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ANZAC Girls: An Ethical Auto-Analysis

Felicity Packard and Ben Stubbs

In the late 13th Century William Wallace led the Scottish people in the First War of Independence against England, now an episode of pride and legend in Scotland. In 1995 Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* dramatised the events around William Wallace's journey to liberate Scotland. The film won commercial acclaim and five Oscars, however the historical liberties taken by the screenwriter Randall Wallace have left an indelible mark on the production. The *Braveheart* screenplay invented characters, relationships, customs and resolutions alongside material which is part of the historical record (McArthur 1998). It is from a cautionary tale such as this that our chapter finds its inspiration to discuss the ethical responsibilities of writing the historical screenplay.

This chapter uses the Australian series *ANZAC Girls* (2013), of which Felicity Packard was the lead writer and producer, as our case study. *ANZAC Girls* (2013) is a six part drama series made by Australian production company Screentime for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) which explores the important, but under-represented role of nurses in World War I. It dramatises the lives of real people and is based on *The Other ANZACS—The Extraordinary Story of our World War I Nurses* (2008) by Peter Rees as well as on a variety of other historical sources. This auto-analysis offers an intimate understanding of the ethical responsibilities of the screenwriter in the representation of history. Of course, there are many understandings and versions of the screenwriter's responsibilities towards history.

Some are focused on synthesising archives and historical material, others on staying true to the broader themes at work and the process of creating a plausible, dramatic rendering of these. The case of *ANZAC Girls* provides a particular insight into the use of historical source material against the dramatic purpose of the screenplays and the framework which was used to navigate between the various ethical and historical questions raised during the process.

'ANZAC' is the acronym given to the Australia New Zealand Army Corps who were among the Allied invasion force who landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey on April 25th 1915. In Australia and New Zealand, the ANZAC landing is widely seen as a pivotal moment in the formation of a national identity distinct from their British colonial heritages. The term 'ANZAC' continues to have considerable social power in both countries, embodying the positive (moral) qualities of mateship, humour in the face of adversity, duty, endurance, sacrifice and courage. As a result of this social power, the representations of 'ANZAC' are held under much scrutiny and interest.

This chapter examines how concepts such as truthful representation, the double story and refraction can inform the writing of a screenplay that is both dramatically and commercially appropriate. It offers a particular perspective on the narrativisation of history (see White 1973) from a screenwriting perspective. The screenwriter has the opportunity to represent history in new and valuable ways by virtue of the screenplay form's particular stylistic and aesthetic qualities. In our analysis of *ANZAC Girls* we draw on studies of ethics and representation in complementary disciplines to provide context and comparison. We also observe how, within this particular project, the screenwriter balanced considerations of truthful representation of historical events

against the dramatic needs of the project by utilising a four part framework comprised of truthful representation, subjectivity, the double story and ethical dramatic construction. This essay introduces this framework and then uses *ANZAC Girls* as a case study in its application. We suggest that by writing within this framework, the *ANZAC Girls* screenplays offers insights into ethical representation of a particular history.

The form of history

In order to begin an analysis of screenwriting as a legitimate and ethical contributor to history, it is necessary to observe how the discipline of history has been challenged in the recent past. Much depends in this analysis of the responsibilities of the screenwriter on the form of history presumed to be most appropriate, as well as the model of historiography being proposed. In both areas, the terrain is complex and shifting, and we can only offer a partial view. In this section, we focus on the work of Hayden White, primarily because recent commentary on White's idea of history as a narrative form opens up useful links to screenwriting as a practice. We also draw on the work of Keith Jenkins, a contemporary British historiographer, to elaborate on a view of history-writing as refraction.

Georg Iggers, Edward Wang and Supriya Mukherjee write that up until well into the 20th Century, 'historians shared the optimism of the professionalized sciences generally that methodologically controlled research makes objective knowledge possible' (2008, 1). This scientific conception of truth gave rise to the idea that it was

possible to understand history as it had actually happened. As the perspectives of history broadened to include 'from below' analysis, subaltern studies and focus beyond the Great Men of history, historiography began to move away from the previous insistence on objectivity and empiricism (Iggers, Wang and Mukherjee 2008). In the second half of the 20th Century, and intertwined with these developments, the narrative and narratological practices of the discipline came into sharper focus. Hayden White with his 1973 work *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* stressed the plot-making choices inherent in history writing. White's theory of the narrative quality of all historical works was a significant contribution to this focus on the plurality of history.

White noted that history writing contains 'a deep structural content which is generally poetic, and specifically linguistic, in nature, and which serves as the precritically accepted paradigm of what distinctively "historical" explanation should be' (1973, ix). Despite the resistance of many historians, this alerted practitioners in other fields such as ethnography, travel writing and film studies to the possible value of their 'poetic' and textually focused interpretations of history. Recently there has been a move towards the recognition of these alternative forms within 'post post-modernism' (Ankersmit, Domanska and Kellner 2009), a term coined to suggest the future narrative and creative interpretations of history writing. Post post-modernism broadens the possibilities of what history is by acknowledging a plurality of voices and interpretations.

