supposed to be educated for. I was meant to be wearing a white cardigan and teaching piano part-time while working in a bank waiting to get married. Well, that was not going to happen. We, my generation of women, have lived way beyond our parents' expectations. When I made my first independent film, *All the Way Up There*, my father and mother came to a screening. At the next family gathering my father took me aside – he'd realised that I was going to be a filmmaker without steady work, standing outside the institutions – he worked it out, which is quite clever for a milkman from Napier. Anyway, he said, 'Look love, I'm retiring next year. I'm 75 and I'll be retiring, and that milk run of mine, that's the best milk run in Napier; you can do it in three hours a day and then you've got the rest of the day for yourself. Why don't you have the milk run? You would have steady money coming in every week! You could see how he had thought about it. So I make my first movie, and my father offers me his milk run. So there is how it was supported – how the arts were supported.

HOME BY CHRISTMAS: RECLAIMING THE COMMUNAL MEMORY

As we are on the subject of support for the arts, could I ask how you acquired funding for *Home by Christmas*?

With great difficulty over a very long period of time. I don't think that there's any such thing as an easy film to fund, I don't think that there ever was, but it is especially not the case now. I produced, directed and wrote *Home by Christmas*. I didn't produce it alone; I have two producing partners – Nigel Hutchinson, who came on board after a year or so, and Sue Rogers, who stepped up to the plate a year or two after that. I'll just go through the process of how it got made because you can't really separate out financing as a separate issue from the rest of the evolution of the film – well, I can't because I was involved with it all.

A friend of mine, Nigel Hutchinson said to me, 'You have to come and be our artist in residence for a week' – his place was a completely isolated little cottage on a peninsula in the Marlborough Sounds. So I went there to have a think and clear my head after having made *Perfect Strangers*. That was when I realised that the war story that my father had told me was still sitting there in my computer; a series of interviews that had been transcribed, with scenes that I had worked on over the years. And I thought, well, that would be a good project for me. I like to just follow my nose you know, follow what interests me. Choosing a project means you're going to live with it for a long time. So anyway, I started – I could see how making a work that was based on oral history, like closely based on oral history that included dramatic interventions, would be a really interesting form for me to explore as a filmmaker. So then I wrote a script, by taking the transcriptions and cutting them down. I wrote some of his story into imagined dramatic scenes, and sometimes I let him just tell the story. I decided to do that because the way he told the story was about as interesting to me as what he was describing. And also, it's what he doesn't tell that really has huge reverberations. So I always knew that the interview needed to sit in the middle of the story. You've got choices at that point; you can say, 'Well, I'll dramatise the whole thing,'

but I never wanted to do that. I wanted to have the interview in the centre.

So I wrote a script and put that into the Film Commission, and they gave me some development money. In that development proposal I mentioned that I felt that it was not going to be possible just to develop the script in the usual way, by writing and rewriting and getting assessments, because I had to know whether a central reconstructed interview was going to work. So with this tiny amount of development money, I cast Tony Barry to play my father. Tony is an actor whose work was not unknown to me, but I didn't know him particularly well. Anyway, it was my sister who said, 'Tony's well worth looking at – he's awfully like Dad.' So I went over to Sydney and gave Tony the script; he loved it. The next task was to get Tony over here to see if we could pull off a reconstructed interview, because if you don't believe that interviewee in *Home by Christmas*, you haven't got a film.

That's right, but you never doubt it – I never did. How did you work with him to ensure that he would have that authenticity?

I thought I would just muck around with my PD150 – my little Sony camera. Alun Bollinger had read the script and really liked it, so the idea was that Alun and I would just muck around here in this house with Tony being Ed [Preston's father]. And then it somehow grew. Some people round the corner had some Thomson Viper cameras, and once they knew Alun was coming to town, they wanted him to try out these new-fangled cameras; to run those cameras you kind of needed a crew, and the next thing, we had a crew.

Did you shoot the interviews here in the house?

Yeah. We came to shoot the interviews here in the house because I could control the location. If anything we shot worked, it could supposedly be in the final film. I could do subsequent shoots in the same location – my home. If we had been developing, financing, shooting in the way that you normally do, we wouldn't have been shooting in my home. It's not very convenient when you're trying to work, to do it at home – to have your house full of film crew. However, it worked really well. I stepped in to work with Tony one-to-one because we certainly didn't have money to pay for another actor

to come in and play me. If I had been making the film the usual way I would have cast an actor to be me, a younger actor. When I interviewed my father I was 40, and my father was 80. When I interviewed Tony in the film he was 67, and I was 60.

I must say, in the film, it doesn't really come across that way.

No, no, it doesn't does it. Mind you, we did our best to make sure it didn't. But that decision made the difference with the interview because I could make Tony really talk to me, I could catch his eye and direct him as he was going – the way a good documentary interviewer does. So a lot of the decisions that were made, were made because it was a muck about, where we were just trying to find out how we could make this thing work. Actually, I'm sure that if I had had another actor it would have just been too hard. It would have been just about impossible.

Did he work from the transcripts of the tapes that your father did? Obviously you cut and edited the tapes to make a kind of scripted transcript.

Yes.

But did he work verbatim from that transcript or did he improvise at all along the way?

We both improvised, but it's a strange kind of improvisation because you're not allowed to make it up; you have to improvise using what you've heard. I wouldn't let him learn the words. It's a very interesting medium; once you take an interview out of a tape into a transcript, then edit the transcript and then go back to editing the original sound tape, it's amazing how much you've edited out from the sound tape – just in little wee ways of saying, 'the' instead of 'a' or, you know, just changing things slightly. It was very interesting going back and doing a new sound edit and those sound edited tapes were what was used for Tony. So he was given those to listen to as he biked around Sydney. One of the hardest things was to get them onto a cassette tape because he had a Walkman; he's the last person alive with a Walkman! Fortunately he was really busy, and he didn't learn any lines. I had told him not to learn them. But actors will always want to learn the lines because that's what actors do. They learn the words.

It's hard to believe when you're watching him on film that he's actually speaking to some degree a script, or speaking from the recorded transcript. It's so natural that you never get a sense of that at all.

Well, that's what we had to achieve. We had to work really hard to get to a really relaxed place where we could achieve that. When I'm making a documentary I'm always trying to get the person to get off the tape recorder version in their memory – the tape recorder memory is not pure memory, it's a retelling of how the story is usually told. There is remembering what happened, then there is remembering how to tell the story. I prefer the former. It makes more compelling cinema storytelling for one thing, but also, it's more pure and immediate. Human memory is quite complex. The soldiers they would go out into battle, something horrendous would happen; they would end up back in the bar, having a beer or two, and their only chance of being able to talk about the horrendous stuff was to find a way to tell it that had a punchline, that made everybody laugh. So the well-told war story always has a horribly funny punchline. It's a performance – right? But when I make a documentary, I'm wanting to get past mere performance of storytelling into something more immediate, truthful, compelling. I'm always digging to try and punch a hole in the tape recording of how the story is usually told, to pass through that layer of memory into moments that might suddenly illuminate the pure memory. I've probably spent years of my life thinking very specifically about interview and very specifically about interview on film and what it really ought to be. Because if you want to make a film it's got to be cinematic, and the great pieces of cinema have brilliant performances in the centre of them, and what is a brilliant performance? From an actor, a brilliant performance is where there doesn't seem to be any glass between the performance and the screen – immediacy is everything.

Actually I've ended up with a very specific niche interest that comes from long exploration of what memory is. Once you do any work in oral history, you know that what this person says happened and what that person says happened are so mutually exclusive sometimes – you couldn't believe that they were in the same room at the same time, but they're both speaking their truth. What is interesting about

oral history is you get all the truths, and you add three and four and five and six people, and you start to get a story net. You start to see how the situation might have been in the round. I mean, there's no doubt it's a very different story of a battle if you're stuck out the back sending messages to the colonel, or if you're digging a hole and burying dead people under fire. And because of the way that the old soldiers came together around the bar at the RSA upon their return, they homogenised their versions to all sort of fit a story that was convenient to tell in the 50's, and of course, stories are always quite quickly made convenient to tell, but it's a strange kind of edit of the reality of the thing over time. So I was always just trying to dig to get beyond that and into different more original territory.

It's interesting what you've just said about different perspectives; it seems like your mother's version of her 'war story' in *War Stories Our Mothers Never Told Us* (1995) is a very different recounting?

Totally – couldn't be more different, could it – my point entirely. Tui [Preston's mother] – she's a completely different kind of storyteller to my father anyway. I couldn't have chosen two more different storytellers really. My father is very matter of fact. Supposing they are both telling a story about going down to the dairy. My father might say, 'Oh well, you know, we had to take this dairy. It was on a hill, and the Germans had it. We wanted it, so we had to take this dairy, and we did. And after it exploded, and we'd all settled down a bit, I said to Dinghy Taif ...' You know, I mean, it's all like that. Unembellished. My mother is a far more conflicted personality. She might tell it this way, 'Well, I knew that nice girls did not go down to the dairy. It just wasn't done in those days, and I knew that I shouldn't go down to the dairy, but this one day, well one thing led to another, and I went to the dairy. And I knew I shouldn't have, but then of course, well ...' See, completely different – totally different. One very elliptical storytelling full of internal disharmony and indecision, and one terribly matter-of-fact about awfully big things.

I think my father's 'war story' was a very sly war story – political in terms of the statement he had to make about war in general and very clear in terms of the particulars of his war, told in a very generous 'one of the boys' way. My father's war story is not the one that gets told in the official versions.

I don't think that your mother's got told either until you told it or until you let her have the opportunity to tell it – both very unique.

But the reason I told them ... the reason I thought they were important was because in New Zealand, because we have such huge budgetary restrictions – you know, we're a small territory – so the amount of movies where we are able to put our version of the war or our version of any damn historical thing up there is actually really limited. So the reason that I wanted to tell *Home by Christmas* was to put something into the film catalogue that reflected an ordinary soldier's version of the war. It wasn't the English version or the American version – that's our version. It's not the Australian version; it's our version – that one. And not only that, but it's from a man who truly, truly is an anti-hero; he's otherwise invisible. It's a story of a man who went away in a flush of excitement, got over there, didn't like it and unashamedly tells you about all the things he didn't like. And even when he escapes, he does it by accident, not because he's trying to get back to his army to fight on, but actually because he *could*. He took the opportunity. Why? Because he wanted to get the hell out of it and go home to his wife and kid. So, there's no heroism in my father's story as he tells it – none. You can't find nobility in there. The only nobility you have is of an ordinary man doing what he could to try and avoid being a part of this terrible thing he had got himself into. Now that's usually described as being a coward, but the way he tells it without artifice means that he takes the audience with him. So again, I'm just consciousness-raising. I think the film's claiming back some territory in the communal memory actually.

