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Divergent Femininities in British Film, 1945-59

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on

Divergent Femininities in British Film, 1945-59

British cinema of the post-war period has often been characterised as anodyne in terms of gender relations, with the exciting 'wicked ladies' of the war years erased in favour of more conservative versions of femininity. Recent writing (Geraghty, 2000, Harper and Porter, 2003) has brought challenges to bear on this paradigm and opened up a critical space for a more nuanced analysis of gender. This thesis considers representations of divergent femininities in post-WWII British films, that is, female characters who function as liminal figures and who queer boundaries between normative and divergent femininity. I explore how divergent femininities are constructed and the extent to which gender conservatism can be challenged in films from the period. A number of well-known (cross-genre) films, such as *Woman in a Dressing Gown* (1957) and *Mandy* (1952), are analysed, augmented by other films that have received little critical attention, for example, *The Perfect Woman* (1949), *Dear Murderer* (1947) and *Young Wives' Tale* (1951). This study employs detailed textual and semiotic analyses (film, reviews, publicity material, critical writings) to produce a historicised feminist reading of 1950s films and femininity and, by combining attention to visual style with an analysis of contextual material, complements existing scholarship which emphasises film production and reception.

This thesis explores the extent to which female desire for autonomy, excitement and social mobility could be expressed in 1950s films, and how women questioned their 'proper place' in the gendered social economy. Women's function as housewives is problematised in ways that enter into contemporaneous debates about modernity and consumerism. The heterosexual nuclear family survives as the preferred familial model but the difficulty of mothering is dramatised in ways that challenge hegemonic maternity. Heteroromance and marriage remain the central goal for all women and censorship largely curtails the depiction of female sexuality outside this paradigm. A space however is opened up for women to voice desire for something *in addition* to the role of wife and mother and in this respect these liminal figures represent a cultural contestation of normative femininity. They shore up - whilst simultaneously challenging - certain ideals of femininity and in doing so speak of the consolidation and transformation of gender relations in post-war British society, suggesting a more dynamic model than has been acknowledged.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the construction of femininity in British films from the post-war period. In particular I analyse representations of femininity as they occur in films produced between 1945-59. Since the time in question is frequently associated with a rather conservative model of femininity (Hopkins, 1963; Perkins, 1996), I am concerned with those depictions of femininity that do not easily fit within a normative paradigm, women who function as liminal figures and who, in so doing, are symptomatic of some of the tensions and contradictions of representations of women during this period. For, as I shall demonstrate in this thesis, representations of femininity in films from the period 1945-59 offered an uneasy negotiation between the old and the new, shoring up certain ideals of womanhood whilst simultaneously questioning those very ideals.

My interest in this subject stems from an awareness of how the period between 1945-59 has been understood, from both a general and a feminist standpoint, as a time when the advantages women gained during the Second World War were rapidly lost (Hopkins, 1963; Friedan, 1963; Wilson, 1977; Perkins, 1996). These advantages broadly pertain to employment and increased personal freedom. Churchill's war-time government introduced female conscription which created a large pool of young, single women who were increasingly visible in entering employment and traditionally male occupations such as engineering, and increasingly mobile.[1] This visibility and mobility in female employment drew young women into the public sphere and in doing so brought challenges to bear on the traditional links between women and the private, domestic realm. Many single women enjoyed enhanced disposable incomes and relaxed parental control in relation to their

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[1] Female conscription was introduced with the National Service (No. 2) Act of 1941 and the 1942 Employment of Women Order. The former introduced female conscription for women aged 19-30 years to either the auxiliary forces or essential industries. The latter applied to women aged between 18-40 years, and gave the government powers to control the geographical movement of women war-workers, directing them to

sexuality and personal freedom, whilst mothers with young dependants benefited from state-supported nursery provision.[2] It is these advances that were thought to have been lost in the post-war period when the sexual and economic opportunities that had opened up for women during the war dissolved as male troops returned and women, willingly and happily, retreated to the home.[3] Paradoxically, women's employment increased during the 1950s (particularly among married and older women) as the British economy expanded in areas which either traditionally or increasingly employed women, for example, clerical work, light and service industries, and the caring professions in the new welfare state[4] (Pugh, 1992: 287-8). The post-war labour market however was sharply marked by gender-segregation with women employed in casual, poorly paid and unskilled occupations (ibid). Furthermore, dominant discourses did not address women as workers but rather as dependants; Beveridge's welfare state was predicated on the notion of women as housewives. It is for these reasons that the period has passed into historical consciousness as a time of feminist failure. The 1950s have therefore often been seen as a period of conservative gender relations which reinforced women's primary role as wife, mother and consumer for the domestic realm, only challenged by the advent of the more radical 1960s.

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areas across the country that were experiencing acute labour shortages. Women caring for children were exempt from the acts (Chapman, 1998).

[2] I am not suggesting either a homogenous war-time femininity or experience of the war. However, within the cultural imaginary, the war is associated with a period of freedom in opposition to the 1950s which are understood as a time of containment in relation to women.

[3] Hopkins' social history is predicated on this perspective and sets up a clear opposition between the 'old-time feminist' who argued for equal opportunities and equal access to education and jobs, and the new women of the fifties who happily embraced their domestic role and 'shamelessly ... hug their chains' (1963: 323). Perkins takes a similar position, arguing that the period is often associated 'both at the time and retrospectively' with feelings of 'disappointment ... for socialists and feminists alike ... that something "went wrong"' (1996: 265). Although Perkins recognises that the number of women in employment increased in the 1950s their position in traditionally feminine occupations and the gendered structuring of the labour market is evidence for her of a failure to capitalise on war-time gains. The shortcomings of these approaches are that they are grounded in assumptions that female agency and autonomy can only be expressed completely through equal opportunities and access to education and employment. Failure to compete with men on male-defined terms is understood as a feminist failure but this does not engage with some women's desires to be based in the home, to raise children, how they understood that role, and women's continued and increasing presence in the work-force throughout the 1950s and beyond.

[4] The association of women with caring professions such as nursing is long-standing and allows apparently contradictory discourses of career versus domesticity for women to be resolved. As Philips and Haywood argue the popular image of the nurse, frequently found in literature and film, 'celebrates "maternal" qualities, but at the same time allows for a "modern" professional competence in women' (1998: 100). Many of the

From the standpoint of 2004, the fifties are a period that fall between the two major events of World War II and the social revolutions of the 1960s. Indeed from a broadly feminist perspective, the fifties are a decade of relative silence, flanked by the lone voice of Simone de Beauvoir in 1949 and Betty Friedan's 1963 exposition of what had actually been happening to – albeit white, middle-class - women in the intervening decade.[5]

Woman's primary role as wife, mother and domestic consumer was predicated on certain key discourses of femininity. At this point I want to expand briefly on these dominant ideas of femininity as they have been imagined historically in Western thought; there will be a fuller discussion on certain strands relating to femininity in each chapter. I focus my discussion on those writers who propounded theories of femininity that are most relevant to this thesis. Femininity is understood as the attributes, cultural and social, that are assumed to be 'naturally' linked, as a result of biological and/or psychic processes, to a body that is read as sexed female. These attributes, as Tuttle argues, are 'displayed through costume, speech, posture, behaviour, bodily adornments and attitude' (quoted in Mills, 1992: 271). The dichotomy in Western thought between male and female, masculinity and femininity (extended to include other polarities such as rationality and emotion, mind and matter for example) is long-standing, pervasive and hierarchical, and has been the subject, historically, of significant debate.[6] For Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, women were trained to exhibit 'cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety' which was necessary to obtain the

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skills associated with nursing such as patience, empathy and professionalism are closely aligned with the qualities deemed essential for marriage and motherhood in the post-war world.

[5] Pugh (1992) details the vicissitudes of the organised women's movement in Britain in the 1950s which experienced a relative decline in membership and uncertainty about its direction after the goals of political voting rights and welfare reformism had been achieved. Politically active women such as Barbara Castle increasingly turned away from women's separate organisations and female issues as they entered the political mainstream, although some politicians such as Dr Edith Summerskill continued to fight for 'women's issues' such as rights to housekeeping money and believed that female politicians should focus their energies on matters that directly affected women.

[6] Lloyd (1993) demonstrates how the male and female have been constructed in Western thought in ways that, despite changes throughout the centuries, have been remarkably consistent and resilient. Women's

'protection of man' ([1792] 1992: 21). Femininity was therefore placid, docile, dependent and potentially deceptive. Martha Vicinus, in her discussion of the 'perfect lady' in the late Victorian period, identifies very similar feminine characteristics such as modesty, sexual passivity and obedience to male authority (1972: ix). Within a psychoanalytic framework Sigmund Freud's 1933 essay on the subject argues that femininity is marked by narcissism, an incomplete super-ego which leads to moral deficiency, masochism and passivity. Further, the development of normal femininity is precarious (due to women's capacity for bisexuality) and marked by a certain 'unknowable' quality, which led Freud to famously refer to femininity as the 'dark continent' (quoted in Doane, 1991: 210). Although Freud recognises bisexuality, normative femininity is heterosexual. Joan Rivière's contribution to the concept of femininity is the development of her idea of 'womanliness as a masquerade'[7], that is, the belief that '[w]omanliness ... could be assumed and worn as a mask' and that there is no difference between 'genuine womanliness and the "masquerade" ... they are the same thing' ([1929] 1986: 38). Rivière, as those before her, conceptualises femininity in ways which suggest a certain unknowable quality and inherent artificiality to femininity, attributes which connote duplicity and a troubling uncertainty in relation to identity. Beverley Skeggs (1997) argues that the dominant discourses of femininity that developed throughout eighteenth and nineteenth century Western Europe, and which form the legacy on which more contemporary discourses are grounded, are marked by class and 'race' differences. The ideal femininity, which I have outlined above, is white, middle-class, and constructed in opposition to the imagined femininities of the 'other' (often black and/or working-class) which are constructed as physically fitter, overtly sexualised, conduits of (class)

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alignment with nature, the physical world and the body is in part explained by women's reproductive role and the assumed biological determinism of that role.

[7] Rivière's thesis is based on her clinical observations of women who were high achievers in both their domestic and their chosen professional roles. Women who excelled professionally would use flirting to secure the sexual attentions of men. This mechanism was 'an unconscious attempt to ward off the anxiety which would ensue on account of the reprisals she anticipated from the father-figures after her intellectual

contamination, and marked by a 'lack of discipline and vulgarity' (Skeggs, 1997: 100). In summation the key characteristics of white, bourgeois, patriarchally-defined femininity are docility, obedience, modesty, passive heterosexuality, and a propensity for masochism, narcissism, deception and untrustworthiness. Those women who exhibit the characteristics of 'other' or divergent femininities and who, in so doing, challenge the normative paradigm are, at best, castigated and then offered the chance of redemption, or are, in extreme cases, either criminalised or treated as psychiatric cases.

If World War II brought certain challenges to the dominant discourses of femininity, in terms of sexual and economic freedoms, the post-war years as I argued are frequently understood as a time of conservatism in gender relations. Cora Kaplan, drawing on autobiography to make sense of her passionate experience of reading *Gone with the Wind* (1936) in 1950s America, remembers what she terms her 'slavish addiction to fifties femininity ... its macho-femme versions of sexual difference' (1986: 143). Her statement captures both a belief in the fifties as a period of gender conservatism, and the attributes of that conservatism. 'Slavish addiction' implies a passive state, without agency or critical thought, to a rigid dichotomy of masculinity and femininity grounded in the traditional gender norms that I outlined above.[8] Indeed a feminine lack of agency is a characteristic frequently attributed to the central female figure of fifties society, 'the housewife', of whom Angela Partington argues that '[i]t has generally been assumed ... [that she] was a passive consumer of commodities offered her' (1995: 249), an observation which highlights the association between fifties femininity and consumerism. Partington problematises this assumption, stating instead that working-class women were active in their consumption for example they appropriated the 'New Look' in ways that challenged

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performance' ([1929] 1986: 37). The intellectual woman in possession of 'masculinity' would use the masquerade of womanliness to counter the anxieties of both herself and her male audience.

the established 'rules' of so-called 'good taste' (1995: 252).[9] Whilst Partington and others challenge the widespread belief that the 1950s were a decade of gender conservatism, these beliefs continue to have widespread resonance in contemporary popular culture.[10] A brief analysis of advertisements that appeared in one of the most popular film magazines of the period *Picturegoer* further demonstrates how fifties femininity was imagined. The majority of the advertisements are for products relating to the transformation of the female body into a feminine one through the use of deodorant, make-up, talcum powder, hair dyes and setting lotions. Adjectives such as 'discreet', 'clear', 'healthy', 'radiant' and 'odourless', with their connotations of modesty and restraint, are frequently used to describe the desired femininity (one of 'naturalness') as it was imagined within British discourses.

The conservatism of the period was to an extent duplicated in popular British film where the dominance of the war and comedy genres served to marginalise women in cultural representation.[11] Historians of film and popular culture have recently come to reassess the post-war years and to consider them as a time of change and contradiction, not least in gender relations. Sue Harper for example argues that changes in the structure of the film industry *vis-à-vis* production companies allowed some interesting gender depictions to

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[8] Kaplan is, crucially, not arguing that she is uncritical and passive in her reading but rather uses this piece of autobiography to initiate a discussion about reading romance as an activity and its historic and problematic links with female subjectivity.

[9] Partington argues that, according to the rules of 'good taste', the New Look was imagined as a 'complement' to sober, everyday styles and should only be worn on special occasions but working-class women wore it '"improperly" ... adapting it as an everyday style' in ways that collapsed the distinction between the 'functional' and the 'decorative' and in so doing produced new 'hybrid styles' (1995: 252). The work of Jackie Stacey (1994), which is discussed later in this chapter, also argues for an understanding of female agency in relation to consumption.

[10] The currency of the idea is evidenced by the critical writing that has accompanied recent film productions which are set in the 1950s such as *Mona Lisa Smile* (2004) and *Down With Love* (2003). The films have been either critiqued as a 'retreat into 1950s gender conformity' (Cherry Potter, *The Guardian*, 14 June 2004) or defended as an accurate reflection of the gender dynamics of the period (Julia Stiles, *The Guardian*, 17 June 2004), both positions supporting the understanding that the decade in question was essentially conservative.

[11] Geraghty argues that 'comedies satirise women and their modern ways, the war films marginalise them' (2000: 195). On a broader note, much of British cinema of the period was concerned with masculinity and the difficulties associated with the return to civilian life for men. These difficulties manifest themselves in either an exploration of male anxiety or a denial of anxiety through an attempt to 'offer reassurance about male roles' (ibid).

emerge in popular film (2000: 99).[12] Christine Geraghty's work (2000) analyses how some of the social tensions between tradition and modernity were negotiated in popular film, and specifically in relation to women. Marcia Landy also challenges the assumption of the period as homogenous and argues that the 'films of the post-war period ... are a fruitful source for examining profound contradictions in the private sphere ... [which] work against the grain of efforts to recover traditional values' (1991: 14). The fifties were a time of both consolidation and transformation and my aim is to analyse how femininity was constructed in that period in popular British films and how the presence of contradictions was symptomatic of challenges, whether conscious or unconscious, to a normative paradigm of femininity. By doing so I shall provide an account of gender issues which complements current scholarship on British cinema of the 1950s (Geraghty, 2000; Harper and Porter, 2003; MacKillop and Sinyard, 2003).

My own personal investment in the period is three-fold. Firstly, it is in part driven by a belief in the importance of recovering diverse representations of femininity from the cultural margins. There is a great deal still to be explored on this subject and an appreciation of the subtly complex representations of femininity needs to be written into the dominant discourses emerging about British cinema from this period. Secondly, my interest in the period was shaped by my relationship with my mother who experienced her teenage years through the 1950s and visited the cinema on a regular basis. This research provided us with a shared interest and in part functioned as a bridge between two generations of women. Thirdly, I have been aware of how my own subjectivity is shaped by dominant discourses of femininity, their frustrations and limitations but also their occasional pleasures. I needed to explore femininity to understand how it relates to me and the sense of both recognition and alienation I experienced between dominant discourses of

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[12] Harper argues that '[t]he bigger distribution companies (Rank and ABPC) had so many satellites that total control was impossible' (2000: 99). This gave rise to a lack of coherence in terms of depicting gender norms.

femininity and my own sense of self. This thesis is then a feminist project, for all of the myriad difficulties such a term conjures up, and is driven by a concern with women and a critical engagement with femininity.

Methodology

This thesis is also grounded in the understanding that one appropriate methodology for doing historical work on film and popular culture, from a broadly feminist perspective, is to take a discursive approach to the study of film texts. Jacqueline Rose (2001) illustrates how Michel Foucault's work on discourse can be particularly productive for the analysis of visual culture. She argues that discourse 'refers to a group of statements which structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking' (Rose, 2001: 136). This suggests that there are particular ideas or beliefs about a concept such as femininity for example and that we act in relation to those ideas. However, as Chris Weedon states, 'discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning' (1987: 108). Discourses are 'ways of constituting knowledge, together with social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them' (ibid). Discourses shape truth claims, social practices and our sense of self or identity. Indeed our subjectivity does not pre-exist discourse, nor is it formed in relation to it, but is shaped and only comes into being through these 'statements' or discourses.[13] This thesis considers femininity to be a 'discursive construction' (Rose, 2001: 141) that is shaped through a myriad of practices but is not monolithic. For Foucault, discourses are intimately intertwined with power, and a number of inter-related discourses circulate, some of which contradict each other. Foucault argues that they do not simply represent power and powerlessness, rather, 'discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations: there can exist different or even

contradictory discourses within the same strategy' ([1976] 1990: 101-2). In relation to the discursive construction of femininity in the post-war period for example, Foucault's approach can explain both the dominant discourse of woman as wife and mother and the contradictory discourse of expanding consumerism that could only be achieved by women working outside the home. These two seemingly opposing discourses can be understood if they are viewed as 'blocks' manoeuvring 'within the same strategy.' In this thesis I shall examine the extent to which such manoeuvring is evident in the constructions of femininity in films from the post-war period.

A study of discourse must recognise that '[t]he diversity of forms through which a discourse can be articulated means that intertextuality is important to understanding discourse' (Rose, 2001: 136). Green's statement, quoted in Rose, that discourse is 'a coherent pattern of statements across a range of archives and sites' (2001: 143) signals that discourse is intertextual and as such requires an eclectic approach from the researcher in the collating of source material. Indeed the 'text, intertextuality and context' (Rose, 2001: 135) tripartite structure captures the three inter-related aspects that are the object of study for discourse analysis, that is, the text, its relationship to other texts and their meanings, and the context in which they circulate. There are parallels between this approach and the current debates in film studies regarding the appropriate focus for critical analysis and whether that should be the film text, its production or reception.[14] In this thesis popular

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[13] Further, because dominant and reverse discourses always exist and are fluid and historically variable, subjectivity is never fixed, static or a unitary concept but is open to change and modification.

[14] Stacey for example criticises film studies for its almost exclusive focus on the text and for paying scant attention to audience studies. In an article published in *Screen* in 1993 she criticises the lack of explicit methodological awareness in film studies as a discipline and the lack of debate concerning the priority afforded the film text. This is in opposition to related disciplines such as television studies where the focus of critical analyses is the audience in the production of meaning. Furthermore, film historians such as Sue Harper and Vincent Porter have given greater priority to the production context whilst others such as Sarah Street attempt to combine attention to both text and context. All positions entail strengths and weaknesses. Hall (2001) criticises Harper's 1994 study for its lack of textual analysis (unfairly in my opinion), whilst Harper and Porter (2003) argue that an understanding of cinema cannot be divorced from an analysis of its economic determinants. Their latest work (2003) does provide a sophisticated account of films from the 1950s, their production context and their reception by audiences. What is at stake here is the intellectual shape of the field and the right to determine the terms of the debate.

films are the main source and are drawn from across a range of genres such as comedy, social problem film, science fiction and melodrama. They are augmented with additional material from the post-war period such as the writings of Donald W. Winnicott and John Bowlby on motherhood, Otto Pollak on female criminality, George Orwell on popular music, and trade and film magazines such as *Kinematograph Weekly* (hereafter referred to as *KineWeekly*) and *Picturegoer*.[15] Altogether these materials will be examined to identify the 'statements' they elucidate regarding femininity, particularly divergent femininities, and the extent to which they are able to challenge social and cultural conventions of femininity.

In analysing both films and their context I hope to avoid some of the criticisms levelled at film analysis that has focused on only one aspect for study. However, although I critically consider context, I place the films centre-stage. The justification for this is two-fold. Firstly there are a number of practical considerations that constrain this study (and which are outlined in more detail in the methods section). Secondly, British cinema of the 1950s has frequently been seen as a literary cinema, which tends to steer academic criticism away from detailed content analysis of the kind that focuses on *mise-en-scène* analysis.[16] This may in part be explained by the recent general move in film studies away from textual analysis as historical studies have gained ground. This development led commentators on the 1998 Screen conference to voice their concerns about the 'surprising lack of attention to the image (as visual text)' (Bennett and Tyler, 1999: 99) that was evident in discussions

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[15] *KineWeekly* and *Picturegoer* are important publications for revisionist work on British cinema from the period. *KineWeekly* was the main trade publication which provided exhibitors with information and debate about (amongst other subjects) films and their expected audiences, and general trends in British cinema. *Picturegoer* was one of the most popular film magazines of the period, although its circulation did decline throughout the 1950s as the popularity of cinema itself waned. Both publications were attuned to mainstream audience taste and whilst this thesis is not concerned with audience response to the films under discussion, an analysis of the reviews that appeared in these publications gives an indication of the intended audience, as imagined by the film's producers, distributors and exhibitors.

[16] MacKillop and Sinyard for example outline the received wisdom of 1950s British cinema as one characterised by 'literateness' and 'a poverty of visual style' (2003: 5).

about film.[17] In focusing on film and augmenting that analysis with supplementary texts I aim to analyse discourses of femininity in a way that facilitates the close attention to the visual text that I think is useful for a study of cinema. Discourse analysis challenges us to consider '[h]ow are particular words or images given specific meanings?' (Rose, 2001: 151). To achieve this I employ *mise-en-scène* analysis to consider the visual style of the films. I temper this with the recognition that there may be limits on how particular figures can be imagined, for example, censorship and cultural tradition shape the representation of the prostitute in cinema of the period.[18]

A further point needs to be made concerning the concept of reflexivity and my own truth-claims. Rose quotes Tonkiss who argues '[i]t would ... be inconsistent to contend that the analyst's own discourse was itself wholly objective, factual or generally true' (2001: 160). Rather I accept that I provide a 'persuasive rather than truthful' (Rose, 2001: 160) account of the discursive construction of femininity in post-war film and I accept Tonkiss' demand, cited in Rose, for 'a certain modesty in our analytic claims' (ibid).

Related to these concerns is a consideration about what is involved in writing about 'the past.' Jameson argues that 'history is inaccessible to us except in textual form ... it can be approached only by way of prior (re)textualization' (1981: 82). Historiography then involves the construction or recreation of history via texts, tempered with a recognition that what is created is conditional. Indeed Jordanova, in writing about the 'chimera of comprehensiveness' (2000: 102) in historical work, implicitly recognises the conditional nature of the discourses we construct about the past (and indeed the present and future).

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[17] The remit of the conference was to debate what the object of study should be for film and television studies. Bennett and Tyler claim that visual examples were either lacking or not appropriately bedded into theoretical discussions.

[18] Indeed the figure of the Victorian prostitute has been shaped in similar ways. Rose quotes Nead's analysis of images of the prostitute in Victorian society which argues that there were a 'limited number of key visual terms used to produce her ... dress, bodily condition, location, looks ... [which were] repeated again and again in a wide variety of contexts' (2001: 151).

Further, film is a textual form through which we may glimpse the traces of history, but, as Harper argues, 'cinema always produces imagery which is, as it were, at a tangent from history' (1992: 217). Cinema can only ever be an oblique reflection and it is more productive to think of it as a symptom of the cultural imaginary rather than as a reflection of a pre-existing, ordered reality.

In a thesis that analyses femininity in a particular period consideration must also be given to how the past is shaped by the concept of periodisation. Jordanova demonstrates that how we write about the past is grounded in a set of assumptions about the concept of time, the use of a particular calendar system, and the attachments of metaphors to those measurements of time (2000: 114). Common methods of carving up the past are to divide it 'according to rulers or dynasties, around key events or individuals, descriptively by epoch, century, decade or millennium, in terms of the type of government, and according to perceived cultural styles, moods and patterns' (Jordanova: 2000: 116). This is not a neutral activity but makes certain presuppositions.[19] In writing a thesis about femininity in the period 1945-59 I implicitly make assumptions about concepts such as nationality, the importance of the Second World War as a key event and its symbolic status for the national psyche. Indeed part of the significance of the war is its status as an 'accessible point of reference' from which to orientate the recent past (Jordanova, 2000: 122).[20] The war can

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[19] Periodisation is a way of putting boundaries around a subject to make it manageable as an area for academic or non-academic study but the act of doing this creates and reinforces a period as a discursive construction.

[20] It is very difficult to think of British history of the late twentieth century without reference to the Second World War. I have already suggested that the post-war period is seen as a time of feminist failure, falling between the gains of war-time and the social revolutions of the 1960s. However, as Wilson has argued, Bevin's policy of female conscription succeeded in 'accelerating the existing trend for more women to work outside the home' (1977: 131). The significance of the war, certainly in terms of female employment, might have been to make visible gendered trends that were already in place rather than as an event that instigated new developments. However, as Jordonova argues, the war and its significance is 'indelibly etched on the national consciousness' to the extent that 'radical revisionism' even if it were justified, is hard to imagine (2000: 124). I am aware that this study, in seeking to critically reassess femininity in British films from the post-war period, is implicitly accepting certain given binaries between the war and the 1960s, and between the concepts of austerity and affluence. This work therefore does not challenge existing assumptions of time periods and their significance, or offer a more radical way of imagining the recent 'past' but rather has more modest ambitions that seek to reassess a 'given' period and consider its contradictions. In terms of existing

then be used to order or give structure to something which can be named as the 'post-war period' which is in turn afforded certain meanings. Indeed the 'post-war period' is a vague term which can be used to describe the years between 1945-1950, at which point decadology is activated to usher in a period named 'the fifties.' Such a period is associated with a particular set of meanings that are evident in both writing of the time and are re-circulated in more recent writings.[21] In relation to gender 'the fifties,' as I have already demonstrated, are widely associated with conservative gender relations and 'traditional' femininity. Furthermore, the fifties/post-war period is described in ways that encapsulate the two opposing ideas of 'austerity' and 'affluence.' This is evident in titles of books dealing with that time. Sissons and French in their social history *The Age of Austerity* (1963) use the term to identify a particular homogenous understanding of the period.[22] Durgnat's 1970 work, *A Mirror for England: British Movies from Austerity to Affluence*, signals to a knowing audience the time period under scrutiny and some of its associated meanings. Hopkins (1963) and Geraghty (2000) use the phrase 'The New Look' which operates metonymically to denote affluence, social transformation and a particular historical consciousness marked by the concept of modernity. These twin poles function mythologically and provide an anchor from which we can 'orientate ourselves' and in doing so seek to explore 'the relationships between, to put it crudely, periods and identity' (Jordanova, 2000: 130). In gender terms the concept of affluence is inextricably linked to consumerism which, when associated with woman, connotes passive femininity. Indeed the number of binaries in play that I have made reference to and their gendered meanings (war and post-war, war and social revolutions, austerity and affluence) demonstrates that

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writing about British cinema of the period, as I will demonstrate, studies have been few and the field is still developing.

[21] Jordanova invites us to consider why certain decades such as 'the Roaring Twenties and Swinging Sixties' are named and in so doing marked out as 'special' (2000: 129). The Sixties, as she argues, 'can carry either positive or negative connotations' depending, broadly speaking, on one's political viewpoint (Jordanova, 2000: 130). Although there is no one common adjective that is used to describe the Fifties, (rather, the twin poles of austerity and affluence are evoked) that the decade is most often associated with a homogenised femininity is a belief which, as I have demonstrated, continues to have cultural currency.

periods are not governed by a monolithic identity but may produce multiple positions for identification.[23] It is these multiplicities, which challenge the idea of homogenisation, that I seek to explore in relation to the films to be discussed.

Methods

In this section I want to outline the methods used to conduct the research. As the thesis is concerned with the construction of femininity during a particular period I undertook archival research to identify films for analysis and patterns of representation.[24] One of the greatest difficulties facing researchers in film studies is access to films and related materials such as film magazines and press books. British films from the 1940s and 1950s are generally available from a number of official and unofficial sources, and I made use of the following sources, to varying degrees. The British Film Institute (BFI) holds copies of many of the films from this period (both key films and less well-known films), but viewing and travel costs are prohibitive, particularly for student researchers located in the North of England and beyond. I visited the BFI and gathered a small amount of information related to reviews of films from a variety of sources such as *Film Comment, Motion Picture*

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[22] Jordanova argues that 'the age of' approach is another widely-used way of periodising history that is grounded in a 'desire to lend unity to a period' (2000: 134).

[23] In terms of periodisation and British cinema, that the years between 1945-59 incorporate a number of sub-periods demonstrates how boundaries are porous. In addition to the work cited by Geraghty and Durgnat, Wollen (1998) for example writes about the 'spiv cycle' in British cinema between 1943-50 whilst Hill (1986) discusses the social problem genre from 1956-1963. As my interest is thematic (rather than a more self-contained cycle of films) the period chosen is quite broad as this allows critical consideration of concerns that emerged over a period of time that were related to femininity such as science, mechanisation, affluence and consumerism.

[24] A point needs to be made here about the concept of 'the archive', which is relevant to all the sources used in this thesis. This relates to the issues raised earlier about truth-claims and comprehensiveness. As Rose makes clear, the archive can itself be seen 'as an institution' (2001: 164). She quotes Sekula who argues that '[a]rchives are not neutral: they embody the power inherent in accumulation, collection and hoarding' (quoted in Rose, 2001: 165). They are not therefore 'transparent windows onto source materials' (Rose, 2001: 165) but rather select, shape and prioritise materials in a non-neutral way and in doing so participate in the discursive construction of the academic discipline of the arts and humanities. Steedman's work on how modern history is written in part suggests, drawing on Freud, Derrida and Foucault, the Western preoccupation with 'beginnings, starting places, and origins' (2001: 5). Steedman argues that archives do not allow the researcher to get closer to the 'truth.' Rather, they are places where historians go to construct the truths of people's lives based on the 'dust' left behind. Jordanova writes about the 'cult of the archive' and the 'seduction into past worlds' it seems to offer the researcher in the belief that it can provide direct access to a less mediated version of the past (2000: 186-7). In introducing the concept of reflexivity here Jordonova

Herald, Picturegoer and *Monthly Film Bulletin*. The British Universities Film and Video Council (BUFVC) were unable to provide copies of either films or related materials such as the industry's trade paper *Kine Weekly*. The National Museum of Photography, Film and Television (NMPFandT) do not hold a collection of British films but do have a useful bibliography pertaining to British cinema and a list of the names and addresses of all film archives in the UK and Ireland.[25] Sheffield Hallam University produce *Close Up, The Electronic Journal of British Cinema* which provides a small series of comprehensive introductory essays on British cinema by Tom Ryall that include a detailed bibliography and a list of relevant journals. The University of East Anglia (UEA) is home to the *Kine Weekly* Online Index[26] and a search of the courses run by the Film Studies department in British cinema offers a link to a list of selected British films produced between 1920-1969. This provides a useful introductory list of some mainstream and less well-known films from the period. The University of Sussex houses the Mass Observation Archive which includes a large body of writing about cinema-going in the 1940s and 1950s which is of use for studies which focus on cinema audiences. The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) database can be searched on-line to check whether films have been certified for video release in the UK.[27] Denis Gifford's *The British Film Catalogue, 1895-1970: A Guide to Entertainment Films* (1973) is a comprehensive list of British films and contains information pertaining to cast, crew and a film synopsis. The Woman's Library (Fawcett Society) based in London holds copies of women's magazines such as *Woman*,

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(and Steedman) force us to recognise our own relationship with the archive and how what we do with its materials is also a non-neutral activity.

[25] Both are available as information sheets which can be downloaded from, respectively, www.nmpft.org.uk/insight/info/5.3.72.pdf and www.nmpft.org.uk/insight/downloads/FilmArchives.asp

[26] As of March 2004 only a small number of years are available on-line but these are constantly being supplemented. Whilst it is extremely helpful to be able to electronically search the index of such a central publication as *Kine Weekly* hard copies of the publication held by UEA are obviously located in Norwich and the researcher must locate locally-held copies for the publication to be of any sustained use.

[27] The BBFC database provides information on which company holds the video rights for a film, its running time and whether cuts were made, to either the original or video version (although detail on the precise nature of those cuts is often not available).

Woman's Own and *Woman's Illustrated* which provided a useful introduction to the dominant discourses of femininity in the post-war period.

The most useful overall resource for me was the British Cinema and Television Research Group based at De Montfort University in Leicester. The group, established in 1997, has an archive of research materials which includes copies of films on videotape and a collection of film magazines such as *Picturegoer* and *Pictureshow*, trade publications such as *KineWeekly* and press books for some films from the period. The majority of the films discussed in this thesis, including all of the less known films, were made available to me through the De Montfort group and specifically Dr Steve Chibnall. Informal contacts were also utilised. Other researchers in British cinema within the University of Hull were helpful, providing me with copies of films, in particular more mainstream films such as *Mandy*, *Woman in a Dressing Gown* and *Yield to the Night*, and access to a private collection of *Picturegoer* magazine from the 1950s.

By drawing on a range of resources I was able to compile a list of potential films for the thesis.[28] The UEA list of British films was augmented with the filmography included in Harper (2000), Geraghty (2000) and Landy (1991). This was then cross-referenced with Gifford, Halliwell, BBFC and the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) to identify films that might be of interest for the thesis.[29] As critical writing on studios such as Gainsborough,

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[28] Rose argues that, for discourse analysis, one must start by identifying relevant resources which act as '*starting points*' [sic] and from which one can widen out ones search (2001: 143).

[29] As I have argued it is difficult to conduct research in an area where resources are difficult to identify, locate and obtain. I gave careful consideration to the rationale for selecting these particular filmography resources. UEA have a history of quality teaching on British cinema so their filmography provided a useful starting point. Harper writes extensively and imaginatively on gender and British cinema and her *Women in British Cinema* (2000) helped me identify some potentially interesting texts. Likewise, Landy's study (1991) is impressive in its breadth and includes brief yet insightful textual analyses. Geraghty's work (2000) was particularly interesting and helpful because it is an extensive study of films specifically from the post-war period. In contrast, *Halliwell's Film and Video Guide* (2001) and the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) were used to corroborate production information. Factual sources such as Gifford were used to widen the search and yielded many interesting titles that could not be traced. For example in *Latin Quarter* (1945) a sculptor murders his fiancée and hides her body in his latest exhibit whilst in *While I Live* (1947) Julia believes the amnesiac Sally to be the reincarnation of her dead sister Olwen (Harper, 2000: 179). Both films sound

Ealing and Hammer is considerable[30] I was keen to focus on films that had not yet been subject to sustained critical analysis. Potential film titles were circulated amongst the film providers, identified above, to establish which titles were readily available. I was fortunate in making contact with the British Cinema and Television Research Group early in the research process, and being invited to give a paper to members of the group, which provided invaluable feedback and suggested other lines of enquiry. This process allowed me to widen the terms of my search as additional films were suggested to me (either through discussion with contacts or reading materials) and possible lines of enquiry were explored, and rejected. As Rose argues, the process of collecting research materials involves a significant investment of time (2001: 143). It must also however be finite to avoid intellectual paralysis. At some point one must stop surveying and begin the process of discursive analysis. This point was arrived at when I had located a number of films that provided an interesting or unusual approach to femininity in British cinema.

I have already argued that my choice of films was shaped by several inter-related factors such as availability, time constraints, and critical space. In my viewing of films I was seeking to identify challenges and contradictions to the normative paradigm of white femininity.[31] This allowed me to consider films across genre, production company and director. There are certain recognisable categories of women that repeatedly appear within film and these guided my viewing and helped shape my selection. 'Murderous Women' and 'Mothers' for example are frequent features of melodrama whilst the category of the

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fascinating and have not been the subject of sustained analysis, but copies could not be located. Lovell cautions that written information about films can often bear little relation to the films which prove disappointing on viewing (2001: 202). It is for this reason that only films for which copies were available were chosen.

[30] Harper (1994) and Cook (1996) write about Gainsborough and the costume film, Barr (1998) on Ealing studios and Hutchings (1993) on Hammer horror.