According to Frank Ankersmit, Ewa Domanska and Hans Kellner, White gave historians new 'technical implements' with which to interpret history writing and it led to the discovery of a new intellectual universe of historical narrative (2009, 3). For

Keith Jenkins, history writing must re-think and expand its mode of representation. Jenkins insists that we ‘re-think that which we call a historical fact so that we understand that it is only a description of things that happened and which, therefore cannot have an intrinsic meaning’ (2003, x). Jenkins says that history writing should now focus on the new ways to construct its representation. The idea of construction here refers to the narrative structure (the organisation of the plot) used to give the history meaning for the reader.

Just as with White’s claims of the inherent structure of history, Jenkins’ celebration of values of plurality and inclusiveness in history open up new possibilities for the screenwriter as historian. Jenkins asks for an openness that provokes ‘radical readings and rereadings, writings and rewritings of the past’ (2003, 3). Jenkins writes of the plausibility of artistic interpretations when he says that it is often expected that words or texts be ‘true’, though there is not the same expectation of a painting. He asks us to imagine the different interpretations of ‘Gainsborough, Turner, Picasso, Warhol, Hockney—all painting the same people against the same, scenic backdrop’ (2003, 55). We expect five very different points of view and stylistic interpretations. He then asks us to imagine asking five historians writing a history and asks why there is resistance to accepting these same differences in style and point of view within history.

Jenkins argues that our attitude towards new history writing should be ‘refractive’; our view (from where we sit in time, culture, profession, etc.) will always give the past a sense of dislocation which we should embrace. Refraction is thus a key component to the ethical dramatisation of history within a screenplay. This concept

invites us to consider the negotiation which occurs between the research material and supplementary sources and dramatic needs of the project. Refraction furthers the understanding that a diversity of narratives presented to a reader can provide more complex and creative, and ultimately illuminating, versions of history.

Refraction is not just a question of perspective, but can also concern the medium in which history is composed. In his 1995 article 'The Historical Film as Real History' Robert Rosenstone observes that many professional historians view the historical film with caution, highlighting the lack of control the historian has over the telling of history in film as a major reason for their unease: 'They (film makers) fictionalize, trivialize, and romanticize important people, events, and movements. They falsify History' (1995a, 1). Rosenstone contests this view in *History on Film/ Film on History*, suggesting that we 'who are called "postmodernist historians" … want our deep interest in and caring for the past to be expressed in forms congenial to both a contemporary sensibility and to intellectual forms consonant with our own era' (2012, 3).

Rosenstone examines genres such as such as history films, mini-series, documentaries and docu-dramas and asks why these forms cannot offer valid representations of history: 'To leave them out of the equation when we think of the meaning of the past is to condemn ourselves to ignore the way a whole segment of the population has come to understand the events and people that comprise history' (2012, 4). By way of an example, the 1981 film *Gallipoli* directed by Peter Weir, is a representation of history which uses research material, subjective interpretation and immersion to create a narrative that is intentionally shaped for its original late 20th Century

audience. The film depicts the Australian experience leading up to the Battle of the Nek, where the 3rd Light Horse Brigade charged the narrow stretch of land on the Gallipoli Peninsula. *Gallipoli* not only examines issues of World War I and Australian soldiers, it refracts them through the style of a well-known director who implores us to question the on-going significance of these historical events. Rosenstone argues that film 'emotionalizes, personalizes, and dramatizes history' (1995b, 59) and that this should not be seen as a restrictive practice, but rather as one that can broaden history.

The diversity represented by different histories are an important form of refraction. If someone gains their first understanding of the important role women played in World War I through watching *ANZAC Girls*, this is not necessarily a negative attachment. If this 'creative' history then prompts a reading of additional histories or women's roles in war to gain a broader understanding of a specific era or topic, then it has enriched their historical understanding. If a film is 'inspired by events' or 'based on real events', it is not necessarily a threat, as some historians would see it, but can be a further contribution to the mosaic of a particular history.

A framework for screenwriting as history

Rosenstone's claims for the director and the 'creator' of a film history can, we believe, also be made for the screenwriter constructing the framework of the story, but creates some key questions. What are the standards that screenwriters as historians should strive for? What are the criteria by which we should evaluate our work? How

should we define, and then work within, our ethical, historical and creative responsibilities? Arising out of the experience of working on *ANZAC Girls*, we suggest that careful use of a framework of truthful representation (Berkhofer 1997), subjectivism (Ankersmit, Domanska and Kellner 2009), the double story (Grafton 1997) and ethical dramatic construction (Beker 2004) can be used to evaluate and inform historically oriented screenwriting. This framework covers a variety of issues and subjects which articulate some of the key responsibilities of the screenwriter, on both ethical and dramatic levels.