It's an oral history. I don't know if you've ever heard about the African griot, who is the person in the culture endowed with multiple functions – as a dancer, a storyteller, a performer. But in ancient tradition he was the storehouse of the oral tradition of the community. This was before there was writing and written records. So the griot's performance became part of the recounting of history, and this is how history was passed down.

Oh, well, I'm just one of those.

Or a griotte, in your case ... Could you comment on the structure of the film and the use of film stock and colour to identify the various narrative strands?

It's a collage, a patchwork quilt of a film. Because of the way the Viper walked in the door, the interview was shot on HD, which gives it a kind of digital 80's feel; it's flatter; it's beige; it lacks mood, but it feels authentic. The flashbacks are all on 16mm, shot on split focus lenses. Split focus lenses work on a mirror system, which means as you're moving the camera or even if you're not moving the camera, you can move the focus in the frame. Similar to how your memory works, you have a frame, and you can move the focus in it in your head. So that's used quite often in the flashback story. Once you're in 1942, you're with the split focus and the heightened colour. We worked most of the palate of the film from my mother's housecoat – the floral dress you see worn in the first part of the film.

The red, white and blue seems to come up quite a bit, was that intentional on your part?

Well, that wasn't the case in my head at all, but the way we decided to treat the archive was that we would slightly colourise aspects, just like you have a black and white photograph, and then you hand tint it. So the archive – each shot is treated as its own postcard. We didn't match grade the archive footage to be the same through the film. It's actually very different – each shot. And of course you are either adding red or you're adding blue – adding yellow is a bit harder. If you add yellow you just get brown, so that's how the red, white and blue ...

WAR STORIES AND HOME BY CHRISTMAS: GAYLENE'S 'WAR AND PEACE'

I see and, of course, you use your own home photos too. All those photographs, were they passed to you by your mother and father?

Mm'mm well see, probably the making of those films – let's talk about *War Stories* and *Home by Christmas* together for a minute. When I was little – growing up, the house had a bay window along the side, and I could get down between the couch and the window, and there was a chocolate box and in the chocolate box were all these black and

white photos, plus negatives, and I wasn't allowed to touch those photos, you know, sticky fingers. But I would hide in that secret spot and look at those photos. I remember one particular day, there was music on the radio, and the fire was burning, and my nana sitting by the fire and I was behind the couch looking at these photos, but I couldn't ask anybody anything about who was in them because I wasn't supposed to have them. So I must have spent a bit of time trying to make connections with them, making up stories – you know – in my imagination how little kids do that? It's a very vivid memory.

I did the same thing.

Did you? Maybe it was common? So you see it all comes from there, combined with – I had really bad eyesight. I don't know why I put that in the past tense because my eyesight is still not good, but I was really into drawing and colouring in, which I would do on the floor and not get noticed. I loved it when my mother's friends from next door came over for morning tea, which they did quite regularly. They were in and out of one another's houses, those women. And every now and then, they would talk about the war – with me under the table – ears flapping, but they would forget I was there. So I would hear – I can't remember specific stories, but I'd hear very specific pain shared, you know what it's like with little kids. They pick up the feeling without understanding the details. So from an early age I knew that my mother's time during the war was difficult and that my father's was not. Then as I grew up I came to realise that in the other households of school friends of mine, it was the other way around. Their dad was usually the one that had the problem. Whereas, my father wasn't at all like that. He was just this anchor in the household, he held it together for everybody. So making a documentary about women's experiences in World War II was kind of obvious to me, and I was always really interested in the rugby club aspect of my father's trip away – the rollicking yarn aspect. And of course my mother was the sort of person who had her own internal pain anyway – brought up with an alcoholic father, so she was always going to be a bit easy to rattle emotionally.

Was her story that she revealed on film, was it a surprise for you or did you suspect as much?

Well, I was digging – I had interviewed my father before that, before he died.

So her concerns weren't the same as his ...

He's being protective of her – he knows he's dying and no matter how far I want to dig, there's going to be a beginning, a middle and an end, and it's going to be dictated by him and that's pretty well how it worked – very generous, very warm, very clear – right; that was him in every aspect of his life. So it wasn't until after he died that Tui told her story in *War Stories Our Mothers Never Told Us*.

And in fact, the title is significant; pointing to the fact that she hadn't ever told you?

Well, I think I must have got it by osmosis, but certainly her sitting there telling wasn't something that happened until there was a camera on it. My father died in 1992. *Ruby and Rata* (1990) had just left the cinemas, and I interviewed Ed over Christmas–New Year 1991, and Tui looked after Chelsie who was three. It was during this period, Tui said – that song ['As Time Goes By'] from *Casablanca* came on the radio – and she said, 'Oh, that was a very special song for me during the war.' And I thought, oh, that's interesting. She said, 'Yes, oh, with your father and I.' And I thought, that's funny, *Casablanca* didn't come out till 1943. I understood that she was telling me something truthful. I had recorded 10 tapes with my father – that's 15 hours of tape. My father then goes into remission and refuses to mention it ever again. So there's no way that I'd ever be able to film him. I mean we went off to the Sydney Film Festival screening of *Ruby and Rata*, and I had three or four days with my father, just him and me in Sydney. It was like he hadn't told me anything about the war – it never happened, off the radar – in only the way that he could do. I think you can probably understand how he did it, with lots of jokes and evasions.

Do you suspect that he knew about your mother's liaison during the war or ...

I have no idea. She said that they never talked about it. But I don't know, they could have both known.

There are places where you can't go.

Especially a daughter who is also a filmmaker! In any case, everybody tells their version. They're not lying, they're just telling you their version. So I asked Judith Fyfe who, with Hugo Manson, had set up the New Zealand Oral History Centre ten years earlier. I said to Judith, 'Could I pay you a pathetic amount of money, and would you go and interview my mother because I think that there's a story there?' And she said, 'No, certainly not, that's exactly what we don't do.' Anyway, I got talking to her about stories of women and World War II and things that I thought were important gaps that were emerging in the communal history and that we should get cracking before they all left us. Judith did go out and interview Tui, and I said, 'What did she say, what did she say?' 'You'll have to listen to the tape, and you've got to get her permission to listen to it.' 'Fair enough.' And you know what? I never did. I never listened.

Really!

And then two years later Judith and I got cracking, and we raised money to make an oral history of women in World War II. We worked with wonderful interviewers like Alison Parr and Jane Tolerton and Susan Folkes – brilliant interviewers and others. And we trained up Queenie Rikiana Hyland with other Māori interviewers and said, 'Go and interview your aunts. We are not talking to only service women. We want the stories from ordinary women – just go and interview your aunty! 'You were alive during World War II. What happened to you?' We had money to do 20 interviews, and we got 23 out of that, and we raised another lot. I think in the end we'd got 60 or 70 interviews – and I think we got 12 or more in te reo Māori.

Anyway, impetus was building. The Museum [National Museum and Art Gallery in Wellington] wanted to use some of our interviews for an exhibition. We had Geoff Walker of Penguin Books wanting to make a book. Could I get a film made? No. We kept going to the Film Commission and getting booted out the door and told it wasn't cinema, it was television, and I mean you can forgive them for that I suppose – it's seven old ladies talking about the war with a bit of archival footage thrown in. Anyway, I had some film stock that I had bought off Kodak on a special deal; so after two years of trying, I just got a camera and did it. Got

started the traditional way that most New Zealand documentaries get made, by picking up a camera and just shooting. Well it was Alun who shot them. With that footage from the first five subjects it was possible to raise some money for a film because it was clear they were amazing interviews and that they would work as cinema. When they asked what would make it cinema, I would say, 'Because a filmmaker's going to make it and it's going to have a Dolby stereo sound track.' Quite arrogant. But I held to the idea that in New Zealand it is cinema that remains the liberating social space.

New Zealand television has been such a tragedy in that it has not been consistent. There hasn't been any consistent public service space in the television area, and every time there's a new Government they completely rejig all television. It's been a very expensive missed opportunity, culturally speaking, for the New Zealand audience. So, therefore, with a completely commercialised television network and a teeny, tiny amount of New Zealand films being made every year, the audience is so starved that if you actually give them a film that reflects any kind of truth in terms of the world they inhabit, they're so grateful they gallop into the theatres.

Well, I guess that they are inundated from global products being circulated.

More so than most places. If you actually give the New Zealand audience something that they can really click with, it's like they're having a glass of water in the middle of a desert, they are hugely grateful, and they never forget it. I think whenever a film reflects in an entertaining engaging way to a New Zealand audience a part of itself that has been hitherto under the radar, they go in numbers. That accounts for *Boy* [Taika Waititi, 2010], you know. *Boy* is reflecting a very energetic aesthetic and sensibility of a generation that hasn't had its say. And I just wish that we could find a way in New Zealand to pull ourselves together and actually understand how important this is because, you know, we're really still talking about memory, aren't we?

Yes.

Because we have personal memories and how those personal memories get expressed is a part of our communal oral history. There's the way



we choose to tell it, and there's the way that we actually remember it. Our films are a flagship, which becomes how we choose to tell it. We need stronger funding of local storytelling on film. Having said that, when I look at my generation of filmmakers across the world, and if I then decided to look at only women filmmakers who are my peers, there are very few of them who have managed to keep going, so it's hard the world over. It's very difficult to make a work that is self-generated and not commissioned. Most of my films start between my left ear and my right ear – in my head – and get made independently without creative interference. So if you like my work, or if you don't like my work, whatever you think, it's mine. There are so few filmmakers who have managed to keep on going. I'd say if we did decide to make a list, we'd find that at least half of the list would be French filmmakers, wouldn't they?

Yes, they would. From your generation, Claire Denis comes to mind ...

Well, yes, and Agnès Varda, although she is older than me, but you know they are the models. My heroes.

What direction do you see yourself going in the future? Do you see yourself doing more fiction feature films, or do you feel like there are more documentaries and stories that you're wanting to recount from the community?

So, am I going to do a fiction film or a drama or a straight doco next? I don't know – the world's my oyster, isn't it? But I'll tell you what – *Home by Christmas* was conceived as the middle story in a trilogy and the other two are – I could call them '81'. One is a pacifist stand that happened in 1881 during the Land Wars, and the other is the stand that was made in 1981 during the Springbok Tour. I would like to work using oral histories, archival footage and dramatising for those two. So I'm just taking the long way round to make my 'War and Peace' – Gaylene's 'War and Peace'. Don't hold your breath, it will take a while.