[31] This focus of this thesis is the representation of *white* femininity. Unlike the US, where representations (albeit problematic) of black femininity were a part of the cinematic mainstream in the 1950s, Britain did not engage cinematically with 'race' and femininity until the end of the 1950s. Black figures increasingly appeared in films as the decade progressed, for example, in the pub in *The Good Die Young* (1954), a nanny pushing a pram in *Lost* (1955) or serving in a coffee bar in *The Flesh is Weak* (1957) but these are very much

'Housewife' is a central figure in post-war representation. The 'Prostitute' has a long history of cultural representation, and the incarcerated females of the 'Criminal Women' category are a feature of the social problem genre that emerged in the 1950s. The films that appear in the category of the 'Perfect Woman' were included because, from the outset, they struck me as unusual and I could not fully account for them within existing paradigms of British cinema. Using these and other categories allowed me to manage the material and give shape to themes as they emerged. It also allowed me to consider the ways in which representation is nuanced within a post-war context. The films chosen are a mix of those which have received some critical scrutiny, *Yield to the Night* (1956), *Woman in a Dressing Gown* (1957) and *Mandy* (1952) and those which have received little critical attention at all, for example *Dear Murderer* (1947), *The Perfect Woman* (1949) and *Young Wives' Tale* (1951). Those films which have been subject to analyses have often been approached in ways which place emphasis on director, studio or genre rather than gender dynamics. *Mandy* for example has been assessed for its place in the director Alexander Mackendrick's oeuvre (Kemp, 1991) or as part of Ealing's output (Harper and Porter, 2003) whilst *Woman in a Dressing Gown* had been critically appraised as a film from the social problem genre (Hill, 1986). King argues, in her discussion of the British woman's film, that the dominant film culture does not readily recognise melodrama and indeed many films which exhibit 'melodramatic emotionality' are often 'swept under the umbrella of other film movements or genres' (1996: 219). Whilst this is not a study of melodrama *per se* King's argument is valid for this thesis. One of the aims of the research is to group films together in new ways which allow fresh perspectives to emerge. In analysing these films therefore I have sought to create a body of critical writing that can complement existing work on post-war cinema and gender and which can influence the dominant discourses emerging in this field.

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background figures. It is *Sapphire* (1959), where the murdered black (and sexualised) female teenager is the subject of investigation, which attempts a sustained treatment of black femininity, from a white perspective.

Literature Review

There is a wide range of studies which in various ways touch on the theme of femininity in the 1950s and which I shall now discuss in relation to my work. British cinema as an area for critical analysis has been subject to significant revision in the last twenty years.[32] The 1998 international conference on British cinema, held at UEA and reviewed by Mary Wood, is testament to how the study of British cinema had moved to a more central position in film studies and illustrates how the subject has been shaped in terms of studies of genre, star, studio, national identity, class and gender (Screen, 1999: 94-6). Furthermore, critical attention has been increasingly paid to the audience. Stacey's 1994

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[32] Lovell argues that British cinema has moved 'from scarcity to abundance' since his paper 'The British Cinema: The Unknown Cinema' was presented at a BFI seminar in the late 1960s (2001: 200). Prior to this, Rachel Low's *The History of British Film, 1896-1906* (first volume published in 1948 with Roger Manvell) provided an introduction to the subject whilst Durgnat's *A Mirror for England: British Movies from Austerity to Affluence* (1970) was something of a maverick text (in its belief that British films were worthy of critical scrutiny) in the face of orthodox British criticism on film which tended to focus on European and Hollywood cinema. Barr's 1986 anthology, *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema*, is credited with inaugurating the contemporary debate on British cinema (Ashby and Higson, 2000). Indeed Barr's introduction alone provides a useful overview of how British films have, traditionally, been received by critics from both abroad and home. Critically derided for many years for being unimaginative Barr argues that its zenith was WW2 when it was widely thought that 'British cinema had embraced its true vocation ... realism' as '[c]inematically ... the war seemed to have validated precisely those qualities of restraint and stoicism which might previously ... have appeared insipid' (1986: 11). The critical priority afforded the documentary and realist approaches to film (which drew on the traditions associated with Grierson and Jennings) meant that there developed 'an established view of the correct path for British cinema, and a set of films to go with them, a list mainly from the 1940s, but brought up to date with more recent ones, including some from Ealing, Free Cinema, and Woodfall' (Barr, 1986: 13). What this canon excluded was the 'disturbingly "other"' of British cinema (Barr, 1986: 14), that is, the Gainsborough melodramas, Hammer horrors, science fiction and crime dramas, which Petley referred to as 'The Lost Continent' of British cinema (1986: 98-119). King suggests that it is because of the realist tradition that the British 'woman's film,' which exhibits 'excessive emotionality,' has the status of a 'cuckoo-in-the-nest' (1996: 218). The significant critical engagement with these genres that has taken place in the last twenty or so years (Harper, 1994, Hutchings, 1993, Hunter, 1999, Chibnall and Murphy, 1999) has helped to redefine our understanding of British cinema. In recovering these 'other' genres however there has been a tendency to diametrically oppose realism and excess. More recent writing on British cinema (Geraghty, 2000 and Lovell, 2001) has sought to challenge that paradigm, with Lovell arguing for example that 'British cinema is often most exciting when restraint and excess interact with each other' (2001: 202), whilst Geraghty critically considers excess in the realist films from Ealing. Unfortunately, Lovell weakens his case by exhibiting an uncomfortableness with melodramatic elements and perhaps an implicit desire that such elements *be* curtailed by realism and restraint because they are, for the writer, embarrassing. Lovell quotes Gavin Lambert who, he argues, 'sensibly remarked that he found it difficult to take *The Wicked Lady* (1945) seriously because its notion of wickedness was so suburban!' (2001: 202). The derogatory term 'suburban' is used to dismiss the film (with the qualities of good sense and seriousness further evoked to support the dismissal) and negate the enormous popularity of both the film and its star Margaret Lockwood with cinema audiences. As Babington demonstrates part of Lockwood's enormous appeal was her very suburbanness, an element recognised and exploited by Gainsborough producer Edward Black (2001: 94). Babington argues that criticism from the 1940s of Lockwood was grounded in a fear that British cinema was becoming subject to a 'melodramatic feminisation' (2001: 95). I would suggest that Lovell's argument from 2001 demonstrates a lingering

study (which is discussed in this section) is concerned with female spectatorship whilst Harper and Porter discuss audience response to films.[33] These different approaches to British cinema introduce, to varying degrees, some analysis of femininity. In my review of the literature I shall now provide a brief outline of those studies that are of secondary interest to my subject before focusing in more detail on those which have as their central theme a concern with gender and post-war British films and/or cinema.

There are a number of anthologies which provide an introduction to the general subject of British cinema and which touch on the theme of gender relations in the post-war period. Barr (1986) as I have already indicated provides a thorough grounding in the history of British cinema and his anthology includes two essays of relevance for this thesis. Pam Cook's essay on *Mandy* brings a broadly feminist perspective to bear on the film and reads it as emblematic of the post-war discourse of the New Woman and a country that essentially falters in the face of change. Geraghty's contribution on Diana Dors argues that her star image embodied many of the post-war tensions concerning conspicuous consumption and overt female sexuality. These two essays initiate a debate about some of the contradictions and challenges brought to bear on norms of femininity in this period but their place in an edited collection means that they cannot be expected to offer a sustained gendered analysis of films from the period.[34]

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suspicion and uncomfortableness with melodrama and emotion and a fear that recent film scholarship has become somewhat effeminate. It is for these reasons that critical work on British cinema is on-going.

[33] 'Moved to Tears: Weeping in the Cinema in Postwar Britain' (*Screen*, 37:2, 1996) discusses the responses of cinema-goers to a 1950 Mass Observation study about which films made them cry in the cinema. Responses were in part shaped by respondents' class, age and gender, for example, men were more likely to actively distance themselves emotionally from films, a strategy rarely employed by women who 'judged films according to the intensity of their involvement ... and indeed celebrated, their own identification with events on the screen' (Harper, and Porter, 1996: 156). There were gendered differences in terms of what events or issues moved men and women, with women affected by scenes involving vulnerable children, animals or moments of loss, whilst men responded to acts of heroism or moments of loneliness. Harper and Porter conclude that 'the film text could not speak directly to the cinemagoer unless it could match his or her psychological disposition, like a tracing laid on top of a map' (1996: 173), comments which persuasively suggest the importance of audience response in the construction of meaning.

[34] Other anthologies such as Murphy's *The British Cinema Book* (2001) include entries on themes such as masculinity (Spicer), gendered readings of particular films, for example *Darling* (Geraghty) and analyses of

The British Film Makers series has produced auteur-based writing on directors whose films are discussed in this thesis, for example *Terence Fisher* (Hutchings, 2001), *J. Lee Thompson* (Chibnall, 2000) and *Lance Comfort* (McFarlane, 1999) but none of these studies offer any sustained treatment of how gender is handled by these directors.[35] There are a number of publications that deal with the theme of class. John Hill's *Sex, Class and Realism* (1986) gives some consideration to gender in his readings of social problem films. In contrast Gillett's *The British Working Class in Postwar Film* (2003) foregrounds class analysis leaving gender divisions relatively untouched. More recently studies of stars and stardom in British cinema have entered the field of critical debate. Babington's anthology *British Stars and Stardom* (2001) includes some insightful essays that critically explore the femininity of key stars from the post-war period, specifically Margaret Lockwood (Babington), Diana Dors (Cook) and Deborah Kerr (Deleyto), whilst Macnab's *Searching for Stars* (2000) attends to the star personas of Margaret Lockwood and Phyllis Calvert.

Studies that focus on the post-war period such as Durgnat's *A Mirror for England, British Movies From Austerity to Affluence* (1970) provide an insight into the cinema of the time but are not concerned with gender relations in film. Murphy's *Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain 1939-1948* (1989) followed the tradition inaugurated by Durgnat in its partisan reassessment of British cinema, highlighting the melodramatic traditions which have often been effaced by the critical focus on realism. More recent work specifically on the 1950s provides some insight in terms of gender. Williams' article in MacKillop and Sinyard's *British Cinema of the 1950s: A Celebration* (2003) undertakes a feminist analysis of *Woman in a Dressing Gown* (1957), arguing that the film's visual style depicts

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genres such as the crime film (Durgnat) and the costume film (Harper) which make some reference to gender relations.

[35] Indeed the series does not purport to provide a gendered analysis but rather to make the work of British directors known to a wider audience. Chibnall (2000) offers some discussion of gender dynamics in his study of the work of J. Lee Thompson but it is the work of Melanie Williams (2004) that brings feminist criticism to bear on the representations of women in the films of J. Lee Thompson.

the domestic entrapment of the female protagonist and comments on the impoverishment of her personal life, sacrificed at the alter of housewifery. In the same anthology Kidd's reading of *Women of Twilight* (1952), a film about unmarried mothers and baby farming, suggests the film is torn between a liberal sensibility that blames social hypocrisy for the girl's predicament and a punitive discourse that implies the girls are sexually immoral and therefore culpable. This tension between ostensibly recognising societal shortcomings and ultimately finding the (female) protagonist reprehensible is not uncommon in British films from the post-war period, especially those of the social problem genre. Chadder's contribution to the genre-based *British Crime Cinema* (1999)[36] analyses three films that place female criminality centre-stage. She argues that female desire, which challenges normative femininity, is criminalised and its expression contained and punished as ultimately women, not society, are presented as the problem. Conversely, other work by Williams on the films of the director J. Lee Thompson argues that he presents a more sympathetic portrayal of women and works through some of the contradictions relating to femininity in the post-war period and themes of female 'containment and entrapment' (2002: 13).

In her work on British genres Landy suggests that '[s]exual difference is a structuring principle in the British genre film' (1991: 10). For example in the social problem film, a key genre of the fifties that dramatised contemporary social issues, the shifting fortunes of women in society are expressed through 'greater emphasis on woman law-breakers ... [and] the breakdown of male authority' (Landy 1991: 48). Indeed concerns with male authority are themes that recur in melodramas and the films of empire, whilst women are generally marginalised in favour of male relations in war films from the post-war period.

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[36] This publication is part of the British Popular Cinema series, edited by Chibnall and Hunter at De Montfort University, Leicester, which aims to re-evaluate popular British films that have been subject to critical neglect. Other publications in the series include *British Science Fiction Cinema* (Hunter, 1999) and *British Horror Cinema* (Chibnall and Petley, 2001).

In contrast, family melodramas continue the theme of male authority but place emphasis on reinstating normative and legitimate family (and gender) relations whereby the war-time threat of increased female independence is both recognised and neutralised, albeit incompletely (Landy, 1991: 285-8). In contrast to Landy's work which foregrounds genre and considers gender only as a secondary factor, my work prioritises femininity and considers generic conventions where they shape or limit the construction of femininity. The portrayal of the female protagonist in *Dear Murderer* as a *femme fatale* is an example of this.

The research that I have discussed in the previous pages has been key in mapping the field of British cinema. A review of this literature however highlights the gaps that are apparent in terms of the study of gender. The remainder of this chapter reviews three texts that are of central importance in addressing the critical lacunae of gender relations in post-war British cinema; Stacey (1994), Geraghty (2000) and Harper and Porter (2003). These studies, albeit in different ways, place emphases on text and context and in this respect have provided inspiration for my choice of methodology.

Stacey's 1994 study *Star Gazing* is concerned with British women who attended the cinema regularly in the 1940s and 1950s, the memories they have of female Hollywood film stars, and discourses of spectatorship, identification, femininity and commodity consumption. She seeks to broaden psychoanalytic debates of sexual difference and spectatorship in relation to cinema by using ethnographic research in an attempt to produce a theory of a historically situated female spectatorship. She argues that the practice of cinema-going functioned as a complex form of escapism for women from the harsh realities of war, and that the cinema-space was itself feminised through its associations with certain smells, sight, touch and sound which invited 'gendered pleasures' (Stacey,

1994: 97).[37] In this respect the 'context of cultural consumption' was feminised and cinema-going allowed '"expressions" of femininity' that were otherwise difficult to express under wartime conditions (ibid). This meant that the complex identification processes female audience members had with female stars and their femininities took place in an already feminised space.

In terms of identification, Stacey identifies two different modes, cinematic and extra-cinematic. The former refers to how the female spectator recognises the differences between herself and the star but how she may be inspired by the star's image to think of an 'imaginary self' (Stacey, 1994: 129) that may be informed by the star's confidence or may think of herself as the glamorised, idealised 'other' on the screen, taking on the preferred star's identity. This form of identification is based on difference between spectator and star. Extra-cinematic identification refers to how the female spectator may copy or imitate the hairstyle, make-up, clothes and behavioural characteristics of the star to reduce differences 'through the typical work of femininity: the production of oneself simultaneously as subject and object in accordance with cultural ideals of femininity' (Stacey, 1994: 168). Identification is then based on similarity. The crucial point here is how this relates to commodity consumption and femininity. Stacey argues that women purchased consumer items such as clothes and cosmetics which reminded them of their stars and in transforming the self produced a 'new feminine identity ... which combines an aspect of the star with their own appearance' (Stacey, 1994: 170). There is therefore what Stacey terms a 'productive recognition of differences between femininities' (1994: 171). This demonstrates both the pluralities of femininities and the agency that women bring to

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[37] Stacey draws on written qualitative responses from cinema-goers to argue that the 'pleasures ... associated with the cinema interiors were ones which have been culturally ascribed to femininity: perfumed air, the plush texture of the curtains and seats, the glistening chandeliers all contribute to what could be seen as a feminised environment for consumption' (1994: 97). Indeed these comments reveal some of the characteristics of normative femininity and their cultural inscription, that is, sensuality, emotion, proximity and touch.

bear in commodity consumption and the construction of femininity. For Stacey this shows that feminine identities are '"in process", continually being transformed' (1994: 73), they are not static and monolithic, but are at the same time 'fixed by particular discourses, however unsuccessfully, temporarily or contradictorily' (1994: 226).[38] Female consumption, frequently thought of as a passive act, functions as a form of resistance. The British women in Stacey's research based their feminine identities on American movie stars which stood in opposition to 'restrictive British femininity' (Stacey, 1994: 205) with its connotations of austerity, regulation and/or motherhood.[39] In this way femininities were produced that signified 'autonomy', 'individuality' and 'independence' (Stacey, 1994: 238). Stacey's research focuses on female cinema-goers, their relationships to female stars and their active construction of their own feminine identities. Her work demonstrates plural femininities, female agency and the forms it took during a time that, as I have argued, has often been thought of as conservative in terms of gender relations. In contrast to Stacey's spectator-based research I offer readings of British films that I consider dramatise some of the themes relating to femininity, commodity consumption and resistance.

Geraghty's *British Cinema in the Fifties* (2000) is broadly concerned with modernity, politics and gender in post-war British society and how popular films from the period dramatised and negotiated the tensions between change and tradition. Some of the key themes that Geraghty identifies in relation to modernity are a belief in the need to control and rationalise all elements of contemporary society (including work, personal relations and physical space for example); the development of new discourses of sociology and

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[38] Part of Stacey's project is to develop a theory of spectatorship that recognises identity as in process whilst considering historical and social specificity.

[39] Indeed it is not the case that the meanings associated with, and the priority afforded to, glamorous 'American' femininities were a feature only of war-time. Stacey argues that this was an on-going feature of the 1950s when the increasing (although uneven) availability of cosmetics and clothing to British women meant that 'the reproduction of self-image through consumption was perceived as a way of producing new
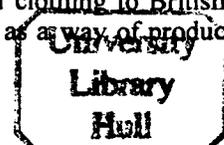
psychiatry (which could extend the interest of the state into the private sphere of, for example, the family); and the privileged role of the expert (2000: 22-5). The 'experience of modernity' for citizens was both 'exciting and frightening' (Geraghty, 2000: 24) and Geraghty's research is in part concerned with the cinematic role women played in the negotiation of the myriad social changes. In her analysis of the portrayal of housewives in three Ealing films from the period Geraghty suggests that women in these films have to sacrifice glamour and personal desire for social responsibility in ways that demonstrate the limitations imposed on women. The figure of the European woman, a common dramatic type from the cinema of the period, marries a post-war concern with female sexuality and politics, functioning as both a 'site of fantasy about sexual possibilities ... [and] a metaphor for Britain's relationship with Europe' (Geraghty, 2000: 96). Geraghty argues that British cinema, 'with its anti-modernist tendencies'[40], struggled to successfully dramatise the mythical figure of the 'new woman' who incorporated the overlapping discourses of 'motherhood, sexuality, paid work and consumption' (2000: 29).[41] She suggests that the British film star Kay Kendall epitomised, in a number of roles, the modern woman and the companionate marriage through her clothes, her home, her financial independence and sexual confidence, although the narrative often undermines the figure.[42] There was an attempt in the roles played by Virginia McKenna in British war films of the fifties (specifically in *A Town Like Alice*, 1956 and *Carve Her Name With Pride*, 1958) to combine the four elements of the new woman but the films ultimately demonstrate 'the difficulty of keeping the different aspects of femininity together' (Geraghty, 2000: 174). For Geraghty the figure of the new woman 'proved difficult to

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forms of "American" feminine identity which were exciting, sexual, pleasurable and in some ways transgressive' (1994: 205).

[40] Geraghty states that '[m]ainstream British cinema ... demonstrated a blithe resistance to change', a position 'underpinning some of the key genres of the 1950s, in particular the domestic comedy and the war film' (2000: 36).

[41] It was through this figure that the discourse of modernity entered the private sphere, 'the home [was] ... modernised, marriage "psychologised" ... and children socialised' and the housewife created as an 'expert in her own sphere' (Geraghty, 2000: 35).

translate into cinematic terms,' not least in genres such as comedy and war films which were conservative in terms of modernity, although McKenna and Kendall offer 'a rare glimpse of the complex construction of femininity in the 1950s' (ibid). The scope of Geraghty's research means that she critically considers a range of genres and key themes of the decade. This thesis is less ambitious in its thematic range, which allows for a more detailed textual analysis of the different strands of femininity as they appear across a range of films.

Harper and Porter's study, *British Cinema of the 1950s, The Decline of Deference*, is a comprehensive analysis of the British film industry at a time of 'transition' which witnessed 'the struggle between residual and emergent film material – old and new ways of presenting the world and pleasing audiences' (2003: 1). They argue that the industry was remarkably complex in its representations, indeed they characterise it as 'a battleground in which different factions – in finance, in class politics, in gender representation, in technology – struggled for dominance' (2003: 2). Predicated on a belief that 'the economic base sets the agenda and limits the parameters of film culture in our period', Harper and Porter nevertheless propose a 'dynamic model of interaction' between industry and creative artists, that is, the producers, costume designers, scriptwriters for example (2003: 3-4). This battleground is traced in their research which analyses, in detail, the workings of a variety of sections of the industry including, for example, the Rank organisation; the declining fortunes of Ealing studios;[43] the popular success of comedies by the Boultings and Launder and Gilliat at British Lion;[44] and the organisation of Associated British Picture Corporation which generally privileged the workings of the script above

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[42] According to Geraghty this is the case in *Genevieve* (1953) and *The Constant Husband* (1955) whilst *Simon and Laura* (1955) is more successful in portraying an equal relationship between the central couple.
[43] This they argue is largely attributable to Michael Balcon's refusal to adapt his world view that shaped his film production to class changes taking place in British society.
[44] They indicate that these were popular with audiences because they demonstrated a 'contempt for traditional class structures' (2003: 113).

visual style.[45] In their writing on visual style they chart the vicissitudes of British art direction, production design and costume design in the 1950s, the uneven use of Technicolor by British cinematographers, and the more successful use of Eastmancolor in the Hammer horror films. In doing so they explore the extent to which certain companies (Hammer) and directors (for example Wendy Toye, J. Lee Thompson, Joseph Losey) were able to imbue the films they worked on with a distinctive visual style. They consider censorship issues and the impact of the 'X' certificate on film production and look at changes in the cinema audience, its demographic structure and changing tastes. Harper and Porter argue that it was difficult for film-makers to predict what would appeal to audiences and that, for example, '[g]ender differences in 1950s film taste were "wobbly"' because 'audiences themselves were in flux, unsure about their own place in the new, supposedly classless world of consumption and pleasure' (2003: 264). British cinema, they conclude, was an 'anxious cinema' (2003: 272) which worked through many of the myriad contradictions in wider society (with varying degrees of success); dynamics of class and gender, the impact of modernity, consumerism, and Britain's declining fortunes on the world-stage. If films were to be commercially successful they had to 'reassure audiences that the familiar emotional landscape was still there, but ... also ... provide them with an image of new possibilities;' this dialectic 'was in acute tension in 1950s British cinema' (Harper and Porter, 2003: 267-8). Harper and Porter's study offers a sophisticated explication of the interaction between industrial forces and creative agency that shaped cultural representation in British cinema. Within this dynamic gender is a recurring, but not central, theme.

In this chapter I have outlined some of the dominant discourses of femininity, the methodology and methods utilised for this research, and have provided a review of the

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[45] They suggest that ABPC produced some interesting films in terms of gender representation when J. Lee Thompson directed or Anne Burnaby scripted.

literature pertaining to the field of inquiry, arguing that the analysis of femininity has received insufficient critical attention. This thesis takes as its central concern representations of femininity that challenge the normative paradigm and I analyse films that have received little or, in some cases, no critical attention but which must be incorporated into the on-going debates about British film from the post-war period.

This thesis comprises six chapters that analyse femininity as it is represented in different figures. Chapter 2, 'The Perfect Woman,' explores three films that have as their central theme the attempts made by men, specifically scientists and medical doctors, to construct the 'perfect woman.' The films present dramatisations of how femininity is imagined from the perspective of the male expert, how it is created through a scientific discourse of male-controlled reproductive technology, and the extent to which those depictions are sustainable in the social sphere. In Chapter 3, 'The Female Murderer,' I analyse films where women kill men. The representation of these women is explored in relation to discourses of female criminality and the notion of the enigmatic female. Chapter 4, 'Criminal Women,' examines two films that depict women in prison, a theme that was relatively new to British cinema in the 1950s. I analyse the extent to which women's desires for excitement, glamour, independence and social mobility are criminalised and the mechanisms for rehabilitating them to their proper place in the gendered social economy. In Chapter 5 'The Female Prostitute' I explore the extent to which mainstream cinema can represent a figure that stands as a significant challenge to normative femininity and the mechanisms that are used to do so, drawing attention to the casting of foreign actresses, differing versions of femininity, and the motif of the heterosexual romance. The central theme of Chapter 6, 'Framing the Mother,' is an analysis of the post-war depiction of the mother figure and her relationship with her child. I critically consider two films where the physical and psychological health of the child depends on the ability of the mother to

discourses of female criminality and the notion of the enigmatic female. Chapter 4, 'Criminal Women,' examines two films that depict women in prison, a theme that was relatively new to British cinema in the 1950s. I analyse the extent to which women's desires for excitement, glamour, independence and social mobility are criminalised and the mechanisms for rehabilitating them to their proper place in the gendered social economy. In Chapter 5 'The Female Prostitute' I explore the extent to which mainstream cinema can represent a figure that stands as a significant challenge to normative femininity and the mechanisms that are used to do so, drawing attention to the casting of foreign actresses, differing versions of femininity, and the motif of the heterosexual romance. The central theme of Chapter 6, 'Framing the Mother,' is an analysis of the post-war depiction of the mother figure and her relationship with her child. I critically consider two films where the physical and psychological health of the child depends on the ability of the mother to respond to its needs correctly, and in what ways the mother may succeed or fail. Chapter 7 examines the figure of 'The Housewife' as a central concern of post-war discourses of femininity. I explore the interplay between femininity, the domestic sphere, and discourses of modernity and consumerism. In sum, in the conclusion I consider some of the broad concerns about femininity that have emerged from the research, the dramatisation of contradictions and tensions that represent the cultural contestation of the feminine.

Chapter 2: The Perfect Woman

In this chapter I shall discuss three films from the post-war period that explore the theme of the male scientist as inventor and his creation of the perfect woman. In *The Perfect Woman* (1949) an elderly professor creates a mechanised doll in the image of his niece. The niece subsequently substitutes herself for the doll, which leads to a series of chaotic misunderstandings before the doll self-destructs and harmony is restored. *Stolen Face* (1952) follows the misguided fortunes of a plastic surgeon who, unable to have the woman he loves, recreates her face on a disfigured female criminal, with tragic consequences. In *The Four-Sided Triangle* (1953) a young scientist suffering from unrequited love develops a replicating machine and uses his invention to produce an exact copy of his would-be love. The facsimile spurns him and both perish in an accidental fire.

This chapter will outline how the cultural construction of science and the scientist is gendered and will explore themes of male control in the arena of reproduction and the historical antecedents of male-created females in literature and film. I shall then consider how cultural constructions of science interact with the representation of women in an era of rapid technological change and explore in more detail how the themes of male control in the areas of technology, science, invention and plastic surgery are negotiated in the films under discussion. I shall discuss what conclusions might be drawn from these films about masculinity, femininity, and the issue of anxiety in the post-war period.

Modern science is linked to the Enlightenment project in Western Europe, that is, the decline of religion and spiritualism and the emergence of a belief in the sovereign subject, reason and objective knowledge. Within Enlightenment thought a number of binary oppositions are evident, for example, nature/culture; mind/body; reason/emotion. These oppositions are profoundly gendered and hierarchical, for example, the association of

women with nature and men with culture.[1] Such associations did not emerge with the Enlightenment period and are not exclusive to science (Lloyd, 1993). Indeed, Jordanova argues that these gendered associations are both 'ancient and widespread' (1989: 19). The Pythagoreans in the sixth century BC devised a hierarchical table outlining such oppositions including 'light/dark, good/bad' and placed the female on the inferior side, in opposition to the superior masculine side (Lloyd, 1993: 3). The Enlightenment project however did witness changes to the meanings commonly associated with terms such as '"culture ... "civilise", "nature"' that had profound implications for how society and the natural were understood (Jordanova, 1989: 23). For these reasons I shall frame my discussion of science within the nature/culture opposition. Jordanova argues that 'science and medicine held a privileged epistemological position because their methods appeared to be the only ones which would lead away from dogma and superstition towards a secular empirically-based knowledge of the natural and social worlds' (1989: 24). The project of science, associated with the male domain of culture, civilisation and reason, was to scrutinise, understand, and account for that which is feminine, that is, nature and the social.[2] Thus science, as an activity, was masculine and privileged and an opposition was created between science and the social.[3]

If science was a masculine activity, it was also a discipline commonly practised by men; hence the scientist in Western culture was male.[4] There are three key themes associated

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[1] Other binaries that exhibit a gendered bias include physical/mental; feeling and superstition/abstract knowledge and thought; nature/science and civilisation (Jordanova, 1999: 163). As Jordanova comments however, it is not simply that male culture is valourised in preference to a denigrated female nature. Rather, the female alignment with nature combines both positive and negative elements for example 'sentiment and simple, pure morality' on the one hand and 'ignorance and lack of intellectual powers' on the other (ibid).

[2] For Jordanova, '"nature" includes people and the societies they construct' (1989: 41).

[3] It has been argued by Jordanova that '[i]n the self-conscious scientism of the Enlightenment, the capacity of the human mind to delve into the secrets of nature was celebrated. Increasingly this capacity for scientific prowess was conceptualized as a male gift, just as nature was the fertile woman' (1999: 158).

[4] This is not to say that women do not practise science, they do, although the numbers involved are small, relative to men. Keller comments that women are 'grossly under-represented ...especially [in] the so-called "hard" sciences like physics and chemistry' (1992: 17). Furthermore, where women are active in science, their work is often over-looked and goes unrecognised. The well-known case of Rosalind Franklin in the development of DNA provides such an example. James Watson and his colleague Francis Crick received the

with the cultural history of the idea of the male scientist and I shall discuss these in turn. These are the sovereign subject; the mad scientist and the notion of the over-reacher and secrecy; and the laboratory as a private sphere.

Cultural constructions of the male scientist draw on philosophical beliefs about the sovereign subject. Grounded in Enlightenment thought, sovereign subjectivity is based on a fundamental belief in the individual who has agency and is in control of 'his own words, thoughts, deeds and will' (Morris, 1993: 137). The sovereign subject bears individual responsibility for his actions and is understood as an 'isolated' subject who has no inevitable bond with other individuals (Jagger, 1983: 355). In terms of the production of knowledge, this is understood as the 'product of individual minds' (Jagger, 1983: 40), a cornerstone of Cartesian philosophy. The male scientist is thus conceptualised as an active, autonomous agent in the production of knowledge.

Another aspect of the construction of the scientist as a sovereign subject is that he is a predominantly reclusive figure, fundamentally a solitary being, one who works in isolation.[5] Keller suggests that science has been traditionally perceived as a solitary pursuit undertaken by an individual who is occasionally supported by an assistant. Such a

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Nobel Prize in 1962 for their discovery of DNA. Watson recalls his experience in *The Double Helix* (1968). Integral to the success of their work was the contribution made by Rosalind Franklin. However, Watson's attitude to Franklin and her work was both dismissive and patronising. Watson comments that the problem with Franklin (or Rosy as he refers to her) was that she refused to see her role as that of an assistant: '[c]learly Rosy had to go or be put in her place' (1968: 17). The difficulty in getting rid of Franklin was 'there was no denying she had a good brain. If she could only keep her emotions under control, there would be a good chance that she could really help him [Wilkins]' (Watson, 1968: 18). Watson's attempts to undermine Franklin's scientific credibility with comments about her emotions fail to recognise his own 'emotional' response to the scenario of a woman in a male-dominated laboratory. In his epilogue Watson makes some attempt to correct his position on Franklin, commenting that 'my initial impressions of her, both scientific and personal ... were often wrong' (1968: 225). Franklin died in 1958 and thus could not correct any of Watson's claims and assertions. However, her work and its reception stand as a salutary lesson in how women have been marginalised within science. Further, it provides an example of what Keller has termed the 'great man attitude to science' that is, the tendency to attribute scientific discovery to just one person (1992: 23). Such an approach is interesting because, whilst it is widely acknowledged that the production of scientific knowledge is a collaborative activity, the accreditation of a singular person is consistent with dominant ideologies of the individual scientist as a genius-creator, a legacy of the Romantic period.

model predominated until the early nineteenth century when the pursuit of science became a more communal process (Keller, 1992: 17). Keller concludes that 'the popular image of the lone (and possibly mad) male scientist working late into the night in a grim laboratory – for example, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* – is now a fictitious one' (ibid). Keller's comment highlights that, albeit fictitious, the dominant popular image in the Western imaginary is still that of the scientist as an individual creative figure.

A further dimension of the figure of the male scientist is the possibility of his madness. Jordanova states that 'the "mad scientist" is a literary type in Gothic and utopian novels' associated with the notions of 'over-reaching' and 'secrecy' (1989: 125). The scientist as over-reacher[6] seeks to emulate God in his pursuits and devotes himself to his studies and the search for scientific knowledge, to the exclusion of his friends, family and other social commitments. Levine, writing about Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), argues that the over-reacher is driven by the 'aspiration to divine creative activity' (1979: 9) which shares much in common with how the Romantics viewed the poet. All of the male scientists in the films I discuss exhibit the characteristics of the over-reacher.

The theme of secrecy is an integral aspect of the 'mad scientist' and secrecy has three dimensions. Firstly, the activity is an exclusive one thereby assuring the ownership of any knowledge that may be produced. Secondly, the outcome is uncertain, success or failure may follow and a degree of risk accompanies the activities of the scientist. This is linked to the third aspect as the mad scientist is operating on the boundaries of what is morally acceptable. Part of his madness arises from his desire to explore areas of science that

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[5] The belief in the solitary being draws on Enlightenment principles of abstract individualism, that is, the belief that individuals are abstracted from the social environment and are 'ontologically prior to society' (Jagger, 1983: 28-9).

[6] The concept of the over-reacher is associated with the Greek term 'hubris' and was used in Greek mythology to describe tragic heroes such as Oedipus who believed they could defy the will of the Gods. Thus an over-reacher is someone who has aspirations beyond the bounds of normative humanity and who is doomed to failure.

involve 'difficult, dangerous, even trangressive experiments,' thus his activities are associated with questionable ethics (Jordanova, 1989: 126). Furthermore, by cloaking experiments in a shroud of secrecy science remains mystified and difficult to understand, a strategy that fuels both the understanding of the scientist as a creative genius figure and the separation of science from the social.

For such isolation and secrecy to be assured a private space that belongs to the male scientist is required, a laboratory. This private space of the laboratory is profoundly gendered and differs significantly from the private realm of the domestic associated with the female. Its presence violates the conventional distinction between the male public sphere and the female private sphere. However, its status as a masculine domain is assured because it is a space for the pursuit of scientific knowledge. It also provides a hermetically sealed universe where the social cannot intrude. One of the problems science faces is the attempt to introduce laboratory-based discoveries or creations into a wider social environment. Scientific invention is, within this model, a process which begins in the private sphere of the laboratory and then moves into the social. Often factors may arise in the social that are not present in the laboratory and therefore the discovery or invention may fail to function in the social as predicted.[7] In this respect male isolation from the social can be seen as problematic. The failure of science and its endeavours to function effectively in the social realm is a theme that is evident in the films that I discuss where the male scientists attempt, and fail, to integrate their creation into the social. Thus the films all raise questions about the problematic of the male private sphere. Furthermore, it is the woman, and her body, that acts as mediator of this process from science into the social.

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[7] Such factors are known as 'confounders' and are used in randomised controlled trials to describe characteristics that are immaterial to the research question but which may introduce bias. Attempts can be made to control or limit confounders, usually through statistical methods, but such an approach is based on the assumption that the researcher is already aware of the confounder (Sackett et al, 1997: 93n). This is problematised by the fact that social confounders are notoriously difficult to anticipate and control.

The woman is the terrain upon which the interplay between male reason and female nature, science and the social is negotiated.

I have outlined briefly how science is gendered male and how certain attributes such as over-reaching, secrecy and isolation are key characteristics of the cultural reproduction of the male scientist. I now want to explore how science is used to circumvent the 'natural' in the arena of reproduction, be it by technological, mechanistic or surgical means. Reproduction should here be understood in the broadest sense as creating a facsimile of life, a copy, which is made by a man without recourse to either God or woman. Reproduction can occur in at least five different ways in the cultural imaginary:

- through revitalising a human or human body parts

- through creating an artificial human, a machine that resembles a human

- through significantly transforming an existing human

- through creating an exact copy or clone of a human

- through the creation of a cyborg, where the human is fused with technology.