Truthful representation

The acceptance of the truthful representation by the reader is crucial to the recognition of a screenplay as a legitimate and ethical contribution. Robert Berkhofer (1997, 66) states that no work of history conveys only literal truth through factuality, and few fictional narratives depict only fantasy. Berkhofer says that historians claim the accuracy of their subjects and a fidelity on the basis of documentary evidence—they do not create motivations or allude to acts without this evidence. Because of the selection and ordering of material it could be said that this is also a form of subjective history and it suggests that any narrative expression—such as a screenplay—that adheres to a conduct of truthfulness can make claims to validity. In other words, it is possible to believe in the 'truth' of a work if it adheres to this conduct. This suggests that the truth of a work is dependent on the conduct of a subject (the screenwriter), thus highlighting the responsibilities of the screenwriter if they hope their screenplay is regarded seriously.

Subjective perspectives

Subjective perspectives acknowledge the place of the constructor within the work.. Scholars have now come to accept the narrative nature of history, which can be subjective, against the notion of a singular 'truth' which previously clouded accounts of the past and the claim of objectivity. The key here is the conduct of the writer and the production team representing this truthfulness. Ankersmit argues that by accepting that there are different notions of 'truth' we can observe the validity of a subjective perspective in history writing: 'a political history of France in the 18th Century does not contradict, but complements, an economic history of France in that same period' (2001, 78). Ankersmit continues, 'What is objective truth to one historian may well be a mere value judgment in the eyes of another historian' (2001, 80). He says there are three variants to be taken into consideration with the writing of history:

> First, it presents us with a *representation* of the past; second, this representation will consist of *true statements* embodying its cognitive pretensions; and third, though this may take different forms and may be more prominent in some cases that in others, *ethical rules and values* will codetermine the historian's account of the past. (2001, 95)

This provides clear suggestions for the writing of a particular history. The elements of representation, truth and adherence to certain ethical values offer different points of intersection for all writers of history, whether they are traditional historians,

filmmakers or screenwriters and these ethical values, such as responsibility, reaction and fidelity to sources will differ depending on the medium.

Ankersmit affirms multiple representations of history: ‘If we were to possess only *one* representation of part of the past, we would be completely helpless to judge its scope’ (2001, 96). From this statement it is possible suggest that the screenwriter’s account can be both an ethical and valuable addition to the narrative while extending the reach and perspective of a particular history.

The double story

A further aspect to consider when constructing a historical screenplay is the ‘double story’, a term coined by Anthony Grafton in *The Footnote*. The double story is the trust forged with the audience through the visibility of the research. ‘Like the high whine of the dentist’s drill, the low rumble of the footnote on the historian’s page reassures’ (1997, 5). It is not enough to recount months or years of archival work, it must be done in such a way that the reader or audience can participate and understand the history (and its perspective) through narrative and how this is synthesised within the narrative. Academic history writing is often preferred over other representations of history because it makes an appeal to evidence to distinguish it from other more popular forms. Within *The Footnote* Grafton gives a sophisticated theory of this rigorous method. He makes it clear that the double story that arises within academic

history, firstly of the actual history and, secondly, of the accompanying footnotes which detail how the writer arrived at these points, are both narratives within the text.

Grafton suggests that the reliability of the double story within history writing is about how the writer persuades the reader to believe in the rigour of their method. This double story also allows the reader to check for themselves within the references. Grafton says that 'no two anthropologists will describe the same description of a transaction in identical categories' (1997, 15) and it is through this double story that the reader is able to understand how the writer arrived at their particular interpretation (whether it is history, anthropology or screenwriting). 'In practice, moreover, every annotator rearranges materials to prove a point, interprets them in an individual way, and omits those that do not meet a necessarily personal standard of relevance' (1997, 16). Grafton suggests that truth is achieved through the conduct of the subject, shown within a history as the 'proofs' of the validity of the work—an argument which opens up the possibility that screenwriting can also utilise this double story within history writing.

Screenwriters do not simply consult Wikipedia before launching into a historical screenplay (one hopes). The archival research in a project such as *ANZAC Girls* is immense and it is the screenwriter's job to demonstrate this evidence within the texture of the screenplay, whether this be through the use of text cards and titles to establish context, or the broader faithful rendering of events to assure the audience of the writer's knowledge. There are numerous commercial, ethical and structural concerns for the screenwriter writing history and, as such, it is a more challenging

process for the screenwriter to demonstrate their archival research in a way which respects the flow of the drama.