A Decent Sense of Outrage:

GAYLENE PRESTON –
FILM DIRECTOR

Dr Deborah Shepard
Biographer and Life Writing Mentor

My association with Gaylene Preston began in 1990 when I first approached her hoping to write an MA thesis on her life and work. Gaylene was 'appalled,' apparently, and did her best to dissuade me. When she finally had an opportunity to express how she really felt, in the foreword to my book, *Reframing Women: A History of New Zealand Film*, Gaylene explained

This involved not returning her phone calls, then when she did get through arguing, correcting everything she said, and basically making sure she knew I thought she was on the wrong track, entirely misguided and possibly quite stupid etc etc. When none of that worked I sent her off to talk to anyone else I could think of to divert her. She made all the diversions make sense and like a delicate bulldozer just kept on going and patiently persisted. Dammit. (Shepard 2000, 9)

A delicate bulldozer indeed! It wasn't quite the flattering epithet I was hoping for but she was right, I was determined. I had seen her on stage with a large group of cast and crew at the Auckland premiere of *Ruby and Rata* (1990) and been impressed with her acknowledgment that films are collaborative in nature, made by creative teams, not just directors. I was also fired up, following studies in feminism at Canterbury University where I had been introduced to the male bias in recordings of history. This really sank in when I began my own

research in the Film, Television and Media Studies department at Auckland University and discovered a masculinist discourse running through New Zealand film history. I found the work of key early women filmmakers, such as Margaret Thomson, Kathleen O'Brien, Ramai Hayward, Deirdre McCartin and the team who made a series of seven feminist documentaries (throughout 1975 and 1976) had been completely obscured. Something had to be done. I interviewed Ramai Hayward and wrote up my findings in a series of Masters papers. Then for my thesis I approached Gaylene, wanting to explore and document the work of a woman director who was already a major practitioner – eleven films in thirteen years – but hadn't yet been fully recognised. I'm glad I persevered because the material that emerged over that year of interviews constitutes a valuable record of an important New Zealand film director in mid-career.

I have formally interviewed Gaylene in three instalments now. The latest was for a chapter in *Her Life's Work: Conversations with Five New Zealand Women* (Shepard 2009). Each interaction was stimulating and fun. Gaylene is a gifted storyteller and an astute, intelligent thinker, whose perceptions are always on the mark. She provides the most stunning, quirky quotes a biographer could ever wish for. When she made her first feature, *Mr Wrong* (1985) she said, in reference to the high energy male action films that had so far dominated the New Zealand scene, 'I wanted to make a film that didn't have a rape scene, didn't revolve around high speed car chases and didn't have Bruno Lawrence playing the tortured neurotic man with a gun and chooks.'

Mr Wrong was a feminist revision of the thriller, the film genre Gaylene considers the most disempowering to women. Adapted from a short story by English author Elizabeth Jane Howard, the protagonist – Meg – is a recognisable Kiwi woman who is resourceful rather than a victim, outwits the male predator and survives. The film attracted controversy because it ended radically – on the screams of the predator as he perishes in a burning car. Asked to explain why she introduced the ghost of an earlier victim to kill him off, Gaylene argued

Meg isn't a superhero and she doesn't kung fu anybody and she doesn't kill anybody. She's just normal, like you and me. I probably wouldn't be able to kill anybody. What Meg does though is

... saves her own life. The film could have ended there, yes, but the thing is he did need to die. There are a lot of crimes against women that remain unsolved. In this society there's a big silence left by the victims. I had to empower the silent ones. (Shepard 2009, 220)

Gaylene first encountered feminism in England in the late 1960s–1970s, when she moved there with her husband who was studying for a PhD at Cambridge University. It was fortuitous timing. She found the environment a hotbed of Feminist, Marxist, Socialist, anti-war and anti-nuclear politics and thought. She joined women's liberation group Redstockings, the London Women's Film Group, and created cartoons for feminist magazines *Bloody Women* and *Spare Rib*. Her involvement in student activism fomented the various threads that would feed into her filmmaking. She also read the work of Kate Millett (*Sexual Politics* 1970) and Germaine Greer (*The Female Eunuch* 1970), who translated feminist theory into accessible language giving her 'a new vocabulary' that helped her 'understand why we felt the way we did' (Shepard 2009, 215). The equal opportunity arguments where the rearing of children, housework, jobs and workplaces might be shared resonated too. As Gaylene says, feminism gave her 'something to fight for.' It gave her work energy and a bite and what she terms a 'decent sense of outrage' about the marginalising of so many interesting stories.

Before leaving for England, Gaylene had undertaken a diploma in painting at the Canterbury School of Fine Arts – and her art from that period displays her talent, particularly a watercolour self-portrait that is eerily reminiscent of the most beautiful of the self-portraits of Rita Angus, someone she admired immensely. Her film *Lovely Rita* (2007) reflects this admiration, and her comments provide insight into what motivates her work. 'There's usually a sense of outrage behind every film I make and that extends to Rita Angus too. I'm outraged that her work hasn't, until recently, had the same acknowledgment as say Colin McCahon and Toss Woollaston' (Shepard 2009, 228).

On her return to New Zealand in 1977, Gaylene felt alone in a ruggedly macho culture.

For the first year or so I felt like an outsider looking in. Just being a woman without a partner, without children, living a single life and

having been away for seven years isolated me. I was the expatriate. And it was paradoxical because I then found myself working with a group of men, none of who had been involved with the personal politics or the rethinking I'd gone through. However, it was because I'd thought it all through that I was able to stand my own ground. (Shepard 2009, 217)

It is staggering to hear her talk about the sexism endemic to the film culture at that time. Her first job was as an art director at Pacific Films, where in her words she was 'affectionately' given the nickname Bruce. However, when she was invited to manage the art department of the 1979 film version of Roger Hall's play *Middle Age Spread*, directed by John Reid, she felt deeply isolated on set.

I mean, they'd tell jokes about dead nuns' cunts. Over six weeks the imagery in the swearing really got to me. I didn't like it but that was the style of the film crews in those days. I'm talking about a time when you'd go to a party and someone might come up and say, 'Wanna fuck?' That's how it was then. (Shepard 2009, 219)

At this time, Gaylene also visited the Hawke's Bay community of Waimarama, where she met Geoff Murphy and his wife Pat Robins, who would later become a drama director, actor Bruno Lawrence and production manager Veronica Lawrence, actor Martyn Sanderson, sculptor Liz Earth, and members of the Crayford family. Cinematographer Alun Bollinger had already relocated to Reefton, but she met him at Pakiri filming an explosion test for *Dagg Day Afternoon* (1977) directed by Geoff Murphy and John Clarke. These people became her friends, and some of them members of her creative teams. Alun Bollinger went on to shoot many of her films – including *Mr Wrong*, *War Stories*, *Perfect Strangers* and *Home by Christmas* – and Jonathan Crayford was her film composer for several years. In 1982 Gaylene observed Geoff Murphy making his second feature *Utu* (1983) in a fly-on-the-wall documentary *Making Utu* (1982), and Geoff co-wrote the script of *Mr Wrong* with Gaylene.

Years after Gaylene's first visit, Pat Robins directed a drama – *Instincts* (1986) – about that period. It reflected the gender politics and division of household labour and also the women's experience of 'free love' which Pat said was 'bloody nice for the blokes' but difficult for the women. 'And all of us

women sat around trying to come to terms with this one and feeling vaguely guilty as if we were failing in some way.²

Gaylene poured some of her feelings of alienation and feminist indignation into the character of Meg – who is single, financially independent, drives a second-hand Jaguar and unsettles the male characters in *Mr Wrong*. Her drama *Married* (1992), an under-recognised gem based on author Sue McCauley's screenplay, about a working-class marriage, also illustrated the problems with narrow gender prescriptions. Gaylene's second feature *Ruby and Rata* (1990), with a compelling script written by the late Graeme Tetley, continued the feminist discussion but also outlined her concern over discrimination towards Māori and the aged. The social message is never far from the surface in Gaylene's work and in this film it is deftly communicated via comedy.

In 2003, almost twenty years after *Mr Wrong*, Gaylene returned to feminist thriller territory with *Perfect Strangers* (2003), but this time her plot contained elements of fable and a decidedly bent love story. And, of course, she couldn't resist adding some black comedic moments. In this film the tormentor is not burnt but frozen in a freezer. The main character Melanie is more complex, more anti-hero, even predatory – by turns sexually adventurous, alluring, stropky, perverse and vulnerable. Shot on the wonderfully wild West Coast of the South Island, where Gaylene grew up and cinematographer Alun Bollinger lives, it was described by Australian reviewer Ruth Hessey as 'the sort of audacious, brilliantly visualised, and slightly unnerving film we expect from New Zealand filmmakers.'³ *Perfect Strangers*, like *Mr Wrong* (which incidentally sold to 90 territories) was also popular internationally. International film expert David Stratton described it as 'an intriguing, virtually unclassifiable romantic thriller fantasy,' and as Preston's best work in film to date.⁴

Gaylene is one of New Zealand's most versatile film directors. She is equally at home directing drama and documentary. Her oeuvre stretches over political documentary, portrait of the artist, history and social issues documentaries, to comedy, thriller and feminist fantasy. Her sensitively crafted film *Bread and Roses* (1993), about pioneering trade unionist and politician Sonja Davies, is a feminist

biopic in the same league as Margarethe von Trotta's *Rosa Luxembourg* (1986).

War Stories Our Mothers Never Told Us (1995) is the documentary that defined Gaylene's career. Yet it almost didn't get made. An initial lack of interest from funding institutions left Gaylene and her producer Robin Laing feeling desperate. They finally decided to approach the Film Commission one last time and submit what, according to Gaylene was

the film that had been turned down the most and the one that was definitely not internationally bankable or aiming for multiplexes. This was the film about seven old ladies talking about the war.

(Shepard 2009, 243)

Thank goodness they were successful because *War Stories* is one of her best works. It went on to an international cinema release and was much loved by audiences both in New Zealand and overseas, where it received special recognition at Film Festivals in Sydney, Venice, Sundance and Toronto. It combines a feminist analysis of the untold stories of ordinary Kiwi women and their experience of war, with gripping stories of danger and survival.