The first four of these five strategies are evident in the films that I shall discuss. The fifth strategy, the creation of the cyborg[8], had not emerged in cultural representation in the period under discussion and indeed only comes into play from the 1960s onwards. Different strategies may be used to achieve a similar end but all such strategies are fundamentally concerned with circumventing what is 'natural,' either the role of the female or God, in the reproductive process. Underlying these various strategies, with the exception of transforming an existing human, is the notion that a thing may come to life without an in-uterine birthing process and in so doing render the female womb redundant.

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[8] The *New Oxford Dictionary of English* defines a cyborg as, 'a fictional or hypothetical person whose physical abilities are extended beyond normal human limitations by mechanical elements built into the body' (1998: 456). Donna Haraway's article 'A Cyborg Manifesto,' first published in 1984, theorised the cyborg figure.

Examples of ex-uterine reproduction are prolific in Western culture and include within Christian mythology the creation, by God, of Eve from Adam's rib, and within Greek mythology the creation of Athena who was born from the head of Zeus. Although there are different strategies for achieving reproduction in mythic, cultural and anthropological contexts, key themes concerning the scientist and the being that he creates are duplicated, regardless of the strategy implemented. I shall explore the cultural representation of these key themes and different reproductive strategies. My initial focus will be the literary precursors that form the cultural backdrop to the films that are my main consideration.

The literary tradition of the theme of revitalising a human is evident in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (1818)[9], although it is certain that the theme did not originate here. Levine argues that Shelley transformed 'fantasy and traditional Christian and pagan myths into unremitting secularity' (1979: 6-7). The novel centres on birth and creation, and Levine suggests that we are 'confronted immediately with the displacement of God and woman from the acts of conception and birth' (1979: 8). The novel thus shifts the creation of life from God or woman to an individual man. The focus of Dr Frankenstein's creative powers is the creation of a male human being, formed from human remains and re-animated via electricity. However, this being proves extremely difficult to control. Levine suggests that the Frankenstein story has become a metaphor in Western cultures for 'a work, or agency that proves troublesomely uncontrollable especially to its creator' or 'any agency or creation that slips from the control of and ultimately destroys its creator'[10] (1979: 3-4). The creation of life through non-conventional means here appears to be

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[9] Shelley's novel was first published in 1818. In this thesis quotations from the novel are primarily drawn from the edition edited by Johanna M. Smith (2000) which is based on the 1831 version of Shelley's text. Exceptions are indicated.

[10] Levine's definitions come from Webster's *Third New International Dictionary* and *The American Heritage Dictionary* respectively. The *New Oxford Dictionary of English* defines Frankenstein's monster as 'a thing that becomes terrifying or destructive to its maker' (1998: 728).

intricately bound up with the destruction of life or, at the very least, the destruction of harmony.

Many of the characteristics of the male scientist mentioned at the beginning of this chapter are clearly evident in *Frankenstein*. Frankenstein is marked as an over-reacher. He pursues his studies with intensity and makes no visit to his relatives in Geneva for a period exceeding two years (2000: 55). His aspirations to immortality through his scientific creation illustrate his belief in his divinity.[11] He works in isolation and without assistance and recalls how '[i]n a solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house, and separated from all the other apartments by a gallery and staircase, I kept my workshop of filthy creation' (2000: 58).[12] The spatial segregation is doubled here, as not only is the laboratory an isolated, non-public arena, but it is physically segregated from the main domestic body of the house. Finally, although the scene of creation is described it is not explained and therefore cannot be understood, thereby ensuring that the mysteries of science remain intact.[13] In relation to the being that is created, Frankenstein creates a male figure but one which fails to convince as a human because his appearance is so disturbing. Frankenstein's description of his creation as 'more hideous than belongs to humanity' (1998: 76) signals a failure of verisimilitude in relation to the artificially-created human.

Whilst Shelley's *Frankenstein* dramatises the creation of a male figure, E. T. A. Hoffman's short story 'The Sandman' (1816)[14] deals with, amongst other things, the creation of a

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[11] Frankenstein maintains that '[a] new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs' (2000: 58).

[12] Furthermore, Frankenstein comments how he 'disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame' (2000: 58). 'Fingers' implies the penetration by the male scientist of that which is hidden and secret, that is, nature, as the female is penetrated by the male. That such fingers are described as profane judges their activities as contemptible and irreverent. Frankenstein's experiments are clearly 'transgressive' in the sense that they cross an ethical boundary in terms of reproduction and scientific experimentation.

[13] Frankenstein refuses to divulge his secrets to Captain Walton, arguing that he does not wish others to make the same mistakes.

[14] In this thesis quotations are drawn from the translation by Ritchie Robertson (2000).

female figure. I want to consider briefly some of the characteristics of the being that the scientist creates, her physical appearance, and her perceived limitations, relative to the human.

The creation of the female by and from the male is perceived in Christian mythology to be a lesser form of creation. There are certain gendered differences between Shelley's and Hoffman's respective creations. In Hoffman's story the female figure Olimpia is an artificial human, a mechanised female figure that resembles a human, rather than a re-animated human such as Frankenstein's monster. Created by Professor Spalanzani and Coppola[15] Olimpia does not seek to destroy her creators but is a passive agent in a feud between her two male creators and the cause of Nathanael's decline. In contrast to Shelley's male monster who is articulate, Hoffman's automaton Olimpia has only two expressions, 'Oh! Oh!' and 'Good night, my dear friend!' (2000: 112). She is much admired when first presented at the Professor's ball. Her physical appearance receives approval: 'her beautifully moulded features and her shapely figure compelled general admiration' (2000: 108) but her movement, dancing and posture are criticised. Even Nathanael, her ardent suitor, recognises that she has a 'peculiar rhythmic regularity' (ibid). Nathanael's friends are more critical of her. Siegmund comments: 'her gait is curiously measured, as though her every movement were produced by some mechanism like clockwork. She plays and sings with the disagreeably perfect, soulless timing of a machine, and she dances similarly' (2000: 111). Siegmund concludes that Olimpia is a 'dummy,' a 'wax doll' (ibid), a remark to which I shall return later. In contrast to Frankenstein's creation, Olimpia is physically beautifully but it is her movements which unmask her and reveal her as not human. Siegmund's comments on this offer a critique of

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[15] Nathanael is convinced that Coppola is merely Coppelius, the Sandman of his boyhood who terrorised his family, by another name. Nathanael comments in his opening letter to Lothar that 'the barometer-seller who called on me was none other than the abominable Coppelius' (2000: 92).

mechanisation and, in doing so draw on an implicit hierarchy where the human has a unique spirit or soul, which places it as superior to the soulless machine.

The creation of Olimpia is an attempt at female perfection, a perfection that is defined through physical appearance, but one that ultimately fails to please. The doll's perfection is critiqued as a lack of individualism. As a machine she fails to display the unique characteristics of a human. Her perfection renders her too predictable and she has none of the idiosyncrasies that are associated with the human and indeed, which are taken to define the human in opposition to the mechanical. The attempt to render the doll more human by endowing her with typical bourgeois accoutrements such as singing and dancing ultimately fails.

The actual moment of the creation of Olimpia is not revealed in 'The Sandman' and in so doing the secrets of science remain intact. What is dramatised in the story is a primal scene. Within Freudian theory the primal scene arises from the child's curiosity about its own origins in its parents' lovemaking. In 'The Sandman' the boy Nathanael surreptitiously spies on Coppelius and his father engaged in creating the automaton child: 'I was rooted to the spot. Despite the risk of being discovered and, as I was well aware, of being severely punished, I stayed there, listening, and poking my head between the curtains' (2000: 90).[16] Robertson argues in his introduction to the story that this theme of spying, a 'motif of surreptitious looking' (2000: xx) is repeated throughout the story. For example, Nathanael repeatedly and compulsively peers at Olimpia through a spyglass sold to him by Coppola and later, using the same spyglass, becomes demented when peering at Clara. Freud, in his discussion of 'The Sandman,' argues there is a 'substitutive relation between the eye and the male member ... [and a] connection between fears about the eye

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[16] The automaton child is created in the father's room which substitutes as a laboratory, a private male place marked off from the rest of the domestic realm.

and castration' (1925: 383-4).[17] In this respect spying (extended looking) can be understood as an attempt to counter castration anxieties. The theme of spying and scrutinising the specifically female body is a key motif that is repeated in all the films and one I shall expand upon later.

The fascination with male control over the reproduction of life translated into film. Film versions of the Frankenstein story first appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century[18] but it was the productions by Universal Studios of *Frankenstein* (1931) and *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) that brought the Frankenstein story to a wider film audience (Lavalley, 1979: 250). Key images from the 1930s films proved influential for subsequent film-makers of both the Frankenstein story and other stories that dramatise the theme of male-controlled reproduction. Lavalley argues that the Universal *Frankenstein* films draw partly on the 'psychology of terror' evident in German films such as *Metropolis* (1926), *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920) and *The Golem* (1920) (1979: 252). These German films are the filmic antecedents of both *Frankenstein* and the post-war British films.[19] My discussion here will briefly illuminate some of the features from *The Golem* and *Metropolis* that are particularly relevant to the later films I wish to discuss. Lavalley argues that the German films established a visual grammar that profoundly influenced the Universal films and, I would argue, other films about male-controlled reproduction. Of specific interest to this discussion is the creation scene within the laboratory setting, and the appearance and movement of the being that has been created.

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[17] This is because there is, for Freud, a link between eyes and the father figure. The Sandman, who steals children's eyes, is a substitute for 'the dreaded father at whose hands castration is awaited' (1925: 384).

[18] *Frankenstein* (1910) where the monster is not reanimated flesh but created in a cauldron full of chemicals, its skeleton gradually acquiring flesh, and *Life Without Soul* (1915) where the 'creature' is a clay model which is animated using a regenerative fluid (American Film Institute Catalog of Feature Films, <http://www.afi.com>)

[19] It is for this reason, and the limitations of space, that my discussion here focuses on these films rather than any analysis of the Universal *Frankenstein* films.

The Golem[20] is based on a medieval legend about an artificial man modelled from clay who is both guardian and possible bane of the Jews. He is brought to life by the star of David and seeks to protect the Jews from a cruel and oppressive king but becomes violent when the planetary directions change (Lavalley, 1979: 256). In the 1920 film it is the golem's bodily movement that is most similar to Frankenstein's monster. Both creations share a 'retarded motion ... shuffling forward in a jerky, robot-like way' (ibid). It is this style of movement which is repeated by the mechanised Olga in *The Perfect Woman*.

Metropolis is set in a futuristic city run by Joh Fredersen where industrial processes have been rationalised to the extent that workers have become dehumanised. A young woman, Maria, preaches to the discontented workers that they will be saved but Fredersen asks an inventor Rotwang to build a robot in the likeness of Maria with the purpose of provoking a riot amongst his workers which he can then justifiably quell using violence. Reproduction here, as in 'The Sandman', is about creating a machine that resembles a human.

In terms of set design it is the laboratory in *Metropolis* and the creation of the evil robot Maria that influences subsequent films from the Universal *Frankenstein* ones to British films from the post-war period. Lavalley argues that the 'vast and well-equipped laboratory, pulsing with electricity, is dramatically essential for Rotwang's creation of a robot' and that the director James Whale drew heavily on this to create his own 'elaborate machinery ... [and] electrical vials' in *Frankenstein* (1979: 258). The creation scene in *Metropolis* arguably produced many of the key cinematic images associated with both artificial reproduction in the broadest sense and the work of the scientist more generally.

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[20] The story does not fit exactly any of the five reproductive strategies I have outlined but is possibly closest to the Frankenstein story in that matter is animated, albeit by spiritual rather than physical means.

In this scene the laboratory is presented as a strange and highly complex site which comprises a plethora of technical equipment that only the scientist, with his specialist knowledge, can control. This demonstrates the importance and gravity of the scientist and his achievements. The laboratory is located in Rotwang's private house, thereby duplicating the themes of a private space of secrecy and isolation.[21] In the pivotal three-minute scene where Rotwang creates Maria's *doppelgänger* the focus of the scene shifts between Rotwang in charge of the technical and creative process, and the product of the process, the evil robot. We witness Rotwang engaged in the act of creation, manipulating the levers, pulleys, chemicals and electrical equipment that control life. We also witness the *doppelgänger* come to life. A life-force begins to glow inside her and her robotic features, already gendered female, change to resemble those of the human Maria. Thus, in the creation scene, equal emphasis is placed on what Rotwang does <u>and</u> what he produces.

Interesting, the *doppelgänger* Maria does not move in the robotic or retarded manner that is commonly associated with artificial creations and is evident in *Frankenstein, The Golem* and 'The Sandman.' Rather it is the workers, compelled to endlessly tend the machines, that 'move in a senseless mass, devoid of individuality' (Jordanova, 1989: 118). The workforce has become mechanised as a result of the need to service the machines and, like Olimpia in 'The Sandman,' are lacking human individuality.[22] In contrast with the workers who are 'real' humans the *doppelgänger* Maria must prove that she is real. For Maria, 'the test of whether she is "real" or not' occurs when she is presented 'as the object of the collective gaze of a roomful of men' (Jenkins, 1981: 86). The objectification and exposure of the female to the scrutiny of the male gaze is the method by which femininity

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[21] Rotwang's house is introduced with a storyboard that proclaims, 'in the middle of the city, overlooked by time, stood a mysterious old house.' The house is geographically isolated from the rest of the city of Metropolis and its everyday world. It gives the appearance of being an island in a sea of skyscrapers and is architecturally different from the skyscrapers. These aspects serve to make stark the contrast between science and the social, their fundamental divorce.

[22] For Jordanova, *Metropolis* and its concern with machines is in part a response to Taylorist principles of efficiency and rationality in production methods which were prominent in the 1920s (1989: 118).

is confirmed.[23] Part of the concern however surrounding the artificial female is that she may be 'undetectable' (Jordanova, 1989: 123) from the real female. In this respect the distinction between real and artificial femininity is undermined. Indeed whilst both Olimpia and Frankenstein's monster fail to convince because their man-made construction is apparent (through either physical appearance or movement) Maria is arguably more unnerving precisely because her artificiality is harder to detect. The robot Maria clearly suggests Rivière's thesis of masquerade. The method by which the men are convinced that Maria is real is through her 'mask of femininity,' whilst a fear remains concerning what lies behind the mask.

I have outlined some of the ways in which male-controlled reproduction is presented in film and how cinematic traditions such as the creation scene, the artificial being, the laboratory, the role of the scientist and mechanisation have developed. These themes will be explored further in the three following post-war films: *The Perfect Woman* (1949), *Stolen Face* (1952) and *The Four-Sided Triangle* (1953). The dates of the films precede the discovery of DNA, which Watson and others worked on between 1951-53. They also precede the technical developments in reproductive technology of the 1970s and 1980s and more recent developments in the area of gene modification and cloning. Recent progress has been made in the area of facial transplantation where surgeons are developing techniques that make it possible to graft the entire face of someone newly deceased onto a recipient.[24] Although the films were produced at a time before these scientific developments, they do prefigure many of these.

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[23] These actions resonate with the theme of spying that I identified earlier. Jenkins notes that Maria is subject to a 'sea of eyes' (1981: 86).

[24] See Jo Revill's article in *The Observer* (24 Nov. 2002) which suggests that such techniques 'may seem more akin to a science fiction plot' and Sarah Hall's article in *The Guardian*, 28 Nov. 2002.

That the films which I discuss are in part concerned with the uses to which science and technology is put demonstrates the importance of these themes in the post-war years. Jones suggests that 'the prestige of science was very high in 1945' (1997: 31), not least because of its role in securing the war-time victory of the Allies.[25] Marwick states that 'there was great enthusiasm for, and much talk about, the importance of science and technology to Britain's social regeneration' (1990: 21). Scientists therefore had significant status in post-war society and were looked to as experts whose knowledge was of fundamental importance in shaping the future.[26] Alongside prestige however was a certain amount of anxiety about the uses to which scientific inventions may be put. The creation of the atom bomb in 1945 for example led the 1947 Mass Observation Report 'Where is Science Taking Us?' to describe, as Spicer comments, 'widespread public anxiety about atomic bombs, a feeling that science was now out of control whereas it had formerly been a blessing' (2001: 212).[27] Other scientific developments such as eugenics for example, which dominated reproductive science in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, were thought to have been perverted by the Nazis.[28]

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[25] Marwick states that the war was at times referred to as 'the physicists' war' and describes how military needs led to the refinement of scientific advances in areas such as nuclear capabilities and radar which in turn had profound implications for peace-time, particularly in the area of medicine (1990: 21).

[26] Geraghty argues that science was an integral feature of what has broadly been termed 'modernity.' In Chapter 1 I briefly discussed Geraghty's analysis of the features commonly associated with the term modernity. Indeed the scientist was widely perceived to be an expert in all matters, not just those relating to science. Orwell, writing in 1945, states that, '[a] scientist's political opinions, it is assumed, his opinions on sociological questions, on morals, on philosophy, perhaps even on the arts, will be more valuable than those of a layman. The world, in other words, would be a better place if the scientists were in control of it ... there are already millions of people who do believe this' (1968: 11). Whilst Orwell's essay is a critique of these opinions, his statements do capture the beliefs held by many regarding science and scientists. Further the discourse of 'expertise' was one which extended beyond science. Geraghty comments that one of the features of modernity was 'the need for trust in technical and professional knowledge and the expertise and systems that dispense them' (2000: 24). As I shall demonstrate in subsequent chapters in this thesis, this discourse of expertise was extended to mothering and housework.

[27] Orwell complains, in an essay first published in *Tribune* in 1945, that 'the atomic bomb has not roused so much discussion as might have been expected,' although there has been 'much reiteration of the useless statement that the bomb "ought to be put under international control"' (1968: 6). The difference between the position reported by Mass Observation and that of Orwell may, in part, be explained by the passage of two years and that, perhaps, Orwell's criticism is directed towards the intellectual community.

[28] This is not to say that eugenics no longer shaped reproductive discourses. Indeed the concern about the birth-rate was a concern that the 'right' people should reproduce. As Philips and Haywood argue 'the real danger was ... that the lower classes were proliferating at the expense of the "better," higher-quality sections

Not surprisingly therefore, science and scientists were a recurring feature in films throughout the period in both the burgeoning science-fiction genre and other more mainstream genres such as comedy.[29] *Seven Days to Noon* (1950) for example is primarily concerned with the fear of nuclear development and the theme of the 'mad scientist' (Spicer, 2001: 55; Landy, 1991: 403), whilst the 'comic scientist' is a feature of films such as *The Mouse that Roared* (1959) (Geraghty, 2000: 61-2). The films which I discuss in this chapter are particularly interesting because of the interaction between science, ethics and the representation of women, specifically in the arena of reproduction. All three films are concerned with how male scientists use science in the quest for female perfection, as defined by men. These films come some considerable time after Universal's *Frankenstein* cycle and prefigure Hammer's return to the *Frankenstein* theme towards the end of the 1950s. Chibnall suggests that, in addition to cold war fears, British science fiction also explored post-war concerns about 'the threat from women' and produced a number of films which 'mix[ed] fear of female sexuality with excitement about its possibilities' (1999: 58).[30] The emergence of these films (in a manner analogous to the film noir genre in Hollywood cinema[31]) may, in part, be a response to male anxiety about men's gendered role within the post-war settlement. The theme of male control over, and definitions of,

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of society ... eugenicist discourse could be invoked ... as long as there was no hint of compulsion in the aftermath of the knowledge of Fascist practices' (1998: 25-6).

[29] British science fiction films were, as Landy argues, broadly concerned with 'social instability, the false promises of science, and cold war threats, much like their American postwar counterparts' (1991: 395). Whilst Landy argues that the genre was a feature of 1930s British cinema, its prevalence in the 1950s can in part be explained by the dominance of cold war discourses and the creation of the 'X' certificate which allowed film-makers (in the face of declining audience numbers) to engage with what might be broadly termed more 'adult' subject matter (1991: 395). The genre appeared on British television with the broadcast of the first *Quatermass* series in 1953 (Leman, 1991: 109), which was subsequently remade by Hammer as a series of *Quatermass* films between 1955-1967 (Spicer, 2001: 59-61).

[30] Indeed it is interesting that this theme emerged in a genre that Chibnall terms 'pulp sf cinema' (1999: 57). As I suggested in Chapter 1 British cinema has, to use Petley's phrase, a 'lost continent' which serves as the 'other' of the more respectable realist tradition. Harper argues that such features had 'B' status and functioned in a manner similar to 'Quota quickies,' providing a space for film-makers to take what she terms a 'rough-and-ready, risk-taking, might-as-well-as-not approach' (2003: 5). It is for these reasons that films such as *The Perfect Woman* and other cheaply-made, low status productions can prove so fruitful for gender analysis.

[31] Hirsch suggests that women in the film noir genre are portrayed as 'amoral destroyers of male strength,' a depiction that he links to 'the wartime reassignment of roles, both at home and at work' (1981: 20-1), an argument that is supported by Place (1978).

normative femininity can be understood as an expression of that anxiety, although the failure to create or control the perfect women dramatises the impotence of the male.[32]

The Perfect Woman, Stolen Face and *The Four-Sided Triangle* all dramatise the theme of male-controlled reproduction and the creation of females to satisfy the personal needs, either professional and/or emotional, of the individual scientist. Each film uses a different reproductive strategy: respectively; creating a machine that resembles a human, surgical transformation of an existing human, and creating an exact copy of a human. Difference in technique or reproductive strategy however does not result in difference in outcome.

The Perfect Woman, directed by Bernard Knowles, was released in 1949. It was adapted for the screen by George Black and Bernard Knowles from a play by Wallace Geoffrey and Basil Mitchell that had proved commercially successful in the West End theatre. Professor Belmon (Miles Malleson), an eccentric scientist, creates a mechanised 'perfect woman,' Olga (Pamela Devis), modelled on his niece Penelope (Patricia Roc). The Professor hires two men, Cavendish (Nigel Patrick) and Ramshead (Stanley Holloway), to take Olga out to see if she is convincing as a real woman. Penelope substitutes herself for Olga in an attempt to secure a rare evening of entertainment, and chaos and misunderstanding ensue. *KineWeekly*'s suggested box-office angle for the film was '[r]eliable British "rib-tickler"' and awarded the film a 'CC' classification, that is, 'excellent for children' (May 12 1949: 17). The film's status as a comedy with broad appeal suggests a family audience and indeed Harper argues the film (which was an inexpensive production) was commercially successful, especially in the regions, despite receiving poor reviews (2003: 4). Publicity material for the film centres on the depiction of Patricia Roc in lacy underwear. Roc's star image had been established in a number of

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[32] Films concerning the theme of the 'threat from women' (either as male-produced *doppelgängers*, female scientists or aliens from outer-space) were produced throughout the 1950s and included *Spaceways* (1953),

commercially successful British films, the most famous of which was *The Wicked Lady* (1945) where she played the 'good girl' in opposition to Margaret Lockwood's 'bad girl.' Babington's description of Roc's 'good girl' star persona as 'tennis-clubby' (2001: 98) suggests a particular, middle-class, version of femininity that is friendly, approachable, and also 'natural' and 'healthy,' characteristics which I suggested in Chapter 1 were a feature of normative femininity as it was imagined within British discourses. Roc's casting as 'the perfect woman' is therefore believable, whilst her appearance in her underwear suggests a degree of sexual titillation.

I want to consider first the Scientist and how his understanding of his creation illustrates his own character. The Professor valorises the male creative process and, in so doing, highlights the traditional opposition between science and nature and its gendered skill divide. When referring to his niece Penelope the Professor comments, 'she's just another young woman, flesh and blood and a little calcium, there are millions of them, mass-produced, there's only one Olga.' He further comments, 'I have made a woman and I did it entirely alone, something that no other man has ever achieved.' Such comments are based on an argument that what nature or the female does in terms of reproduction can be considered easy precisely because it is 'natural.' In contrast, what male science achieves is much more complex. Nature or the female role in the reproductive process is denigrated and what it produces, that is, the product of its labour, is equally dismissed by the Professor. A mass-produced human woman implies one that lacks individuality, something that is bland and marked by sameness.[33] In contrast, what male science achieves is something unique. This stands in opposition to 'The Sandman' where the

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Devil Girl from Mars (1954) and *Fire Maidens from Outer Space* (1956) (Harper, 2003; Chibnall, 1999).

[33] Indeed the comments regarding mass-production echo fears about mass culture that were not uncommon in Britain between the decades of the 1930s and the 1950s. Cultural commentators such as George Orwell and Richard Hoggart were concerned that mass communication industries such as film and radio were destroying authentic class cultures and were responsible for brainwashing predominantly working-class audiences with the promise of increasing affluence. Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) celebrates the 'authentic values' he associates with the working-class communities that existed prior to World War 2.

human is defined as an individual and the machine fails to please precisely because she is lacking human idiosyncrasies.

The Professor's dismissive attitude towards his niece as an inferior form of creation is inherently contradictory as he chooses to model his robot in her likeness. Perhaps this illustrates an opposition between science and imagination? Unlike Rotwang, the Professor has no reason to model his creation upon another, and in doing so exhibits a failure to think imaginatively beyond his immediate surroundings, functioning only in his hermetically sealed universe. Indeed he has only two models of femininity upon which to draw, Penelope and Mrs Butters the housekeeper, and for him both are interchangeable as they perform the same function of caring for him and looking after his home.[34] The Professor has no need for a young model because he is old and therefore, culturally, outside the sexual economy. He has, in fact, no interest in women beyond the scientific adventure that the creation of the doll Olga signals for him.

The Professor exhibits the characteristics of the sovereign subject as he believes that both the process and the product of male-controlled reproduction are highly complex and can only be brought to fruition by the technical and creative prowess of the scientist, the individual genius figure. He is incapable of explaining his invention, thus ensuring that secrecy is maintained. His explanation to Cavendish and Ramshead is obscure and the use of vague technical terms such as 'gimbals' maintains science as an impenetrable language. Furthermore, not only does he fail to explain the creation of his invention; he fails to

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[34] The Professor's naming of the doll as Olga, which connotes a certain foreignness (especially in relation to the upper-class English setting for the film), suggests that the Professor recognises the 'otherness' of his invention. An opposition between foreignness/otherness and Englishness is evident throughout the film. The setting moves from the Professor's laboratory to a hotel which is staffed by foreign nationals such as a Swiss waiter and a French *maitre-de*. The comedy derives from a series of chaotic misunderstandings concerning not only the doll but issues of social etiquette and behaviour. The hotel staff for example make constant reference to the characteristics of 'You English' and in doing so the boundaries between national identities are re-established, the differences between English and 'other' reaffirmed.

explain how it should be operated. The extensive instruction manual for Olga proves ultimately worthless. The mystification of science and scientific knowledge remains.

The Professor, like other scientists, has his own laboratory, a room within the house that is his exclusive domain. Although he lets others into his laboratory, it is still presented as a strange and alien place. For example, when Cavendish and Ramshead arrive to collect Olga, the room is scattered with an assortment of limbs, torsos and heads, as well as other scientific paraphernalia such as test-tubes and bunsen-burners. It seems a place where dissection and experimentation take place and seems to resonate with Frankenstein's description of his laboratory as a 'workshop of filthy creation.' Cavendish's repeated requests that Ramshead not touch anything presents the laboratory as a place of danger, hazard, and acute uncertainty for the lay person, thus maintaining the enigma of science, and its separation from the social sphere.

Having created, through a complex process, a unique and highly individuated object, a 'perfect woman,' what is the nature of perfection as perceived by the Professor? He makes explicit his definition of female perfection by describing the perfect woman as someone who, 'does exactly what she is told, she can't talk, she can't eat, and you can leave her switched off under a dust sheet for weeks at a time.' The Professor thus defines perfection as passive femininity and this resonates with the popular myth that a quiet female is preferred by the male. Indeed the promotional material for the film makes use of this myth, stating '[a] scientist constructs a perfect woman; she can walk but can't answer back!' (*KineWeekly*, 12 May 1949). Perfect femininity is therefore mute, malleable and subject to male control, characteristics which I introduced in Chapter 1 of this thesis. However, as I shall explore shortly, the notion of control within the film is demonstrated to be highly problematic.

In films such as *Metropolis* both the process and the actual moment of creation are dramatised in a scene with an elaborate and expressive setting. Where this is absent, as in 'The Sandman', a primal scene provides a depiction of creation. Such scenes are entirely absent from *The Perfect Woman*; there is no moment where the creator bestows life upon his creation. As a mechanical device Olga is presented as a ready-made, complete entity that requires only to be switched on. In this respect she functions like a household appliance and it is significant that the Professor instructs the housekeeper Mrs Butters (Irene Handl) to turn Olga on, whilst he is engaged is fine-tuning Olga. Mrs Butters releases a window at the back of the robot and this action allows a brief glimpse of Olga's internal mechanism, the requisite pulleys, pistons and lights that control her. This action functions to demystify her and identify her as a machine, whilst simultaneously allowing us to recognise, and admire, the skill of her creator.

The parallels between Olga and household appliances are interesting and situate the film in the post-war context. The availability of new appliances such as vacuum cleaners and cookers became increasingly widespread in the post-war years.[35] There was a common belief that these appliances would make life significantly easier for the housewife and that they required limited effort to operate them. Part of the interest in the newly developing domestic technology seemed to be their status, within British culture, as signifiers of classlessness, affluence and post-war equality. Wilson comments that, with the disappearance of servants, the domestic duties undertaken by working-class and middle-class women were perceived to be remarkably similar: 'the woman wielding the hoover ...[was] the symbol of the social revolution that had obliterated inequality' (1980: 12).[36] Furthermore, the idea of a household robot may have had a certain cultural resonance in

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[35] It should be noted that initially, only those from wealthy backgrounds could afford to purchase such appliances (Wilson, 1980: 12).

[36] Cowan's research in post-war North American households analyses the similarities between the domestic tasks undertaken by women from different economic groups (1983: 197-8).

1949.[37] The Professor never states the use or purpose of Olga but it could be argued that she functions like a household appliance; she can be switched on and off and responds to verbal commands. Cavendish's comment that if the Professor 'makes them as well as this there won't be a single home without one' can be read as signalling Olga's function as domestic. Olga is perhaps a replacement for the housekeeper Mrs Butters and it is with a certain ironic knowingness that Mrs Butters enters the laboratory with the intention of dusting Olga. Chibnall states that 'Olga the Robot appears to have no domestic function and is designed as a decorative toy for the male' (1999: 58). I would argue that it is the fusing of Olga's sexualised body with a household function that suggests her status as the perfect women/wife.

Whilst Mrs Butters activates Olga, the Professor's prolonged tinkering with Olga's 'gimbals' allows the camera to focus on her body, clad in a strange outfit comprised of a combination of quilted material, leather and metal rivets (see still 1 overleaf). These materials work in a number of ways. The body is clearly segmented in a manner which replicates the Frankensteinian idea of creating something from 'bits.' The quilted material of the torso and thighs gives the impression of a soft doll's body. The softness and malleability of the torso signifies traditional femininity, both in terms of physical appearance and desired or 'perfect' characteristics. The leather material inlaid with metal rivets symbolises the constructed nature of Olga, her status as a man-made object. Indeed, her constructed-ness is displayed on the outside so that we may recognise and admire the skill of her creator. It also leaves the audience in no doubt that the figure is artificial and that, unlike the doppelgänger Maria, there is no danger that the robotic woman would be indistinguishable from the real woman. Olga's body is simultaneously and by the same means presented to us in a sexualised manner. Quilted material is not used around the

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[37] The theme of the household robot is evident in the 1956 American film *Forbidden Planet* where a scientist visits another planet and reactivates a robot that he subsequently trains to act as a domestic servant/assistant.

breasts for example. Rather, leather is utilised to emphasise shape and curve, whilst metal rivets are strategically placed on her bosom to give the impression of a bra with half-cup and underwiring. Her outfit gives the impression of a basque and Olga is thus effectively presented in her underwear for our gaze.

Still 1. Pamela Devis as Olga the doll in *The Perfect Woman* (1949)

In a later scene, Cavendish and Ramshead arrive at the laboratory to take Olga out. Unbeknown to them, but apparent to the audience, Penelope has substituted herself for Olga. Cavendish and Ramshead remove the top half of the dustsheet and peer at her and subject her to a rigorous inspection. Penelope must acquiesce if she is to convince as the passive model of perfect femininity. She is presented in a highly decorative manner with her hair dressed and swept back from her face and her throat adorned with a jewelled necklace (see still 2 overleaf).
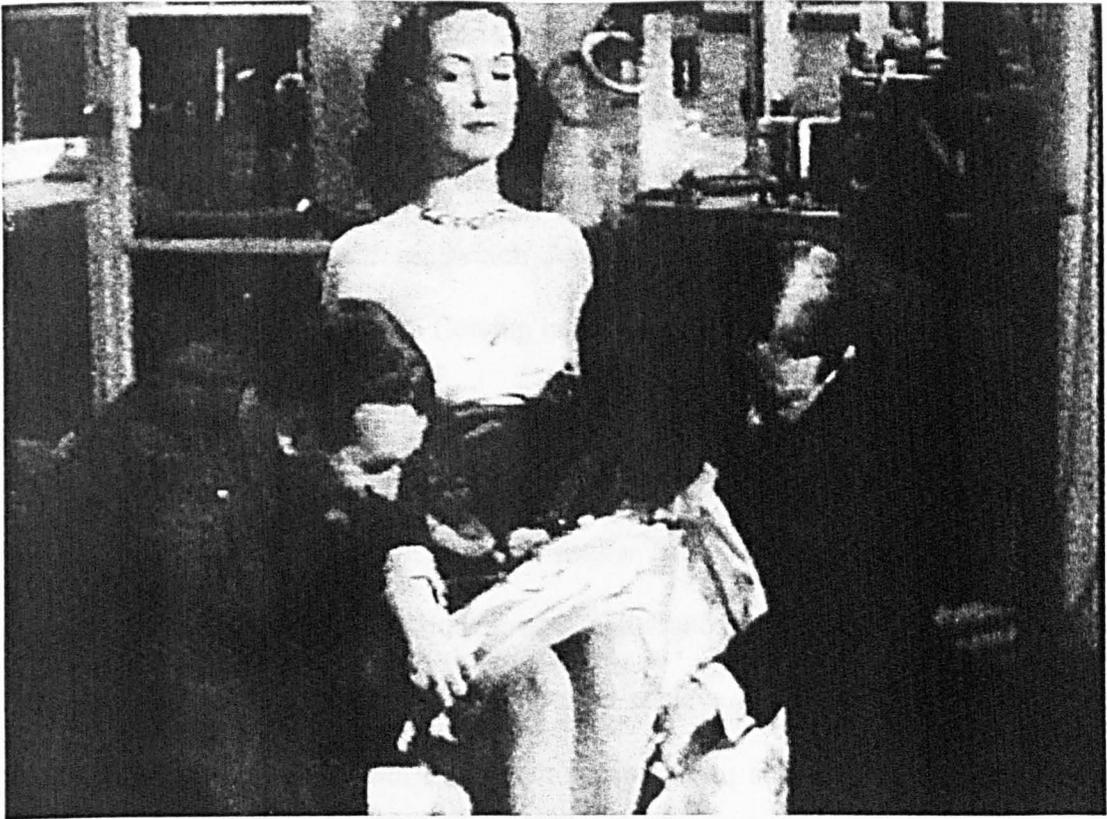
Still 2. Patricia Roc as Penelope in *The Perfect Woman* (1949)

Cavendish brushes her cheek, comments on its smoothness and invites Ramshead to do likewise. Her eyes, nose and ears are then inspected and the Professor's skill and attention to detail applauded. The men lift the lower half of the dustsheet to reveal and fondle her legs and comment with delight on their fleshiness. Penelope's uncomplaining body is presented for the scrutiny of the males. Indeed the scene hinges on the theme of constant exposure in every sense of the term. Firstly, will Penelope's act of substitution be unmasked, will her fraud be revealed? Secondly, her exposure to scrutiny has a sexual dimension and provides the audience with titillation. Her doll-like status means that she can be scrutinised, it legitimates her exposure, her laying bare, whilst the audience's knowledge that the figure is actually Penelope makes that exposure and scrutiny all the more titillatory, pleasurable, exciting and funny.[38]

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[38] There is a question throughout the scene regarding how far the exposure of the doll could go, especially in relation to the batman Ramshead, thereby introducing a class dimension. His behaviour suggests that he might violate her, evidencing a tension between sexual desire and restraint. It is Ramshead who wants to

Penelope, as Olga, exhibits characteristics and features that recall the wax models of the female body which were used to teach anatomy in Western Europe at the close of the eighteenth century. The models were gendered female in particular sexualised ways, displayed in reclining positions, which Jordanova describes as 'passive, yet sexually inviting' and were 'adorned with flowing hair, pearl necklaces, removable parts and small foetuses' (1989: 44-5). Eyebrows, eyelashes and pubic hair were also added (Jordanova, 1989: 47). These attributes are clearly in excess of required medical need and indicate the sexualisation of the female form which is further compounded if we consider the 'sexual resonances attached to seeing and knowing' (Jordanova, 1989: 45). The models have something in excess of function and therefore achieve a high degree of verisimilitude. Their status as objects of artifice makes it acceptable to subject them to scrutiny. They therefore offer the potential (to a male medical audience) for scopophilic satisfaction as 'perfect women.'