Ethical dramatic construction

Marilyn Beker's *Screenwriting with a Conscience* (2004) details how, for both moral and commercial reasons, screenwriters need to be aware of ethics when constructing a screenplay (2004, 10). Beker highlights 'why' as the most important question a screenwriter needs to ask themselves when constructing a screenplay which deals with real events. While there are considerations for structure and shape, when dealing with the stories and histories of people and places, the understanding of the enduring legacy of the work and the lasting imprint it could leave should factor in the screenwriter's considerations. When dramatising 'real' events it is important to ensure the subject and the writer retain dignity and legitimacy to ensure the impact and reputation of the work so that the integrity of the adapted history may remain long after the writing process is completed.

An ethical auto-analysis

In this section, we examine how the four part framework of truthful representation, subjectivity, the double story and ethical dramatic construction operated in the writing *ANZAC Girls.* While focused primarily on the perspective of the screenwriter Felicity Packard, television is, however, a collaborative medium. Packard's was not the only

voice in the creative and ethical debate about how history was represented in *ANZAC Girls*. Also deeply engaged were the second writer, Niki Aken, series producer Lisa Scott and executive [SM1]producers from both Screentime and the ABC, Greg and Des Monaghan, and David Ogilvy and Carole Sklan respectively.[1] Hence the use of collective pronouns in the discussion that follows.

ANZAC Girls is based on the lived experiences of five young women (four Australians and one New Zealander) who served with the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) in World War I. The inspiration for the show came from the desire to make a drama for the centenary of World War I, but with a point of difference. The experiences of Australia's military nurses of World War I are somewhat neglected by both historians and popular culture (Rogers 2003; Hallett 2009; Harris 2011). Our primary source materials were the five nurses' war diaries and letters, and the book *The Other ANZACS—The Extraordinary Story of our World War I Nurses*, by Peter Rees. The competing concerns operating on our creative choices included the desire to accurately represent the nurses' representations of themselves; sensitivity towards the nurses' families and their concerns about how their deceased relatives would be represented; awareness that in making a drama based on real events we would be making substantial truth claims which would invite scrutiny; and, the need to create a work that met the episodic structural conventions and commercial expectations of a mainstream television drama.

Truth claims and the double story

Before the commencement of the title sequence, every episode of *ANZAC Girls* is preceded by the following card of text:

> This drama is based on the lives of real people. Certain characters, events and timelines have been created or changed for dramatic effect.

This card is the first statement about our approach to the dramatization of the past and is integral to our ethical construction of history. This disclaimer predated production and was negotiated through several drafts. The ABC has a substantial 'Factual Drama Policy' which addresses key editorial standards including the possible need for 'appropriate labels of other explanatory information' which seek to avoid presenting factual information in a way that 'will materially mislead the audience' (ABC, 2011). The disclaimer's first sentence makes a truth claim about the actuality of the events and people to be represented. The second sentence then disclaims absolute actuality, acknowledging the consciously fictive elements inherent in that representation. Both sentences commence the double story, which invites the audience to gauge the reliability of our representation. Though based on real events *ANZAC Girls* is not a documentary[2], nor, as this card makes apparent, does it claim to be one. Indeed, this pre-title 'disclaimer' specifically foregrounds the combination of fact and fiction that informs our representation of history.

Following the title sequence but before the drama, every episode of *ANZAC Girls* is preceded by one, two or three 'cards' of text that place the events to follow in historical context.

> Following the outbreak of World War I, the Australian Army Nursing Service was hastily deployed. (episode 1; pre-drama card #1)

Post-drama cards also appear at the conclusion of some episodes where the events that have been depicted in the preceding drama are supported and expanded upon:

> In May 1916, Matron Grace Wilson was awarded the Royal Red Cross 1st Class for her management of No.3 Australian General Hospital on Lemnos. (episode 3, post-drama card #2)

As with the truth (dis)claimer card, all pre- and post-drama cards were not post-production additions to the screen. All had been part of the screenwriters' 'work' in the screenplay through the drafting process. Along with providing factual information and historical context, the pre- and post-drama cards also operate as part of the ethical framework around which our representation of history is built. The cards make explicit that the particular lens with which *ANZAC Girls* examines and dramatises World War One is female- and nurse-focused. The (male) ANZAC soldiers' experiences at the Gallipoli campaign and the Western Front are part of an already well-known historical narrative in both Australia and New Zealand (De Vries 2013); these cards highlight that *ANZAC Girls* offers an alternative history about the war that privileges women's experiences.

At points in some episodes, text is superimposed at the bottom of the screen, over the action. The following three 'supers' appear at the end of Episode 5, as one of our

primary characters, Sister Olive Haynes, leaves No.1 Australian General Hospital (AGH) in Rouen, France for the last time:

> Olive Haynes married Pat Dooley in England in December 1917.
>
> Olive returned to Australia in February 1918, working on a hospital ship.
>
> The Army did not pay her for this service.