In *War Stories*, Gaylene refined her approach to the interview format, allowing the individual to tell the story in what appears to be real time, but was in fact seamlessly edited by Paul Sutorius. Each woman is featured against a simple, black background enabling the viewer to concentrate on the story, to scan and appreciate the softly lit, wonderfully lined and richly expressive, beautiful faces. This film revolutionised the presentation of 'talking heads' and has influenced documentary makers throughout New Zealand – including Annie Goldson, who invited Gaylene to co-produce *Punitive Damage* (1999) and Brita McVeigh, who adopted the style for her interviews with female flight attendants in *Coffee, Tea or Me?* (2002). More recently, Paula McTaggart has replicated the format for her interviews with people who witnessed the 1967 Strongman Mine explosion and she has commissioned Gaylene to direct the dramatic content for her film *Journey Into Darkness – The Strongman Tragedy*.

All of the seven women featured in *War Stories* were stars, but the riveting story belonged to Gaylene's mother, Tui Preston. Tui's was the untold



story referred to in the film's title. It stunned Gaylene when she first listened to the interview tapes. Her mother discusses a romantic attraction that flourished while her husband Ed was at war and during the six-year gap between the birth of her eldest child, Ted, and the arrival of Gaylene. Tui talks openly to camera about the difficulties when Ed returned, how they were both depressed and it was a terrible time ... but the relationship survived and gradually their appreciation grew, 'Ed and I became great friends – he was my mate and I was his.' Gaylene agrees. 'I grew up in a household that got happier and happier and my parents seemed to have more and more fun as time passed. Most people probably grow up with the opposite situation, interestingly' (Shepard 2009, 239).

This affair and Gaylene's father's war experiences became the subject of *Home by Christmas* (2010), a multi-layered family memoir starring Gaylene's daughter Chelsie Preston-Crayford as the young Tui. Reviewers have been unanimous in their praise of this film because it satisfies on many levels. It is formally complex, splicing archival war footage and stills with dramatised sequences that reconstruct what might have happened to Tui – who is played remarkably intuitively by her granddaughter – and it draws on earlier personal interviews where

Gaylene questioned her father about the war. Actor Tony Barry is disarmingly understated and convincing as the down-to-earth Ed Preston and Gaylene plays herself as interviewer. To complete the family involvement, Gaylene's sister – Sydney composer Jan Preston – wrote the score. The content is multilayered too. Ed's story was recorded before his death and before Tui's revelations in *War Stories*, but because Gaylene didn't know about her mother's affair when she interviewed her father she doesn't ask and he doesn't tell – giving the story added pathos, because the viewer knows more than what appears in the father's narrative strand. The tension builds as the audience awaits his homecoming wondering what will happen.

One of the strengths of *Home by Christmas* was that Gaylene persuaded her father to talk honestly about the war – and the resulting material is incredibly moving. As film critic Graeme Tuckett says, Tony Barry's performance 'put the lump in your throat and the smoke in your eye.'⁵ The film has beautiful aesthetics. The cinematography by Alun Bollinger is visually romantic and the production artistically recreates the period in intimate detail. Chelsie as Tui is a luscious vision, poised and pensive, a great young acting talent on the way up. The enduring legacy of this film is, I believe, the



personal reflective quality of the director/daughter's enquiry and that it was so obviously made with love and respect.

To survive as a creative artist anywhere in the world requires enormous dedication. Over the years Gaylene Preston has demonstrated a consistent level of commitment to her art and produced a solid body of work. So where did her energy and self-belief come from? Gaylene thinks it began in childhood, inherent in her self-confessed contrary personality. 'My second name is Mary and I always related to the nursery rhyme, "Mary, Mary, quite contrary." The family always said I was just contrary' (Shepard 2009, 227). She remembers her mother saying, '... you can't just do what you like, and I would think to myself that might be true for you but not for me. Even as a small child I can remember thinking that way' (Shepard 2009, 226). She also credits her father for offering her unconditional, steady, unwavering love. 'He was the epitome of total approval. He was the "love you whatever you're doing" sort of dad' (Shepard 2009, 203). Having a fair degree of 'stubborn bloody-mindedness' helped as well.

Artists also need mentors, but initially Gaylene felt 'mentor-less,' as she was unaware of the female pioneers in New Zealand film. They were still 'hidden from history.' So Gaylene looked outside the film world to other inspirational women.

Princess Te Puea, Sonja Davies and Patricia Grace – Princess Te Puea because she was a person who seized every opportunity to further the greater good of her people; Sonja Davies for doing the same in the trade union movement; and Patricia Grace for writing deeply political works that are complex and uncompromising ... Anne Salmond is another inspiration because she is truly bicultural. In her early books Amiria and Eruera, she put equal weight on written history and oral history – both Maori and Pakeha – and that was quite revolutionary. (Shepard 2009, 209)

When I asked filmmaker Ramai Hayward whether she thought her success was a result of serendipity – being in the right place at the right time – or ambition, she thought it was both. You need to be persistent in searching for opportunities and then you have to make the most of them. The same is true for Gaylene Preston.

Some might say Gaylene landed on her feet with her first film *The Animals and the Lawnmower* (1972) issuing from her work as an art therapist at a psychiatric institution in England, or again when her sister recommended her to John O'Shea at Pacific Films and her first job as an art director rapidly evolved into a directing opportunity for magazine-style television series *Shoreline*. But Gaylene has talent and tenacity and John O'Shea recognised her ability immediately. He liked the way she interviewed a group of Toheroa diggers at the beach, which gave *Toheroa mania* (a short film for *Shoreline*) colour and character. Her first documentary *All the Way Up There* (1978) was the result of creative teamwork, the intuitive editing of Dell King, the camerawork of Warwick Attewell – and she had a great subject in Bruce Burgess, a man with cerebral palsy who had a dream to climb a mountain with the help of mountaineer Graeme Dingle. The film sold to *Encyclopaedia Britannica* for \$22,000, a vast windfall for an apprentice film director. This knack of finding and interviewing interesting people, and giving them a voice would become a signature of many of Gaylene's documentaries. She has an easy friendly manner and enjoys getting alongside people and having a yarn. She could relate to the school leavers in *Learning Fast* (1980); interviewed whitebaiters at Okarito in *Kai Purakau* (1987) about writer Keri

Hulme; engaged with dairy owners Dennis and Norm who kept a protective eye on the elderly poet Hone Tuwhare, the subject of *No Other Lips* (1996); and managed to create a safe environment for breast cancer survivors to talk about their experiences in *Titless Wonders* (2001).

At the conclusion to my MA thesis in 1991 and again nearly 20 years' later in *Her Life's Work* (Shepard 2009), Gaylene described her filmmaking choices and life direction in terms of zigzagging from one genre and one project to another. In 2009, she remarked ruefully that zigging and zagging 'can also mean up and down' and underpinning everything was always the fear that she might have made her last film. 'It's the film-maker's paranoia.' At that time, though, she had established a film studio in her own home and was enjoying a fantastically productive year with three films – *The Time of Our Lives* (2007), *Lovely Rita* (2008) and *Home by Christmas* (2010) – in various stages of production and post production. She was also thinking about a film on peace.

Recently, I caught up with Gaylene and asked for an update. She began by thinking she'd had a bit of a zag, but really it has just been the necessary incubation time between projects, something familiar to all artists. She spent much of 2010 touring *Home by Christmas*, which is one of the top fifteen highest grossing New Zealand films ever at the local box office and received five-star reviews from every major New Zealand film reviewer, a response that genuinely delights her.⁶ For Anzac Day 2011, Gaylene edited a 30-minute silent movie on women in wartime, selected from footage stored at the National Archives. The film was projected on the walls of the Auckland Museum and, as she remarked, 'Once you remove the out-dated, ridiculous commentary – "the women are doing their bit for the war effort and needing their cups of chatterwater" – you get silent images of extreme poignancy and gravitas.'⁷

Currently, Gaylene is writing the foreword for a book about her friend and screenwriter the late Graeme Tetley and working on the dramatised sequences for *Strongman*. She says she is happy to be working on other people's projects because there is satisfaction in completing the companion films on her parents – two projects she had always wanted to make – and because it takes time in the film game to develop a

new project. Her peace film is in development. The boat goes on.

ENDNOTES

1. Shepard, Deborah. 2011. Interview with Gaylene Preston. Auckland, 20 August.
2. Worth, Heather. 1986. 'An Interview with Pat Robins.' *Illusions*, Issue 3, Spring.
3. Hessey, Ruth. 2003. Review of *Perfect Strangers*. *InsideFilm*, October.
4. Stratton, David. 2003. Review of *Perfect Strangers*. *Variety*, August.
5. Tuckett, Graeme. 2010. 'Stunning Achievement.' *The Dominion Post*, 1 May.
6. *Home by Christmas* was selected for Film Festivals in Australia and was third most popular film at the Sydney Film Festival, received rave reviews at the London Film Festival, was a Finalist in the History Makers award, New York, and has been selected for screening on the Knowledge channel in Canada.
7. Shepard, Deborah. 2011. Interview with Gaylene Preston. Auckland, 20 August.

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Agonistic Gender Psychodrama, *Angstlust*, and Sympathetic Insight in the Work of Gaylene Preston, *Bricolage* Cineaste and Documentarian.

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I. 'HETEROSEX' POLITICS WITH BOXING GLOVES

In this paper I will constructively interrogate Gaylene Preston's career as both a highly New Zealand-centred narrative filmmaker and as a documentarian of note and striking style. As a product of the University of Canterbury's School of Fine Arts, the Preston style is unsurprising but the content is more so, in a spirit of humanistic feminism.