Penelope's presentation, as Olga, duplicates the wax doll effect, with her sexualised, passive body subject to scrutiny. Mulvey argues that Freud, in his 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,' 'isolated scopophilia as one of the component instincts of sexuality' (1992: 24). For Freud scopophilia was the act of 'taking other people as objects [and] subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze,' an act that was 'essentially active' (ibid). Thus for Freud the agent of the look derives sexual pleasure from controlling an objectified other via the mechanism of the gaze. Extended looking furthermore can be used to counter castration anxieties. Mulvey argues that cinema provides profoundly gendered scopophilic pleasure. For Mulvey, '[i]n a world ordered by sexual imbalance,

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remove the dustsheet that covers Penelope's lower body commenting 'I wonder if ...' and then pausing, leaving an unspoken idea or desire hanging in the air. It is Cavendish who restrains him. The tension between exposure, restraint and titillation is further exploited in the scene where the two men remove Penelope's dress and reveal her underwear. Norms of public decorum are transgressed. Will they go as far as removing her underwear? Again it is Ramshead who suggests they remove it on the pretext of turning the mechanism off, and Cavendish who exhibits restraint. Ramshead, the lower-class man, is thus associated with lust, whilst Cavendish, the upper-class man, is shown to have restraint.

pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female ... woman are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness' (1992: 27). As I have argued, Penelope's body is presented as passive, the attention to detail of her appearance invites her to-be-looked-at-ness and she must acquiesce to the active male gaze if she is to succeed as a 'perfect woman.' However, in terms of spectatorial pleasure, the presentation of Penelope as the doll plays on the knowledge of the viewer that she is not a doll and in so doing offers a quite dynamic view of the relationship between audience and film. The audience is aware that Penelope has the ability to stop the inspection, should it go too far. In contrast, Olga is not inspected and if she were would not be able to control it. However, unlike Penelope, she has nothing to reveal. The scrutiny of Penelope's body therefore offers, to a knowing audience, both the pleasure of titillation and the tension between exposure and restraint. Furthermore, whilst it is clear that Olga's body could not be mistaken for that of a real woman, the obverse is true for Penelope as she is presented within the plot in a manner in which there is no danger that the audience could mistake a real woman for an artificial one.

Having discussed the physical appearance of both Olga and Penelope I want to now explore how the robotic doll moves. After a period masquerading as a female automaton Penelope's status as a real woman is revealed to Cavendish (by a strategically-placed hat pin!), and she is then substituted with the 'real' doll Olga. In terms of movement and body language Olga's portrayal is reminiscent of the traditions exhibited by Frankenstein's monster, the golem and Olimpia from 'The Sandman.' Olga's movements initially have much in common with those of Olimpia in that they exhibit a certain curious rhythm. There is a stiffness to her body and limbs, a lack of fluidity in movement that suggests her doll-like quality. Her movements then become more and more problematic as the narrative

progresses. As Olga becomes increasingly uncooperative and uncontrollable the movement of her body becomes more robot-like and she comes to resemble both the golem and Frankenstein's monster in her clumsy and destructive motion. Furthermore, the manner in which she functions provides a comment on the failure of perfection. Olga requires constant instruction with regards to movement and will continue to move in a designated direction until instructed otherwise. What the Professor has sought to do is to create the perfect woman whom he can then control but Olga becomes, like Frankenstein's monster, 'troublesomely uncontrollable' to her creator. The necessity for constant instruction leads to the paradoxical situation where Olga's requirements actually robotise those that seek to control her. Cavendish and Ramshead are forced to interact with her in ways that are impossible to sustain. Parallels can be drawn with Lang's *Metropolis* where the machines of industry must be constantly attended by the workers who, in the process, are dehumanised and take on robotic characteristics. I have suggested that Lang's film is, in part, a cultural response to the introduction of, and concerns about, scientific management practices and their effects on the human which were prevalent in the 1920s. Equally, such concerns had contemporary relevance in post-war British society where the development of new technologies and the drive to increase industrial efficiency and productivity raised, for some, fears and anxieties. Commentators such as Orwell expressed concern about the 'excessive mechanisation of life' (1968: 81) and its impoverishment of the human spirit. The robotisation of Cavendish and Ramshead suggests, albeit in a humorous manner, these fears and anxieties. Furthermore, the failure of Olga points to the fallacy that domestic appliances are automatically time and labour saving devices. Olga's instruction manual is too complex to readily understand and she requires of her operators a significant investment of effort and labour to function. As a criticism of female perfection it suggests that perhaps male control over the female is not as desirable as initially

imagined. The fantasy of the perfect woman is demonstrated to be not only a fantasy, but one that is ultimately undesirable.

The catastrophic ending to the film where Olga explodes and the columns supporting the hotel collapse exhibits the failure of the Professor's vision. In this respect what the Professor has created in his laboratory, his hermetically sealed universe, has failed to function in the social sphere. It is significant that the word that finally triggers Olga's destruction is 'Love,' an emotional variable that the scientific realm cannot rationalise and the outcome of which cannot be predicted. The final scenes illustrate that the Professor's creation is misguided. Only after this epiphany can a new social order and new relationships be established.

In *The Perfect Woman* the scientist creates a machine that resembles the 'perfect woman' who is supposedly passive, malleable and does as she is told, but this notion of femininity is illustrated to be a fallacy and the ability of science to deliver what it promises is called into question. In the next section I shall consider two films, *Stolen Face* and *The Four-Sided Triangle*, both directed by Terence Fisher for Hammer. In each film the male protagonist uses a particular reproductive strategy to create his specific vision of the perfect woman. I will look at some of the themes associated with the male scientist such as the over-reacher, secretive creation and ethical concerns, and consider what the failure of female perfection has to say about anxiety and masculinity.

In *Stolen Face* (1952) Philip Ritter (Paul Henreid) is a dedicated and successful plastic surgeon with a thriving private practice. He also undertakes charity work, in the form of reconstructive surgery, at Holloway women's prison, as he believes that facial disfigurement plays a part in female criminality. He falls in love with Alice Brent

(Lizabeth Scott) a concert pianist who returns his love but is engaged to another man and decides to honour that commitment. Distraught, Ritter resolves to recreate Alice's face on an inmate from the prison, Lily, and marries her in the belief that he can rehabilitate her. However, Lily's criminal tendencies remain, she fails to fall in love with Ritter and, to make matters worse, Alice returns and is now free to marry Ritter. Lily discovers that she bears Alice's face and follows Ritter onto a train where she challenges him in a drunken fury and accidentally falls to her death, leaving Ritter and Alice free to marry.

In *The Four-Sided Triangle* (1953) Bill (Stephen Murray), Robin (John Van Eyssen) and Lena (Barbara Payton) are childhood friends. Robin comes from a wealthy family whilst Bill is an orphaned boy who is befriended by the local medic Dr Harvey (James Hayter). After studying science at university Bill and Robin return to their small village and set up a laboratory where they succeed in their goal of creating a replicating machine. Robin and Lena fall in love and Bill, who has always loved Lena, persuades her to allow him to produce a copy of her for himself. Unfortunately the copy, Helen, has Lena's mind and therefore loves Robin. Confused and unhappy Helen tries to kill herself. In an attempt to resolve the situation Bill suggests that he erase Lena's memories from Helen's mind but during the procedure a fire breaks out in the laboratory killing both Bill and Helen.

In genre terms, Hutchings suggests that *Stolen Face* is difficult to define, 'sometimes linked with SF and horror because of its subject matter ... it is probably more accurate to think of it as a rather perverse romantic melodrama' (2001: 63). The theme of melodrama is evident in Rigby's discussion of the film which he terms a '"woman's picture," lushly realised and unashamedly romantic' (1995: 36). *Today's Cinema*, which reviewed the film on its release, suggested it was 'mainly appealing to women' (quoted in Rigby, 1995: 36). Its appeal, as a romantic melodrama, to a female audience was in part enhanced by the

casting of the Austrian actor Paul Henreid in the role of Ritter. High profile roles in films

such *Casablanca* (1942) and *Now Voyager* (1942) had established Henreid as a romantic

male lead in Hollywood. The American actress Lizabeth Scott was best known for playing

femme fatale roles in film noirs such as *Dead Reckoning* (1947) and *Pitfall* (1948),

signalling a star persona that was somewhat removed from Patricia Roc's 'tennis-clubby'

image. *The Four-Sided Triangle* is recognised as adhering more strongly to the science-

fiction paradigm (Chibnall, 1999; Landy, 1991; Hutchings, 2001). The casting of Barbara

Payton as Lena in the role of a 'perfect woman' would have had a certain ironic resonance

for audiences because of Payton's reputation as 'notoriously promiscuous' (Chibnall,

1999: 59).[39] Indeed the casting in both films of American women highlights the

'desirability ... [as] love objects' (Chibnall, 1999: 60) of the characters they play.[40]

As well as the obvious legacy of *Frankenstein*, Hutchings draws comparisons between the

two films and a novel by Villiers De L'Isle Adam, *The Future Eve* (1886). The male

protagonist loves a woman who is physically very beautiful but is unrefined and coarse.

His inventor friend develops a robot copy of the woman with a more obedient and passive

character, but disaster ensues when a fire erupts killing the woman, her robot copy and the

male protagonist. For Hutchings both *Stolen Face* and *The Four-Sided Triangle* draw on

the same themes as *The Future Eve*, that is, 'the disparity between the lived reality of the

woman and male fantasies about and/or idealisations of her' (2001: 64). *Stolen Face* in

particular can be read as a kind of science-fiction Pygmalion as Ritter's project is to take a

working-class woman and remake her as a lady, a perfect woman, through clothing,

manners and exposure to high culture. In terms of post-war context it seems the desire and

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[39] Payton had a reputation in Hollywood for sexual promiscuity, drinking and drug-taking and a generally 'wild' lifestyle. She came to Britain in 1953 to make *The Four-Sided Triangle* and to escape negative publicity following a high-profile divorce (filmfax.com; crimemagazine.com). A front page story about Payton entitled 'Payton, the Problem Girl' appeared in a September 1952 edition of *Picturegoer*, foregrounding to a British public her infamous reputation (I am grateful to staff at the de Montfort-based BCTRG for this insight).

impossibility of creating the perfect woman resonates with the theme of male anxiety about the realignment of gender roles.

Both Ritter, as a surgeon, and Bill, as a scientist, exhibit the characteristics of the over-reacher. Ritter is typically engrossed in his work to the exclusion of anything else and has no pursuits or commitments outside it. His colleague John Wilson comments 'don't you ever relax?' to which Ritter replies 'what for?' It is only when he drives himself too hard and comes close to killing himself and Wilson in a car crash that he agrees to take a break. Further, his aspirations to divinity are evidenced by his project at the prison, his belief that he can fundamentally alter the personalities and life chances of disfigured inmates. Indeed Ritter's role as a plastic surgeon is of particular interest and deserving of further comment. Davis' statement that the characteristics of the 'ideal plastic surgeon' are those of 'the pioneer, the scientist, the idealist, the creator, and the aesthete' (2000: 110) suggests much in common with the scientist as individual genius figure.[41] Plastic surgery is, as Davis has commented, 'one of the most "gendered" of all medical specialties' (2000: 105), with predominantly male surgeons operating on female bodies. It is noteworthy that Ritter only extends his charitable services to the women's prison. Whilst it might be argued that facial disfigurement presents a greater challenge to discourses of normative femininity than those of masculinity, Ritter's work allows him to pursue his search for female perfection. Davis also suggests that the role of the male plastic surgeon (and its retelling through autobiography) allows for the construction of a particular gendered identity, an ideal masculine self, defined by rationality, heroism, and the privileging of one's career (2000: 114-15). Further, what might be described as the archetypal Pygmalion story of 'a man in

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[40] American actress, in a manner similar to European ones, have a place as the 'exotic other' in the British cultural imaginary. I discuss the casting of '[f]oreign floosies' (Harper, 2000: 98) in more detail in Chapter 5.
[41] Davis' article is concerned with the autobiography of plastic surgeon Maxwell Maltz entitled *Dr Pygmalion* (1954), and how, through its telling Maltz constructs a particular discourse of masculinity. Maltz presents himself as someone with a professional foresight that requires him to take risks and is therefore a hero-genius figure, one who resists the corruption of money and has divine aspirations (Davis, 2000: 110-12).

search of the perfect woman' (Davis, 2000: 109) is driven by 'the "typical" male conflict between the desire for and fear of women' (Davis, 2000: 115). In this respect, the role of the plastic surgeon and his reconstruction of the female face seems particularly evocative of the anxiety about gender roles that were a feature of the post-war period, what Chibnall termed a mix of 'fear ... [and] excitement' (1999: 58). Ritter recreates the face of his ideal woman on the prison inmate Lily but then, in a manner similar to Dr Frankenstein (and for reasons I will explore later), rejects his creation. It is in this way that Ritter is able to 'idealize femininity while avoiding real flesh-and-blood women' (Davis, 2000: 117), a state which Davis argues is a motivating factor for all men but one which plastic surgeons are uniquely placed to realise.

The theme of the over-reacher is also a key feature of the scientist/inventor character Bill in *The Four-Sided Triangle*. He has no interests outside science, indeed his only concern is for the development of scientific knowledge. He quickly becomes bored once he has achieved his goal, stating; 'I'm tired of the reproducer, it was fun developing it but now I'd rather start on something new.' He is described by Doctor Harvey as a genius who was 'born to do great things.' He is clearly marked as different from Robin who is his friend and confidant, but not his intellectual equal. His divine aspirations are recognised by Lena who cautions him 'you're not God Bill.' He exhibits characteristics similar to the Professor from *The Perfect Woman* in that he privileges science over nature. Once Bill has perfected the advanced reproducer that reproduces live objects, he states; 'I'm not interested in turning out rabbits by the million, I'll leave that to nature.' It is significant that his first choice of live object is a rabbit, an animal commonly associated with prolific reproduction and which evokes themes of mass production. For Bill, what nature does is easy, its product denigrated, and it presents no challenge to him. In contrast what male science aspires to achieve is more complex and therefore a worthier goal.

Both men, as over-reachers, operate in their hermetically sealed worlds. For Ritter, his private practice and the prison hospital (both consist of a consulting room and a operating room) comprise his world. These spaces function as his laboratory, his private masculine domain for the pursuit of surgical excellence that expands the boundaries of knowledge. It is a space that he shares with his male colleague Wilson who acts as his assistant. Both surgeons function comfortably and confidently in this masculine environment, in contrast to Wilson's date Betty who, upon entering Ritter's operating room, bumps clumsily into the surgical equipment, almost upsetting it because she does not realise what it is. The operating room as the surgeon/scientist's laboratory draws on some of the filmic antecedents of *Frankenstein* and *Metropolis*. It is filled with complex and strange equipment such as bubbling fluids in glass jars, canisters and breathing apparatus. This is the specialist equipment that controls life and which can only be operated under Ritter's instruction.

In *The Four-Sided Triangle* Bill and his partner Robin transform the barn of their childhood games into a laboratory where they carry out their experiments, and also eat and sleep. The filmic conventions of the laboratory are even more pronounced in *The Four-Sided Triangle*; bubbling water in glass bottles, a plethora of tubes and wires, machinery with a complex array of knobs and dials (see still 3 overleaf). Lena shares this space with them but it is made very clear that she is profoundly lacking in technical knowledge. Thus the laboratory's status as a male domain is assured. A significant proportion of the action takes place in their laboratory and only a few other interior scenes are used (the manor house which belongs to Robin's wealthy father for example). Whilst this is a result of cost and production values, it also has the effect of evoking a very closed world, one that is abstracted from the rest of society. Furthermore, the laboratory is set within a sleepy

experiment has failed, why Lily does not exhibit both Alice's love for him and her bourgeois taste and behaviour. He discusses it with the medical director of the prison who concludes, 'maybe you left love out of your calculations.' As with *The Perfect Woman* it is love, or the lack of it, that brings about the failure of Ritter's creation, the variable that science cannot explain or rationalise. Further, his failure to consider love and the demands of the real world rather than the scientific realm suggests his preference for an ideal of femininity rather than a real woman, although the poverty of this vision is signalled when Lily, seeing Ritter gaze at a plaster bust of Alice, dashes the likeness to the ground.[43]

In *The Four-Sided Triangle* Bill's creation Helen is equally doomed to failure when he attempts to integrate her into the social realm. Created in the laboratory, Bill takes Helen out of the scientifically controlled environment to the seaside in the vain hope that Helen will, in Bill's words, 'get used to him.' Helen is tormented by Lena's memories and love for Robin and attempts suicide. Bill may have successfully reproduced Lena's body but he cannot, as Chibnall argues, 'colonise the mind he has created' (1999: 59). Again it is love that proves impossible to control and Bill's later attempts to manipulate it by erasing Helen's memory results in their deaths. Both the scientist and his invention cannot function in the social and are doomed to destruction.

As I have outlined earlier, there are three aspects to the theme of secrecy and the mad scientist and all are evident in *Stolen Face* and *The Four-Sided Triangle*. Firstly, what the scientist does is an exclusive activity thereby ensuring ownership of the knowledge produced. Whilst Ritter is not developing any new surgical techniques, he wants to make sure that what is produced, the 'new' Lily, belongs to him. His colleague Wilson is allowed to assist him, but Ritter remains in charge. Bill and Robin work together and will

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[43] Whilst the plaster bust of Alice/Lily is necessary for the surgical reconstruction of Lily's face, it evokes Ovid's story of a sculptor who shuns real women and falls in love with the statue he has created of a beautiful

not divulge their activities to either the doctor or Robin's father.[44] This ensures that the invention is theirs, to dispose of as they wish. Secondly, the outcome of the scientist's activities is uncertain. Will Ritter be able to successfully reconstruct Lily's face? At this stage Ritter is evasive about his intended outcome, thereby raising suspicions that his goal is to duplicate Alice's features on Lily. The question is therefore raised about whether Ritter is capable of reproducing Lily as a convincing copy of Alice. Bill, and Robin, constantly voice concerns about whether their invention will be successful. Further, Bill is unsure whether he can successfully modify the existing machine to replicate live objects. The final aspect of secrecy raises questions about the boundaries between what is morally acceptable and unacceptable. *Stolen Face* raises questions about whether or not it is ethical that Ritter, as a scientist and Lily's doctor, reproduces Alice's face on Lily. He fails to gain consent from either woman. He does not divulge to anyone that Lily's new features belong to Alice because he knows that it is morally questionable. Ethical issues are frequently raised in *The Four-Sided Triangle* and focus on concerns about whom the invention should benefit and the use to which the reproducer may be put; whether to reproduce atom bombs or poison gas, or to create another Lena for Bill. Both Ritter and, to an even greater extent, Bill are presented as mad scientists engaging in dangerous experiments that push at the boundaries of moral acceptability.[45]

Further, in a manner similar to the Professor in *The Perfect Woman*, Bill and Robin constantly fail to explain their invention. Bill's initial attempts at an explanation are cut short by Robin who states, 'just let's forget about all the scientific jargon, you must just take it on trust that it can reproduce anything in the world.' In a later scene Bill is equally

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female figure (Davis, 2000: 115). As Ovid's sculptor, Ritter prefers the plaster bust to the real thing.

[44] Lena's ready access to the laboratory is constructed as unproblematic because she is not clever enough to understand their invention.

[45] The doctor comes across Bill burying a dead guinea-pig as a result of a failed experiment. This brief scene evokes the literary antecedents of *Frankenstein* where the young doctor removes bodies from charnel-houses for his research. Bill's experiments in life have resulted in death and, as such, his ethical judgement is found wanting.

evasive responding to Helen's queries with 'I can't explain it in detail.' The response of both men ensures that science, and their developments, remain shrouded in secrecy, their status as geniuses intact.

In *Stolen Face* scrutinising the female body is associated with the theme of secrecy and ethical compromise. Ritter subjects Lily to rigorous scrutiny as he prepares to construct her new face. First he has her face photographed, in close-up and using additional lighting. Then he has copies of the photographs blown-up for his own use in his laboratory. Ritter's position as her surgeon legitimises his scrutiny of Lily. Lily must acquiesce if she is to gain her new face. She must obey Ritter's instructions to keep quiet and sit still whilst he examines her. As a patient and inmate she has no agency and, like Penelope in *The Perfect Woman*, must realise the role of perfect because coerced femininity, passive and malleable. Once the photographs are produced Ritter peers at Lily's image through a magnifying glass, measuring and assessing her features (see still 4 overleaf). These activities are carried out in the safety of his laboratory/operating room, his private masculine domain, where he is not disturbed or challenged by others. Ritter gains scopophilic satisfaction from these activities, subjecting Lily, as an objectified other, to his controlling gaze. Indeed he gains greater satisfaction from the images of Lily than he does from the 'real' thing. That Ritter needs to subject the female body to prolonged and unchallenged scrutiny suggests a degree of castration anxiety. He has complete power over Lily who frequently asks, but is never consulted, about her new image. Ritter replies with vague comments that she will look like 'everything you've ever wanted to look like.' What transpires is that Lily looks like everything Ritter wants in a woman, Alice. Thus his ethics are clearly compromised.

village, itself already isolated from the wider social environment, thus reinforcing the scientist's hermetically sealed world.
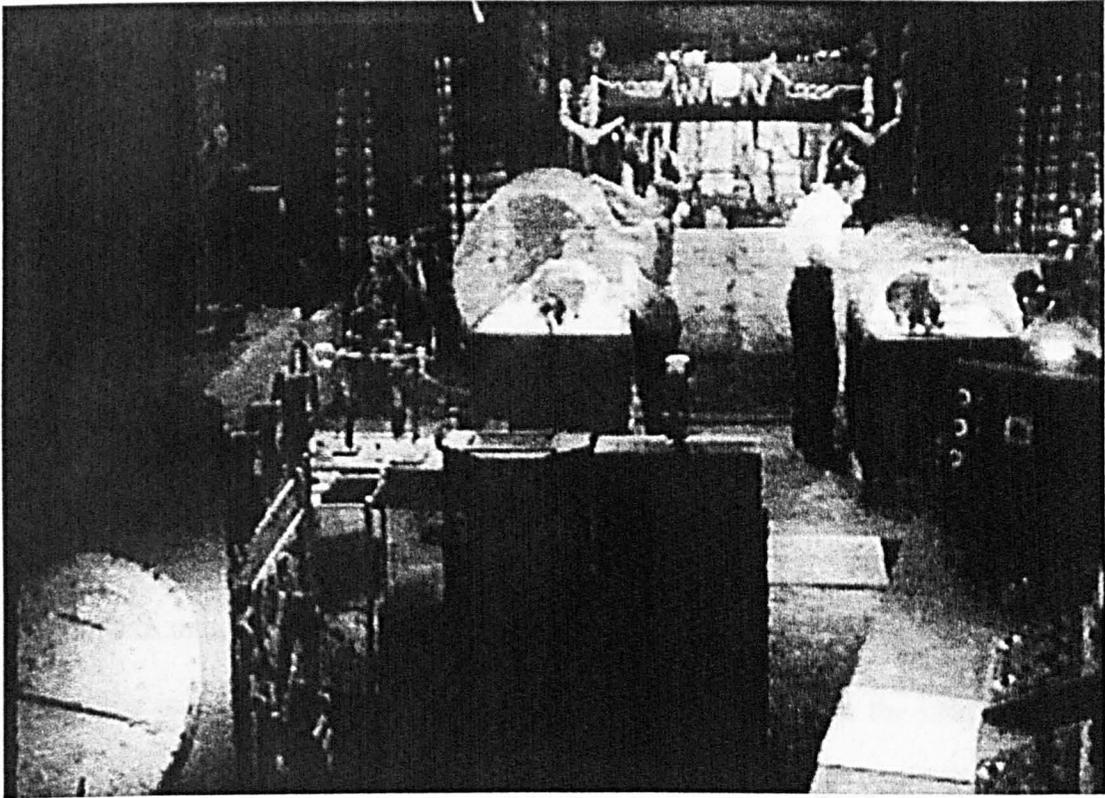
Still 3. The masculine space of the laboratory in *The Four-Sided Triangle* (1953)

The opposition between the scientific domain and the social realm creates difficulties when the scientist attempts to introduce his creation into the social environment.[42] As with all the male creations I have discussed, there is a failure to function in the social. In *Stolen Face*, Ritter, assisted by Wilson, creates the new Lily in the prison hospital, his private realm, through a series of operations. Ritter marries her and attempts to integrate her to the social, public world comprised of his house, restaurants, shops and the opera. Lily's initial delight at her new life is soon marred when she realises that she must acquiesce to Ritter's choice in clothes, jewellery, friends and decorum. Ritter cannot understand why his

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[42] In contrast to *The Perfect Woman*, both films have a creation scene. In *Stolen Face* the act of creation begins with the photographing of Lily's scarred face, then the undertaking of surgical procedures which are followed by a period of convalescence before Lily's new face is revealed, the unveiling of her bandages evocative of the scene where the bride is uncovered in *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935). In *The Four-Sided Triangle* a scene clearly depicts the creation of Helen as the exact copy of Lena, still 3 is taken from this scene.

Still 4. Ritter scrutinises his creation in *Stolen Face* (1952)

Whilst Lily fails to please Ritter because she is too different from Alice, in *The Four-Sided Triangle* Helen cannot please Bill because she is too similar to Lena. For Harper, Helen is presented in ways that suggest her as 'facially impassive … directed … to use none of the normal resources of gaze, expression and response,' which speaks of a (male) anxiety about 'female behaviour which cannot be decoded according to predictable rules' (2003: 5).[46] Helen's impassivity, her blankness, is a challenge for Bill. How should he read her? According to Bill's logic, Helen should respond to him. She does not however react in the ways that were expected and predicted of her. Whilst this might suggest the eternal 'unknowability' of woman, the failure to know and read the woman is clearly shown in this film to be the fault of the male scientist and his science.[47] That his vision is demonstrated to be so impoverished suggests something of the working through and realignment of the 'predictable rules' of gendered roles and behaviours in the post-war period.

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[46] Harper's discussion is of the similarities in presentation of the bodies of the female protagonists in films such as *The Four-Sided Triangle* and *Devil Girl from Mars*.

I have suggested that both films raise a number of ethical considerations and these are worth considering in some detail as they illustrate what is perceived to be the monstrousness of the scientist's vision and his desire for controlling reproduction. Both films have a moderating male, that is, a male character that acts as the voice of ethical responsibility. It is their function within the narrative to question the ethics of the scientist's actions. In *Stolen Face* the medical director at the prison fills this role, with some support from Ritter's colleague Wilson. Both the director and Wilson voice their disapproval of Ritter's plans to marry Lily, Wilson telling Ritter he is a fool to stake his professional career on proving a theory. Interestingly no concerns are voiced about the ethics of a doctor marrying his patient. What is seen to be at stake is Ritter's reputation rather than Lily's welfare. In *The Four-Sided Triangle*, the role of the moderating male is primarily filled by the Doctor, although Robin and his father also provide some ballast against Bill's excesses. The Doctor's first response when hearing of their invention is to ask whether they have thought of the implications to which Bill replies, 'what's there to think out, we've done it, that's all that matters.' For Bill what is primarily important is the pursuit of scientific knowledge, the implications of that knowledge are of little consequence. Robin tempers this view, stating, 'not quite Bill, we've a responsibility to ourselves and the world.' Ethically, Robin stands in contrast to Bill. His refusal to assist Bill in further developing the reproducer because of what Bill disparagingly calls his 'code of honour' makes it clear that Bill is not similarly restrained. A question mark hangs over Bill's ethical boundaries and is recognised by the whole group. Whilst discussing the negative use to which the reproducer could be put Robin's father, Sir Walter Grant, acknowledges that whilst he is sure his son could be trusted 'I'm not so sure about Bill, he might do it in the spirit of detached scientific curiosity.' The uncertainty surrounding Bill's ethics is attributable to his status as a scientist and genius figure. The implication is

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[47] Inscrutable females are a feature of the next chapter in this theses, their inscrutability often being a cause of male anxiety.

that his creative vision needs to be monitored to ensure it does not transgress the boundaries of moral acceptability. It is the role of the Doctor to monitor Bill but, as Landy comments, he is a 'benevolent but impotent father' (1991: 409), a patriarch with little real power who stands as no great challenge to Bill realising his creative vision.

In terms of ethics, a contradictory rhetoric is evident in *Stolen Face*. Initially a clear ethical boundary is set up between the deserving and the undeserving, in relation to plastic surgery, and Ritter's morality is unambiguous. Ritter treats a young boy with a damaged hand whose family is too poor to pay for treatment. In contrast, he refuses to treat the imperious Lady Haringay who desires plastic surgery for reasons of vanity. He refuses to succumb to her attempts at financial bribery and instructs her to 'learn to live with yourself as you are.' The boundary between the deserving poor and undeserving wealthy is clear, and Ritter is signalled as someone with honourable principles.

Lily is initially presented as a deserving case. She has been disfigured through the Blitz which simultaneously places her predicament within a post-war context and highlights that her need for treatment is due to necessity rather than vanity. Her question to Ritter of 'who will employ me' is a valid one and her career as a criminal can be understood. But the film does not continue to support this rhetoric and indeed contradicts itself. Lily has her operation and her appearance is changed. However the fact that she continues with her criminal activities suggests that she is innately bad, she has a flawed personality. Wilson's argument that Lily is a 'psychopathic case' undermines the theory that female criminality is linked to facial disfigurement. Thus she is initially set up as deserving and then presented as undeserving. The prison director, who initially claimed only one inmate receiving Ritter's treatment had re-offended, contradicts himself when he states later, with reference to Lily, 'I'm sometimes tempted to believe there's no such thing as a new

person.' The director's statement is supposed to illustrate that Ritter was foolish and misguided in his belief that surgery and marriage would profoundly alter Lily's personality. This contradictory rhetoric ridicules the theory that appearance is everything, but then proposes essentialism as an answer by implying that there are inherently good and bad women.

Ritter too is compromised by his actions, his morality and judgement impaired by his desire. By duplicating Alice's face on Lily to satisfy his own personal desire he is guilty of violating ethical boundaries and the narrative suggests he is as culpable as Lily. Ritter confronts Lily after she has stolen an expensive brooch. Lily's defence implicates Ritter as she replies; 'didn't you ever see something you wanted so badly you just had to have it?' Ritter is as liable as Lily. He is guilty of stealing Alice's face, of misleading Lily and marrying her to satisfy his own desires and, in so doing, his moral and ethical judgement is demonstrated to be highly dubious.

Both *Stolen Face* and *The Four-Sided Triangle* close with catastrophic endings. In *Stolen Face*, Lily falls from a speeding train in a drunken fury, her new face destroyed in the fatal fall. In 1950s Britain a divorce was difficult to obtain so Lily's death is necessary for Alice and Ritter to be established as the new couple. Lily's drunkenness constructs her as partly culpable for her own death and reiterates the theme of her being implicitly bad, but the ending is not unproblematic for Ritter and Alice. In the final scene the new couple walk slowly away from Lily's broken body. They are downcast, their love and any possible future together tainted by Ritter's actions. His creation paid homage to his love for Alice, but in doing so he is guilty of transgressing ethical boundaries and his actions were monstrous. As in *Frankenstein*, Ritter's creation almost destroyed its maker and his future happiness remains uncertain. *The Four-Sided Triangle* concludes with both Bill and

his creation Helen perishing in a fire at the laboratory, which Lena survives but loses her memory.[48] The reproducer causes the outbreak of the fire, thus the equipment that was used to give life becomes responsible for destroying life. The fire is necessary on two levels. Firstly, to ensure that both the equipment and Bill are destroyed, therefore another cannot abuse the secret of artificial life.[49] Secondly, it means that Bill and Helen's deaths are accidental rather than suicide. Helen and Lena have both proposed suicide which the Doctor as the voice of moral reason vetoed as unacceptable. Whilst the Doctor states that no-one has the right to take life, within the logic of the film, no-one has the right to give it through improper means, as Bill has done and by so doing death becomes the only solution.

To conclude, in this chapter I have considered how cultural constructions of science interact with the representation of women. That this occurs in an era of rapid technological change says something about post-war reconstruction and the notion of male anxiety, specifically in relation to the realignment of gender roles. The films discussed show the attempt to realise male desire for the perfect woman through technology, but this technological achievement is then exposed as false. In all three films the artificial 'perfect' woman fails. The failure of the woman seems to reinforce male impotence in terms of actualising their desires. Indeed as scientists they might more accurately be defined as 'panic-stricken rather than authoritative' (Phelan, 2000: 161), a statement which suggests that anxiety concerning gender roles is a driving force for these men. Do men fail to create what they really want, does technology fail them, or do they create what they think they

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[48] That it was Helen who perished and Lena who survived is not immediately obvious. Robin and the Doctor must subject the female figure to one final scrutiny before her identity and therefore male ownership can be confirmed. The only distinguishing feature between the two women are two small scars on the back of Helen's neck. The Doctor lifts the figure from her hospital bed and Robin anxiously scans her neck, turned towards the camera, and then smiles and whispers 'Lena, Lena' as no scars are present. Interestingly the two men debate whether the figure is Lena before investigating her. The Doctor has not examined her suggesting to Robin that; 'I thought perhaps it was your right.' Male right and ownership are asserted over the female body and mind. Lena is not investigated to establish her identity for herself, but to satisfy Robin.

want only to realise that they have failed to read their own desires accurately? What they think they want is not what they want at all. Does the failure of male-made technology to function in the social suggest that the 'real' woman is preferable? In these films the human woman is shown to be more than a 'doll.' It seems that all three films offer a critique of the male-centred scientific paradigm and reassert the female social over male technology and, in so doing, illustrate the limits of the idea, and attributes, of perfect femininity.

This chapter has been concerned with female characters and the *doppelgängers* which male scientists create of the women. The doubling of characters is a common narrative device and one which I explore in more detail in Chapter 3. Indeed doubling, in relation to convergent and divergent femininity, is in evidence in many of the films I discuss throughout this thesis. In *Stolen Face* Alice and Lily duplicate the dichotomy between normative and divergent femininity, whilst the characters of Lena and Helen in *The Four-Sided Triangle* are synonymous and therefore undermine this division. In both films however the casting of American actresses signals a degree of otherness to the British cultural imaginary, certainly when considered alongside British 'good girl' Patricia Roc. In the following chapter the focus of my analyses shifts from notions of 'perfect' femininity to explore what might be considered its antithesis, murderous women.

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[49] The narrative makes it clear that Robin is not aware of the advanced modifications Bill has made to the reproducer. Therefore he is not able to recreate Bill's developments.

Chapter 3: The Female Murderer

I shall begin this chapter with a brief outline of the history of social theories about women and crime. This will illuminate core themes about normative and divergent femininity as they later appear in films on the subject. Three key texts emerge from a chronological study of the history of writing about female criminality; *The Female Offender* (Cesare Lombroso and W. Ferrero, 1893), *The Unadjusted Girl* (William I. Thomas, 1923) and *The Criminality of Women* (Otto Pollak, 1961). These research studies formed the critical orthodoxy of understanding and explaining female criminality in the twentieth century. Their influence was widespread and went largely unchallenged until revisionist work by feminist criminologists such as Carol Smart (1976). In these classic accounts of female criminality, a biological model is evident. Hucklesby writes that 'woman's criminality was determined by ... their biology and physiology (particularly their sexuality), to the exclusion of social and economic factors' (1993: 307). Whilst accounts of male criminality were also initially understood with reference to a positivist approach drawing on a biological and psychological framework, the debate soon moved on to consider wider social factors, with Marxist theory becoming influential (Smart, 1976: 4). This had not been the case in writings about female criminality, which remained firmly focused on a positivist, biological explanation. The intractability of the biological explanation may be linked to a broader understanding of female subjectivity that was closely related to a biological, reproductive model. In this chapter I shall outline some of the key points that emerge from these three classic studies and then consider feminist challenges brought by Carol Smart, Ann Jones and Helena Kennedy, who illustrate how gendered stereotypes still prevail in more contemporary understandings of female criminality. I shall then explore the theme of the murderous woman in three films from the post-war period, *Bedelia* (1946), *Dear Murderer* (1947) and *Madeleine* (1950).