These ‘supers’, and others like them used in the series, add to, and expand on, the main narrative, supporting the overall truth claims of the representation and activating Grafton’s ‘double story’ (1997). They invite the viewer to check the facts for themselves, constructing a secondary narrative that moves with, but differs from, the primary story and signal a desire to avoid deceiving or misleading the audience. Along with the disclaimer and pre- and post-drama cards, these text-on-screen supers also produce, following Beker, an ethical dramatic construction of history, building on and enhancing the reliability of the *ANZAC Girls* version of World War I. They help to build in the audience trust that the version of history represented in *ANZAC Girls* is truthful. They offer the audience warrants that the storylines that seem like ‘fictions’ possess historical authenticity. The truth claim for *ANZAC Girls* was an essential element in how the series was promoted and marketed, as well as for its legacy as a historical document. The double story embodied in the cards and supers reminds audiences accustomed to fictional narratives that that the people and events they are seeing represented on screen are drawn from lived experiences.

The double story in *ANZAC Girls* also address any accusation that we were freely inventing material, and playing fast and loose with events and timelines for purely dramatic purposes. The cards and supers are not offered as exhaustive proof of every assertion made by, or implicit in, the screenplay. They are instead supporting evidence of the historical actuality of the events depicted, offered in a such way that does not 'break the fourth wall' or take a viewer 'out of the drama' with a documentary history lesson. Operating within the conditions outlined by the pre-title disclaimer, the pre- and post-drama cards and supers offer the audience reassurance that the representation of history *ANZAC Girls* offers is not misleading; that it is a valid representation of past events and people.

Ethical dramatic construction

One of the most serious deviations from historical fact is the changing of a player's name, the alteration of an identity. Yet in order to satisfy our ethical representation of the ANZAC nurse's stories we took the decision to change a character's name. While reading the journal of Sister Alice Ross King, another of our primary characters, held at the Australian War Memorial, we came across the following entry. Alice was working at No.1 AGH in Cairo at the time.

> March 1st,
>
> Claude was telling me of a nice clean boy of ours who was put in a tent with a venereal case and has caught gonoreal[sic] conjunctivitis. His eyes are running with pus and he is almost sure to lose the sight of them both. The sad part of it

> was that the nurse (Miss Samsing) objected to nurse him for fear her own eyes become infected. I'm really longing to nurse that man and perhaps save his eyesight. This wretched woman made a fuss and would not go in the boy's tent—I could slay her. (Ross King 1915)

This is a very appealing incident for a screenwriter. Firstly, it shows the nurses as multi-dimensional, flawed characters. Following on from this, it contests the prevailing 'ministering angel' image of World War I nurses of popular sentiment (Harris 2011). Moreover, it comes straight from the diary of one of our main historical figures and speaks to her strong attitude and character. It also gives a different perspective on the war and opens up an instance of nursing that does not involve war wounds, discussing instead an aspect of but raises instead the huge challenge to the army and the medical corps that was venereal disease.

The incident was, however, reportage and our central character was not directly involved. In keeping with the disclaimer that points to invention of incident, therefore,O our first decision was to put our character Alice working in the venereal disease ward in order she become direct witness to, indeed, a participant in the incident. This conflation and restructuring of an event and its participants and is standard practice in adaptation (Portnoy 1998) where the adapting writer faces the challenge to ensure 'the original material work(s) within a tight dramatic structure' (Portnoy 1998, 5).

In the first draft of the screenplay, the incident and players were represented thus:

INT. NO. 1 AGH/VD CORRIDOR – DAY

ALICE

Why haven’t you cleaned his eyes?

ALICE has cornered SISTER SAMSING in the corridor. SISTER SAMSING is somewhat defensive.

ALICE (CONT’D)

Private Leigh’s your patient. Why haven’t you cleaned his eyes in two days?

SISTER SAMSING says nothing. ALICE is livid. Calm, but livid.

ALICE (CONT’D)

Sister Samsing?

SISTER SAMSING

(bursts out)

Do you know how infectious gonorrheal conjunctivitis is?! The slightest transfer of matter and my own eyes could be at risk...!

ALICE stares at her, appalled.

SISTER SAMSING (CONT’D)

The orderlies should work this ward. We shouldn’t have to risk our health with these filthy men, their filthy habits...

ALICE

Private Leigh isn’t ‘filthy’, he’s a nice clean boy who contracted VD from using his tent-mate’s towel. As you could have discovered if you’d actually bothered to talk to him!

SISTER SAMSING reacts - but the best defense is attack.

SISTER SAMSING

Yes, well, we’re not all of us coquettes with the patients like you Sister Ross King.

ALICE

I beg your pardon?