In both her first fiction feature film *Mr Wrong* (1985) and the more recent *Perfect Strangers* (2003), Preston seems compelled to explore the often masochistic nature of female romanticism–sexual desire. In both films we see variants of what I term 'heterosexual politics with boxing gloves' – an aesthetic of agonistic gender combat viewed from a female perspective that can be simultaneously suspicious of, yet also attracted to, dangerous males, and one which thus, finally, enacts a saga of conflictual relations as the ambiguities of female desire and *angstlust* (pleasure in fear) are potently limned with noir humour. While presumably gesturing towards a post-patriarchal cinema (which dissects patriarchal seduction ploys by males), both movies play Hitchcockian games (deploying what film theorist Laura Mulvey calls 'aesthetics of the uncanny' [Mulvey 2006, 97]); 'almost in the spirit of the master's films *Rope* (1948) and *The*

Trouble with Harry (1955). *Perfect Strangers*, in particular, is constructed as a *jeu d'esprit* with a comic thriller, female neo-Gothic undertone (signalled by its extended resurrection fantasy), and it works ultimately as a satire structured around intertextual echoing and the reprise of motifs from such New Zealand films as Vincent Ward's *Vigil* (1984), Alison Maclean's *Kitchen Sink* (1989), Roger Donaldson's *Sleeping Dogs* (1977), Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1992), and even Preston's own *Mr Wrong* (adapted from an Elizabeth Jane Howard story and exploring fear and sexual violence against women). In *Mr Wrong*, Meg (Heather Bolton), in buying a stereotypically potent 'masculine' car (a Jaguar) becomes unwittingly ensnared in a Gothic thriller when the ghost of the car's previous owner, a woman who had been murdered in that very vehicle, returns to take revenge upon her misogynistic assailant. Eventually removing Meg from danger, the vengeful spirit destroys her killer by locking him in the car and sending him to a fiery death over a cliff. This exercise in justified 'womanist' vengeance and retribution perfectly captured the *zeitgeist* of early 1980s New Zealand feminist art movements (also typified by the Spiral Collective, which published Keri Hulme's phenomenal novel *the bone people* in 1984). In these two female Kiwi Gothic social fables, Preston captures various dimensions in the female struggle against male-imposed limitations and valuations regarding authentic

female being. In keeping with her stringent existential realism, Preston is not only exposing and deconstructing the patriarchal unconscious, but also the tap-roots of erotic subservience and female neediness – so that, finally, *Mr Wrong* and *Perfect Strangers* are not didactic works of propagandist feminist cinema.

Paying homage to talented others is a very positive and dominant trope of Preston's *oeuvre*, and it is the expression of a constructively feminist aesthetic as a *voyeuse feminine* (as someone who visually explores the lives of real and imagined others). I am here effectively revisiting author Tania Modleski's concept of female spectatorship in a more embracing way, emphasising Preston's visual pleasure in creating specular images but devoid of the negative connotations routinely connected to the discourse of voyeurism (Modleski 2005, 5).²

Preston celebrates the South Island's stunning coastal landscape in her documentary about novelist Keri Hulme *Kai Purakau* (1987) and in her richly visual feature *Perfect Strangers*. In constructing her careful montages in these films, Preston's aesthetic provides a specular examination of the integration of human beings into these New Zealand land and seascapes, which themselves offer a liberating expansiveness in such a 'small, closed, reticent society' (Preston 1992, 172).

I believe Preston's real strength as a filmmaker

lies in her arts documentaries (capped most recently by the sympathetic portrait of Rita Angus in *Lovely Rita* [2007]), which act as intimate and crucial artefacts of 'Aotearoa's' cultural salvage. The unifying *modus operandi* in all these films, whether imaginative or historical, is Preston's own quite idiosyncratic version of what I call '*bricolage* cinematics,' in which intimate access is given to the personal world of the subject Preston has chosen to explore and celebrate. Her affirmative vision is what gives her work heart and real appeal, and her remarkable 'faction' (fact–fiction) feature *Home by Christmas* (2010) adds weight to this assessment.

II. SPECULARITY IN LANDSCAPE

In June 2002, the production team assembled at Punakaiki, on the West Coast, to start work on Gaylene Preston's erotic thriller, *Perfect Strangers*. It was Preston's first fiction film set on her home turf of Westland. Her formative years were spent in 1950s Westport and Greymouth – locales used for some of the film's sequences³ – and most of the film was shot in the coastal strip between these towns. Casting Sam Neill as the male lead was appropriate, for not only were he and Preston at Canterbury University together in the 1960s, but *Perfect Strangers* is also a clear *homage* to the setting of *The Piano* (where Neill played the bullying English patriarch Alisdair Stewart, who boards up his home with his wife Ada McGrath [Holly Hunter] trapped inside and later cuts off one of her fingers in a furious outburst of outrageous sexual possessiveness).⁴ However, neither Preston's Meg (Heather Bolton) in *Mr Wrong*, nor Campion's Ada were self-victimising women. For an examination of this collision with a predatory and dysfunctionally violent male, Preston developed Melanie (Rachael Blake), the female lead in *Perfect Strangers*.

Billed as 'A Chilling Romance,' *Perfect Strangers* marked something of a return to Preston's quasi-Hitchcockian feminist melodrama, *Mr Wrong*, and is imbued with an air of Hitchcock's *The Trouble with Harry*. In *Perfect Strangers*, Preston explores the disturbing psychic undercurrents of 'heterosex' passion in a 'cinema of the mind' style (Tredell 2002). One could argue that Preston's peculiar *forte* follows Jane Campion's intense investigations into female masochism (for example, *Sweetie* [1989], *The Piano*, and *Portrait of a Lady* [1996]), and the



tortured quests of 'women who knew too little' about men (Modleski 2005). In *Mr Wrong* 'a woman [Meg] gets much more than she bargains for when she buys a second-hand Jaguar car' (Shelton 2005, 75), but in *Perfect Strangers* Melanie finds herself in trouble when, drunk, she succumbs to the charms of a tall, handsome stranger, who then whisks her away to his remote island home. In this, the plot of *Perfect Strangers* seems to resonate with the notion of definable 'South Island Gothic' starring a 'phallic' female in modern New Zealand art and cinema and, as journalist Philip Matthews has rightly noted, the dark Southern Man trope fits with Preston's use of 'The West Coast's wild weather [as] a Gothic effect,' in which 'Neill is the charming stranger who abducts a woman on his boat and takes her back to his lair.'⁵ It is almost as if Preston has created this psychodrama to reprise the woman putting a man in a cold bath in Alison Maclean's incredible short *Kitchen Sink*, and re-working Maclean's resurrection fantasy. *Perfect Strangers* is a clear instance of a *bricolage* style of cinema. It reprises elements of both *The Piano* and *Sleeping Dogs* (where, escaping a failed marriage and avoiding repressive government and violent resistance, Smith [Sam Neill] becomes a man alone and sets up home on an island) and references those great classics of the macabre and stylish, Hitchcock's *Rope* and Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980).

Preston's corpse in the freezer playfully blends David Kentley's (Dick Hogan) dead body in the old chest and Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson) frozen stiff in the topiary maze of the Overlook Hotel. The way Preston resurrects the Southern Gothic Man in *Perfect Strangers* plays with notions of cross-referentiality and trans-dimensionality, inviting cineastes to recall elements of *Kitchen Sink*, James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931), and the shore-washing sequence of Hulme's Booker Prize winner *the bone people*.⁶

Preston is part of a generation whose sensitivities came to fruition in the aftermath of the vigorous New Zealand cultural nationalism of the 1940s. Two artistic collaborators during that era, crime writer and theatrical producer Ngaio Marsh (1895–1982) and composer Douglas Lilburn (1911–2001), reflected on the links between New Zealanders and their spacious and often forbidding landscape. In *Died in the Wool* (1945), one of Marsh's characters – Arthur Rubrick – reflects on the absurdity of humans talking of settling the South Island's Mackenzie Country plateau and 'bringing in a new country' ... 'All we do is to move over the surface of a few hills. There is nothing new about them. Primal, yes, and almost unblotted by such new things as men and sheep. Essentially back among the earlier inhuman ages' (Marsh 1945, 104–105). The Lilburn character, Cliff Johns – a musical farmhand with

compositional ambitions – rejects the writing of classical music which, incongruously, includes 'the introduction of native bird song and Maori hakas into an ersatz symphony.' Responding to this, Marsh's detective – Roderick Alleyn – adds, 'There is no forcing the growth of an art, is there, and, happily, no denying it when the moment is ripe' (Marsh 1945, 159). Lilburn said as much about the work of writers Monte Holcroft, Allen Curnow and Frank Sargeson: 'What I find most stimulating about all this activity is that it hasn't happened as a result of groups of people self-consciously setting out to produce a national literature' (Lilburn 1946, cited in Norman 2006, 128).⁷ This excursus on Marsh and Lilburn frames a context for the role landscape plays in Gaylene Preston's work – in *Perfect Strangers*, in her documentaries about Keri Hulme, Hone Tuwhare (*No Other Lips* [1996]) and Rita Angus, and in *Home by Christmas*. Preston is a practitioner of a 'mindscape' aesthetic, which expresses a luscious, lyrical and Lilburnesque tone in her evocations of the South Island landscape, especially on the coastal fringe of the turbulent and moody Tasman Sea (the North Westland locale of Preston's upbringing). Indeed, the visual ambience of both *Perfect Strangers* and *Kai Purakau* recalls poet Alistair Campbell's tribute to Lilburn pacing 'an empty beach, creating in his head / bare harmonies of sand and wave' (Campbell, cited in Norman 2006, 180).⁸

In her arts documentaries Preston respects her subjects by avoiding an ego-intrusive linear 'master' narrative overlay. We see this to great effect in *Kai Purakau* (1987), which is a very self-effacing film text that 'stars' Keri Hulme and her Okarito environs, achieved with extremely skilful montage editing that allows the film experience to build organically and develop fluidly from minor set-piece to set-piece. Preston's key directorial technique is one of linear collage scenic construction, which creates an almost painterly flow of imagery. *Kai Purakau* starts with a mix of bird sounds, lush romantic West Coast light and scenery (seascape–soundscape), low-key music and a voice-over by Hulme herself, all recalling Lilburn's concept of 'our as yet inarticulate paradise' (Norman 2006, 264) and presenting a perfect line-up between evocative mimetic film imagery and a description of her environment by Hulme, the refurbisher and refashioner of myths and stories, who casts ancient

legends and narratives in modern form. This segues to a shot of the kotuku (white heron) emblematic of the Okarito Lagoon and a whakatauki (proverb) which precedes Hulme's incisive commentary on Papatuanuku (the earth mother) and an explication of whenua (land) and the land's chanting. This is all fertile background to a montage of iconic Okarito images, flowing into shots of whitebaiting, then to Hulme's lucid exposition of Maori metaphysics (lineage and the inter-relationship of humans and 'departmental gods'). This sequence presents Preston's artful marriage of form and content, as her expressive medium visually enacts Hulme's references to being a 'writer of fluid fantasies,' who lives on a watery, liminal tideline and habitat. The succeeding narrative segment deals with Hulme's move to Okarito and building her home, with crisp inserts of Hulme's neighbours and friends, before the camera pans slowly in upon the carved kaitiaki (guardian) figure at Hulme's front door. The next major interlude shows Hulme driving to collect mail at the Whataroa Post Office, before returning home in sharp late afternoon light to Okarito village. Then, successively, the sights and sounds of a perfect West Coast evening fill the screen as the sky moves into a gorgeous pink sunset to the sound of cicadas and that of the sea; and an image of Hulme's home framed by the snow-clad Southern Alps; and the squawk of a Kiwi in the enveloping darkness. The film then 'irises out' with images of whitebaiters, a potent Keri Kaa waiata (song) and the camera exploring Hulme's octagonal living room, where Hulme talks about her ambitions and philosophies, while the sense of intimate dialogue is embroidered with imagery of her interior (a trademark hat, walking sticks and her telephone jingling out a local party-line ringing code). Against fluid shots of trees, beach and sky Hulme discusses her long-awaited second novel *Bait* and her philosophy on bridging the two major cultures of New Zealand, set against the backdrop of the road into Okarito and arresting images of surf breaking on Okarito beach. Viewers are finally treated to a calming diminuendo of Jonathan Crayford's music with a view of the sea and waves cutting to an intimate framing of Hulme talking, followed by a final panoramic shot of Hulme walking 'her' beach, with Abut Head in view, declaiming that she is but 'a singer' of the land and its awesome rhythms. The fabulous evocative cinematography of Leon