Lombroso and Ferrero's work on female criminality, *The Female Offender* (1893), is grounded in the belief that there are only two types of woman, madonna and whore. This work uses craniology and observation of physical appearance in an attempt to distinguish between the two types of woman.[1] 'Good' women were those who met with societal expectations of normative femininity, as outlined previously. Those identified as 'bad,' that is criminal females, were thought to be 'unnatural ... masculine and virile' (Heidensohn, 1985: 114). Lombroso and Ferrero concluded that the criminal woman demonstrates 'an inversion of all the qualities which specially distinguish the normal woman; namely, reserve, docility and sexual apathy' (quoted in Heidensohn, 1985: 114). One might therefore argue that any woman who deviated from the path of normative femininity could be classified as criminal, and that divergent femininity was thus criminalised. The criminal woman was punished for being both a criminal and unfeminine. Within the framework provided by Lombroso and Ferrero, 'the born female criminal was perceived to have all the criminal qualities of the male plus all the worst characteristics of women, namely cunning, spite and deceitfulness' (Smart, 1976: 33). Smart goes on to argue that 'female offenders are doubly damned for not only are they legally sanctioned for their offences, they are socially condemned for being biologically or sexually abnormal' (1976: 34). Lombroso and Ferrero recognise this in their statement, '[a]s a double exception, the criminal woman is consequently a monster' (cited in Smart, 1976: 34-5).

The next major work on female criminality was Thomas' *The Unadjusted Girl*, published in 1923, which comprised case studies of female criminals. As in the work of Lombroso and Ferrero, it was again grounded in a number of assumptions about women. For Thomas

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[1] Lombroso and Ferrero initially favoured atavism to explain criminality but this theory revealed only a few female criminals. The researchers then turned to a model of biological determinism which they claimed illustrated that women were less developed on the evolutionary scale than men and thus more prone to law-

the binary between active male and passive female was core to his understanding of femininity, with women less developed on an evolutionary scale than men (Heidensohn, 1985: 116). Fortunately, for Thomas' thesis, woman's reduced moral development made it easier for her to be readjusted. The eponymous 'unadjusted girl' was one who failed to take her 'proper' feminine role in the gendered social order, preferring instead freedom and autonomy. Thomas claimed, 'the beginning of delinquency in girls is usually an impulse to get amusement, adventure, pretty clothes, favourable notice, distinction, freedom in the larger world' (1923: 109). For Thomas female desire for autonomy was a threat to the social order. Furthermore, a specific sexual dynamic prevailed. Several of Thomas' case studies reveal 'lives of promiscuity and adultery rather than crime' (Heidensohn, 1985: 117). Thomas' research, as Lombroso and Ferrero before him, criminalised female behaviour, particularly sexual license and the desire for freedom.

Otto Pollak's *The Criminality of Women* (1961) was first published in North America in 1950, firmly locating it within the post-war period. Pollak makes a number of assertions that are of interest to this discussion. He claims that female criminal activity has been widely hidden from society, stating that 'female crime is perhaps the outstanding area of undiscovered, or at least, unprosecuted, crime in our culture' (1961: 154). Four key reasons can be distinguished to explain why it was hidden, or 'masked' to use Pollak's term, and all are grounded in biological assumptions of sex difference. Firstly, the types of crimes that women commit particularly lend themselves to masking, due to under-reporting. Pollak cites 'shoplifting of nonprofessional character, thefts by prostitutes, domestic thefts, abortions, perjury and disturbance of the peace ... [as] offenses in which women take an outstanding or even an exclusive part' (1961: 1). Secondly, women's place in the home offers them special opportunities to conduct undetected crime. Women's role

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abiding behaviour (Smart, 1976: 32). Women therefore who did commit crime were considered particularly disturbing and unnatural.

as 'the rearer of children, the nurse of the sick, the domestic helper ... furnishes them ... [with] many opportunities to commit crimes in ways and by means which are not available to men' (Pollak, 1961: 3). Pollak gives the example of 'female murderers ... [who] resort to poison to a much higher degree than men' (ibid) although such a specious argument does not address the ability of men to obtain poisons. Thirdly, women's crimes are hidden because of misguided notions of male 'gallantry' with men less likely to bring complaints against women and, when brought, the criminal justice system less likely to convict, hence a gendered 'acquittal bias' which favours women (Pollak, 1961: 4). Finally, women's crime is largely concealed because women are by nature 'more deceitful than men,' a statement that Pollak applies to both female criminals and women in general (1961: 8-9). Pollak explains this with reference to the 'physiological fact' that a man cannot lie about sexual arousal in the way that a woman may. Pollak then shifts the debate from physiology to consider the impact of social mores which force the girl to constrain her 'natural aggressions' (1961: 11). Deceit then becomes 'a socially prescribed form of behavior' (1961: 11). For Pollak, female deceitfulness is the result of both biological and social conditioning and can be used to illustrate why women's crime goes undetected. Deceitfulness for Pollak, as other social commentators, is an integral and innate component of femininity.

Pollak's research ostensibly identifies a number of characteristics that are associated with femininity in general and that profoundly influence female criminality. Women's inherent nature is characterised by deceitfulness, and they take advantage of their place within the home to commit crimes which men, by virtue of misguided gallantry, fail to either report or prosecute. Pollak's approach to his subject matter is interesting because he takes a number of methods such as physiology, socially prescribed behavioural roles, and female

nature, to justify his research which is clearly grounded in what are a set of prejudices relating to women and gender relations.

In his work on female murderers Pollak pays close attention to the method of poisoning, which is of particular interest for this chapter as the three films I shall discuss shortly all feature female poisoners. Pollak postulates that poison is the weapon of choice for women. The reasons for this preference are three-fold. Firstly, it is relatively easy to procure and is a staple of many households. Secondly, its symptoms upon ingestion are similar to those evoked by other major stomach complaints, thus accurate detection is difficult. Thirdly, women's primary role within the home gives them unique access to the unguarded and vulnerable stomachs of the family. Pollak concludes his piece on female poisoners by claiming that men who have easy access to poisons such as chemists are as likely as women to use them as a means for homicide. Chemists however represent only a small proportion of the male population whereas the majority of women are housewives *ergo* women have more opportunities to murder and are less likely to be detected because 'woman's crimes are more frequently and more successfully masked than the crimes of man' (Pollak, 1961: 17-18).

Pollak's work is based on a number of gendered assumptions. What initially begins as an argument about female biology is then supported with reference to gendered opportunity; thus arguments about nature are supplanted with those about access. Pollak does not consider that, where women do use poison, it may be due to practical constraints, for example, a man's greater physical strength makes it difficult for women to physically assault men. His statement does not engage with either the fact that there is nothing to stop men availing themselves of household poisons, or the question of how male chemists administer the poison to their victims. Pollak's implicit argument however is that every

housewife has an unregulated scope for murder and because female crime goes largely unreported a great many may have taken advantage of such opportunities.

Pollak's arguments about female poisoners have a historical legacy. Jones illustrates that in nineteenth-century North America, although calls for equality by the women's rights movement challenged the notion that women's rightful place was within the home, the 'poisoning wife became the specter of the century – the witch who lurked in woman's sphere and haunted the minds of men' (1991: 81-2). One prosecutor of a woman charged with murder, described poisoning as 'most horrid and detestable ... [because] it is usually committed in secret, and so insidiously, that no forecast can prevent it – no manhood resist it' (cited in Jones, 1991: 110). Poisoning was seen as a quintessentially female method of murder, something underhand and duplicitous, a gendered weapon that evoked notions of slyness and, in so doing, was an affront to masculinity. Female poisoners, by virtue of their method, were understood to be sneaky and inherently deceptive. Furthermore, as deception was an integral component of femininity (as conceptualised within dominant discourses), there was an underlying fear that all women had the potential to be poisoners.

Jones makes the point that all of the major studies about female criminality were written at a time when gender norms were being challenged, challenges which resulted in 'profound unease about woman's place in society' (1991: xxii). Pollak's study emerged in the post-war period and may in part be read as an emotive response to the perceived socio-economic gains women had made during the Second World War. This has been theorised as the 'liberation thesis', the belief that as women have gained greater freedom and autonomy in society the levels of female crimes have risen. Such claims have been proven to be unfounded and illustrative of a 'moral panic' (Gregory, 1993: 316). They are however of interest as they demonstrate a populist response to the perceived changing role

of women in society and how deviations from normative standards of femininity are understood.

I have argued that the work of Lombroso and Ferrero, Thomas, and Pollak formed the critical orthodoxy on female criminality for most of the twentieth century. Feminist challenges were brought by, amongst others, Carol Smart (1976), Ann Jones (1980), Frances Heidensohn (1985), Helena Kennedy (1992), and Ann Lloyd (1995). Their research, whilst bringing new understanding to the subject of female criminals, illustrates how gendered stereotypes still prevail in more contemporary understandings of female criminality. I shall briefly outline three points that are of particular interest for this thesis. Firstly, Smart argues that adolescent 'offences' in the UK are sex-related. Girls are much more likely than boys to be apprehended for offences such as being in 'moral danger' (87.6 / 12.4%) and being 'beyond parental control' (60.5% / 39.5%), offences that Smart argues have strong 'connotations of sexual promiscuity' (1976: 11-12) and which suggest that female behaviour is sexualised and then criminalised.[2] Secondly, gender distinctions are evident in relation to murder. Women, when they do kill, do so in ways that can be reconciled with what Smart identifies as the '"feminine" stereotype' (1976: 16). Citing research done by Wolfgang (1958) Smart suggests that women use 'knives or household implements in over a third of the cases and tended to kill their victims in the kitchen or within their own homes' (1976: 17). When women do commit murder it frequently takes place in what is thought to be woman's traditional sphere within the home, the kitchen, whilst in contrast, women are more likely to be murdered by men in the bedroom. This gendering of the site of murder is a point to which I shall return in my discussion of the

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[2] Smart furthermore cites work by Chesney-Lind (1973) that argues that girls are criminalised for behaviour that 'offends morality rather than criminal statute' and that 'juvenile courts ... actively sexualise offences committed by girls' (1976: 22). This is done by either 'creating offences which are explicitly sexual or which include the possibility of sexual infraction such as running away or incorrigibility' (ibid). Girls are criminalised when they do not conform to standards of normative femininity and there is a failure to think of girls beyond a biological/sexual framework.

films. Thirdly, a connection is often made between women and madness. Kennedy argues that women who kill are more likely to receive psychiatric treatment, or be recommended for psychiatric investigation than are men. Lloyd argues that there is a tendency to '"psychiatrize" women who commit crime' (1995: 44). The British criminal justice system is more likely to attribute to women 'emotional problems' as a way of explaining their criminal acts. Men who kill are 'bad', in opposition to women who kill who are deemed 'mad' (Kennedy, 1992: 23). This binary is grounded in gendered assumptions that consider women as passive, nurturing and caring beings, whose natural location is the domestic sphere. Kennedy argues that there is a refusal to accept that women are capable of killing; thus, when they do kill, or commit criminal acts, it can only be understood as a psychological aberration (ibid).

The links however between women and madness are longstanding and far-reaching. In the same way that women are criminalised for 'abnormal' female behaviour, these same female criminals are then 'psychiatrised.' Showalter traces the links between femininity and madness in English culture through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and argues for a gendered binary in relation to madness. Women in cultural representation are generally placed on 'the side of irrationality, silence, nature, and body, while men are situated on the side of reason, discourse, culture, and mind' (Showalter, 1987: 3-4). Furthermore, the female body is used to signify 'irrationality in general' thus, the 'cultural tradition ... represents "woman" as madness' (ibid). Showalter identifies three key representations of the madwoman within the Romantic period, which continue to have cultural resonance; 'the suicidal Ophelia, the sentimental Crazy Jane, and the violent Lucia' and argues that, in each case, woman's mental illness is linked to her 'female sexuality and feminine nature' (1987: 10).[3] Collectively there are a number of signifiers of

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[3] Showalter argues that each representation stands for a 'different interpretation of women's madness and man's relation to it' (1987: 10). Ophelia was the dominant image in the cultural imaginary, with Crazy Jane

feminine madness which range from ornamental head-wear decorated with, amongst other things, feathers, loose flowing hair, flowers, a generally 'dishevelled' appearance and a 'glazed' stare (Showalter, 1987: 11-14). Such signifiers are in evidence, in varying degrees, in the films to be discussed, suggesting that the link between feminine madness and criminality is reproduced in cultural representation. Indeed existing social and cultural norms relating to femininity and criminality shape the understanding and representation of women who kill and, in the next section, I shall analyse how these norms frame the depiction of three female poisoners.

The films all focus on women who kill their partners. The female protagonists use either poison or sleeping-tablets, administered in the home, and added to food or drink. In this manner they appear to be a dramatisation of Pollak's fear of housewives lurking in the kitchen killing off unsuspecting male relatives. In *Madeleine* (1949), an upper-class girl has a clandestine affair with a lower-class man who threatens her with blackmail. His sudden death arouses suspicions that Madeleine may have poisoned his cocoa, she stands trial and a verdict of 'not proven' is returned. In *Dear Murderer* (1947) a jealous husband murders one of his wife's lovers and frames a second for the murder. His wife laces her husband's hot milk toddy with sleeping tablets, but is later apprehended by the police. *Bedelia* (1946) deals with a serial poisoner who has killed three husbands and is planning the demise of her fourth. She attempts, and fails, to poison food for the investigator intent on bringing her to justice and the film closes with her suicide. All the women administer poison under the guise of caring for the victims and fulfilling their domestic duties and, in so doing, appear to dramatise Pollak's fears that domesticity provides women with an undetectable, gendered, opportunity for killing.

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and Lucia 'auxiliary images' denoting respectively, passive or 'harmless' mad femininity, and violent, vindictive mad femininity, directed against men (Showalter, 1987: 11-14).

In *Dear Murderer* the female protagonist Vivien (Greta Gynt) is an adulterous wife with at least two lovers and is therefore constructed as sexually 'deviant,' with the criminal activities of the film linked to her divergence. When her husband, Lee (Eric Portman), has his suspicions of her adultery confirmed, he murders one lover, Fenton (Dennis Price), and successfully frames a second lover, Jimmy (Maxwell Reed), for Fenton's murder. The investigating police officer suspects Lee of Fenton's murder but cannot prove it and suggests to Vivien that unless her husband confesses, her innocent lover will be executed. Vivien, after convincing Lee that she really does love him, poisons him in a manner intended to suggest that he has committed suicide because he is overcome by guilt for causing Jimmy's incarceration. However, Lee makes a deathbed confession to the police of both his role in Fenton's murder and Vivien's role in his own murder, which leads to Vivien's subsequent arrest.

Reviews for the film were mixed. *Pictureshow*, targeted at a mainstream cinema audience, gave the film a three-star rating (from a possible four) and described it as a 'cleverly directed, neatly developed melodrama' (12 July 1947). In contrast, the more 'highbrow' *Sight and Sound* described it as an 'old yarn ... stagily set ...[although] competently done' and suggested 'its chief redeeming feature is Greta Gynt's performance as a highly unscrupulous siren' (Vesselo, 1947: 77). Gynt was best known for her *femme fatale* roles and, whilst often confined to B-films, was widely recognised in the early 1950s after kissing Field Marshal Montgomery during an Albert Hall reunion and greeting the Queen at a film performance in a spectacular silver outfit, events that received significant press coverage.[4] Her style of acting was not uncommon in the mid-1940s. Indeed Harper classifies her as one of the 'Wicked Ladies' who, alongside Margaret Lockwood and Jean

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[4] See Ronald Bergan's obituary for Greta Gynt, *The Guardian*, 5 April 2000. Indeed Gynt's talent for tongue-in-cheek self-promotion was akin to that of Diana Dors. She said of her silver outfit 'I looked like a fairy on a Christmas tree gone wrong – but, of course, it made all the papers the next day' (quoted in Braun, 1973: 37).

Kent, used 'wide-open eyes, a slow shift from one facial expression to another, and a majestic style of movement' (2000: 70) as a performance style. In genre terms Landy classifies the film as 'tragic melodrama', a genre which often centres on 'male conflicts' (1991: 237), and where men may exhibit female characteristics in a working through of man's conflictual relationship to the social order. My analysis focuses on the central female figure of Vivien whose portrayal as a *femme fatale* clearly incorporates elements of the film noir genre in the use of particular devices such as chiaroscuro lighting and the strategic placing of mirrors within the *mise-en-scène*.

Vivien is introduced first through her appearance, a common device for describing femininity. Her husband Lee recalls to Fenton the occasion when he told Vivien of his trip to America, the trip which provided the space for Vivien's and Fenton's affair. Narrative flashback is used as Lee's voice-over comments, 'I remember how she looked, she was wearing her new black dress.' The camera cuts to a scene of Vivien and Lee seated for dinner in a restaurant. In medium close-up we see Vivien wearing a black, off-the-shoulder evening dress decorated with sparkly feathers across her bosom, her hair is dressed and pinned up. Earrings accessorise the outfit, and she is smoking. The simultaneous introduction of Vivien through her appearance and Lee's description of her denies her the opportunity to represent herself. However, rather than indicating passive femininity Vivien's divergent femininity is marked from the outset. Place outlines the characteristics of what she identifies as the 'spider woman' from film noirs of the 1940s; 'long hair (blond or dark), makeup, and jewellery. Cigarettes with their wispy trails of smoke' (1978: 45). Bruzzi's analysis of the *femme fatale* draws on similar signifiers, 'bleached hair, boldly coloured, sexual clothes, heavy make-up and cigarettes' (1997: 139-40). Vivien has many of the signifiers of the *femme fatale*. In terms of appearance she has long dark hair, frequently pinned up and dressed in an elaborate manner, she always

appears in full make-up, and her wardrobe comprises a number of elegant and sophisticated outfits. The first introduction to her is a typical illustration of her appearance throughout the film.

The scene between Vivien and Lee in the restaurant introduces many of the dynamics that characterise their relationship. Her history of sexual adultery and his history of possessiveness are introduced through her statement, 'you're not so ridiculously jealous you're still thinking about Paul?' Her authority and his dependence are further illustrated when she tells him, 'eat your soup before it gets cold.' Such a comment is more indicative of a parental relationship and indeed such a domestic statement is somewhat incongruous with her glamorous image. It seems clear from the outset that the conventional roles of masculinity and femininity are problematised between the couple, a point to which I shall return shortly.

Landy comments that 'doubling' is a key feature of the film's structure (1991: 269), an observation evidenced by the two female characters Vivien and Fenton's sister Avis (Jimmy's former fiancée). Indeed doubling is a common narrative device and has been theorised by Freud as 'an insurance against the destruction to the ego' (1925: 387). The double incorporates 'all those unfulfilled but possible futures to which we still like to cling in phantasy, all those strivings of the ego' (Freud, 1925: 388). The ego survives by 'project[ing] such a content outward as something foreign to itself' (Freud, 1925: 389). The presence however of the double is associated with feelings of 'paranoia as the boundary between self and Other is eroded' (Hutchings, 2001: 49). The double is therefore an 'ambivalent figure, combining ... both reassuring and threatening characteristics' (ibid). These contrasting elements suggest how the feminine is contested in cultural representation. Vivien is the antithesis of Lombroso and Ferrero's 'normal woman' who

exhibits the characteristics of 'reserve, docility and sexual apathy' (quoted in Heidensohn, 1985: 114). She is the archetypal criminal woman, confident, aggressive and sexually promiscuous, characteristics commonly associated with normative masculinity. As a 'bad' woman Vivien is the whore, in opposition to Avis who is the 'good' woman, the madonna. The doubling of the good/bad woman in not uncommon in genres such as film noir, and indeed wider cultural representation. Place argues that 'woman as redeemer' (1978: 50) is the opposite of the spider woman and Avis fulfils this function. More modest in dress and demeanour than Vivien, Avis continues to love Jimmy, despite being abandoned by him in favour of Vivien. She is rewarded for her faithfulness at the end of the film with the implication that Jimmy will return to her.

The concept of doubling is extended to the characterisation of Vivien and Lee, who share a number of similarities and oppositions. Both husband and wife are flawed characters and constructed as therefore deserving each other. They are locked in a destructive relationship which Landy argues dramatises the 'constraints and impossibility of marriage' (1991: 269). Their relationship fails because of 'his possessiveness and her promiscuity' (ibid). They both play out a number of feminised and masculinised positions in the film. Lee is jealous and possessive towards Vivien, emotions usually associated with women who, Freud argued, had a weaker sense of justice and a less developed super-ego. In contrast, Vivien is sexually active and experiences monogamous marriage as restraining. There is a question over who is at fault. Is Vivien's behaviour motivated by a reaction to Lee's possessiveness and the constraints of monogamy or is his jealousy a reaction to her promiscuity? Lee's insistence that Vivien write every day is unreasonable. Alternatively, he may make such a request because of her history of adultery. Both, albeit in different ways, fail to internalise the normative adult behaviour of restraint. Their inability to check

their respective excesses is illustrative of their failure to be socialised into normative, gendered, adult roles.

Vivien challenges the gendered stereotype of women as 'emotional and credulous' (Jordanova, 1989: 21). Indeed, these characteristics are more readily exhibited by Lee. Upon her return to Lee, Vivien claims 'I've thought it out in a logical and sensible manner.' Although she is referring to the supposed fact that she and Lee are meant to be together she seemingly applies principles of rationality and logic to affairs of the heart. Her declaration of love for Lee is in fact a ruse to curry favour with her husband in the belief that she can manipulate him to engineer her lover Jimmy's release. Such behaviour illustrates a premeditated approach to her predicament. She has 'thought out' the best method for dealing with an unwanted situation. She exhibits the 'essential' characteristic of normative femininity, duplicity, in her dealings with Lee, using sex and emotional blackmail to achieve her goals. The ends to which she puts them however are not to ensure, as Wollstonecraft argued, the 'protection of man' but rather her survival and his destruction. Her approach is a rational and calculating assessment of the situation. She is correct in her assessment of Lee and his responses, and succeeds in securing what she wants. In contrast Lee is driven by emotion and gullibility, certainly in his dealings with Vivien whom he fails to relate to in a 'logical' manner. He is quickly, easily and predictably persuaded that Vivien loves him again and agrees to her suggestion that he confess to framing Jimmy for Fenton's 'suicide.' He is further persuaded by Vivien to write an ambiguously worded note under her guidance, letting his emotions overrule his rationality, when he knows such a course of action is unwise (he states, 'I hate putting things down on paper'). However, his planning and execution of Fenton's murder is carried out with rationality and precision, implying that it is in his dealings with his wife that he is compromised.

Lee's convoluted and elaborate plan for Fenton's murder can be contrasted with Vivien's relatively simple plan for Lee's murder. Both inform their victims that they are to die, thus both are sadistic, a point that illustrates how the two characters mutually deserve each other. Interestingly, in a reversal of the usual pattern, Lee murders Fenton in the kitchen, whilst Vivien murders Lee in the bedroom. Lee trusses Fenton up in the living-room and gasses him, and then places his body in the kitchen gas oven. In contrast, Vivien gets a tired Lee to lie down in their bedroom where she promptly administers hot milk laced with sleeping tablets. This suggests a confusion of the usual gender dynamics associated with space, feminising Lee and masculinising Vivien. Vivien makes opportune use of the available resources, both the sleeping tablets and her femininity, which she uses to play the traditional female role of carer, a role which Lee, who is struggling with the roles of normative masculinity and femininity, is keen to believe in. Vivien is implicated in Fenton's death because her adultery plays a role in her husband's actions. Conversely, Lee is implicated in his own death as Vivien murders him with sleeping tablets prescribed to Lee because his guilty conscience keeps him awake.

There remains a question mark over whether Vivien murders for love for not. At one point the implication is that she does, she kills Lee because she loves Jimmy. However, within the logic of her characterisation it is likely that she will grow bored with Jimmy as she has done with other lovers. Her comment to Lee that he must die 'so that I may go on living the way I want to live' might be read as illustrative of her true goal of personal and sexual freedom/permissiveness. It might also be read as an example of the liberation thesis, that is, that she prioritises her needs and her self above everything else and it is her desire for autonomy and her own life that is sexualised and criminalised.

What Lee attempts, and fails, to do with Vivien is control her. The dynamic between the couple, and the awareness of what motivates their respective behaviours, is acknowledged by Vivien's lover Fenton in his astute comment to Lee, 'you can't kill us all.' Fenton recognises that there will be too many lovers for Lee to kill, after Fenton there will be another and another, and that Lee is culpable in his wife's behaviour. His possessiveness is as much at fault as her promiscuity, not least because it has led him to murder. The culpability of both partners, their shared failure to exhibit restraint, places them both outside the conventional family frame. It is noteworthy that family is presented as absent within the film. Lee has no relatives other than Vivien and a very brief mention of a possible visit by Vivien's mother evokes disinterest in both Vivien and Lee. The couple have no children and neither Vivien or Lee have any same-sex friends. The maid Rita is taken into Vivien's confidence, but through necessity rather than desire. Family ties where they do exist are quickly severed with Avis's brother Fenton being murdered by Lee. Vivien and Lee's lack of family makes them expendable as characters; they are not fully embedded in the social sphere. They have no dependants and so their loss, at the close of the film, is 'unproblematic.' The absence of family, or the family being in some way problematic, is a characteristic often found within the film noir genre. The family functions within Western ideology as the site for reproduction, the channelling of sexuality and the privileging of the concept of romantic love (Harvey, 1978: 24). Film noir subverts these ideological conventions through the absence or perversion of 'normal' family relations within the genre. *Dear Murderer*, in its representation of the family, exhibits this genre convention. Furthermore, within film noir Place argues that 'men need to control women's sexuality in order not to be destroyed by it' (1978: 36). Lee's failure to control Vivien's ultimately destructive sexuality is clearly evident.

The absence of the family, and a voracious sexuality, are typical exemplars of the *femme fatale*. Vivien is also marked as a *femme fatale* by her appearance, and by the rational and calculating approach she takes to emotional affairs. The moment of calculation is clearly illustrated in the use of chiaroscuro lighting in the scenes leading to Lee's murder. The police inspector visits Vivien and claims to know that Lee is guilty of Fenton's murder, but cannot prove it. He suggests that it would be in Vivien's best interests if she could persuade Lee to confess, otherwise Jimmy's trial will go ahead and her adultery be made public. He suggests that it is a question of which of the two men she prefers. After his departure Vivien sits alone in the living-room and plans her next move. As she deliberates, chiaroscuro lighting plays across her face, her mouth partially obscured by shadow, whilst the medium close-up shot is tightly framed against the chair-back, suggestive of her entrapment (see still 5 below).

Still 5. Greta Gynt as the contemplative *femme fatale* Vivien in *Dear Murderer* (1947)

Tellingly, this shot depicts Gynt's acting style of controlled and purposeful movement, the only facial movement is a widening of the eyes and slight arching of her eyebrows, whilst her hands move in a restless manner. As Cowie argues, 'the use of chiaroscuro effects; strongly marked camera angles .. tight framing and close-ups that produce a claustrophobic sense of containment' (1993: 126) are common features of the visual style associated with film noir.

The moment of deliberation indicates Vivien's subsequent actions as premeditated, as is her gesture of awarding Rita, the maid, an unexpected night off. Lee returns from work and Vivien soothes his brow and pours him a drink, playing the role of the good wife. The following scene where Vivien poisons Lee makes judicious use of mirrors to indicate Vivien's inherent duplicity. Vivien takes the sleeping pills from a mirrored bathroom cabinet. We think we are watching Vivien come towards the camera whereas the camera is filming Vivien's reflection through the mirrored cabinet (see still 6 overleaf). Appearance and reality are thus confused. The difficulty the audience has in establishing whether it is watching Vivien or her reflection is itself a comment on Lee's inability to distinguish between truth and untruth in relation to Vivien. Indeed this 'masking' speaks of both Pollak's thesis that female crime goes undetected and the collapsing of the boundaries between the real and the artificial in relation to femininity that is the central component of Riviere's thesis of womanliness. As Doane argues in relation to film noir, '[t]he lighting style implies a distortion of an originally clear and readable image and the consequent crisis of vision' (1991: 103).[5] This scene reinforces that notion in that what the viewer sees does not necessarily reflect reality.

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[5] If, as I argued in Chapter 2, prolonged looking can be used to counter castration anxieties then confused vision suggests how the *femme fatale* threatens masculinity.

Still 6. Greta Gynt as Vivien in *Dear Murderer* (1947)

The mirroring theme continues when, after administering the fatal dose, Vivien sits at her dressing-table, her face reflected in the table's three-sided mirror as she waits for the tablets to take effect (see still 7 overleaf). Mirrors are frequently used in film noir to symbolise what Place calls 'women's duplicitous nature' (1978: 47). The belief that all women have the capacity to deceive and lie resonates with Pollak's thesis, and wider social theories of femininity, that women are by virtue of their physiology 'more deceitful than men' (1961: 8-9). Place argues however that 'the independence which film noir women seek is often visually presented as self-absorbed narcissism: the woman gazes at her own reflection in the mirror, ignoring the man she will use to achieve her goals' (1978: 47). Towards the beginning of the film Vivien entertains Jimmy in her apartment, unaware that Lee has murdered Fenton and is now ensconced in their bedroom. After Jimmy's departure, Vivien pauses for some time and contemplates her reflection in the hall mirror, softly smiling. She then moves to the bedroom and sits at the mirrored dressing-table,

gazing again at her reflection. The use of mirrors in these scenes offers a commentary on power and gender relations. What we are offered as an example of innate female duplicity and narcissism may, within feminist discourse, be read as the desire for autonomy and independence, a desire that can only be realised in the gendered social economy through an alignment with men.

Still 7. Female duplicity in *Dear Murderer* (1947)

I have indicated earlier that women, when they are deemed criminal, are often characterised as mad, in contrast to men who are considered bad. In the final scene of *Dear Murderer* Vivien, rejected by Jimmy, returns to the flat, to be led away by the police. It is only at this point that madness is indicated. Vivien is in a certain trance-like state when she returns and wears a somewhat glazed expression giving the impression of being detached from the reality around her. The police inspector returns Jimmy's ring which bears the inscription 'until death do us part.' Vivien at this point breaks out into maniacal

laughter as she is escorted by the police, indicating that her desire for autonomy and/or a lover of her choice has led to madness.

It seems unlikely that Lee would grant Vivien a divorce although Fenton is astute enough to observe that he does not think Vivien would want to marry him even if she were free. Showalter argues that women's mental illness is linked to their sexuality and this is evidenced in *Dear Murderer*. Vivien is constructed as an aberration of normative femininity; she is promiscuous and calculating, unable to be faithful and experiences monogamous marriage as restraining. She is portrayed as both excessive and unrestrained in her sexual appetite and overly controlling in relation to Lee. For Vivien husbands are interchangeable and a different husband is unlikely to afford her the freedom and opportunities she desires. It seems it would be difficult for her, within societal norms, to live on her own. Vivien is first criminalised for her sexual behaviour, which is then explained with reference to her mental faculties.[6] It is Vivien's desire for independence that results in her criminal activities and eventual mental breakdown. Female autonomy, within the patriarchal order, cannot be supported.

In *Dear Murderer* the representation of the female protagonist Vivien dramatises many of the characteristics of female criminality alleged by social commentators such as Pollak. I have demonstrated however that it is those actions which diverge from the paradigm of normative femininity – particularly in relation to female sexuality – that are criminalised. In this next section I shall consider two films, *Bedelia* (1946) and *Madeleine* (1950) where the female protagonists use poison to rid themselves of their male partners. I shall explore

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[6] The link between active female sexuality, criminality and madness is a common feature of cultural representation. Within the film noir genre for example retribution may be exacted from the *femme fatale* via the mechanism of madness. *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) culminates with Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson) being led away suffering from psychosis whilst the *femme fatale* Lana (Ida Lupino) in *They Drive By Night* (1940) suffers a mental breakdown in the witness box.

the themes of madness, femininity, the family and the home, and consider what comment this may offer about gender relations in the post-war era.

In *Bedelia* Margaret Lockwood plays the titular heroine who has poisoned three husbands and is planning the murder of her fourth. The film opens with Bedelia and her new husband Charley (Ian Hunter) on honeymoon in Monte Carlo. Bedelia is beautiful, glamorous and impetuous, and prone to lying. Charley is middle-aged, stolid and conservative, in both taste and opinion. The couple are befriended by an investigator, masquerading as an artist, Ben Chaney (Barry K Barnes) who wants to paint Bedelia's portrait, and who follows them to Charley's hometown in Yorkshire. Once ensconced in her new marital home Bedelia takes up her role as housewife and Charley soon falls ill. Bedelia becomes increasingly suspicious of Ben's true identity and tries to poison him, only to be unmasked by a previously unsuspecting Charley. Facing imprisonment Bedelia, encouraged by Charley, commits suicide.

Madeleine, based on a true-life case, is set in nineteenth century Scotland with Ann Todd as the protagonist, the eldest daughter of an upper-class Victorian family who are keen for her to marry. Madeleine is conducting an affair with a lower-class man Emile (Ivan Desney), whom she knows her father will never accept as a respectable suitor. Under increasing pressure from her father to accept Mr Minnoch, his choice of husband for her, Madeleine breaks with Emile who resorts to blackmail. Emile dies suddenly in suspicious circumstances and Madeleine is accused of poisoning. She stands trial and a verdict of 'not proven' (only available in Scottish law) is returned. The film closes on Madeleine's enigmatic smile.

The films do not appear to have been particularly well received by either critics or audiences. *Bedelia* was Lockwood's first film role after the commercial success of *The Wicked Lady* in 1945. The film was certainly marketed as a Lockwood vehicle with McFarlane arguing that '[s]he is the film's major publicity asset' whilst the press book contains 'numerous suggestions for soliciting female attention to her wardrobe ... [and] her shoes' (1999: 78).[7] The film received a front-page cover in *Pictureshow* upon its release, probably because of Lockwood's name (29 June 1946), but, despite the supposed marketability of the Lockwood star image, Landy claims that reviewers disliked *Bedelia* as Lockwood's *femme fatale* was thought insipid and lacking in 'extreme villainy' (1991: 203), suggesting that the element of ambiguity in Bedelia's characterisation was unpopular. *Madeleine* also failed to be commercially successful despite attracting David Lean as director and Ann Todd in the titular role, internationally famous after her 1945 role in *The Seventh Veil*. It was booed by cinema audiences who, Harper suggests, did not like ambiguity in relation to female villainy (1994: 165).[8]

Both films, in theme and style, exhibit genre characteristics associated with melodrama and the woman's picture. In both there is a focus on the domestic sphere and personal relations and a working through of Oedipal issues in relation to a variety of dynamics within the middle-class family (Landy, 1991: 189-90). *Madeleine* is structured around a woman's relationship with three men; an over-bearing father, a demanding lover and a would-be husband. The cruel father and the rakish lover, stock figures of melodrama, make unreasonable demands of Madeleine, in contrast to the prospective husband who exhibits

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[7] Indeed the costume designer for the film was the experienced Elizabeth Haffenden, a stalwart of the Gainsborough studio, who had worked successfully on *The Wicked Lady* to produce costumes that exhibited a complex visual style, something which Harper (1994) analyses in her study of Gainsborough costume drama.
[8] Interestingly, as Pam Cook argues, Helen Taylor's research with viewers of *Gone with the Wind* (1939) shows that the ambiguous open ending of the film was strongly preferred as it both remained faithful to the novel and allowed space for 'their pleasure in constructing their own fantasy endings' (1999: 368). Perhaps the difference between the two is that Scarlett O'Hara is a romantic heroine thus the possibility of romance

patience in relation to the woman's needs. Bedelia, as the murderous housewife, is an inversion of what Kaplan identifies as the 'angel in the house' (cited in Landy, 1991: 191), the self-abnegating mother, a frequent feature of melodrama. Stylistically, melodrama can circumvent the restraints of censorship and morality and their effects on, for example, sexual desire by 'the syphoning of unrepresentable material into the excessive *mise en scène*' (Gledhill, 1987: 9). *Mise-en-scène* is therefore used to articulate the emotional life of characters. Both *Madeleine* and *Bedelia* make use of clothing and hair to depict the emotions and desires of their eponymous heroines whilst in *Bedelia* Lockwood's character uses both the restrained style of acting that I outlined for Gynt and, as the narrative progresses and she becomes increasingly desperate, the 'clichéd and excessive body language' (for example hand-wringing and facial contortions) that Landy (1991: 192) identifies as a feature of melodrama.