SISTER SAMSING

Being familiar with the men, glad eyeing every officer...you’d think we were at war just so you can play the field!

ALICE is furious but she’s also taken aback because there could be some truth. But she recovers. Leans in close, practically nose to nose.

ALICE

I could slay you. Keep your rotten eyes closed.

This sees the dialogue for both characters drawn to a large extent from the diary entry, and as such operates within Berkhofer’s standard of truthful representation in that we have documentary evidence for the event and motivations we ascribe. Sister Hilda Samsing nursed with the AANS in World War One, serving on hospital ships as well

as in Cairo, and later in London. She was a person of clearly very strong views, describing (in her diary) the British High Command during the disastrous Gallipoli campaign as ‘those inhuman monsters’ and calling for them to be sacked (Samsing, quoted in De Vries 2013, 112). The Australian Army saw venereal disease as a moral issue rather than a medical one, and the tens of thousands of men who became infected were regarded by High Command as ‘rotten’ and ‘swindlers’ with their pay stopped for the duration of their absence from duty (Rees 2008, 48).

Representing this incident was complex. We took the decision to give Sister Samsing the fictional name ‘Sister Halliwell’ which is how the character appears in the finished episode. Beker says that in order to ensure their work is ethical ‘screenwriters who want to include controversial material must first examine their motives for doing so’ (2004, 10). Refusing to nurse a patient is clearly a controversial incident and my evidence for it is hearsay—it is Alice’s representation of what someone else has told her about a third person. The real Sister Samsing was a decorated nurse, whose service in the AANS is discussed extensively by historians (De Vries 2013; Harris (2011). To represent the historical Sister Samsing in what amounts to dereliction of duty, would have been to move beyond allowable subjectivism. The decision to fictionalize fictionalise the character is encompassed by the fourth element of the framework that informed our representation of history: ‘ethical dramatic construction’. Beker says that ‘everything that appears in a screenplay should be considered in context and by the seeming intent of the scriptwriter’ (2004, 10). To have taken Sister Samsing out of context would have been, we felt, ethically unjustifiable.

Had *ANZAC Girls* been Sister Samsing's story we would have perhaps had the opportunity to explore and dramatise the deeper motivations for her attitude to the gonorrheal conjunctivitis sufferer and fear for her eyesight. But she was, at best, a supporting player. Thus, in order to retain the incident, but treat the players within it in an ethical manner, we decided to avoid any inference that the nurse depicted was Sister Samsing.

Another alternative was of course, to drop the gonorrheal conjunctivitis incident altogether. But leaving out the practical implications of reduced content and subsequent storytelling problems, to have ignored the 'refusal to nurse' incident and its examination of differences in the nurses' professionalism and attitudes would have been to homogenize and sanitize our representation of what were, in actuality, complex human beings operating in a complex world (Harris 2011). Fidelity to and concern for an ethical representation of the past can and should involve looking beyond the facts, and include a consciousness of the period's complexity of milieu. By changing and creating events and characters in the way we did in this sequence, we were able to represent a version of World War I nurses that told a larger truth than just that available to us had we adhered strictly to the primary evidence of Alice Ross King's diary.

Subjective perspectives

A final example of how we sought to represent a version of history that was engaging and 'refractive' (Jenkins 2003, 55) while also treating the real events and people on

which it was based an ethical manner, played out in the final episode of the series. The following entries come from the diary of another of our primary sources and major characters, Sister Elsie Cook, whose diary is also held in the Australian War Memorial. Elsie had joined the AANS in 1914 under her maiden name, as nurses were not permitted to be married. After having been forced to resign from the AANS in 1916, Elsie returned to the war, nursing with the Red Cross in various hospitals across France. Her husband was Sydney Cook, son of the former Prime Minister of Australia, Sir Joseph Cook. Syd had been wounded twice at Gallipoli (once very seriously) but had continued to serve in frontline duties.

> 27th December
>
> A letter from Syd and such a miserable one too—that is, in between the lines, writing on his knee with a candle on his tin helmet, in a ruin of an old chateau freezing with cold—poor old chap and going into the line. (Cook 1917)

> 5th June
>
> A very important document from the High Commissioner's office to say that Mr Cook was expected to arrive in England any day after 13th June—three letters from Syd all dwelling on the all important subject of leave for Blighty. Very awkward and difficult to arrange just at this moment, with so much to be done. (Cook 1918)

> 11th June
>
> A letter from Syd which again speaks of leave when the Pater arrives but my chance of leave looks pretty poor. (Cook 1918)

14th June

Mr Cook arrived in London today. Got a letter from Syd to say he expected to go on leave today—the letter was written a week ago. Although I shouldn't, I asked for leave to go to England tomorrow. (Cook 1918)

These entries and several others like them were appealing as drama for two reasons. Firstly, they give an indication of the stress that Sydney Cook was under after three or more years at war. Secondly, and more significantly, they indicate the tension Elsie felt at her divided loyalties between her role as a wife and daughter daughter-in in-law, and her job as a nurse. This is the scene dramatizing dramatising the 'leave' issue alluded to by the entries:

INT. OFFICERS' HOSPITAL/ELSIE & FRASER'S ROOM (AMIENS) - NIGHT

SYD strides into the room, excited, up-beat.