Narbey (and Tim Rose) augments the impact of *Kai Purakau*. This documentary's significance as a filmic cultural object lies in the way in which it provides a revelatory glimpse into Keri Hulme's life, environs, values and artistic practice for a 'glocal' (that is, global and local) audience. It at once obliquely, but definitively, severs the unhelpful myths and stereotypes which have surrounded Hulme, precisely because Preston has constructed a 'film vision' which allows the embattled author the space to 'shine' on her own account – to radiate her luminous intelligence and sensitivity without the aggressive and unhelpful mediation of the literary commentariat. This is no mean achievement of positive mediated agency and personal sovereignty, and Preston is to be saluted for making such an outstandingly enlightening short film.

III. VERTIGO REVISITED? A 'PHANTOM OF DELIGHT'

As mentioned above, *Perfect Strangers* is a kind of quirky homage to the filmmaking talent of Alfred Hitchcock, Stanley Kubrick, Vincent Ward and Jane Campion. The occasional visual echoes of Ward's *Vigil* and Campion's *The Piano*, in terms of weather and landscape, are not surprising, especially given that Alun Bollinger was cinematographer on those celebrated shoots, as well as being the camera operator for *Mr Wrong* and cinematographer for *Perfect Strangers*. Reprising some of the visual and textual tropes of *Vigil* and *The Piano*, and also of Kubrick's *The Shining* and Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) in particular, accomplishes for *Perfect Strangers* both homage and a kind of complex feminist deconstruction of an androcentric field. Costume designer Helen Bollinger wittily defined the key theme of *Perfect Strangers* as, 'The only decent man is a dead man.' Preston, jocularly defending her 'chilling romance,' rejoined, 'It's about a woman who falls in love with a man about thirty seconds after she's killed him and put him in the freezer!⁹ It is, of course, more a film about the need to deploy fantasy in building real human relationships,¹⁰ but it shares *Mr Wrong's* focus on a terrorised woman who discovers her own powers of survival and who can kill threatening men. It is also a macabre black comedy, which imperfectly explores a masochistic, self-punishing female sensibility and recalls film critic Robin Wood's

observation that the 'romantic love' fantasy is regressive, 'with its demand for perfect union and its tendency to construct the loved person as an idealised fantasy figure: the necessary condition for the "perfect union" being the denial of otherness and autonomy' (Wood 1989, 120).

In this very painterly film Preston makes symbolic use of the Westland light and rain and recycles the embattled female which she had proffered in *Mr Wrong* and which resurfaced with Holly Hunter's Ada McGrath at the mercy of Sam Neill's psychotic Stewart in *The Piano*, the Campion classic of female masochism and dark desire. Preston has crafted in *Perfect Strangers* a truly strange, vertiginous cinema experience – but one that, to a degree, shares with Hitchcock's *Vertigo* an *oneiric* quality (that is, being driven by the logic of dream and fantasy) yet which lacks the 'otherworldliness' that film critic David Sterritt suggests defines *Vertigo's* 'most insinuating quality' (Sterritt 1993, 92). Preston's text is firmly anchored in the quotidian world of Kiwi life and speech codes (only oddly qualified by the fisherman Neill's impeccable Anglophilic vowels and syntax, even as he utters his often banal greeting card clichés). And yet the film also expresses a debilitating deathly romanticism, anchored in a kindred spirit to Edgar Allan Poe's disturbing texts about the power of vampiric women (in such stories as 'The Fall of the House of Usher,' 'Berenice' and 'Ligeia'). Furthermore, Preston's spooky, suave, controlling Man (Sam Neill) recalls Scottie Ferguson (James Stewart) of *Vertigo*. He has his Hitchcockian moment of fetishistic makeover fantasy when he declares to Melanie, 'I will always remember you like this,' as she emerges from the bathroom wearing the negligee, dress and pearls he left out for her (having just burned her wet clothes to prepare her for her new identity in his fantasy). A brilliant hand-held pull-in shot replicates his slightly unsteady but obsessive focus. Melanie emerges, like Judy (Kim Novak) in *Vertigo*, visible for herself and reflected in a mirror, freezing the desired, unalterable (thus unreal) person in the crazy beloved's phantasms. The man is, like Ferguson in *Vertigo*, a dangerous romantic obsessive. 'I know everything about you because I love you,' he says like a practised seducer, before rejecting Melanie's clear offer of a one-night stand and demanding commitment and the prospect of marriage, before insisting, 'You have to love me,' yelling, 'Never



laugh at me,' calling her unkind," and then striking Melanie, in puritan recoil from her evident ease with her own sexuality. The man subscribes to the Madonna/Whore dichotomy, and Melanie can only tame him into a perfect fantasy lover by killing him off and psychically resurrecting him without his ego-libido. In stabbing this arrogant, controlling and short-tempered male, Melanie demonstrates that *Perfect Strangers* is not finally about 'the male gaze' but, more interestingly, about female agency and praxis, as she enacts a necessary 'phallic woman' role as one who literally penetrates the 'male Other' just as he is about to unlock the door of the hut he was minding (his lair). Melanie transforms herself from an object of what Freud termed *schaulust* (scopophilia), or the sadistic component of the male gaze, by becoming an actant and seizing control of her destiny. However, as Melanie stitches up her Frankensteinian suitor's abdomen, he recites pseudo-Blakean low Romantic verse:

What is true love? Who could tell?

What causes such a magic spell, and

Fills the veins with liquid fire

And fills the heart with warm desire? (Perfect Strangers)

It is intriguing that Melanie finds herself whispering, 'Don't die; please don't die,' as they clasp hands and

thunder rumbles in a Southern Gothic mode. 'I'm so sorry,' whispers The Man, and Melanie sniffs as he continues, 'I am bright with the wonder of you. Despite the dark waiting, I endure; I am bright with the wonder of you' (*Perfect Strangers*). The death romanticism inscribed here is qualified when in a fantasised moment he tells Melanie, 'You needed rescuing.' Yet Melanie is reborn as a rural 'Woman Alone,' without the extraneous pearls that had defined her sassy urbanity, and now, full of Kiwi-girl pluck, attempts a rescue. She dumps the man in a wheelbarrow and tries to pilot the boat back to the mainland, before a fierce Tasman storm obstructs their passage and The Man dies. We see Melanie, bereft and hugging him, as the angry waters pour in. That the whole episode seems teasingly fantastic is reiterated when both figures are washed up on the same stretch of shore in a mythic reunion. The film exudes elements of respectfully parodic intertextuality (for instance, where the man, buried in the sand, recalls the image of Jack Torrance frozen in the snow in Kubrick's *The Shining*). With his death Melanie undergoes a psychotic break, tries to talk to the man, and then freezes his corpse like a practised mortician. She mordantly calls him 'my beautiful thing' (suggestive of a feminist counter-objectification of the male!) and then kisses the freezer that is preserving him, saying 'I love you forever.' However, her new-found passion soon gives



way to possessiveness and she loads storage cases on top of the freezer, suggesting she will cage the man and not allow him access to air and light, let alone other women. At this moment we recall the rage in *Mr Wrong* and it is as if we are watching post-patriarchal cinema, for if the man was once in control of his 'plot', there is a more positive, feminist-friendly ending in that Melanie does not die as a result of his scheming obsessive machinations, but actually dispatches him and survives triumphantly.

By putting the man in the freezer, Melanie freezes time and then can mentally resurrect him in bouts of fantasised dialogue and sex. She even credits her tormented, egomaniacal lover with curing her of her *angstlust*. 'You helped me break through my own resistance,' she tells him cryptically, as part of a dream sequence of the duo dancing on the beach near a blazing fire. Then, one morning Bill (Joel Tobeck) arrives in his fishing boat, and it appears that her narcissistic paradise in what Preston has called this 'bloody spooky land' (Preston 1992, 163) will be lost forever. But the film's conclusion demonstrates that her 'demon lover' (the man) will be a permanent mental adjunct and stimulant to this new relationship, providing fantasised excitation (a mental *ménage à trois*) and even suggesting that Bill might also be the victimiser who becomes victimised. When Bill discovers the frozen corpse of his friend, The Man, Melanie whacks him with a shovel (her second act of 'phallic' violence) and the film reverts to melodrama. Eventually, they wrap

the man up and dispose of his body – and Melanie tells the hapless Bill that if he will let her stay on his island she will love him forever. The song that ends the film ('Not the girl you think you are' by Neil Finn) offers tantalising clues about what Preston is really communicating about sexual politics, for as Preston has said, 'I always preferred a story to reality' (Preston 1992, 163).

In the end we have a clear rejection of what Camille Paglia once called 'the received black-and-white view of male ogres and female martyrs' (Paglia 1994, 43). While not exculpating men for their scurrilous behaviour, the function of feminist art 'is to awaken women to their equal responsibility in dispute and confrontation' (Paglia 1994, 43) and, I would add, to accept their responsibility for the pursuit of intrigue and danger in relationships. (Paglia termed the latter 'the appetitive mind in free movement' [Paglia 1994, xiii]). Melanie demonstrated agency in offering herself to The Man and, as such, was a sexual seductress (a Paglian–Amazonian vamp, a tough-cookie adventurer in the raw realm of sexual desire).