For Landy, *Bedelia* is an example of how the woman's film was profoundly influenced by film noir in the post-war period (1991: 229). Written by Vera Caspary, who also wrote *Laura*,[9] *Bedelia* opens, in a manner similar to *Laura*, with an oil painting of Bedelia and a voice-over by the police investigator Ben who seeks both to explain Bedelia and to bring her to justice. Indeed the opening of the film uses many of the key elements of film noir: 'flashback ... voice-over ... investigative narrative structure ... the posing of an enigma ... which the film attempts to resolve' (Cowie 1993: 126). Frequently the enigma is one associated with a woman. Paintings in the woman's film, as Landy has observed, are often used to denote 'female entrapment and claustrophobia as well as fractured identity' (1991: 193) as the woman is held within the frame for the scrutiny of the male gaze. Bedelia's character is clearly signalled from the outset. Ben's voice-over opens the narrative, 'this

must be kept alive whereas it is deliberately unclear whether Madeleine is a villain, who must be seen to be punished for her transgressions, or a misunderstood female heroine who should elicit audience sympathy.
[9] Directed in 1944 by Otto Preminger *Laura* is a film noir with Dana Andrews as a cynical detective who falls in love with a portrait of Laura (Gene Tierney) whose alleged murder he is investigating.

was Bedelia, beautiful and charming, she radiated a curious innocence, eager to fascinate those she attracted, like a poisonous flower.' Bedelia is presented as inscrutable and, as with Vivien in *Dear Murderer*, is first introduced through her appearance. It is not clear who she is, her background is never explained, and she has no friends or family. Furthermore, she does not speak for herself. Rather, it is the two men in the film, Ben and Charley, who seek to explain her. The inscrutable female is a common device of film noir. Doane argues that the *'femme fatale* in film noir is characterized as unknowable ... [t]his unknowability is consistent with a broader cultural/social positioning of woman as having a privileged link with the pre-Oedipal or pre-symbolic' (1991: 102). Further that 'woman thus becomes the other side of knowledge as it is conceived within a phallocentric logic. She is an epistemological trouble' (Doane, 1991: 103). Bedelia is unknowable and it is her inscrutability, her opacity, for both characters and audience, that is the cause of anxiety within the film.

One of the central questions pertaining to Bedelia is uncertainty about whether her actions are motivated by her desire to avoid detection, or whether she is slightly deranged. There is a question mark regarding her sanity that runs throughout the film. Her inscrutability makes her actions difficult to read and her behaviour is frequently ambiguous. Is she rational and calculating, planning her next move in a premeditated manner, or is she over-emotional and prone to unpredictable responses? She refuses, for example, to be photographed by Charley and only reluctantly agrees to her portrait being painted, at the suggestion of Ben and the insistence of Charley. Within the logic of the narrative it is obvious that Bedelia would not want her image to be recorded but her response to Charley's actions is exaggerated. Landy argues that 'on a psychological level, she is resisting being looked at' (1991: 230). The usual position of woman as subject of the male gaze is disrupted. Indeed, Bedelia chastises Charley when he attempts to photograph her

without her permission, 'haven't you something better? You have me.' Her comment sets up an opposition between image and self, suggesting that Charley privileges the former over the latter. Her actions in this respect challenge the conventions of normative femininity by refusing to be subject to the male gaze and suggesting that she is more than appearance or masquerade. Her response, albeit exaggerated and seemingly over emotional, may be read as a rational, predictable response to the fear of detection, a fear that is logical and understandable because she does have something to lose, her liberty. Alternatively it can be read as excessive in response to the request made of her. This central theme of ambiguity regarding motivation, behaviour and questions of sanity is evident throughout the film. We are constantly confronted with the question of whether Bedelia is skittish and mercurial, characteristics that question her mental state, or whether she is repeatedly forced to improvise in response to the threat of detection posed by Ben.

Madeleine, in contrast to Bedelia, is not presented as potentially deranged but there is a certain unknowability about her character that resonates with Doane's arguments about the *femme fatale* and indeed the wider cultural representation of women. The film opens, as with *Bedelia*, with a male voice-over whose narration frames the story, introducing us to Madeleine and her 'strange, romantic story.' There is an enigma surrounding Madeleine. Both the press pack for the film and *Picturegoer's* commentary on the film repeatedly refer to the character of Madeleine as 'enigmatic.' This mysteriousness is derived partly from the 'not proven' verdict; Madeleine's status as a murderer is ambiguous. But further, Madeleine as a woman is presented as enigmatic. The press pack claims she had a 'strange, passionate nature, allied to a hard, swift, uncompromising intellect, with an unusually coherent and forceful style of self-expression' (*Madeleine* Press Pack). Certainly, Ann Todd, whom Harper refers to as one of British cinema's 'Ice Maidens' who combines 'repression and display' in her performances (2000: 70) brings these

characteristics to bear in her portrayal of Madeleine.[10] She plays the role of normative femininity, ostensibly demure and obedient, which masks a passionate nature that periodically erupts. In this respect Madeleine's characterisation is reminiscent of the heroines of romance novels whom Radway comments often have 'unusual intelligence or ... an extraordinary fiery disposition' (1991: 123).[11] It is Madeleine's femininity that is difficult to understand or reconcile with the conventions of normative femininity. She is representative of Thomas' 'unadjusted girl.' She has desires and passions she expects to fulfil and struggles against the demands of her father that she accept a husband. She resists taking her 'proper' role in the gendered social order and evokes her father's wrath, who comments, 'there seems to be something about your character that prevents you from acting naturally.' Indeed that Madeleine demonstrates an understanding of femininity as masquerade, the expectation that she will play a 'natural' feminine role, is evidenced in a scene where her father questions her about the failure of Mr Minnoch to propose.

Madeleine: 'I can hardly propose to him myself, Papa.'

Papa: 'No, but I cannot help feeling that some sign, some indication from you would ...'

Madeleine: 'Bring him to the boil, Papa?'

Papa: 'That is both vulgar and flippant ... these things can be done with perfect modesty and propriety.'

Madeleine's quip is insightful because it is exactly what she is expected to do, and she is fully aware of her role. Her sole purpose as a Victorian upper-class girl is to attract the

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[10] For Braun, Todd had a 'genius for understatement; the flair for hinting at what was going on in the heroine's mind by just the tiniest inflection of her naturally clipped and precise speaking voice and by the slightest movement of her facial muscles' (1973: 38), a statement which suggests how Todd's particular acting style was well-suited to the role of the enigmatic Madeleine.

[11] Madeleine departs from the romantic heroine in other respects though. She is sexually experienced, has an awareness of her own beauty and an active desire for men (Radway, 1991: 132).

attention of the opposite sex and elicit a proposal of marriage whilst staying within the confines of a given morality.[12] She makes her view of marriage clear when she comments on the ring given to her by Mr Minnoch. It bears the symbol of the crossbow which suggest that Madeleine is both the hunter and the hunted quarry. She occupies both positions in the film and has to negotiate between the two polarities. Madeleine however misreads the sign and comments, 'I thought it was an anchor.' This suggests that she views marriage as something that would oppress her, weigh her down and keep her in one place, something antithetical to her character.

Madeleine's femininity and sexual availability are encoded in her clothing. She wears numerous outfits that signal her femininity as different from that inhabited by either her mother or her sister Bessie (see still 8 below).

Still 8. Clothing and femininity; Bessie, Mother and Madeleine (left to right)

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[12] Viola Klein comments how the Victorian girl had to balance the achievement of her main goal in life, marriage, with societal expectations of 'maidenly reserve' and 'etiquette' (1946: 11-12). For this reason, women often resorted to 'frailness and disease' as a means to '"catch" attention without offending contemporary morality' (Klein, 1946: 13).

Her mother, for example, is frequently dressed in black dresses with long sleeves and high collars, an outfit that gives a drab and funereal appearance. Bessie's dresses, although more colourful than her mother's, also have long sleeves and are cut higher across the bosom than those worn by Madeleine. In contrast to her female relatives, Madeleine's clothes are elegant and decorative. Her dresses frequently exhibit a décolletage adorned with sprays of small flowers or elaborate ruffs, and are sleeveless thus revealing bare arms and shoulders.

Her hats are close fitting and decorated, one with black and white feathers, another with fur and a skunk's tail.[13] Such ornamental head-gear is evocative of the signifiers of madness identified by Showalter. Indeed when Madeleine surreptitiously entertains Emile at the family holiday home she wears a white dress of very delicate, lacy and transparent material, decorated with diamanté jewels and her hair is loose. Her appearance signifies her sexual availability and it is during this scene that she engages in (what she believes to be) pre-marital sex with Emile. At her instigation the couple dance together on the hillside to the strains of music from a working-class wedding party taking place in the village below, the action of the two events intercut. As the music and dancing intensifies Madeleine grasps Emile's cane, emblematic of the phallus, and discards it before the couple embrace passionately (see still 9 overleaf).

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[13] Madeleine wears these when she, respectively, horse-rides with Mr Minnoch on the beach, and visits Emile in his lodgings and asks him to elope.
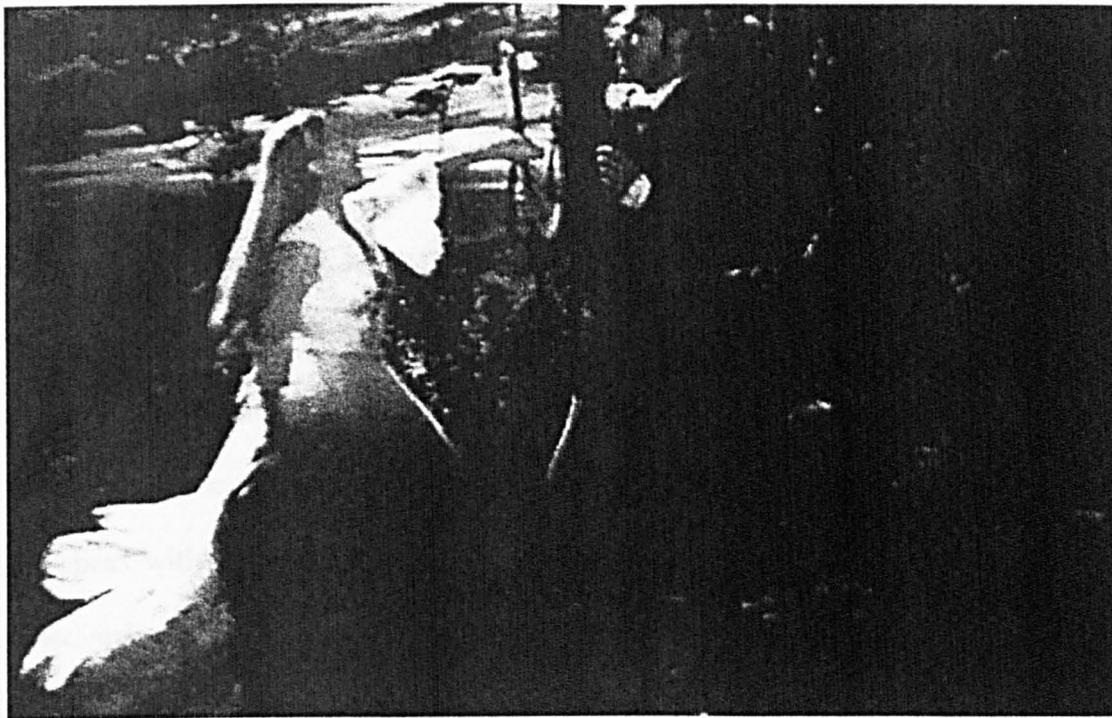
Still 9. Ann Todd as Madeleine and Ivan Desney as Emile

Showalter comments that Ophelia usually appeared on stage wearing a white dress and that female hair worn down is indicative of 'an offence against decorum, an improper sensuality' (1987: 11). Although Madeleine is not overtly coded as a madwoman the signifiers I have outlined above - clothes, hair, cane - are used to give melodramatic expression to her emotions and desires which in turn signal her femininity as divergent. As Harper argues in relation to Gainsborough costume dramas, 'frills could have a talismanic significance and could symbolise a female sexuality denied expression through conventional signifying systems' (1994: 132).[14] For these reasons, it is noteworthy that when Madeleine receives Emile in the family drawing-room, a scenario into which she has been coerced by him, her dress is significantly more conservative than on any other previous occasion. As this is one of the occasions when she is alleged to have

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[14] Harper's argument is related to Gainsborough costume dramas from 1940 to late 1946 when Sidney Box took charge of the studio. Her thesis is that the verbal level of the script is undermined by the visual discourse of costume that encoded female sexual desire. Although *Madeleine* is not part of the Gainsborough paradigm, the costumes do function to signify the active female sexuality of Madeleine.

administered poison to Emile, her dress may be used to signify her innocence, her protest at her coercion and/or her withdrawal of sexual desire for Emile.

In relation to the representation of femininity in *Bedelia*, a number of oppositions are evident which, as in *Dear Murderer*, suggest the concept of doubling between the two central female figures Bedelia and Ellen (Anne Crawford), Charley's business partner. This doubling between the two women is illustrated through location, cats and dress. The film opens with Bedelia and Charley on their honeymoon in Monte Carlo. Whilst it is immediately evident that Charley as a Yorkshire man does not belong to that environment, Bedelia as the inscrutable woman is naturally aligned with the foreign and exotic. In contrast Ellen, like Charley, is naturally aligned with Yorkshire and its qualities of pragmatism. Ellen's ability to joke about the priority placed by the servants Hannah and Mary on the qualities of being 'proper Yorkshire' suggests a comfortable affinity with her surroundings. Furthermore, it is evidence of a connection between herself and Charley that Bedelia, as an outsider, does not share.

The opposition between the two women is further articulated through the use of cats within the film. Cats are frequently used to symbolise values that are antithetical to domesticity and their characteristics are thought to be sly and untrustworthy.[15] Bedelia's alignment with cats and their associated characteristics is clearly marked from the outset when she tries to adopt the Siamese cat of her French maid in Monte Carlo. Her affinity with the cat is used to signify her own exoticism and duplicity. She is delighted when Charley presents her with a Siamese cat upon their return to Yorkshire. Bedelia's desire for things that are inappropriate (under the given circumstances) is recognised by Ellen's comment about the difficulty of finding a Siamese cat in Yorkshire: 'they don't seem to go in for them much

around here.' Ellen's pragmatism clashes with Bedelia's taste for the exotic (see still 10 below).

Still 10. Bedelia (Margaret Lockwood) and Ellen (Anne Crawford) in *Bedelia* (1946)

Further oppositions between the two women are present. Bedelia is the epitome of the perfect housewife, her role is centred on the home where she fulfils her domestic duties, she is physically beautiful and glamorous, and succeeds in the role of cordial hostesses. In contrast, Ellen is a career woman whom Charley values for her business skills and who is, relative to Bedelia, homely, pragmatic and good-natured. The differences between the two women are illustrated by their choice of dress (see still 10 above). Bedelia, for example, arrives at Charley's office wearing a tight-fitting black coat which accentuates her waist and which is decorated, at collar and cuffs, with a generous trim of white fur shot through

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[15] *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* lists a number of sayings and characteristics frequently associated with the cat. Key amongst these is the cats' alignment with 'liberty' and therefore its opposition to 'restraint' and its use to denote spite, particularly in women (Evans, 1989: 202).

with black markings and complemented with a black hat with matching trim. The overall impression of the outfit is one of elegance and glamour and, in a manner similar to Madeleine, signifies her as a sexually available female. In contrast, during this scene Ellen wears a fur coat, which is loose rather than fitted, is devoid of decoration and is accompanied by a plain hat. Her outfit is one of pragmatic response to the cold Yorkshire winter and signifies a conservative, normative femininity (see still 11 below).

Still 11. Clothing and femininity; Ellen (left) and Bedelia (right) in *Bedelia* (1946)

Other outfits that Bedelia wears are used to signify a femininity that suggests deception and a compromised integrity. Before leaving Monte Carlo for example Bedelia meets Ben in the hotel bar and asks that he not visit them in Yorkshire. In this scene Ben is ambiguous about whether his intentions towards Bedelia are romantic and questions Bedelia about her honesty in relation to Charley. Bedelia wears a full-length black dress and a striking black veil liberally decorated with diamanté studs. Much of the scene takes place in medium close-up so that the focus is of Bedelia's face and veil. Showalter argues that the black veil was used in the Gothic novel to symbolise 'female sexual mystery' (1987: 11) and was adopted in many popular representations of Ophelia. A continuum can

be drawn from the enigma to the madness that is female sexuality. Bedelia's costume in this scene suggests both her mysteriousness and hints at madness.

The opposition between the two women appears to be an inversion of the norm. Bedelia as the housewife should represent the values of normative femininity whilst Ellen as the career woman should exhibit divergent femininity but this is not the case as both characters have a number of convergent and divergent elements in relation to femininity. Ellen's divergent status as a career woman is balanced by her qualities of pragmatism and reliability.[16] Bedelia's convergent status as a housewife and beauty is undermined by her skittish and unpredictable nature and her taste for the exotic. Bedelia's problematic status as housewife may offer some recognition of the changing role of women within post-war British society. It seems to suggest that the woman who is 'overtly domestic' no longer has a productive place within the family (Landy, 1991: 229). However, the notion of Bedelia as 'overtly domestic' is already undermined by her alignment with the Siamese cat, her taste for the exotic and her unpredictability. Bedelia in fact undermines patriarchal notions of domesticity and the concept of the home as a place of shelter for men. What Bedelia appears to dramatises is Pollak's fear that that which most threatens the home comes from within, and in this respect she is the inverse of the 'angel in the house' figure.

In relation to family, both Madeleine and Bedelia, in a manner similar to Vivien in *Dear Murderer*, are presented as outside the conventional family frame and are therefore socially expendable. Bedelia has no family, friends or children and her loss at the close of film is thus unproblematic. The several nationalities of her previous husbands, revealed by Ben to be French, English and Scottish, indicate that she has no home or community to

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[16] The film suggests that Ellen would be a more suitable wife for Charley. They share a similar background and Ellen understands Charley's business. They would make an exemplary 'companionate' or 'democratic' marriage, an idea promulgated after the war and throughout the 1950s which suggested that within marriage men and women were equal partners, though with different gendered roles to play (Wilson, 1980: 89).

which she may belong. In contrast Charley has a familial history in his town of Leadsford in Yorkshire. From the local Doctor who 'slapped the life into him' when he was born, the servants Hannah and Mary who have always worked for the family, and the family-run business, Charley belongs to a community in a way that Bedelia does not. Indeed Charley's innocence is confirmed by Mary's remark that the 'Carringtons have no scandals.' For this reason he is not expendable in the way that Bedelia is, nor is he culpable or deserving of death in a manner that, one could argue, befits both Lee in *Dear Murderer* or Emile in *Madeleine*.

Although Madeleine belongs to a family unit she has no dependants, no responsibilities for others, and is one of three daughters, all factors that render her expendable and her loss through societal banishment acceptable. Emile, in contrast to Charley Carrington, does not belong in any way to the community in which he resides. The film sets up an opposition between Scotland and France and Emile's status as a foreigner presents him as an outsider. He has no family and his only friend is also a French national. Furthermore, Emile is presented as somewhat deserving of his fate. His blackmail of Madeleine results in his being implicated in her actions against him and he too is socially expendable.

The expendability of the female characters is in part linked to the representation of the home, and the role of servants, in both films. The household arrangement in *Madeleine* is particularly interesting. The film opens with Madeleine and her family viewing a large house for sale. Madeleine is particularly taken with a basement room. As she enters the room for the first time the music swells in a romantic manner and Madeleine declares 'I like this room very much.' The musical accompaniment and Madeleine's verdict are somewhat incongruous given the room itself which is extremely dark and gloomy. The windows are barred and, as a basement room, Madeleine can only see the legs of passers-

by and a glimpse of sky. The room is thus more reminiscent of a prison cell than a young woman's bedroom. Furthermore, the use of the room as a bedroom for Madeleine and the youngest sister Janet places them on the same level as the servants, since the latter are also quartered downstairs. From a practical point of view the spatial arrangement suits Madeleine as it allows her to entertain Emile in the kitchen and in the maid Christina's bedroom, quarters that are separated from the rest of the house. Such an arrangement however suggests that the 'normal' social order has been corrupted. Madeleine descends to a subterranean level and is afforded the same status as the servants. Indeed her father treats her in a similar manner, for example, making her kneel at his feet and buckle his shoes whilst he berates her for her displeasing attitude. The father, by allowing Madeleine to reside alongside the servants, is then partly culpable in her ensuing corruption.

The servants perform a supportive role for Madeleine within the film. Madeleine uses the room of Christina the maid to entertain Emile. The maid thus acquires a certain knowing and *confidante* status, in opposition to Madeleine's family who are unknowing. During her trial, Madeleine is supported, not by her mother or sisters, but by the female prison nurse. Madeleine's increasing alignment with lower-class characters (signifiers of divergent sexuality) as the narrative progresses signals the corruption and debasement of her middle-class femininity.

In *Bedelia*, the heroine is alienated from her marital home. It has belonged to the Carrington family for ten generations. Thus Bedelia is an outsider in what should be her 'natural' domestic realm. Its recent refurbishment has been undertaken under the guidance of Ellen, and the furnishings and decoration therefore do not conform to Bedelia's taste. Indeed Bedelia is alienated from the world that she understands both Charley and Ellen to inhabit, a world of 'jam and sweets and presents at Christmas.' The two servants, Hannah

and Mary, form a bridge between Bedelia's house and Ben's lodgings, with servants, food and information passing between the two locations. The servants for example inform Ben of vital events such as the dismissal of Charley's nurse, and Bedelia of the arrival of Captain McKelvie, her brother-in-law. Bedelia is able to poison food intended for Ben and the Captain because food from her kitchen is delivered to Ben's house. The servants mediate between the two worlds of Ben and Bedelia, the investigator and the subject of his investigation. Unlike Christina in *Madeleine*, and Rita in *Dear Murderer* however, they are unknowing and are unaware of the true roles played by Ben and Bedelia.

The final points I wish to explore relate to the issues of madness, and poison as the preferred murder weapon. Madeleine is alleged to have murdered Emile using arsenic administered via cocoa. Her defence is that she purchased arsenic as a toilet preparation for her face. Both arguments are reconcilable with conventional understandings of femininity. It is conceivable that Madeleine is guilty of pandering to the vanity of female appearance. It is equally believable that she would attend to the demands of the male stomach. For Pollak it is this ready access to the male stomach that is so disturbing, his argument turning from biology to gendered opportunity. Madeleine is not marked by madness in a way that is suggested of Bedelia, but it is indicated that she is out of control, her active sexuality leading her to criminal acts.

In the case of Madeleine circumstances conspire against her. She is prepared to elope with Emile but his refusal suggests that he is using her to further his desire for social mobility. It is his refusal and then subsequent blackmail of Madeleine that coerces her into drastic action. The question remains why a verdict of not proven is returned, why is Madeleine set free? Although the ending is historically accurate the film refuses to offer resolution and solve the conundrum, closing instead on a close-up of Madeleine's smiling face; the secrets

of the enigmatic female remain intact. The ending suggests that prison is not an appropriate place for her, perhaps because Emile, and to some extent her father, must bear some responsibility for events. However, she must be punished for her active sexuality and this is achieved by placing her as a social outcast.

In contrast to Madeleine, Bedelia's sanity is questioned throughout the film. As the narrative progresses she becomes increasingly unstable. Her body language changes from the 'slow shift from one facial expression to another, and a majestic style of movement' that Harper identified (2000: 70) to becoming increasingly clichéd, including hand-wringing, covering her face with her hands and extreme facial contortions. A tension remains about whether this is a degeneration of her mental state or a desperate reaction to the increasing threat of exposure. The use of headaches throughout the film is illustrative of this ambiguity. Bedelia frequently cites headaches to excuse herself from sitting for her portrait with Ben, and as a means to avoid difficult conversations and confrontations with Charley. It is unclear whether she evokes such a strategy because of her fear of exposure, employing a feminine ruse to deflect unwanted attention, or whether the headaches are in fact indicative of her diminishing mental state. Any semblance of normality is shattered at the end of the film when Bedelia, unable to evade Charley's questioning, responds with a violent outburst stating 'I hate men, they're rotten beasts, I wish all the men in the world were dead.' This outburst which, in psychoanalytic terms suggests displacement, and the use of melodramatic gestures suggest this as a moment of emotional truth from Bedelia. This leads to the question of why Bedelia murders. Ben states at the end of the film that there is no ambiguity about Bedelia's motives; she murdered for financial gain. Ben's verdict of Bedelia however cannot be easily reconciled with her outburst which suggests a trauma in her life that goes unrecognised by Ben and Charley but which is nevertheless present and has not been explained. In terms of madness Bedelia's characterisation evokes

parallels with the 'violent Lucia' version of the madwoman identified by Showalter who exhibits a violent and vindictive femininity which is directed against men (1987: 11-14). In relation to the concept of the female poisoner, Bedelia dramatises Pollak's concern of the poisoning housewife, the male fear that every woman is inherently duplicitous and seeking to eradicate her husband through sly and foul means for financial and personal benefit.

In this chapter I have explored three films that dramatise the theme of the murderous woman who kills her partner and have illustrated the cultural norms that shape the representation of these woman. The women exhibit characteristics of divergent femininity, in their sexual promiscuity, their desire for autonomy and independence, and their rejection of men. Within a patriarchal social order that seeks to suppress female desire, their actions and behaviour are criminalised and the suggestion of madness, certainly in the case of Bedelia and Vivien, is clearly signalled. In this respect the depiction of femininity and criminality conforms to the norms of cultural representation. The question remains regarding what these films might have to say about gender roles in the post-war period. The films emerged, as with Pollak's study, at a time of uncertainty about gender roles, which might indicate that they may be understood as cultural examples of the 'liberation thesis,' the belief that greater female freedom leads to increased female criminality. Female murderers, however, are a common feature of cultural representation, they pre- and post-date the period in question, so further answers must be sought. What is under scrutiny in these films is patriarchally-defined femininity, the alleged uncertainty and unknowability of woman (her duplicity in part signalled by her choice of weapon) which is the cause of male anxiety. It is this very ambiguity however that paradoxically suggests the culpability of patriarchy. In *Madeleine* for example it is unclear whether Madeleine is guilty of murdering Emile. If she did murder her lover it was because patriarchally-

defined notions of morality and propriety offered her no alternative response to Emile's blackmail. If she did not murder Emile then she was punished for taking a lover, on her own terms, to satisfy her own self-defined desires. The question of her guilt in relation to murder remains unanswered. What is certain is that failing to conform to the demands of heterosexual marriage has dire consequences; Madeline survives but loses her social status.

What is also on trial however is male culpability in female oppression, which is not presented as ambiguous. In *Dear Murderer*, the desires of Vivien the unknowable *femme fatale* are signalled, but cannot be supported within the existing patriarchal structure. In *Bedelia* we are seemingly offered the choice of reading the inscrutable heroine as either a murderer trying to cover her tracks or as a woman suffering from mental instability. Accepting however that style has meaning in melodrama, the increasing use of melodramatic acting which culminates in her verbal attack on Charley ('I hate all men, they're rotten beasts'), and the reading of the outburst as an example of displacement, suggests that Bedelia is knowable, but not within the structures of patriarchy. Furthermore, in relation to the post-war period it is noteworthy that Bedelia's characterisation as the perfect housewife might suggest a critique of an overtly domestic role for women and therefore a working through of some of the tensions relating to gender roles. What remains from these films which foreground the inscrutable female is a questioning of the patriarchal structures which shape the family, heterosexual marriage, female sexuality and domesticity.

In the films which I have discussed the female protagonists face either madness, death or the loss of social status. In the next chapter the theme of female criminality continues but the focus is now on incarceration and the extent, and manner, in which women can be rehabilitated.

Chapter 4: Criminal Women

In this chapter I shall analyse two films from the 1950s that dramatise the theme of the incarcerated female criminal, *The Weak and the Wicked* (1954) and *Yield to the Night* (1956). In my previous chapter I briefly discussed some social theories of female criminality, and poisoning as the quintessential female crime. The narrative of the three films I examined in that chapter stopped at the point where the women were apprehended for their crimes. This chapter follows on from this by exploring women who have been convicted and who are subject to incarceration. *The Weak and the Wicked* is a portmanteau drama[1] following a group of women who are imprisoned for a variety of crimes including fraud, shoplifting, and child neglect. The group is headed by Jean Raymond (Glynis Johns) and the majority of the action takes place in prison, although flashback is used to tell the stories of various characters and how they came to be incarcerated. *Yield to the Night* is the story of one woman, Mary Hilton (Diana Dors), who is convicted of murdering a female rival for her lover's affections and is sentenced to death. The action takes place over three weeks in Mary's cell as she waits to hear if her reprieve has been granted. Mary's story is told through her voiceover, and flashbacks are used to reconstruct the events that led to her conviction. Both films were directed by British director J. Lee Thompson and adapted for the screen from novels written by Joan Henry. This chapter will explore the popular appeal and critical acclaim of these films, the star persona of Diana Dors, why these films appeared in the mid-1950s, and what conclusions they might lead us to draw about normative and divergent femininity.

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[1] In this context a portmanteau drama is a film comprising a number of separate stories that are brought together within one film.

In the 1950s, the theme of women in prison was relatively new to British cinema.[2] Although Hollywood had explored the theme in a number of films prior to the 1950s[3] it was Jean Kent's performance in *Good Time Girl* (1948), set partly in a reform school for girls, that provided the first British treatment of this subject.[4] The emergence of this sub-genre in British cinema during the 1950s is in part explained by the success of the US film *Caged* (1950) in which a teenage girl is sent to prison for robbery, and which received three Oscar nominations (Chibnall, 2000: 60). Anne Morey, writing about American women's prison films of the 1950s (including *Caged*), states that within this sub-genre, women's prisons are 'agents of socialization for women; the jail's ostensible project is to retool the female inmate for domestic life' (1995: 81). A 'medical trope' is in evidence as the redeemable inmates are depicted as 'patients' who can only respond to a male 'good care provider', a role fulfilled by either the 'male prison doctor' or the 'prison chaplain' (ibid). Their role as mediating males is to bring about, in the female inmate, the conversion from prison and divergent femininity to domesticity and normative femininity. As Morey argues, the men's function is to 'effect the transition from prison to husband ... or reconcile her to the remainder of her sentence' (1995: 82). Morey comments that only men can bring about the required transformation in women as 'women cannot effect a cure for other women, nor can they effect it for themselves' (1995: 85). Indeed the dynamic between female prisoners and male carers has some parallels with the female patient/male doctor paradigm that is a frequent feature of 1940s Hollywood films which employ a medical discourse.[5] In relation to the post-war context, the role ascribed to men in the

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[2] Chibnall comments that prison drama was largely absent from British cinema due to BBFC censorship; only a few films dealing with male convicts emerged before the war (2000: 60).

[3] Crowther lists *Ladies of the Big House* (1931), *Women in Prison* (1938), *Convicted Woman* (1939, more widely known as *The Forgotten Woman*) and *Gallant Lady* (1942, reissued as *Prison Girl* in 1946) as American examples of the sub-genre (1989: 63-4).

[4] Chibnall states that the British films *Prison without Bars* (1938) and *2000 Women* (1944) depict imprisoned women but in a French setting. A slightly later British film *Turn the Key Softly* (1953) opens with three women being released from Holloway prison and follows them through their first twenty-four hours in London.

[5] Doane's analysis of films which are structured around a medical discourse suggests that women who are ill are often suffering from 'some form of sexual dysfunction or resistance to their own femininity' (Doane,

women-in-prison sub-genre may in part be explained as creating a need for men at a time of uncertainty in relation to gender roles. Indeed if women could cure themselves, men would be redundant. I will explore the relevance of these arguments in my analysis of the British women-in-prison film.

For Landy the female prison drama is part of the social problem genre that exhibits the characteristics of 'melodrama, film noir, social topicality, and a concern with rehabilitation' (1991: 437). Hill, in his writing about the social problem film, identifies women in prison as one of a number of themes[6] that emerged in a British cinema that was exploring 'contemporary social issues' (1986: 67). Like Landy, Hill argues that such films 'raise topical social issues' and that an analysis of these films can unveil 'many of the dominant ideological assumptions and attitudes of the period' (ibid). Why should female prison dramas be socially topical in the 1950s? It is not the case that female criminality was increasing. Indeed figures from the post-war period demonstrate that the number of female prisoners was relatively steady in contrast to the figures for men which did increase (Heidensohn, 1985: 60). It seems that what was of topical social concern was a belief in, or fear of, female criminality, albeit ungrounded in material reality.[7] I would argue that the emergence of the female prison drama can in part be explained in terms of the liberation thesis, that is, the mistaken belief that women's societal gains had resulted in a concomitant increase in female criminality.[8] These films may dramatise an unconscious fear of female independence and a certain ambivalence surrounding changing gender roles, feelings held by both men and women. What is on display in these films is the punishment

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1987: 46). One of the functions of the doctor is to expose the truth about the woman to herself and to reconcile her to normative femininity, a function that is analogous to that of the male carer in the prison drama.

[6] Others include youth culture, race, homosexuality, and prostitution.

[7] What was socially topical was the issue of capital punishment, a debate which *Yield to the Night* made a deliberate attempt to influence.

[8] Gregory specifically applies the liberation thesis to criminality (1993: 316). I have demonstrated in the previous chapter how female agency is criminalised therefore the liberation thesis can be extended to suggest

of female desire and excess and the attempt to rehabilitate divergent femininity to its proper role in the gendered social economy.

The Weak and the Wicked (1954) and *Yield to the Night* (1956) were both produced by small companies, respectively Marble Arch and Kenwood, working under the umbrella of the Associated British Picture Corporation (ABPC). Whilst no claims can be made that ABPC was a beacon of feminist enterprise a number of women, notably Anne Burnaby and Joan Henry, were in evidence in key roles such as scriptwriting which had a positive influence on gender representation in the companies. Harper argues that 'the minor companies attached to ABPC gave rise to some innovatory representations of women' (2000: 84) as central control was difficult, particularly those where Lee Thompson directed and which were scripted by women. Both films were directed by Lee Thompson and were adapted from novels written by Joan Henry.[9] Henry wrote *Who Lie in Gaol* in 1952, based on her own experiences in prison,[10] and *Yield to the Night* in 1954. Anne Burnaby worked with J. Lee Thompson and Joan Henry to produce the screenplay for *The Weak and the Wicked*, whilst Lee Thompson and Henry worked with John Cresswell[11] to produce the screenplay for *Yield to the Night*.

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that female independence and female divergence are linked and are in many respects considered synonymous.

[9] On both films photography was provided by Gilbert Taylor and editing by Richard Best, both of whom worked with Lee Thompson again for *Woman in a Dressing Gown* and which explains some of the stylistic coherence across these three films.

[10] Joan Henry was an well-educated, upper-class woman, a cousin of Bertrand Russell, who led an ostensibly 'respectable' life, married to an officer and mother to a young daughter (Chibnall, 2000: 58-9). She had, however, a predilection for gambling which led to her being barred from local racetracks when she was unable to pay her substantial debts. She became a novelist for financial reasons and achieved a fair degree of success by the late 1940s, but then served a twelve-month prison term for fraud, an experience that became the basis for *Who Lie in Gaol*. The novel was a commercial and critical success and Lee Thompson was keen to meet Henry with a view to adapting the novel for the stage. During their collaboration they fell in love and Lee Thompson left his wife and children to marry Henry, already separated from her husband (ibid).

[11] Henry states however in her interview with Chibnall that Cresswell's input was extremely limited. Lee Thompson despised Cresswell and it was Henry and Lee Thompson who primarily wrote the screenplay although Cresswell retained his writing credit (Chibnall, 2000: 74-5).

The Weak and the Wicked received significant press interest prior to its release, partly because the Home Office disapproved of its subject matter, but also because of its casting of Diana Dors. I will only briefly introduce Dors' star image here as she receives a more comprehensive discussion in my analysis of *Yield to the Night*. Dors was a renowned sex symbol of the period, whose star persona exuded a voracious sexuality and who was famed for an equally flamboyant personal life. Her casting as a female convict and her appearance in *The Weak and the Wicked* in utilitarian prison clothing was antithetical to her usual star image and as such attracted a great deal of interest. *Picturegoer* printed a one-page article on Dors' role in the film just prior to its release. Entitled 'DORS Deglamorized' it contrasted a glamour shot of Dors with one of her behind bars wearing prison clothing (Andrew Walton, 6 Feb. 1954: 25). The article set up an opposition between glamour and serious acting, and suggested that Dors had to forgo the former to be considered as a contender for the latter. The exposure of Dors as deglamorized became, as Chibnall comments, the 'key publicity motif' for the film (2000: 63). What was at stake however was far more than just the opportunity to see Dors without make-up because her star persona evoked a number of contradictory and ambivalent responses due to the position she held in the post-war cultural imaginary.