SYD

Have you had your leave for London approved yet?

ELSIE follows, closing the door behind her.

ELSIE

(beat)

Not yet.

SYD

Well it won't be a problem...

He pulls out a LONDON GUIDEBOOK (circa 1917), starts flipping.

SYD (CONT'D)

Father's going to have a word to the head of the Croix Rouge, pull a few strings. Now, I've circled the places we should visit. Thought we'd start with the galleries then go onto Covent Garden...

But ELSIE is stunned by his earlier information.

ELSIE

Your father's writing on my behalf?

SYD nods, smiles, keeps flipping...

ELSIE (CONT'D)

I do wish he wouldn't.

SYD

(smiles)

Not feeling squeamish over a bit of queue jumping are you...?

ELSIE (OVER)

No -

SYD hasn't picked up on her tension. Teasing:

SYD

...because you’ve certainly never scrupled to play the ‘my father-in-law is Sir Joseph Cook’ card before!

ELSIE says nothing, turns away to hide her anger.

SYD (CONT’D)

Something wrong?

ELSIE

(turns back)

I told you - with the big push on, things are very busy at the hospital right now. They’ll be hard pressed without me.

SYD

Hard pressed?

(a smile)

Are you sure? You’re only a nurse.

On ELSIE, stunned, as the unintended slap in the face hits. It takes her a beat to find her voice. And when she does, though calm, she’s as angry as we’ve ever seen her.

ELSIE

Only a nurse or not, now’s not the time for me to go gallivanting off to London.

(an edge)

Even though I am ‘only a nurse’...

SYD’s getting angrier too now.

SYD

For goodness sake, I’m not saying they don’t value you, but I can’t believe there’s no-one else who can fill your shoes.

ELSIE

And I can’t believe that you expect me just to come to your beck and call -!

SYD (CUTS IN)

Alright, alright!...Just seems a bit off, putting your...(work)... what you do, ahead of us.

(sadder; quieter)

We don’t get many chances to be together.

He’s hurting. His excitement drops away revealing that he’s utterly weary, utterly worn. And now ELSIE’s dudgeon evaporates and she comes to stand beside him.

ELSIE

And I would love to take this one. But I can’t.

(beat)

I know you need me. But I truly believe that right now I’m needed more here.

SYD’s not convinced, but he’s got no energy to argue. He puts his guidebook back in his pocket.

ELSIE is miserable, their evening spoiled. And she’s troubled - there’s a gap between them that’s never been there before.

As evidenced in her diary, Elsie did, in reality, apply for, and take leave to visit her father in law in London as her husband urged. But in our version of history we had her refuse, a decision to depart from the documentary evidence whose ethics required careful reflection. Like all our five primary historical subjects, Elsie Cook has living descendants with whom we were in contact during our research. The Cook family, like the families of the other nurses, were delighted that their grandmother's war service was to be celebrated on screen; but were also clearly concerned that she (and their grandfather) be represented ethically in a medium which has a reputation for using 'history …[as] just another tool for selling tickets' (Rosenstone 2012, 2). Inventing a serious 'gap' between these real people had to measure up against a stronger ethical framework than simply providing a lovers' tiff for the sake of dramatic conflict. Beker stresses that in order to assert that their work is ethical, it is critical that a screenwriter reflect not only on what they are saying but also on why they are saying it and strive to ensure what they say is what they actually believe (Beker 2004). We felt it was, in this instance, ethically responsible and justifiable to deviate from a literal representation of the events in our primary source (Elsie's diary) in order to make two larger points, to access and represent other historical 'truths'. The first is that nursing was, in World War I, a marginalised and little understood profession (Hallett 2009; De Vries 2013). Moreover, nurses often experienced substantial prejudice from officers and the Army hierarchy and were paid less than half the rate of untrained male orderlies (Rees 2008, xv). Having Elsie resist, in some small but significant way, an attack on her profession and identity outside of that related to her marriage, represented a refraction from the source material that we believe is valid. Like creatively adapting the gonorrhoeal conjunctivitis incident, it allowed for a legitimate plurality of histories and also speaks to the broader theme of

the series which is based on a larger and, in this context, more important ‘truth’. Moreover, various others of Elsie’s diary entries do hint at occasional tension with Syd.