We can draw no simple conclusions about the kind of revisionist feminism which Preston has created in *Perfect Strangers*; suffice to say that it has moved on from the more victimological discourse of *Mr Wrong*, and that in constructing her own Kiwi aesthetics of the erotic–romantic 'uncanny' in the figure of Melanie, Preston gifts to us a Wordsworthian 'phantom of delight':

*A creature not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food,
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears and smiles.*

*And now I [the film-goer] see with eye serene
The very pulse of the machine;
A Being breathing thoughtful breath,
A Traveller between life and death:
The reason firm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength and skill;
A perfect Woman, nobly plann'd
To warn, to comfort, and command;*

*And yet a Spirit still, and bright
With something of angelic light.* (Wordsworth 1807/1969, 243–244)

I hope that, within this very tight compass, I have demonstrated that Gaylene Preston is unquestionably New Zealand's finest practitioner and purveyor of a benignly voyeuristic *bricolage* cinema in her dual roles as a documentarian and feature film artist.

ENDNOTES

1. See Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' (1919), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XVII [1917–1919], edited by James Strachey and Anna Freud. 1955. London: The Hogarth Press/Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 217–252.
2. My approach may also have affinities with Patricia MacCormack's approach to cinema spectatorship in *Cinesexuality* (2008), in which MacCormack frames cinematic pleasure beyond the realm of fixed gender framing, encouraging all spectators to challenge traditional notions of what elicits 'desiring' subjectivity. The classic statement is in Laura Mulvey's 1975 article 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.' *Screen*, 16:3, 6–18.
3. Madgwick, Paul. 'Thriller for Neill.' *The Press*, 26 June 2002, 2.
4. One of the film partners for *Perfect Strangers* was Huntaway Films, a production company owned by Jay Cassels, Sam Neill and John Clarke.
5. Matthews, Philip. 'The Dark Side.' *The Press* Weekend, 26–27 April 2008, D1–D2.
6. The latter reference is one we can be sure about, given Preston's production of the documentary portrait of New Zealand writer Kerri Hulme, *Kai Purakau*.
7. Douglas Lilburn. 'A Search for Tradition.' Talk at Cambridge Summer School of Music, January 1946, cited in Philip Norman's biography *Douglas Lilburn: His Life and Music*.
8. Alistair Campbell. 'Wild Honey,' cited in Philip Norman's biography *Douglas Lilburn: His Life and Music*.

9. Helen Bollinger and Gaylene Preston in 'Barefoot Cinema: The Art and Life of Cinematographer Alun Bollinger' (2008). Screened Artsville, Television One, TVNZ, 16 November 2008.

10. A lyric booms out – 'Romance is all in the head' – near the film's conclusion.

11. The trope of the 'unkind' female may have been sourced from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem 'Lewti, or the Circassian Love-Chant.' It is also a repeated trope of John Keats, in such works as 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' and 'Lamia.'

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SELECT FILMOGRAPHY

Marian Evans

Gender & Women's Studies, Victoria University of Wellington

2010 – HOME BY CHRISTMAS

Feature

92 minutes, 35mm, widescreen, colour/black & white, Dolby Stereo

A true story of love, war and secrets.

Gaylene Preston Productions in association with Midnight Films, Motion Pictures, The Wellington Company, New Zealand Film Commission, New Zealand on Air and TVNZ. With grateful thanks to the Museum Hotel.

Executive Producer Nigel Hutchinson

Producer/Director/Screenplay Gaylene Preston

Co-producer Sue Rogers
Photography Alun Bollinger

Editor Paul Sutorius

Sound Ken Saville, Tim Prebble, Mike Hedges, Gethin Creagh

Music Jan Preston

Principal actors Tony Barry, Chelsie Preston-Crayford, Tina Cleary, Martin Henderson

2007 – LOVELY RITA – A PAINTER'S LIFE

Documentary

70 minutes, Digibeta

A sensitive and affectionate portrait of celebrated New Zealand artist Rita Angus (1908–1970).

Gaylene Preston Productions in association with New Zealand on Air and TVNZ, with assistance from the Fletcher Trust, Matura Licensing Trust, Eastern Southland Gallery, the Douglas Lilburn Endowment Trust, Thorndon Trust, and the Rita Angus Estate. Developed in association with the New Zealand Film Commission.

Producer/Director

Gaylene Preston

Photography Alun Bollinger
Editor Lala Rolls

Sound Ken Saville, Marc Chesterman, Gilbert Lake

Music Plan 9

Biographer Jill Trevelyan

Rita evocation Loren Horsley

Narrator Donogh Rees

2007 THE TIME OF OUR LIVES

Documentary

45 minutes, Digibeta

On the road to the unveiling of New Zealand's war memorial in London's Hyde Park, in 2006, 32 veterans reflect on the battles, lost friends, and the terrible cost of war.

Gaylene Preston Productions in association with New Zealand on Air and TV3.

Producer/ Director

Gaylene Preston

Photography David Paul

Editor Paul Sutorius

Sound Paul Berenston, Chris Todd, Tim Prebble, Mike Hedges

Participants Lt General Jerry Mateparae, Dave Dobbyn, Tony Wellacott, Brian Clamp, Lyndsay Bruce, John Neal, Rutene

Irwin, Larry Southern, Jim Dunning, David Irwin, Raymond

Baty, Aaron Gibbs, Broughton Tomlins, Gordon Thompson, Tony

Wellacott, Kevin Roebuck

2006 EARTHQUAKE

Documentary

44 minutes, Digibeta

Eyewitness accounts of Napier's earthquake in 1931. A documentary of loss and survival, told by people who thought their world was ending.

Gaylene Preston Productions in association with New Zealand On Air and TV3.

Producer/Director Gaylene Preston

Photography David Paul, Edward Davis, Waka Attewell

Editor Raewyn Humphries

Sound Richard Gannon, David Holmes, Chris Hiles, Melanie Graham, Polly McKinnon, Mike Hedges

Original Music Plan 9

Participants Hone Hohepa, Hana Lyola Cotter, Jim Clayton, Sally Sutherland, Thomas Fouhy, Lauris Edmond, Ivan Hodgkinson, Audrey McKelvie, May Blair

2005 PUSH PLAY – THE ACTIVATOR

5 x 30 sec commercials

for Sport and Recreation New Zealand

Promoting physical exercise through activation.

Pearl Productions and Y & R Advertising

Director Gaylene Preston

2004 LANDS OF OUR FATHERS – MY AFRICAN LEGACY

Documentary

70 minutes, Digibeta

Opening an old leather suitcase compels a New Zealand filmmaker to revisit her Rhodesian childhood and reconcile herself with the effects of the colonial past.

Bushcraft in association with Gaylene Preston Productions.

Executive Producer Gaylene Preston

Producer/Director Jennifer Bush-Daumec

Photography Donald Duncan

Editor Paul Sutorius

Sound Tim Prebble,

Michael Hedges

Music Jonathan Besser, Whirimako Black, Oliver Mtukudzi

2003 PERFECT STRANGERS

Feature

100 minutes, widescreen, 35mm, colour

The dangerous deception of desire. A chilling romance.

Gaylene Preston Productions in association with Huntaway Productions, New Zealand Film Productions Trust Fund, New Zealand Film Commission, New Zealand on Air and TVNZ.

Producers Gaylene Preston, Robin Laing

Director/Screenplay

Gaylene Preston

Photography Alun Bollinger

Editor John Gilbert

Sound Ken Saville, Tim Prebble, Mike Hedges

Music David Donaldson, Plan 9,

Steve Roche, Janet Roddick
Principal actors Rachael Blake, Sam Neill, Joel Tobeck

2002 COFFEE, TEA OR ME?

Documentary

70 minutes, Digibeta

The surprising tale of the underestimated trolley dolly. Gaylene Preston Productions

Producer/ Director

Brita McVeigh

Co-producer Gaylene Preston

Photography Cameron McLean

Editor Tim Whitehouse

Sound Anthony Nevison, Tim Prebble, Mike Hedges

Music Paul Casserly

2001 TITLESS WONDERS

Documentary

72 minutes, Beta SP

Emotional journeys after a breast cancer diagnosis.

Gaylene Preston Productions

Producer/Director

Gaylene Preston

Photography Alun Bollinger

Editor Simon Reece

Sound Brian Shennan, John Paske, Trish Armstrong, Kit Rollings

Music Gillian Whitehead

Participants Aimee Gruar, Jan Bolwell, Kay Larking, Irihapeti

Ramsden, Ruth Bly, Viv Walker

2001 WAHINE REQUIEM

Documentary

12 minutes, glass laser disc from Beta
Semi-permanent cinema installation for Wellington Museum of City and Sea. The sinking of the ferry Wahine, in Wellington Harbour, on 10 April 1968.

Producer/Director Gaylene Preston

Photography Alun Bollinger

Editor John Gilbert

Sound Marmalade Sound

1999 GETTING TO OUR PLACE

Documentary

72 minutes, Beta SP
A fly-on-the-wall behind the scenes look at the creation of Te Papa Tongarewa, the Museum of New Zealand.

Gaylene Preston Productions in association with New Zealand On Air and TVNZ.

Executive Producer Geoff Steven

Producers/Directors Gaylene Preston, Anna Cottrell

Photography Chris Terpstra, Darryn Smith

Editor Paul Sutorius

Sound Craig Mullis, Mike Huddleston

Music Jonathan Besser

1999 PUNITIVE DAMAGE

Documentary

78 minutes, 35mm, colour, Dolby stereo
The true story of a death in Timor and the power of a mother's grief.

Occasional Productions in association with Gaylene Preston Productions, New Zealand Film Commission and New Zealand On Air

Executive producer Gaylene Preston

Producer/Director Annie Goldson
Co-producer Gaylene Preston

Photography Leon Narbey, Max Stahl

Editor John Gilbert

Sound Ken Saville

Principal participant Helen Todd

1998 SURVIVOR STORIES

Documentary

36 minutes, glass laser disc
Semi-permanent cinema installation.

The Napier Earthquake of 1931 remembered.

Gaylene Preston Productions for the Hawke's Bay Culture Trust.

Producer/Director Gaylene Preston

Photography David Paul

Editor Paul Sutorius

Participants Hana Lyola Cotter, Lauris Edmond, Audrey McKelvie, Jim Clayton

1997 PARALLEL PATHS

Television commercials for the Land Transport Safety Authority.