The mixed reviews that the film received are a good illustration of the tradition in British film criticism that prioritised realism over melodrama and notions of 'excess,' which I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis. Broadsheet newspapers such as *The Times* criticised what they considered the film's unsuccessful attempt to marry comedy with social realism, whilst other publications such as *The Daily Worker* and *The New Statesman* considered it a somewhat 'sanitised' version of prison life (Chibnall, 2000: 67-9). The implicit critical approach of these publications is that realism is the appropriate medium for exploring such concerns. The faults of the film are found, for these critics, to lie in its

dilution of realism as an aesthetic approach, whether that be through comedy or a lack of verisimilitude. In contrast, reviews of the film in publications which were more attuned to popular audience taste, *Picturegoer* and *KineWeekly* for example, were more favourable. For *Picturegoer* the film is authentic because, in combining elements of 'comedy and romance and melodrama' (27 Feb. 1954) it achieves a realistic portrayal of prison life. *KineWeekly* argues that the film 'artfully avoids the purely documentary approach' and 'shrewdly embellishes revealing fact ... with colourful fiction' (14 Jan. 1954). Implicit to these arguments is that the strength of the film is found in the skilful marriage of realism and broadly melodramatic elements. Indeed there is a recognition that the traditions of documentary and realism do not produce box office material. The understanding of realism used by *KineWeekly* and *Picturegoer* is different to that employed by broadsheet publications. For the former, 'realism' is whether something is 'true to life' and melodrama can be an appropriate tool for achieving this, for the latter realism is an aesthetic approach and the only one which can successfully achieve verisimilitude, therefore it must eschew melodrama. *KineWeekly's* assessment of the film as 'an arresting and highly entertaining piece of eminently saleable screen merchandise' (14 Jan. 1954) appears to have been borne out by the response of audiences, who generally received the film well, and box office returns, which were good (Porter, 2000: 161).

The central character of the film is Jean Raymond (Glynis Johns)[12] who is imprisoned for fraud and who, during the course of the narrative, is introduced to other fellow prisoners, the 'weak and the wicked.' Betty Brown (Diana Dors) is imprisoned for handling stolen

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[12] Johns starred in another gambling drama *Third Time Lucky* (d. Gordon Parry, 1948) as a young woman Joan who functions as a lucky mascot for professional gambler Lucky (Dermot Walsh). Although Johns' character professes no interest in gambling, she accompanies Lucky to expensive clubs and in so doing acquires the necessary wardrobe of beautiful clothes. This rise in class status is short-lived as Lucky's fortunes soon deteriorate, leaving him open to blackmail and violence. The film culminates in his non-fatal shooting and he is eventually redeemed by Joan's love for him, although the excitement associated with gambling remains unresolved. Johns' character in *The Weak and the Wicked* is the antithesis of her role in *Third Time Lucky*. In *The Weak and the Wicked* she plays the 'male' role and although the love of a good man is thought to save the errant woman the excitement of gambling remains.

goods, Babs (Jane Hylton) for child neglect, Nellie Baden (Olive Sloane) for shoplifting and Millie (Athene Seyler) for blackmail. The film opens with Jean receiving her prison sentence from the court followed by a period of incarceration in a traditional prison before being moved (with Betty) to an open prison The Grange. Each woman recalls her story in a flashback sequence, with each individual tale being recounted within the context of everyday prison life which comprises activities such as sewing, visits to church and exercise in the prison yard. The gendered nature of incarceration is evidenced by the weighing, bathing and medical inspections the women are subjected to, processes which infantilize them.[13] The gender dynamic extends to an exploration of the problematic of mothering in a prison context and the difficulties faced by women who have to give up their babies at nine months old.

The types of crimes that have led the women to prison are remarkably similar to those which Pollak – as discussed in the previous chapter in this thesis - stated were particularly feminine and prone to under-reporting. The title of the film suggests that there are two types of female criminals and during the course of the narrative we must assess whether the female protagonists are 'wicked', that is, innately bad, or merely 'weak' and therefore led astray by circumstances. Many of their crimes are committed either in direct relation to men or as a result of a patriarchal order that is unsympathetic towards the needs of women. Betty for example perjures herself to protect her worthless boyfriend Norman who allows her to be imprisoned for his crime. Babs leaves her children unattended at night whilst she goes dancing with Joe. One of the children dies and Babs is imprisoned for neglect. Babs narrates her tale to Jean.

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[13] The prolonged inspections to which the women are subjected appears to be a particular feature of the women in prison sub-genre. In Joseph Losey's *The Criminal* (1960) for example the male protagonist Bannion is only briefly shown bare-chested as he exchanges his personal clothes for prison issue at the start of his sentence. Whilst the scene where signifiers of freedom and individuality (clothes and personal belongings) are exchanged for those of conformity, utility and incarceration is a recurring feature of the prison genre, films with female prisoners seem to place greater emphasis on inspecting the women, mechanisms which infantilise them.

I'm no good really Jean, I like men too much. I really loved Jim. I'd have been all right if he'd been good to me. I think I was out of my mind when he went off with that other woman. I couldn't stand being alone night after night. Then Joe came along, he was good to me and kind.

It does not require much reading against the grain to see that Babs' situation offers a comment on the difficulties of mothering, particularly with the absence of adequate support services. Abandoned by her husband shortly after giving birth Joe represents the possibility of companionship and fun to Babs. Indeed it is Joe who encourages Babs to leave her children and, despite her initial protests, she acquiesces, fully aware that she will lose the man if she puts the children before him. The baby's death from choking (which would probably be classified today as a cot-death) would not necessarily have been prevented had Babs stayed in for the evening. It is assumed however by Babs, her neighbours and the legal system that Babs' absence led directly to the baby's death and the response of the judge is to imprison Babs. Thus her grief at the loss of one child is compounded by enforced separation from the other. Within the logic of the narrative however, Babs is punished because, in her own words, she likes men too much and pursues her desires at the expense of her children. Indeed she is shown to have internalised the demands of patriarchally-defined maternity and believes herself to be a 'wicked' person.[14] Her female neighbours pass judgement on her, articulating the commonly-held view that 'women like her deserve to hang.' Babs however is portrayed in a sympathetic light. She is weak rather than wicked, and indeed her weakness is as much a symptom of circumstance as of some inherent character flaw. Her repeated attempts to persuade Joe to

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[14] Feminist theory however would challenge that assumption and argue that patriarchal society makes unreasonable demands of women with children by expecting them to be solely devoted to their offspring at the expense of their own needs and desires, even when the practical implications of that devotion are untenable.

bring her home are juxtaposed with images of her enjoying dancing, drinking and company thus capturing, in filmic terms, the tension between duty and pleasure. Indeed Babs' desire for something from her life in addition to motherhood is presented as understandable and is validated. The film presents an awful warning about what can happen if mothers fail to meet the needs of their children but, rather than castigate Babs wholeheartedly, does illustrate some of the difficulties of meeting those needs and how they stand in opposition to the needs of the mother.

In the section I will primarily discuss the central character Jean and the process of her rehabilitation. She is jailed for committing fraud, a crime which Pollak does not list as essentially female, but which is grounded in duplicity, a characteristic that Pollak does consider to be an integral component of woman's nature. Jean is imprisoned for ostensibly making a false claim to an insurance company regarding a 'lost' gold cigarette case.[15] She has in fact been framed by the owner of a gambling club to whom she owes money. Jean's real crime, however, is her failure to take her proper place in the gendered social economy and the film is about her rehabilitation and her acceptance of her proper role. Her characterisation suggests Thomas' thesis of the 'unadjusted girl' as her desires for excitement and something other than marriage are criminalised. Her weakness is gambling, an activity that initially takes priority over her relationship with her boyfriend Michael (John Gregson), a doctor, towards whom she is decidedly ambivalent. At the opening of Jean's flashback sequence Michael rails against her when he receives his medical degree and wants to celebrate but she refuses to abandon her plans for an evening visit to the casino. He calls her a 'miserable, self-centred little weakling.' Jean's desire for the danger and excitement of gambling is far stronger than any hold Michael has over her

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[15] Indeed it is interesting that it is a cigarette case that plays a central role in framing Jean. I discuss cigarettes and smoking in Chapter 5 where I argue that they function as symbols of streetwise adulthood, a 'non-naïve' femininity. The gold cigarette case, as an expensive commodity item, signifies Jean's economic

and the prospect of being a doctor's wife cannot compete with the thrill of the roulette wheel. Her good home and education to which the judge refers later does not equip her for anything other than middle-class marriage, a state that she rejects. As a woman without family, trustworthy friends or the means to support herself, she is expendable and the perfect foil through which to explore the themes of punishment and rehabilitation. Indeed Jean's status as an expendable female is suggested at the start of the film when she stands in the dock in court to receive her verdict and the camera focuses on her hands. We see her only white gloves and wristwatch as her gloved hands, divorced from her body, grip the bar whilst sentence is passed. This brief shot prefigures the more detailed shots of isolated pieces of the female body which are found in *Yield to the Night*. For Chibnall this 'fragmentation of body parts' is symbolic of the 'destruction ... of the female body' and the 'refusal to see women as complete individuals' (2000: 100). In *The Weak and the Wicked* the brief portrayal of Jean's fragmented body at the start of the film suggests her as an incomplete woman in normative terms, that is, one without husband, family, or liberty.[16]

The lesson that Jean must learn in the course of the film is to be selfless, altruistic and to reconcile herself to the demands of domesticity. The prison staff play an important role in facilitating the conversion of Jean and the other female inmates. There are however important gendered differences between the male prison chaplain and the female governor of The Grange. Within the women in prison sub-genre Morey argues that either the male prison chaplain or doctor must bring about the female inmate's conversion. In *The Weak and the Wicked* the prison chaplain is instrumental in effecting Jean's transformation. He visits her early in her sentence and advises her not to wait too long before marrying Michael. His visit is at Michael's request and in this respect the chaplain mediates

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capital and class status but it also indicates her status as a 'knowing' woman and perhaps hints at a weaknesses for the glamorous things in life.

between the public and the private spheres. Indeed the chaplain functions in some respects as Michael's proxy, whose status as a doctor duplicates the gendered paradigm of the patient(prisoner)/doctor that I introduced earlier. The chaplain has a very favourable opinion of Michael, which he shares with Jean and in so doing, encourages her to accept Michael and matrimony. In this respect the chaplain fulfils one of the functions identified by Morey in that he effects the transition of the inmate from prison to husband. The appearance of the chaplain at the beginning of Jean's period of incarceration defines him as a driving force in guiding her towards the appropriate path, facilitating the process of Jean's transition from divergent to normative femininity.

In contrast the female Governor of The Grange fulfils a different function. When Jean arrives at the open prison she is already on the path to normative femininity. The Governor's role is to advocate the prison's philosophy, 'an experiment based on mutual trust', and to test Jean to see if she is capable of adhering to the path, a test that is predominantly played out during Jean's visit to the local town. The Governor's role is in many respects merely one of policing, whilst the chaplain's role is that of guide and mentor. The Governor functions as a headmistress whose purpose is to keep recalcitrant pupils in check.[17] The gendered differences of the prison staff seem to offer some support to Morey's statement that, within the women-in-prison sub-genre, it is men who are primarily responsible for curing divergent femininity and in doing so the fundamental importance of the male is re-established.[18]

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[16] Chibnall's remarks do seem relevant for this reading of *The Weak and the Wicked*. In contrast, Stacey's work on female spectatorship, envy and fascination, offers a more fruitful analysis of the fragmentation of the body in *Yield to the Night*.

[17] This is probably entirely intentional as Henry in her novel *Who Lie in Gaol* comments that the open prison Askham Grange had the 'atmosphere ... of a girls' school' with the Governor taking the role of 'remarkable headmistress' (1952: 142).

[18] This suggests how female criminality and rehabilitation is gendered. Female criminals can be rehabilitated by male carers but in male prison dramas male prisoners cannot be rehabilitated by female carers.

One of the essential lessons of rehabilitation which Jean must learn is that of altruism. Her recognition of the values of altruism commences with the chaplain's visit to whom she confides, 'to live for somebody else is the finest thing in the world ... I want to make him [Michael] a good wife.' Jean appears to be taking the right path towards normative femininity and her new altruism is quickly demonstrated when she disarms a female prisoner Tina intent on attacking an officer, PO Arnold, and is wounded in the scuffle. She is learning to live for others. Her relationship with Michael however is much more ambiguous and appears to dramatise a number of narrative contradictions. Both characters are decidedly changeable in their relations with each other. Their relationship is initially lukewarm with both being ambivalent towards the needs of the other. Following her discussion with the chaplain Jean is then delighted by Michael's unexpected visit[19] but her delight soon turns to disappointment when Michael reveals there is a possible job for him in Rhodesia, but only as a single man. It is at this point that Jean is ostensibly altruistic and encourages Michael to apply. She states that she is unsure of their relationship and whether or not an ex-jailbird would make him an appropriate wife. It is unclear whether she says this to mask her disappointment at losing Michael or whether it is what she truly feels. If it is the former then she passes the test and her alleged altruism is rewarded when Michael says he will decline the Rhodesia opportunity and their meeting ends with a passionate kiss. Within the logic of the narrative learning to live for others is rewarded by the return of love.[20] Michael however subsequently changes his mind and takes up the job offer. This ambiguity in relation to employment is linked to the feelings that the couple have for each other. Jean's feelings towards Michael remain uncertain throughout the film.

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[19] The chaplain's visit to Jean is allegedly necessitated by Michael's inability to visit Jean due to a job interview. This is a device to allow narrative space for the chaplain's discourse. That Michael then changes his mind and turns up on visitor's day has the inadvertent effect of further demonstrating his changeable nature.

[20] It is noteworthy that Michael rejects Rhodesia and takes up a job most probably in the new NHS, having already worked at a new health centre in Guildford. For Michael also altruism is rewarded.

Despite the lessons in altruism and its supposed benefits, there is no evidence to suggest that Jean's predilection for gambling and danger has necessarily been resolved by her incarceration and the process of rehabilitation. Indeed the whole issue of gambling for money is ostensibly side-stepped after Jean's imprisonment. Part of the attraction of gambling is the desire for risk-taking and the associated thrill of danger and excitement. Indeed the allure of gambling is clearly evident at the start of Jean's flashback sequence which locates her in an upmarket casino beautifully attired in a glamorous evening-dress accessorised with expensive jewellery. One of the lessons of the film is that Jean's desire for risk-taking, previously fulfilled through gambling for money, must be channelled into an appropriate, socially acceptable medium. An aspect of Jean's rehabilitation is to learn to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate risk-taking and in so doing to exercise judgement, a point to which I shall return in my discussion of Jean's relationship with Betty.

The film is inconsistent in its treatment of the theme of rehabilitation. Jean claims in her discussion with Michael that the experience of being in jail cannot be easily overcome, it is something that 'stamps you.' Her concern that an ex-jail-bird cannot make a good wife suggests a belief in an opposition between female criminality and normative femininity.[21] Later on Jean and Betty are allowed a day visit to a local town just prior to Jean's release. Jean encourages Betty to ask a policeman the time to prove they are normal women with nothing to fear, stating, 'we haven't got arrows stamped all over us.' This raises questions about whether female prisoners can pass convincingly as 'normal women.' Indeed in the prison hospital Babs tells a pregnant woman Andi than she will be transferred to a regular hospital to have her baby and will be given a 'pretty night-dress' to wear so that 'no-one

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[21] This issue is one that also emerges in the characterisation of Lily in *Stolen Face*. The fact that Lily continues with her criminal activities after her operation is used to suggest she is innately bad and cannot be successfully rehabilitated. This undermines the film's earlier claim that female criminality is linked to facial disfigurement and can be corrected.

will know you are any different.' The suggestion however is that difference goes beyond clothes. The central issue is whether female prisoners are marked as different from 'normal' women: whether they are 'stamped' or 'not stamped.' Difference occurs on two levels: the experience of prison and what brought the women to prison in the first place. The suggestion is that the prison experience can be transcended through the processes of rehabilitation. To rehabilitate divergent women they must be fitted for domesticity and the mechanisms that are offered to the women to integrate them into society suggest a social constructionist account of gender. The chaplain counsels Jean to accept heterosexual marriage and self-abnegation and the ethos of The Grange is to ensure that 'women are fitted for their return to the world.' This is achieved through acquiring 'useful' domestic skills such as dress-making, leatherwork and knitting: activities associated with normative femininity. In this respect the film suggests Lloyd's thesis of 'feminization as proof of normalization' (1995: 156). Lloyd argues that women incarcerated in special hospitals have to demonstrate their conformity to stereotypes of femininity as proof that their condition is improving. The distinction between prisons and special hospitals is not so great, bearing in mind that women who commit crimes are more likely than men to be referred for psychiatric investigation, and the 'medical trope' that is associated with the female prison drama. In *The Weak and the Wicked* learning the attributes of normative femininity such as heterosexual marriage and housewifery skills are necessary to secure remission and release. It is through these socialisation mechanisms that it is expected that the women be will rehabilitated both by men and for men to take their proper place in the gendered economy.

What remains however is the question of why these particular women are in prison and the answers that are given draw on a biological model of gender, although this by no means treated in a consistent manner. Towards the end of the film Jean argues with the Governor

of The Grange, stating, 'I'm a woman too ... there are no different prisoners,' a statement made to refute the Governor's implication that Jean's class marks her as different to the other inmates. Harper argues that this suggests that the inmates have an 'essential femininity' and that 'gender binds them together' (2000: 82). In Chapter 3 I suggested that female criminality was understood with reference to biology in part because of the dominance of biological models for understanding female subjectivity more generally. In *The Weak and the Wicked* the use of biological essentialist models can be read as suggesting a difference between normative and divergent femininity which implies that there are some things which cannot be so readily transcended through social constructionist models which advocate, for example, marriage. There remains a lingering doubt that divergence is never completely contained which suggests the limits of rehabilitation. Jean's statement, 'there are no different prisoners,' suggests a belief that all prisoners are the same, irrespective of class, <u>and</u> that they are different from 'normal women.'

An alternative reading however of this apparently straightforward message of essential femininity can be drawn when consideration is given to the framing of this scene. Slanted camera angles are used in this scene in the depiction of Jean (see still 12 overleaf). Lee Thompson's films are recognisable by their use of skewed camera angles and *mise-en-scène* whereby characters are shot through objects that act as barriers and prevent the spectator from obtaining a clear view.[22] Hill argues that this creates a 'dissonance between subject-matter and style' (1986: 98).[23] Applying Hill's argument to the scene between

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[22] This style is clearly evident in later films such as *Yield to the Night* and *Woman in a Dressing Gown* and will be discussed in more detail in my analysis of those films.

[23] This approach is one often associated with melodrama where directors such as Douglas Sirk would make evocative use of *mise-en-scène* to subvert the film's overt ideological message. The use of such a strategy in a film identified as a social realist text is interesting. Genres are never discrete entities and in the introduction to this chapter I drew on the work of Landy which identified the melodramatic elements of social realism. The camera-work in this scene and Jean's emotional outburst may be read as evocative of the melodramatic moments that critics writing for publications such as *The Times* thought undermined the realism of the film. Conversely it is these moments which eschew a documentary approach, something which *KineWeekly* suggested broadened the popular appeal of such a film through its marriage of realism and melodrama.

Jean and the Governor suggests that there is a disjuncture between what is spoken and what is thought or felt. Jean's speech is an emotional outburst, coming at the end of a film where emotion has, for the main part, been kept under a tight rein. Is Jean's fear that she is indeed the same as the other prisoners, no better or worse, and therefore marked as different from 'normal' women? Alternatively, does the scene undermine the message of essential femininity and suggest that all prisoners are not the same and that Jean is different, in part because of her class background?

Still 12. Glynis Johns as Jean in *The Weak and the Wicked* (1954)

Answers to this paradox can be found by considering the process of Jean's rehabilitation which appears, in some respects, to undermine the message that all women are the same. Jean's difference comes from her role as mediator between the other women. Morey's argument is that only men in their roles as either prison doctor or chaplain can bring about women's transformation to normative femininity. Whilst I have demonstrated that it is the male prison chaplain who effects Jean's transformation, Jean does have a central role within the narrative in facilitating the 'cure' of other women and, in so doing, learn the

values of altruism. This is most evident in her relationship with Betty Brown whom Jean counsels and to whom she teaches the values of trust and honour.[24] It is through her relationship with Betty that Jean learns to exercise her own judgement in differentiating between appropriate and inappropriate risk-taking. Further her role as mediator has a class dynamic, reconciling the working-class Betty to middle-class norms.

Jean jeopardises her own remission when she takes Betty with her on her trip to town. The risk is that Betty will abscond and indeed we are led to believe that she has done so. Betty's return validates both Jean's altruism and the Governor's honour system. Jean learns that appropriate risk-taking is acceptable; her gamble with Betty pays dividends whilst gambling for money does not. Jean's role as mediator would appear to offer a challenge to Morey's thesis that, within the women-in-prison sub genre, only men can transform women. It is important to consider however whether the mediating role that divergent women can play for each other is one that ultimately reconciles them to the values of normative femininity. Gilbert and Gubar, in their feminist analysis of nineteenth-century female-authored literature, argue that certain female characters can act as '[a]n agent of patriarchy' (1984: 326). In their analysis of *Jane Eyre* they argue that the character of Grace Poole, who cares for Rochester's first wife Bertha, illustrates that '[w]omen in Jane's world, acting as agents for men, may be the keepers of women. But both keepers and prisoners are bound by the same chains' (1984: 351). Women do men's patriarchal bidding and reconcile other women to their appropriate gendered place in the patriarchal order. In relation to Jean Raymond it seems that her role as mediator for other women does not extend to challenging the patriarchal middle-class order but to accepting one's place within it. Jean therefore takes an active role but only as an 'agent of patriarchy' and, in relation to post-war society, her character suggests a recognition of

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[24] It is also demonstrated by her role as mediator in the prison hospital and in her first act of altruism, when she prevents Tina from attacking PO Arnold.

some of the changes in relation to gender roles whilst the patriarchal framework remains largely unchallenged.

I have suggested that *The Weak and the Wicked* was read by some contemporary critics as a 'sanitised' account of prison life with most of the sexual elements from the novel removed. What are present in Henry's novel but omitted from the film are 'crimes' of a sexual nature such as abortion and prostitution. Reference, furthermore, to the sexually transmitted infections of the inmates are removed (in the novel Betty Brown has venereal disease), as are the internal examinations for STIs carried out on inmates and any reference to menstruation and the need for sanitary towels. Henry discusses in some detail lesbianism in the novel and several pages are devoted to exploring both the differing attitudes held by the inmates towards what are termed 'unnatural practices' and Henry's own opinions. This dynamic is largely excised in the film and references, such as they are, are oblique. The only evidence of same-sex desire comes in the characterisation of PO Arnold (Joyce Heron) who is presented as sadistic and predatory (see still 13 below).

Still 13. Arnold's (Joyce Heron) predatory gaze at Miriam (Josephine Griffin)

Arnold's designs on the new young blond inmate are evident in the scene where the women choose shoes after bathing. Silencing Betty's chatter to Jean, Arnold homes in on Miriam (Josephine Griffin) who, unlike either Jean or Betty, is young, friendless and obviously frightened. Arnold approaches Miriam and their respective faces are depicted in close-up, in profile, facing each other. Their profiles are momentarily static before Miriam turns away, eyes cast down and looking at the shoes whilst Arnold continues to stare at her. The shot suggests an intimate moment between the two women reminiscent of a love-scene and a precursor to kissing. The dynamics between PO Arnold and Miriam are alluded to in two further scenes but are not explored in any detail in the film.[25] Morey argues in her analysis of American women-in-prison films that lesbianism is 'raised and dismissed almost simultaneously' in only one of the four films she discusses (1995: 86). For Morey this is indicative of the fact that 'women have no value for themselves ... or for each other' (ibid). Whilst I have demonstrated that Jean in *The Weak and the Wicked* does have some value for her peers in her role as mediator, and particularly in her relationship with Betty, this value does not extend to challenge hegemonic sexuality.

Indeed the dominance of heterosexuality is evidenced by the close of the film. Michael's departure for Rhodesia occurred at the point where Jean transferred to The Grange and the audience is led to believe that no future exists for Jean and Michael. Upon her release from The Grange however Jean is greeted by Michael who, having left his job, promises a life together for the couple, something to which Jean readily acquiesces. This ending has been criticised as, broadly-speaking, unrealistic. Landy argues that Michael's return is 'totally unmotivated' (1991: 455), its function being to deny the potential and importance

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[25] Miriam is befriended by Tina (Simone Silva) a relationship that annoys Arnold. Arnold first tries to warn Miriam that Tina is a trouble-maker and to avoid her. When this fails to terminate the friendship she tries to intimidate Tina, first threatening her with punitive measures and later sabotaging her dress-work, an action that causes Tina to lunge at Arnold with a pair of scissors, at which point Jean intervenes and contains the confrontation. It does not require much reading against the grain to see Arnold as a sexual predator and her actions towards Tina motivated by sexual jealousy. Indeed Arnold conforms to the archetypal negative

of supportive same-sex relationships for women. Commentators at the time found the ending unpalatable. *KineWeekly* suggested '[t]he fade-out is perhaps a trifle confected' (14 Jan. 1954) whilst for *Picturegoer* '[t]he trite ending is too pat for the picture's good' (27 Feb. 1954). On one level these arguments have a certain amount of validity but it is possible to draw an alternative reading. In Chapter 7 I discuss the ironic use of music in *Woman in a Dressing Gown* and its undermining of a dominant ideological position, a strategy that is a feature of the subversive potential of melodrama. It is possible to read the ending of *The Weak and the Wicked* in the same way. Indeed it so unconvincing that it implodes upon itself and in doing so offers itself as a comment on the narrative convention of the 'happy ending' and the difficulties of thinking about gender relations outside the heterosexual paradigm. This argument is further supported by the uncertainty that is a characteristic of the couples' relationship throughout the film. That both Michael and Jean frequently change their minds in relation to the other suggests they are skittish and inconsistent, and this ambiguity casts a shadow over the ending. Indeed, as I have suggested, Jean's uncertainty towards Michael extends to questions about rehabilitation, the nature of female criminality, and whether learning the values of appropriate risk-taking can contain the excitement associated with inappropriate gambling. The unconvincing manner in which the film ends suggests that many of the issues that the film has raised remain unresolved.

I have argued in my analysis of *The Weak and the Wicked* that Jean offers something of a challenge to Morey's argument by acting as a mediator for the other women, but that this role however is largely one which supports the class-bound patriarchal framework and women's role within it. In *Yield to the Night* rehabilitation is not an option for the central character Mary Hilton and the role of the prison staff is to attempt to reconcile her to her

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stereotype of the lesbian, 'vindictive ... and "unnatural"' (Bourne, 1996: 117) a characterisation which depicts same-sex desire as a disruptive not supportive force.

death. Female desire and divergent femininity is more in evidence and it is to these, and other, themes that I shall now turn.

Any analysis of *Yield to the Night* must contextualise that film through a discussion of the Ruth Ellis case. There is no claim to be made that the film is directly based on the case of Ellis as Henry's novel was published in 1954, the year prior to Ellis' execution. The film however was released a year after Ellis was hanged, so public response to the film will have been shaped by that case (Harper, 2000: 83). Ellis' place in the history books of the infamous was secured when she became the last woman to be hanged in Britain after being convicted of fatally shooting her male lover. Her execution took place on July 13th 1955 and discussion surrounding her death was part of a wider public debate regarding the use of the death penalty in the UK. Ellis' case was one of three high profile murder cases in the mid-1950s that were debated in relation to the question of capital punishment and its abolition.[26] The first two cases, Bentley and Evans, were of interest because doubts were raised about whether or not the two men were actually guilty of the crime for which they were executed. In contrast there was no doubt that Ellis had murdered her lover David Blakely but her case was particularly newsworthy because she was young, female, blond and sexually active. Ellis' case fulfilled the desire for public titillation and salacious gossip, whilst her appearance as a physically attractive young woman gave rise to public disquiet at the prospect of her execution.

Ellis readily confessed to the killing but, as Kennedy argues in her discussion of the case, what was also on trial was Ellis' morality (1992: 191). As a divorced mother who was sexually active and who held a hostess job in a night-club, it seems that Ellis was also punished for her divergent femininity. Chadder argues that this divergence was displayed

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[26] Christoph argues that the on-going debate about capital punishment repeatedly made reference to the cases of Bentley and Evans, both in the House of Commons and in the popular press (1962: 104).

in the courtroom where Ellis appeared in a smart tailored suit, with coiffured hair and wearing high heels (1999: 71-2).[27] Her image was at odds with the expectation of contrite femininity and Chadder concludes that Ellis was hanged in part for her 'transgressive image' (1999: 72). It seems that there were contradictory elements to the Ellis case. Disapproval of her actions, image and life-style coupled with public discomfort at implementing the death penalty in her case. Such contradictory elements perhaps suggest something of the uncertainties and ambiguity surrounding femininity in the post-war period.

Yield to the Night is the story of Mary Hilton (Diana Dors), a young woman convicted of murder and sentenced to death. The film takes place in prison, predominantly in Mary's cell, as she waits for her death sentence to be administered. Mary's voice-over narrates, her thoughts and feelings laid bare for the audience.[28] Flashbacks are used to tell the events of Mary's life that led to her conviction: her love affair with Jim Lancaster, his infatuation with another woman Lucy Carpenter, his suicide when Lucy rejects him and Mary's subsequent shooting of Lucy whom she holds responsible for Jim's death. The film ends with Mary being led away for execution. Directed by J. Lee Thompson and adapted from Joan Henry's novel *Yield to the Night*, it was the stated intention of Lee Thompson and Henry to produce something that directly entered the public debate about capital punishment.[29] Dors was cast at the insistence of Lee Thompson and in so doing, the 'DORS Deglamorized' theme was continued. Both the populist and 'high-brow' press

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[27] Chadder draws on the journalistic reconstruction of Ellis' case by Laurence Marks and Toby Van Den Bergh (1977).

[28] Female voice-over is rare in both British and American cinema of the period. Where it is present, in *Mildred Pierce* (1945) for example, it is later revealed to be false by the male detective investigating the death of Monty and the male perspective therefore dominates. In *Yield to the Night* however Mary narrates her own story without apology or contradiction from others, something which suggests her agency in relation to her life.

[29] Chibnall draws on his interview with Joan Henry who recalls that she wrote the novel after discussions with Lee Thompson about the subject of capital punishment. The intention was to create a character that was guilty and without remorse but whose execution would elicit disgust at the practice of capital punishment (2000: 73-4).

commended the film for engaging with such subject matter. *Sight and Sound*, although finding fault with the success with which the film renders its theme, does praise it for its bravery in tackling such a difficult subject (Marlow, 1956: 35). *KineWeekly* praises both Dors' performance and the prison setting, suggesting that both successfully achieve verisimilitude in relation to the theme. Furthermore *KineWeekly's* review considers the film to be a 'prison melodrama, approached from the distaff side' and that one of the 'points of appeal' of the film is its 'strong feminine angle' (14 June 1956: 14). Such comments from a publication in tune with popular taste identifies the potential appeal of the film to female audience members, although the casting of Dors, as I shall demonstrate, suggests the very complex nature of this appeal.

Geraghty argues that the 'sex symbol' image is created through both film and publicity material, and the melodrama of the actress's personal life (1986: 341). Dors was renowned for her melodramatic and flamboyant personal life. She graduated from teenage beauty queen through small film parts to become by the early 1950s one of the central figures in British cinema. Three times married, to largely 'unsuitable' men, she was a frequent feature in the popular press who reported her activities with relish (Landy, 2001: 147). She was infamous for spending large sums of money on extravagantly consumerist items such as Cadillacs[30] and one of her most famous publicity stunts was gliding down the grand canal at the 1954 Venice Film Festival wearing a 'mink' bikini (Cook, 2001: 172).[31] The sex symbol image, for Geraghty, combines 'contradictory ideas of vulnerability and knowingness' in relation to her sexuality (1986: 341). Her knowingness is attributed to her active sexuality whilst her vulnerability is caused by that very same sexuality which, Geraghty argues, is 'something which flows through them and is beyond their control'

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[30] In 1954 Dors' public displays of consumption led to questions being raised about her in the House of Commons (Williams, 2003: 131). *Picturegoer* ran an article on Dors after the House of Commons incident entitled 'Where Does Your Money Go?' (Ernie Player, November 27 1954).

(1986: 342), a statement which suggests something of the limits, in relation to agency and responsibility, of the sex symbol. Sex symbols however are not interchangeable and Dors was certainly more 'knowing ... than vulnerable' by the mid 1950s (Geraghty, 1986: 343). Indeed it is Dors' very 'knowingness,' her ability to skilfully (and enjoyably) manipulate her star image, and the press response to it, that marks her as different from other 1950s sex symbols such as Marilyn Monroe whose vulnerability made her version of female sexuality less threatening. Dors is in fact closer to Mae West in her awareness of her own star image, a comparison recognised by writers at the time (Walton, 1954: 25). An essential ingredient of this image was what has been varyingly described as 'good, honest earthiness' (Walton, 1954: 25), 'earthy cheerful' (Braun, 1973: 22) and 'Hogarthian earthiness' (Brien cited in Geraghty, 1986: 345). Dors was certainly imagined (irrespective of her own class background) as working-class and was frequently cast in working-class roles displaying an active sexuality and a desire for a 'good time.' Indeed it was this that marked her a different to other British actresses of the period such as Glynis Johns and Phyllis Calvert whom, as Geraghty argues 'were middle-class in performance, accent and role' (1986: 345). Dors then was characterised as a glamorous figure with both experience and a degree of autonomy, an extravagant consumer who was overtly sexual and whose casting in working-class roles made her 'of the people.'

Dors was unique in the particular place she held in the post-war cultural imaginary. Cook argues that the Dors image was linked to 'cultural discourses around gender, sexuality and modernity in which she becomes a key figure, both idolised and despised, literally embodying the aspirations and anxieties of a society in transition' (2001: 168). Those aspirations (dependent upon one's perspective) are, broadly speaking, for class movement, affluence, and a breaking down of class barriers whilst the anxieties are those associated

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[31] The mink bikini was in fact made of rabbit fur and was designed by Julie Harris a British costume designer who frequently worked on British films and who specialised in glamorous dress (Harper, 2000: 215).

with overt consumerism, creeping 'Americanisation' and the associated destruction of traditional values (ibid). The aspirations for class movement are manifested, Geraghty suggests, in the fact that Dors often played characters 'who want more from life than their apportioned lot and resent others who have escaped boredom and poverty' (1986: 345). Dors image furthermore as a 'blonde bombshell' complete with peroxide blonde hair, obvious use of make-up and voluptuous figure, suggests conspicuous consumption which itself signals a desire for materialism and social mobility. It is for these very reasons that Dors attracted such mixed responses. Cook argues that Dors 'inspired profound ambivalence in the media' (2001: 167) whilst Harper comments that 'Dors was a sort of Lady Docker of the screen, eliciting Schadenfreude responses of disapproval and envy' (2000: 98). As an intelligent and publicity astute actress she consistently undermined any attempts to dismiss her because of her sex symbol status. Her obvious delight at the success of her own image[32] inevitably gave rise to some jealousy in a post-war society where affluence was unevenly distributed.[33] Geraghty (1986: 345) and Landy (2001: 148) both suggest that Dors' popularity was in part due to her cross-class appeal but this popularity, not surprisingly, was not uniform. In Harper and Porter's article, 'Cinema Audience Taste in 1950s Britain' Dors is cited by teenage boys as both their favourite and least favourite movie star, whilst for teenage girls she was 'the most loathed' female star (1999: 73),[34] responses which capture some of the ambivalent feelings associated with Dors.

It is evident that these complex and contradictory meanings are utilised in casting decisions and publicity material for both *The Weak and the Wicked* and *Yield to the Night*. *The Weak*

[32] Indeed Harper quotes Dors as saying 'to be looked at as if you were a chocolate éclair does wonders for a girl's ego' (2000: 98).
[33] The position Dors holds in British culture is more complex that I am able to do justice to in this thesis. In addition to discourses of affluence Dors also challenges norms of morality and was outspoken against the hypocrisy of the British establishment (Cook, 2001: 172-5).
[34] Harper and Porter draw on a sociological study of adolescent taste, published in 1961, to inform their arguments about the response of teenagers to specific movie stars.

and the Wicked inaugurates the 'DORS Deglamorized' theme and its publicity trades on the opposition between Dors' usual glamorous star image and her casting as a convict. Part of the attraction of the film is the opportunity to see Dors' down-trodden and stripped of her glamorous image. In a similar view *Yield to the Night*, which the trade press imagined would appeal to female cinema-goers, continues the deglamorization theme. As Ruth Ellis before her, Diana Dors in her role as Mary Hilton evokes contradictory feelings and perhaps what Mary/Dors is punished for is her lifestyle and morality. Indeed, as Landy comments, the use of flashback sequences to intercut prison scenes with those of Mary's former life gives the impression that 'the punishment precedes the crime or rather, that the punishment is not so much for the act of murder' (2001: 154) but for Mary's transgressive femininity. Certainly Dors' casting aided publicity for the film which used standard glamour shots of Dors to promote her in a role where she is devoid of glamour for a significant proportion of the narrative. This was a deliberate choice by ABPC whose policy for the film was to 'market the contrast between the two "Dianas"' (Chibnall, 2000: 78) and in doing so offer the opportunity to see an actress who was famed for her glamour looking downtrodden.