> 5th November
>
> A letter from Syd (didn’t like it)
>
> (Cook 1917)

This brief allusion is tantalizing for a screenwriter, and while Elsie does not disclose the precise source of her frustration, the entry and others like it suggest that she was not always in complete harmony with her husband. This informed our decision to adapt the ‘leave’ debate in the way we did. Communication with their relatives had indicated that Elsie and Syd’s relationship was not always perfectly harmonious. Thus we did not misrepresent them, nor the family’s memories of them. Throughout the previous episodes of *ANZAC Girls*, in keeping with the evidence from Elsie’s diary, we had represented Elsie and Syd as multi-dimensional people, and dramatised their deep attachment to each other. Adapting this ‘leave’ incident was not to suggest anything ethically problematic about them or their relationship—we were not inventing an infidelity, or a pregnancy, or even a missed birthday.

Deviating from the source material (i.e. seeing Elsie and Syd in conflict) allowed us to explore and expose a second generic, historical ‘truth’. As discussed earlier, rethinking history writing allows for a realism achieved by ‘mimetic illusion’ (Ankersmit 2001, 61). The reality embodied in the mimetic illusion of this conflict between Elsie and Syd, is that the real source of the conflict is their prolonged war

service. It is their nearly five years of constant exposure to the horrors of war, that is driving this wedge between them and taking the toll on their intimacy. The on-going, cumulative psychological and emotional damage done by their years of protracted frontline service (Bassett 1992; Harris 2011) was another aspect of the nurses' lived experiences we felt it was ethically critical to represent. In order to do so, while writing an effective screenplay that remained focused on our chosen historical figures, we departed from our primary source and 'invented' an element of what the series makes a generalised truth claim for.

Conclusion

Michael Hirst, writer of the feature films *Elizabeth, Elizabeth: The Golden Age*, and creator and writer of the TV series *The Tudors* and *Vikings*, says in relation to challenges of representing history on screen: 'What you're looking for is not historical accuracy—in any case there is no such thing as historical accuracy because otherwise all historians would agree. What you're looking for is authenticity, is plausibility, is consistency and hopefully some truth' (in Taylor 2015[SM2]). Just how a screenwriter make ethical claims of having achieved 'some truth', when working in a form renowned more for narrative expediency than historical veracity, has formed the subject of this chapter. Each screenwriter writing history needs to weigh the needs of story against the demands of historical facts - and there is no ready measure. The balance shifts from screenplay to screenplay, from incident to incident; indeed, as shown in our analysis of *ANZAC Girls*, even from scene to scene. And attendant on every decision the screenwriter writing the historical screenplay makes are ethical

responsibilities. We have sought to explore the some of those ethical responsibilities of writing the historical screenplay, investigating how, in the writing of *ANZAC Girls*, screenwriting as history can be a creative and narrative form which operates within ethical boundaries while also extending both the reach and possibilities for retelling history.[SM3]

Each historical event presents the screenwriter with its own unique creative and research challenges arising from knowledge gaps, subjectivity and temporal distance. Similarly, each historical event presents the screenwriter with its own unique set of ethical challenges. Considerations of gender, race, class, sexuality and geography (to cite but a few) may all impact upon the screenwriter's creative and interpretative decisions. The field is wide open for further research into the ethical considerations concomitant with screenwriters dramatizing different histories and how those considerations influenced what actually ended up on the page. Via our auto-analysis of the writing of the World War I drama *ANZAC Girls* we have discussed the ethical framework that worked for us. This framework, comprised of four key elements - truthful representation, subjectivity, the double story and ethical dramatic construction - supported the creation of ethically sound historical screenplays. Our framework is not exhaustive; commercial constraints and differences in approaches to production may see future screenwriters adapting it or applying it in different ways. The auto-analysis of the screenplays for *ANZAC Girls* demonstrates the ways in which one screenwriter writing history sought to represent past events and people in an ethically rigorous way that permitted legitimate truth claims while also allowing for the production of dramatically appropriate screenplays. We believe that approaching writing history via this framework, resulting screenplays have the potential to enrich

the discipline of history writing, particularly during its current era of rethinking (Jenkins 2003; Ankersmit, Domanska and Kellner 2009). W.We also believe that future screenwriters writing history may find our framework useful as they consider the ethical challenges of dramatising historical actualities within their own work.[SM4]

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Notes

[1] ABC Executive Producers: Carole Sklan and David Ogilvy; Screentime Executive Producers: Des Monaghan and Greg Haddrick; Series Producer: Lisa Scott; co-writer of episodes 2 & 3(with Felicity Packard) and writer of episode 5: Niki Aken.

[2] Such disclaimers are not unusual; indeed they have become a kind of trope, attached to many screen narratives to convey a sense of legitimacy and reality to content whose connection to historical events may be somewhat tenuous, such as *Wolf Creek*, *Fargo* and *The Blair Witch Project.*