Sacchi & Saatchi/Flying Fish

Director Gaylene Preston

1996 NO OTHER LIPS

Documentary

46 minutes, Beta SP
An insight into the world of one of New Zealand's best known and most respected poets, Hone Tuwhare (1922–2008).
Greenstone Pictures in association with Gaylene Preston Productions

Executive producer Caterina de Nave
Producer John Harris

Co-producer/Director Gaylene Preston

Photography Alun Bollinger

Editor Simon Reece

Sound Brian Shennan, Simon Hughes

Music Jonathan Crayford

1995 ABSENT FRIENDS

Television commercials for the Land Transport Safety Authority.

Saatchi & Saatchi/Flying Fish

Director Gaylene Preston

1995 WAR STORIES OUR MOTHERS NEVER TOLD US

Documentary

94 minutes, 35mm, Eastman colour, Dolby stereo
Seven New Zealand women talk candidly about their experiences of World War II.

Gaylene Preston Productions in association with New Zealand Film Commission, New Zealand On Air and TV3

Executive producer Robin Laing
Producer/Director Gaylene Preston

Photography Alun Bollinger

Editor Paul Sutorius

Sound Hugo Tichbourn, Beth Tredray, Don Paulin, Michael Hedges

Music Jonathan Besser

Interviewer Judith Fyfe

Participants Pamela Quill, Flo Small, Tui Preston, Jean Andrews, Rita Graham, Neva Clarke McKenna, Mabel Waititi

1993 BREAD AND ROSES

200 minutes / 90 minutes, 16mm, Eastman colour

The extraordinary story of an ordinary woman: an adaptation of the autobiography of Sonja Davies (1923–2005).

Made as a four-part television miniseries and a telefeature.

Preston Laing Productions in association with Dorothee Pinfold. Made for Television New Zealand and supported by the Suffrage Centennial Year Trust, Beyond Distribution and New Zealand On Air.

Executive Producer Dorothee Pinfold

Producer Robin Laing

Associate Producer/Director Gaylene Preston

Screenplay Gaylene Preston, Graeme Tetley

Photography Allen Guilford, Alun Bollinger, Leon Narbey

Editor Paul Sutorius

Sound Ken Saville, Gethin Creagh, Kit Rollings, Don Paulin

Music John Charles

Principal Actors Genevieve Picot, Mick Rose, Donna Akersten,

Raymond Hawthorne, Tina Regtien, Erik Thomson,

Theresa Healy

1992 MARRIED

Television play

50 minutes, 16mm, Eastman colour
Saturday with suburban parents Trish and Kevin, disrupted by goings-on down at the pub.

Meridian Film Productions in association with the Short Film Fund for TVNZ. Part of an anthology series produced by Robin Laing.

Executive Producer Robin Laing

Producer Cheryl Cameron

Director Gaylene Preston

Screenplay Sue McCauley

Photography Donald Duncan

Editor Dell King

Sound Tony Johnson

Principal Actors Tracey Moore, Edward Campbell, Robyn Malcolm, Brian Sergent, Turei Reedy

1990 RUBY & RATA

Feature

102 minutes, 35mm, Eastman Kodak colour

A comedy–drama about an old lady, a wannabe rock singer and a delinquent child, who discover they have in common than they realise.

Preston Laing Productions with the New Zealand Film Commission.

Producers Gaylene Preston, Robin Laing

Director Gaylene Preston

Screenplay Graeme Tetley

Photography Leon Narbey

Editor Paul Sutorius

Sound Kit Rollings, Mike Judd

Principal Actors Yvonne Lawley, Vanessa Rare, Lee Mete-Kingi, Simon Barnett

1987 KAI PURAKAU

Documentary

27 minutes, 16mm, Eastman colour negative

A rare insight into the life of Booker Prize-winning author Keri Hulme.

Gaylene Preston Productions for Thames Television (UK) and TVNZ.

Producer/Director Gaylene Preston

Photography Leon Narbey

Editor Simon Reece

Sound Brian Shennan, Kit Rollings

Music Jonathan Crayford
Whakatauki, Haka, Song Keri Kaa

1985 MR WRONG (AKA DARK OF THE NIGHT [USA])

Feature

88 minutes, 35mm, colour
A genre bending thriller about a young woman who buys a haunted car, based on a short story by Elizabeth Jane Howard.

Preston Laing Productions in association with the New Zealand Film Commission and Barclays Bank.

Producers Gaylene Preston, Robin Laing

Director Gaylene Preston

Screenplay Gaylene Preston, Geoff Murphy, Graeme Tetley

Photography Thom Burstyn

Editor Simon Reece

Sound Ken Saville

Music Jonathan Crayford

Principal Actors Heather Bolton, David Letch, Gary Stalker, Danny Mulheron, Kate Harcourt, Michael Haigh, Perry Piercy, Margaret Umbers, Suzanne Lee





1983 PATU!

Documentary

85 minutes / 113 minutes (two versions), 16mm, Fuji colour
Merata Mita's documentary about the demonstrations that took place all over New Zealand, in protest against the 1981 Springbok rugby tour.

Awatea Films in association with the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council, the Commission for Evangelisation, Justice and Development, and the New Zealand Film Commission.

Producer/Director Merata Mita

Coordinators Gaylene Preston, Gerd Pohlmann, Martyn Sanderson

Photography Barry Harbert, Warwick Attewell, Chris Barrett, Alister Barry, James Bartle, Alun Bollinger, Paul Carvell, Roger Donaldson, Euan Frizzell, Chris Ghent, Allen Guilford, R. Long, Leon Narbey, Rod Prosser, Mike Single

Editor Annie Collins

Sound Gerd Pohlmann, B. Allen, H. Bollinger, R. Brittenden, Russell Campbell, Tony Johnson, O. Goodman, D. Keene, G. Phillips, D. Newton, Barry Thomas, Tony Woollams, Steve Upston
b Diatribe, Tia Kingi, Syd Melbourne, Haruru Mai

1982 MAKING UTU

Documentary

48 minutes, 16mm, Fuji colour
A documentary about the making of Geoff Murphy's feature film *Utū*, looking at the issues involved in exploring New Zealand's racial past.

Gaylene Preston Productions for Scrubbs & Co

Producer/Director Gaylene Preston

Photography Alun Bollinger, Murray Milne, John Toon

Editor Simon Reece

Sound Tony Woollams

1981 HOLD UP

Short film

24 minutes, 16mm, Eastman colour negative

A parable designed to question community attitudes to the disabled. A blind radio announcer, a deaf dress designer, and a film critic with cerebral palsy, witness a robbery.

Gibson Films in association with Gaylene Preston Productions. Funded by New Zealand Film Commission and International Year of Disabled Persons.

Producer Gaylene Preston, Dave Gibson

Director Gaylene Preston

Screenplay Gaylene Preston, Michael Anthony Noonan

Photography Ian Paul

Editor Jamie Selkirk

Sound Kit Rollings

Music Jan Preston

Principal Actors Chris Orr, Lorraine Schriener, George Theobald

1980 LEARNING FAST

Documentary

49 minutes, 16mm, Eastman colour negative
This film follows seven Masterton 17-year-olds as they leave school and find their place in the world. Made over a two-year period.

Gaylene Preston Productions, funded by the Commissioning Independent Programmes Fund, Department of Education, and Ministry of Sport and Recreation.

Producer/Director Gaylene Preston

Photography Alun Bollinger, Ian Paul

Editor Dell King

Sound Lee Tamahori, Guy Phillips, Kerry Coe, Rick Gustavsen, Don Reynolds

1978 ALL THE WAY UP THERE

Documentary

27 minutes, 16mm, colour
A young physically disabled man, Bruce Burgess, fulfils a long held dream when he climbs Mount Ruapehu with mountaineer Graeme Dingle.

Valhalla Films, funded by the Commissioning Independent Programmes Fund and Ministry of Sport and Recreation.

Producers Gaylene Preston, Warwick Attewell

Director Gaylene Preston

Photography Warwick Attewell

Editor Dell King

Sound Don Reynolds

Music Wayne Mason

When Gaylene Preston came back from England in 1977 she brought three short films she had made, and '... a sort of stubbornness: this is my country and I'm going to contribute to it' (Woods 2005). Her filmography reflects this, and her choices to resist the lure of 'career' (which 'shuts you up, makes you conform' [Woods 2005]), to prioritise family – above all, her daughter Chelsie – and her communities. These communities include those where she has lived – on the West Coast of the South Island–Te Wai Pounamu, in Hawke's Bay and in Wellington – friends, and the filmmaking community – many of whom work with her again and again – where she insists on being part of the conversations, competes vigorously, and is a legendary supporter of emerging filmmakers.

The filmography also supports Gaylene's significant place within the global community of feminist auteurs,' based on her contributions to feminist counter-cinema (*Mr Wrong*, *Perfect Strangers*), women's history (*Lovely Rita*, *Titless Wonders*, *War Stories Our Mothers Never Told Us*, *Bread & Roses*), and the work of other women filmmakers (*Patu!*, *Punitive Damage*, *Coffee, Tea or Me?*, *Lands of Our Fathers*). Her use of many archival sources reinforces this position. Gaylene has often incorporated historical footage from the New Zealand Film Archive, the National Archives and elsewhere within her work, and reframed it in conjunction with interviews made by or for her (*Home by Christmas*, *Earthquake!*, *Survivor Stories*, *Wahine Requiem* and others). She has done the same with poems, books, letters and still images (*No Other Lips*, *Lovely Rita*), and with a film (*Utū*). In *Getting To Our Place* she examined a key archival institution, Te Papa Tongarewa, the Museum of New Zealand. She has worked consistently with New Zealand musicians. Finally, Gaylene's own published writing, her websites, and her extensive personal archive held at the New Zealand Film Archive provide a means to contextualise the filmography. Scholars and filmmakers in the next generations can use this to learn more about how Gaylene's 'sort of stubbornness' works, and to inform and inspire their own contributions.

Endnote

1. '... the idea of the auteur as a node, an agent participating in a poetics of exchange through cinematic labour of all kinds. Auteurism is redefined through giving due consideration to the full extent of the work of the feminist auteur: foregrounding (feminized) labor excluded from the auteurial focus on filmmaking, such as curation, distribution, archiving, and programming. Engaged with the virtual feminist cinematheque, this labor always extends in a feminist gesture collaboratively, collectively, and connectively beyond the auteur's oeuvre' (Columpar and Mayer 2009, 8).

References

Columpar, C., and S. Mayer, eds. 2009. *There She Goes: Feminist Filmmaking and Beyond*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
Woods, B. 2005. DVD. *Actors Equity Cameo Series: Conversation with Gaylene Preston*, Paramount Theatre, 13 December. New Zealand Film Archive No: F113582.