In my analysis of the film I shall first consider how the opening sequence suggests a particular relationship between Mary and the wider society. I shall then touch briefly on the genre conventions of the film before exploring the characterisation of Mary Hilton in the light of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, the type of masculinity inhabited by Jim Lancaster, and the relationship between the two characters. To conclude, I will return to the question of what pleasures the film may have offered contemporary audiences, particularly female spectators, and draw on Stacey's work on stars to posit a different understanding of the fragmented female body and its relationship to commodity consumption.

The opening sequence of the film can certainly be read as suggesting Mary Hilton/Dors as a woman alienated from mainstream society, and it demonstrates both Lee Thompson's cinematic style and the dominant patterns of feet, shoes and hands that are repeated throughout the film. Mary makes her way across London to the mews cottage of Lucy Carpenter where, upon Lucy's arrival, Mary promptly shoots and kills her. The sequence, three minutes long and comprising 41 edits, demonstrates Lee Thompson's style of skewed camera angles and the use of objects as barriers which prevent the spectator from obtaining a clear view of the character. This cinematic device, which I discussed briefly in my analysis of *The Weak and the Wicked*, is a central feature of *Yield to the Night*. A number of close-ups, medium and long-shots are used in the opening sequence and the bodies of both Mary and Lucy are fragmented and not displayed in their entirety. When using long-shots the spectator cannot observe the character in detail and this is compounded by the use of objects such as stone pillars, iron gates, statues, a band of musicians and a parked car which act as further barriers to identification. For example, the camera focuses in close-up on a fountain statue and the spectator can only glimpse, through the statue's limbs, Mary's figure in the distance. We also have a medium-shot of Mary as she walks down the street but the spectator's gaze is soon disrupted by a passing street-band whose bodies obscure a clear view of Mary. In contrast, close-ups are used in the sequence to depict in detail fragmented body parts, predominantly hands and feet.[35] The opening shot of the sequence comprises a rear view of Mary's calves and feet clad in high-heels walking through pigeons in Trafalgar Square. The focus on feet, in close-up, is repeatedly duplicated: the naked, masculine foot of a statue, and the boot-clad male (?) foot kick-starting a motorbike. Feminine high-heels dominate the sequence, both visually and aurally. Mary's

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[35] Hands are fetishised in a manner similar to feet. Mary's gloved hand tries the key in the lock of Lucy's mews cottage, an action that serves no narrative purpose. It does however prefigure the opening shot after the title credits where a prison officer's hand, in close-up, inserts a key into a cell lock. The close-up of Mary's gloved hand is reminiscent of Jean's white gloves gripping the dock in *The Weak and the Wicked*. Lucy's hand, decorated with expensive rings and bracelets, is depicted in close-up as she falls to the ground after Mary's shooting. Further, when Lucy gives evidence during the inquest into Jim's death, she is

feet enter and then alight from a taxi, with close-up revealing her stocking seams (see still 15, page 157). Her high-heels are reflected in the shining hubcaps of a parked car. A shot of the interior of Lucy's car focuses on her slipping her stocking-clad foot into a high heeled, open-toed court shoe. The sound of both Lucy and Mary's high-heels clipping across stone cobbles, although diegetic, is amplified to heighten its significance to the narrative.[36] It prefigures the sound of the officers' feet in prison, particularly the prison governor for whom Mary listens in the hope that she will have news of a reprieve. Indeed as Mary becomes accustomed to prison she states that the sunlight hurts her eyes and, as the narrative progresses, her sense of sight is replaced by a heightened sense of sound.

This sequence introduces a number of important elements that relate to the characterisation of Mary. The fragmentation of the female body works on multiple levels. It obviously serves to mystify the protagonist. The camera tracks a young pretty woman as she makes her way across the city but her face is not revealed until the scene climaxes with the shooting, a cinematic device that is used to build tension. The fragmented female body can also be read as a comment on Mary's oblique relationship to the wider society. Stacey demonstrates how fragmentation has been linked, within feminist theory, to 'women's alienation and oppression' (1994: 206). The lack of a whole body both suggests, as Chibnall argues, that women are not 'complete individuals' (2000: 100) and that women are not fully part of the wider society in which they are located. A link is also made between fragmentation and agency. Fragmentation can suggest that the body part is responsible for the action rather than the person as a whole. Such an argument undermines the notion of a person's agency and this position resonates to a degree with Geraghty's argument that the sex symbol is not fully responsible for her actions. Finally the sequence,

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depicted only by her seemingly disembodied hand, resplendent with painted nails, ornate rings, bracelets, and the fur cuff of her coat as her fingers drum imperiously against the wood of the witness box.

through its stylistic use of camera angles and strategically positioned barriers, prevents the spectator from observing the character in an unproblematic manner and in doing so audience identification is disrupted. This device, often referred to as the 'distanciation effect' (Gibbs, 2002: 75, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 7), operates in a way which invites the audience to critically reflect upon the social factors that impact upon the character. The opening of the film then suggests Mary as a woman who experiences a degree of societal alienation and, whilst it is clear that she has killed someone, culpability for her actions may extend beyond the individual. I will return to the question of the fragmented female body in my later discussion of the pleasures the film may offer to female audiences.

As an example of the women-in-prison sub-genre, *Yield to the Night* continues some of the themes identified by Morey and present in *The Weak and the Wicked*, particularly in relation to the prison staff. Mary Hilton spends almost three weeks in a condemned cell and is executed on the third Thursday of her incarceration. As the narrative progresses it becomes evident that a reprieve will not be granted, therefore Mary's life cannot be saved. She can however be induced to accept her fate, to 'yield to the night', and this is what the 'good care provider[s]' (Morey, 1995: 81) advocate, the chaplain, the prison doctor and the prison reformer Miss Bly who, as a female, challenges Morey's thesis that only men can fulfil that role, although none of the 'providers' are particularly successful in convincing Mary to 'yield.' Miss Bly's attempts to elicit remorse from Mary are met with stubborn refusal, although Miss Bly, equally stubborn, steadfastly refuses to believe that Mary feels no regret for her actions. The depiction of Mary as a patient is clearly evident, indeed the whole process of her incarceration infantilizes her. She spends a significant proportion of her time lying in bed with her physical needs attended to by the prison staff.

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[36] Chibnall comments that the 'repeated emphasis on the fetished sound of footwear recalls Robert Hancock's description of Ruth Ellis in court: "Ruth walked with a high-heeled clicking from the dock to the witness

Her nails are trimmed by the prison officers, her foot bandaged by the nurse and doctor, she uses wooden spoons for her food, is regularly weighed and subject to medical examination, and is supervised at all times of the night and day (see still 14 below). She is treated like a sick child. Her bodily functions dominate her day-to-day prison existence whilst her voice-over reveals her thought processes. Indeed, Miss Bly argues that when the time of execution comes her body will instinctively 'obey' and in so doing override her mental faculties as her mind will be 'in a dream.' Mary shifts from confident and glamorous young woman to an infantilized and incarcerated being as society exacts its revenge on her.
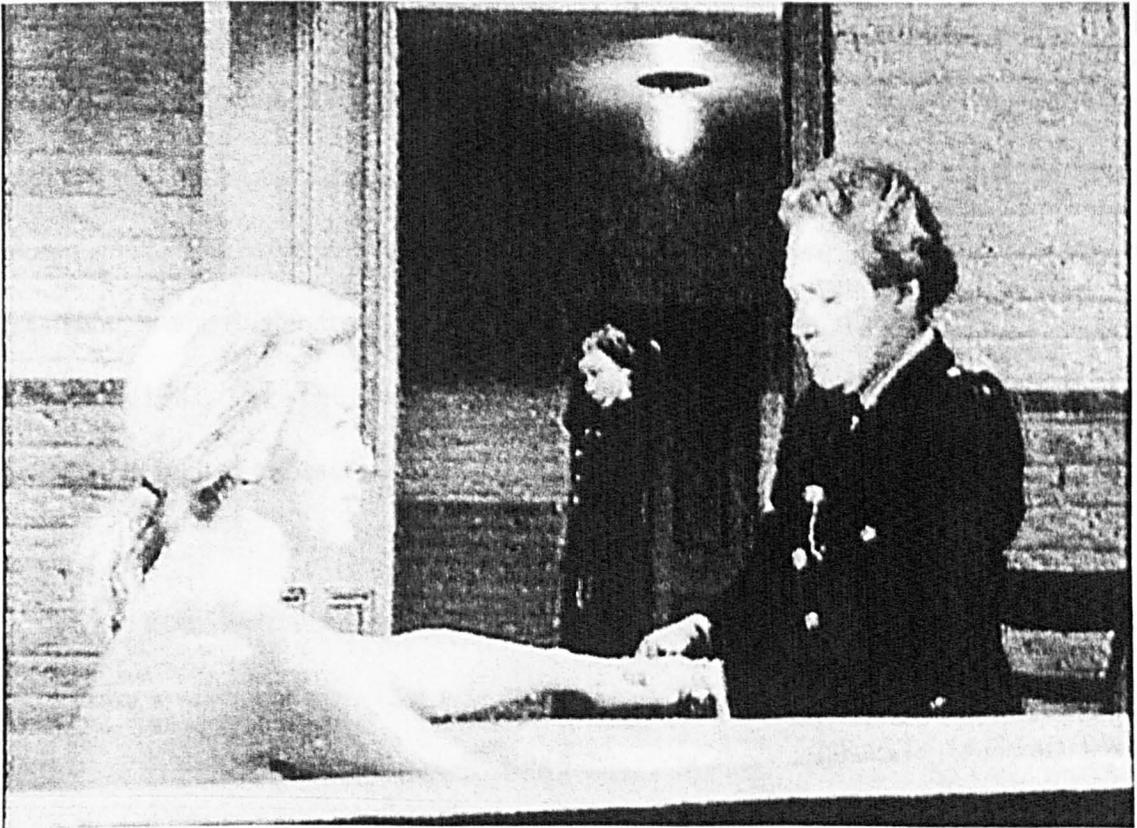
Still 14. Diana Dors as the infantilized Mary Hilton in *Yield to the Night* (1956)

Mary Hilton's background is working-class with aspirations to social mobility. She is young, pretty and childless, and married to an older man, Fred, whom she describes as 'boring.' She works in a beauty parlour, an occupation that had certain moral

box"' (Hancock, 1993: 58 cited in Chibnall, 2000: 100).

connotations. Chadder describes Mary's job as 'one of the few legitimate and glamorous career opportunities open to women in the 1950s' (1999: 73). Wilson argues that by the mid to late 1950s there was a 'plentiful supply of cheap, smart clothing and new cosmetics in the shops' (1980: 84).[37] As the decade progressed cosmetics became more widely available but there remained something of a tension between make-up and respectable femininity. Looking 'beautiful' and 'feminine' was expected of women but make-up was imbricated in moral judgements. Ferguson, for example, in her analysis of women's magazines, argues that the call for readers to 'Be More Beautiful' is one of the 'most repeated messages' of the 'cult of femininity' (1985: 58-9). The beautiful woman is the one who possesses 'gleaming hair, sparkling eyes and a satiny complexion' (ibid). The kind of beauty that this description evokes is natural and healthy, with cosmetics used to create the illusion of effortless and natural beauty. Winship demonstrates that the beauty features in 1950s women magazines advocated that women strive for a 'natural' appearance, one which 'tread[s] the precarious line between discrete and glamorous femininity' (1981: 18). The following quote by Chapkis captures something of the moral tightrope that related to beauty and femininity:

My family were old style New Englanders. My mother, who was really beautiful, never wore make-up. That was not uncommon. Women who were educated, had gone to Smith, 'proper' women, didn't wear make-up. Women who wore make-up were working-class and prostitutes ... Later, when make-up styles changed, women wore a lot more make-up to look as if they weren't wearing any – to look natural (1994: 206).

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[37] Geraghty implies that, although consumer goods proliferated through the 1950s, consumption was primarily intended for the home, and the purchase of make-up was illustrative of the more 'frivolous side' of consumption (2000: 158).

The connection made between female beauty and naturalness indicates the desired normative femininity of the period which I discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Furthermore, looking 'natural' serves to cover over the work of femininity. Indeed, as Winship rightly argues, 'the work of beauty closely parallels the work of the home' (1981: 18). In Chapter 2 I discussed how it was widely assumed that household appliances were time and labour-saving devices which alleviated the hardship of housework to the extent that housework was no longer work at all. In effect appliances efface the signs of female labour. In a similar manner, if make-up is used 'appropriately' the effect is to efface the labour of the woman which has gone into producing the desired femininity. Wearing make-up 'inappropriately' therefore fails to give the effect of naturalness and works on a number of levels. It suggests, by signifying labour, the constructed rather than 'given' nature of femininity. It also denotes an immoral dimension.

Mary Hilton's job in a beauty parlour and Mary's/Diana's image stands as a challenge to normative femininity. Her use of cosmetics is conspicuous, the most obvious example being the platinum hair, but also the pencilled, arched brows and the heavily lip-sticked pout. The use of cosmetics indicates what Geraghty calls the sex symbol's 'calculation of appearance' (1986: 341). This calculated approach, which draws attention to the constructed or artificial nature of femininity, indicates agency in the manipulation of femininity. Indeed Mary's/Diana's hyper-femininity evokes Rivière's concept of the masquerade although its use here seems to differ from that suggested by Rivière (which was to mollify anxiety and deflect reprisals for the appropriation of masculinity). Robertson suggests that working-class women use the masquerade 'to gain strategic access to power and privilege typically denied them as women' and that it therefore functions as a 'strategy of survival and not simply a placating gesture to patriarchal authority' (1996: 78-

9).[38] Mary maximises what she recognises is most readily available to her, her femininity, and uses it strategically to secure for herself both a job in a stylish boutique (which gives her a degree of economic autonomy and places her in proximity to people from a different class background than herself) and access to men such as Jim Carpenter who can facilitate her (legitimate) desire for social mobility. That Mary's job and her image has a particular resonance in terms of inter-locking discourses of femininity, morality and class position is clearly evident. The connotations associated with it are further shaped by post-war discourses concerning consumption. The overt use of cosmetics signifies conspicuous consumption, a factor which Cook argues was thought to be the preserve of 'the working-class, prostitutes and social climbers' (2001: 174). Mary Hilton is clearly a woman who challenges, on a number of levels, societal conventions relating to gender, class and social mobility and her character suggests, as Cook argues that Dors' image did, the 'aspirations and anxieties of a society in transition' (2001: 168).

Mary's aspirations are ostensibly supported by her family whilst simultaneously treated by them with suspicion. Her mother makes references to the sacrifices made by the now-dead father on behalf of the children. Mary however comments on her mother's lack of belief in her. When Mary leaves Fred she mentions to Jim that her mother always believed she would come to a 'bad end.' Mary suggests, in an ironic and morbid flash of foresight, that her mother's response to the news of her separation would be 'give her enough rope and she'll come back.'[39] The concept of the 'bad end' is, as Landy argues, 'a punishment reserved for those who violate class, gender, sexual, and national expectations' (2001: 154). The comments by Mary and her mother suggest that both recognise that Mary's

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[38] Robertson's arguments relate to the representation in 1930s Hollywood film of the 'gold-digger' and how the stereotype is treated to an ironic hyperbolisation which shows it to be an act and is used to suggest that the women are not greedy but rather struggling for economic survival during the Depression (1996: 73-9).

[39] The actual saying is 'give her enough rope and she will hang herself', meaning that certain people, when presented with opportunity, will get themselves into trouble. Is Mary's line a deliberate misquote, a perversion of the actual saying, or is the line supposed to suggest that, in the opinion of her mother, if Mary had sufficient time and space she would get tired and bored of her new life and go back to Fred?

beliefs and behaviour challenge societal conventions, which further supports the argument that Mary's punishment is as much for her transgressive femininity as for shooting Lucy.

What Mary is lacking is a certain amount of what Bourdieu termed economic and cultural capital. Bourdieu, in his work on taste (first published in 1979), argued that class position is determined by both economic and cultural capital. Economic capital has been described by Skeggs as 'income, wealth, financial inheritances and monetary assets' (1997: 8). Cultural capital can be three-fold: it can be 'an embodied state, that is in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods; and in the institutionalized state, resulting in such things as educational qualifications' (ibid). For Bourdieu 'cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education ... cultural practices ... and preferences in literature, painting or music, are closely linked to educational level ... and secondarily to social origin' (1986:1). The things that we enjoy therefore and the reasons why we enjoy them in the ways that we do are the result of our economic and cultural capital. Bourdieu argues '[a] work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded' (1986: 2). To understand Marvel comic books for example requires a different set of competencies than those required to understand opera. In relation to capital, Moi argues that Bourdieu's research 'demonstrates how a certain lack of educational capital can be compensated for by the possession of other forms of capital' (1991: 1025). A mediocre education can be overcome by 'money and political power' and/or by 'social capital', that is, being part of a family that hold capital in other areas (ibid). There are however limits to this which disadvantage the disadvantaged. As Moi argues, 'an agent lacking in social capital at the outset will not benefit greatly from a relatively non-prestigious ("low-capital") education' (ibid). Bourdieu's research illustrates

the profoundly depressing fact that, in Moi's words, 'capital is what it takes to produce more capital' (ibid).

These comments are relevant to Mary Hilton because she is impoverished in terms of both economic and cultural capital. Although employed and in receipt of an income she lacks significant economic capital and indeed cannot compete with Lucy Carpenter, Jim's upper-class, older and wealthier lover, on these grounds. In terms of cultural capital she is disadvantaged, relative to both Jim and Lucy, in her social position, family background and education. She picks up Jim's copy of A. E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* (1896) but does not possess the cultural capital to recognise what Chadder identifies as its themes of 'suicide, murder ... infidelity ... post-war malaise' which, in themselves, offer a comment on Jim's character, a point to which I shall return shortly (1999: 73). Part of Mary's attraction to Jim is that he does have a certain cultural capital and her all-consuming love for him may in some way be linked to her desire for social mobility.

What Mary, and indeed all the female characters in the films discussed in this thesis, possess is capital in terms of their femininity.[40] Lovell discusses femininity as a form of cultural capital and draws on the work of Skeggs whose research with young, white, working-class women illustrates that the women 'made investments in the only forms of cultural capital available to them', that is, their femininity (2000: 24).[41] In Skeggs' study, young women invested in the 'feminine identity of "carer"' which provided them with skills that secured employment but also 'served as preparation for traditional roles in

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[40] The character of Jean, for example, in *The Weak and the Wicked* lacks economic capital because she has gambled her money away, the gold cigarette case being her only remaining asset. She has a certain amount of cultural capital however as a result of her education and family background. Indeed it is to this that the judge and Governor implicitly refer when passing judgement on her. Her greatest asset, like Mary, is the capital she possesses in terms of her femininity. This is sufficient to attract a middle-class doctor like Michael but by refusing to marry him she is failing to capitalise on her greatest marketable asset.

[41] Lovell suggests that the women also invested in their femininity partly because of the reprisals they would experience if they did not and to '"put a floor" under their economic and cultural circumstances' (2000: 24), by this she means to prevent their situation deteriorating.

marriage' (ibid).[42] Likewise, the female inmates in *The Weak and the Wicked* perform tasks such as dress-making and knitting which provide them with skills that have some value commercially but which primarily equip them for the role of wife and mother.[43] What Mary Hilton possesses is capital in terms of her femininity, which is her greatest asset and which I have already suggested she used strategically. Her investment in her appearance, her clothes, make-up and glamorous image, means that she is able to secure a particular job, a husband and attract other men.[44] Indeed Mary shares some cultural capital in terms of femininity with her rival Lucy Carpenter. Despite their class differences they wear the same perfume, 'Christmas Rose' (at a cost of five guineas a bottle), and Mary expresses appreciation of Lucy's shoes (which she recalls as being 'beautiful'). These events suggest that both women have invested in versions of femininity that have some similarities and, in doing so, they share some common ground. Mary's ability to recognise and appreciate luxurious items also suggests a desire for particular consumer goods and her aspirations for social mobility. Femininity however is not worth as much as economic capital, something to which Mary has limited access. As a young woman from a working-class background her femininity cannot compensate for her lack of adequate capital in other areas.[45] What is crucial for Mary therefore is her relationship to men, her respectable but boring husband Fred whom she cannot love, and Jim who possesses the cultural capital to which she aspires but who does not return her love. She is therefore frustrated by her situation as her aspirations extend beyond her ability to fully influence their attainment.

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[42] This is not to suggest that women were at all passive in their choices or labouring under false consciousness. Rather it is a realistic response to a particular set of material circumstances. As Skeggs argues, there are 'few alternatives to femininity' (1997: 101). The investments that the women make can 'accrue relatively high profit in some arenas (the institutions of marriage and heterosexuality)' whilst '[t]he conversion of feminine duty into occupational caring did not ... yield a high investment but it did offer potentially greater rewards than unemployment' (Skeggs, 1997: 102).

[43] I suggested briefly, in the introduction to this thesis, that a similar approach is evident in nursing, where the key skills associated with the profession (caring, empathy and patience) are analogous to those considered necessary for marriage and motherhood.

[44] Femininity is not just about physical appearance, looking 'feminine.' Mary is also able to successfully negotiate relations with men, as evidenced by her handling of men in the club from whom she accepts attentions and drinks whilst keeping them at arm's length sexually.

The character of Jim (Michael Craig) offers an interesting comment on masculinity. Spicer's work on masculinity identifies cultural types prevalent in British cinema. Within Spicer's typology Michael Craig appears during the 1950s as a 'Hero of Modernity' (*Life in Emergency Ward 10*, 1959), a 'Contemporary Adventurer' (*House of Secrets*, 1956) and a variant of 'The Everyman,' the 'Middle-class Boy-next-door' (*Upstairs Downstairs*, 1959). Other important cultural types identified by Spicer include 'The Damaged Everyman' who emerged in the immediate post-war years (Spicer, 2001: 163). This was a war veteran struggling to adjust to, and find his place in, the post-war world.[46] A sub-genre of this cultural type is the 'Post-war Psychotic' who dramatises the 'mental maladjustment of the veteran' (Spicer, 2001: 175). Such a character was evident roughly between 1945-1949 and then disappeared in the 1950s to emerge at the end of that decade as the 'Damaged Young Man' in horror films. The Post-war Psychotic is evident in the characterisation of Peter Courtland (Ralph Michael) in 'The Haunted Mirror' in Ealing's *Dead of Night* (1945) whom Spicer describes as the 'epitome of middle-class respectability ... a rather passive, "feminised" male' (2001: 175). Jim Lancaster's characterisation in *Yield to the Night* embodies the traits of passivity, instability and feminisation but he is not psychotic in the sense that Peter Courtland is. Indeed Jim's characterisation falls somewhere between The Damaged Everyman and the Post-war Psychotic and in so doing illustrates that cultural types cannot capture all variants of masculinity.[47] Michael Craig's star persona was that of a handsome but somewhat untrustworthy 'secondary' figure in British films. His casting as Jim in *Yield to the Night* suggests that his relationship with Mary is ultimately doomed.

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[45] Conversely, Lucy provides an example of Moi's phrase that 'capital is what it takes to produce more capital' (1991: 1025). Lucy can secure another marriage to a man from presumably the same social background as herself.

[46] Spicer argues that the 'Damaged Men' as a cultural type can be spilt into 'two inter-related types'; the 'maladjusted veteran' located in the specific post-war era who suffers 'psychological damage and / or social dysfunction' as a result of his war-time experiences and 'the schizophrenic' who, as a more 'generic' type, raised concerns about the 'instabilities of masculine identities' (2001: 161).

[47] Indeed Spicer's study does not claim to do so as he concentrates on hegemonic versions of masculinity and recognises that '[t]ypes are overlapping and *competing* constructions' (2001: 2).

Jim is portrayed as profoundly and terminally disappointed with life, his character oscillating between self-pity and a chronic sense of failure. He recounts a potted life-story to Mary in response to her question, 'why do you always sound so bitter?' He returned to England with his Irish mother when his Canadian father died. With little money his dreams of being a famous pianist or composer were dashed. Then came the war (his role in it not explicit) and his mother's death in the Blitz, at which he was not 'broken-hearted.' After the war he took a job as a pianist with a 'third-rate dance band' followed by a job at the club, where Mary meets him for the second time. He is suicidal, self-pitying, self-obsessed, disappointed, restless yet aimless and, with thwarted ambitions, somewhat impotent; a 'feminised male.' His copy of *A Shropshire Lad* is evidence of both his cultural capital and, with its focus on themes of angst and alienation, serves to further reinforce the reading of his character as a cross between a Damaged Everyman and a Post-war Psychotic. When Mary and Jim first meet at the club he tells her he plays the piano, teaches and invests in horses (gambling?) but none of these activities he does 'for a living.' He also refers to himself self-pityingly as 'the slave.' He has a certain amount of education and therefore cultural capital but he is not stable, either emotionally or financially, and is therefore not a good prospect as a husband. He is in many respects something of a lounge-lizard and his obsessive relationship with the wealthy Lucy Carpenter may in part be motivated by his own aspirations to social mobility, characteristics that are reminiscent of Emile in *Madeleine*. Jim is middle-class whilst Lucy has greater class status (or perhaps only more money), something which Jim clearly resents. He bitterly tells Mary that when Lucy visits the club she is 'slumming it' and that she is one of those 'spoilt girls with too much money.' A five-guinea bottle of perfume as a present for Lucy is clearly, to Jim, an expensive item.

In Jim's self-engrossed obsession with Lucy he recalls Lee from *Dear Murderer* and his relationship with his wife Vivien, and her lovers.[48] Like Emile and Lee, he is without friends or family and therefore, like Mary too, expendable. Indeed his lineage - Irish mother and Canadian father - immediately signals him as non-English and therefore as something of an outsider. In describing himself as a slave he takes on the persona of the emasculated male figure, a potential lap dog at Lucy's beck and call. His 'feminisation' is further evidenced by his hysterical response to his relationship with Lucy. At one point, he arrives at Mary's flat in the middle of the night, exhausted, weeping and rambling, after Lucy has failed to meet him. Mary calms him down and he eventually falls asleep but he continues his obsessive behaviour the following morning. He tries to phone Lucy and walks out on Mary, who responds in an equally hysterical manner, crying and clinging to Jim in an attempt to get him to stay.

There are thus both similarities and differences between Mary and Jim. Both are hysterical and masochistic in relation to the person they love. Mary however is more positive and optimistic about life in general than Jim and does not exhibit his tendencies towards self-pity and depression. It is interesting that Mary does not kill Jim. If she had it might have been understood as a *crime passionelle*, a jealous woman killing her lover in the heat of the moment when he attempted to leave her. Furthermore she does not kill Lucy in a fit of jealous rage, to prevent Jim from having Lucy. By waiting a few months her actions are read as premeditated and committed in cold-blood, so there is no defence of provocation to be brought. Why does Mary kill Lucy? Mary holds Lucy responsible for Jim's death and in so doing refuses to recognise Jim's previous instability. By denying the extent of her relationship with Jim, Lucy protects her social position, but enrages Mary. Would Mary

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[48] Spicer argues that Eric Portman's character Lee from *Dear Murderer* is an example of the Post-war Psychotic, further supporting the argument that Jim Lancaster is a hybrid of the two types Spicer identifies (2001: 177).

have killed Lucy if Lucy had been honest and remorseful? Perhaps not.[49] Mary, likewise, refuses to repent for killing Lucy. Part of Mary's motivation is jealousy and resentment of Lucy's social position. Mary kills Lucy partly to revenge Jim's death and her own sense of loss, but partly to punish Lucy for her imperious manner, her social status and her lack of decency and, by extension, the society which Lucy represents and from which Mary is excluded. As Geraghty argues in relation to Mary, 'her lack of pretensions is specifically set against the upper-class arrogance of the woman she kills' (1986: 345). Whilst Mary lacks the economic and cultural capital held by Lucy and, to a lesser extent, Jim, she retains qualities of honesty and directness (key characteristics of the Dors' persona) that may go some way to eliciting audience sympathy for her character, despite Lee Thompson's intention that Mary's characterisation should be unsympathetic.[50]

Despite Mary's obvious infatuation with Jim her desire for life is stronger. She states that she does not want to die, she wants to live, even though Jim is dead. Whilst she does not regret meeting and loving Jim she comes to wish that she had not loved him so much. Would her life have been different if she had not met Jim? It is unlikely that she would have stayed with Fred because she has aspirations and desires that outstripped him. She was dissatisfied with the circumstances in which she found herself and, if she had not met Jim, is likely to have sought out other avenues of escape and expression. Mary recognises this herself reminiscing, 'supposing I'd never met Jim, none of this would have happened, or would it?' Such a comment is illuminating. It illustrates Mary's insight into her own condition. It also supports the argument that Mary is punished as much for her life as a transgressive female as for her murder of Lucy. I suggested earlier that the fragmented

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[49] In the novel Mary comments about Lucy, 'I wouldn't have minded so much if she'd been sorry about Jim' (1954: 19).

[50] Indeed Thompson deliberately skewed the characterisation of Mary Hilton to emphasise the implications of capital punishment, arguing '[i]f anything, we're loading the dice against the girl; she is not really a sympathetic character' (*KineWeekly*, 10 Nov. 1955). In a later interview in *Films and Filming* in 1956 he expanded this point arguing '[i]f the person is so completely unsympathetic and you still feel sorry for her –

female body and the sex symbol can be read in ways that suggest that the female protagonist is not wholly responsible for her actions. There is therefore a tension between Mary's/Dors' agency and a recognition of the conditions under which she is operating. It is this tension which suggests a degree of societal culpability in classifying Mary as transgressive and punishing her. It is in this respect that the characterisation of Mary stands as a comment on what Cook termed the 'aspirations and anxieties' of post-war society and gender roles within it.

I want to return now to the question of audience expectation and pleasure. Chibnall suggests that part of the attraction of the film for contemporary audiences might have been the opportunity it offered to see 'a beautiful woman being punished' (2000: 79). Audience pleasure was gendered: 'wish fulfilment to misogynists, and retributive satisfaction to women who feel threatened by overtly feminine displays' (ibid). Chadder cites contemporary social surveys of the 1950s that illustrated that women were harsher in their judgement of Ruth Ellis than men (1999: 73). She then goes on to ask how female audiences might have read the character of Mary Hilton. Were they jealous of Mary's ability to punish the 'seductive other woman? [o]r were they lured by the possibility of purchasing Dors' belted, camel-hair coat, her "chunky" bracelets or her "heeled toe-less leather shoes"?' (1999: 74). Stacey comments on the importance of recognising envy in relation to female spectatorship (1994: 215). During the war and into the post-war period, until rationing of clothing and make-up ceased, British women had very real material constraints on the production of glamorous femininity. There was a feeling 'of failure and of frustration' experienced by many women who, due to lack of resources, could not realise glamorous femininity and for whom Dior's 'New Look' was beyond reach (Stacey, 1994: 212). Indeed Steedman in her recollections of her childhood in 1950s Britain

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then the point is made, and more effectively than had she been presented as a milk-and-water innocent' (cited in Chibnall, 2000: 74).

remembers becoming aware that 'dresses needing twenty yards for a skirt were items as expensive as children' (1986: 29). Class difference continued to play a part with material constraints still restricting many women into the mid 1950s after rationing had ceased and consumer goods were more widely available (Stacey, 1994: 216). Steedman remembers, '[t]he post-War years were full of women longing for a full skirt' (1986: 32). Envy and longing captures the desire for things which have been denied and the anger at the unfairness of life.[51]

In relation to Mary Hilton and the Dors persona, a complex and contradictory set of emotions may have been experienced by female spectators. I have already argued that Dors, as a star, was renowned for her glamorous and sexual image which was both enticing and threatening. Satisfaction could therefore be gained by witnessing the punishment of her self-confidence and aggressive sexuality whilst simultaneously desiring, and envious of, her wardrobe, her looks, figure and confidence. The opening of the film, as Mary makes her way across London to shoot Lucy, presents us with the fragmented female body with an emphasis on legs, feet, shoes, and hands. I have already argued that such fragmentation has traditionally been read within feminist terms as symbolic of 'women's alienation and oppression' (Stacey, 1994: 206). Stacey however illustrates that female spectators had 'a fascination which was remembered as a form of intimacy' with the close-ups of fragments of the female body (ibid). The fragmented female body is broken down into parts which are commodified. Through the purchase of particular commodities, make-up, hairstyle, clothing, shoes, jewellery, female spectators could 'replicate their ideal through the transformation of particular body parts' and in so doing formed a sense of intimate identification with their favourite star (Stacey, 1994: 207). Stacey's work on female spectatorship focuses on memories of Hollywood stars whom respondents recall in

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[51] As I have argued these are some of the reasons why Mary kills Lucy. Mary desires what Lucy has, her clothes, status and Jim, and is resentful and angry that she does not have those things.

quite loving terms, with a particular emphasis on facial features ('eyes, eyelashes, teeth and hair' 1994: 209).[52] There is nothing to suggest that the response of female spectators to Dors was loving; indeed, at best, it would probably be described as ambivalent. However potential desire for, and envy of, Dors'/Mary Hilton's glamorous wardrobe and what it represented remains a valid point. Stacey quotes Swann's argument that 'British screen stars were never rooted in the ideology of consumerism in quite the way that American stars were as a matter of course' (1994: 198). Whilst this is true for 1940s stars such as Margaret Lockwood[53], I have already demonstrated how Dors' star image in the mid-1950s was linked to conspicuous consumption. Therefore whilst disapproving of Dors on one level, female spectators might still have desired her chunky bracelets and high-heeled shoes (and her independence) revealed in close-up at the start and throughout the film.

Indeed one of the recurring motifs of the film are close-ups of female feet and shoes, objects which are particularly suited for fetishism. Freud argues that 'the foot ... is an age-old sexual symbol' and furthermore that the 'shoe or slipper is a corresponding symbol of the female genitals' (1949: 33).[54] It is not only Mary's feet that figure. In the prison the camera lingers in close-up on the sensible shoe of the warden, the heel covered in studs to increase its longevity. Mary recalls that the first thing she noticed about her rival Lucy were her 'beautiful shoes, black suede with very high heels,' which are illustrated in close-up as Lucy enters Mary's place of work. In relation to the historical period Chadder, in her analysis of post-war British crime films, argues persuasively that the 'shoe condenses a nucleus of meanings: it speaks of the relaxation of post-war austerity, modernity, female consumption, feminine aspiration and desire, but also the dangerous association of

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[52] Respondents used adjectives such as 'beautiful', 'lovely', 'glorious', and 'perfection' to describe these features (Stacey, 1994: 209-10).

[53] Lockwood is interesting however precisely because she had such a large and loyal female fan base and evoked such intense feelings from fans (see Babington, 2001: 94), something which Stacey's work, in its focus on American stars, cannot adequately account for.

gangland weapon, the Italian "other", and the troublesome eruption of the unknowable element of female sexuality' (1999: 66). The heel therefore becomes 'the point where meaning slides metonymically from permissible feminine enhancement to deviant dangerous excess' (Chadder, 1999: 74). Mary's desire and subsequent punishment is depicted symbolically via her shoes and feet, which are increasingly incapacitated as the narrative progresses. The opening sequences focuses on her high heels, accessorised with seamed stocking, as she makes her way across London (see still 15 below).

Still 15. Mary's high heels, signifiers of female autonomy

These high-heels are swapped first for sensible flat prison shoes. She then develops a blister which the prison staff must dress and which forces her to wear moccasin-style slippers (see still 16 overleaf). The sophisticated clipping of high heels across cobbles is

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[54] Freud argues that the scopophilic drive seeks the female genitals but is thwarted by 'prohibition and repression' which causes it to focus instead on 'a fetish in the form of a foot or shoe, the female genitals ... being imagined as male ones' (1949: 34).

replaced with the soft sound of the slipper that scuffs against the cell floor. The foot and the shoe, symbolic of female desire, is subject to '[a]n oedipal castration' (ibid).
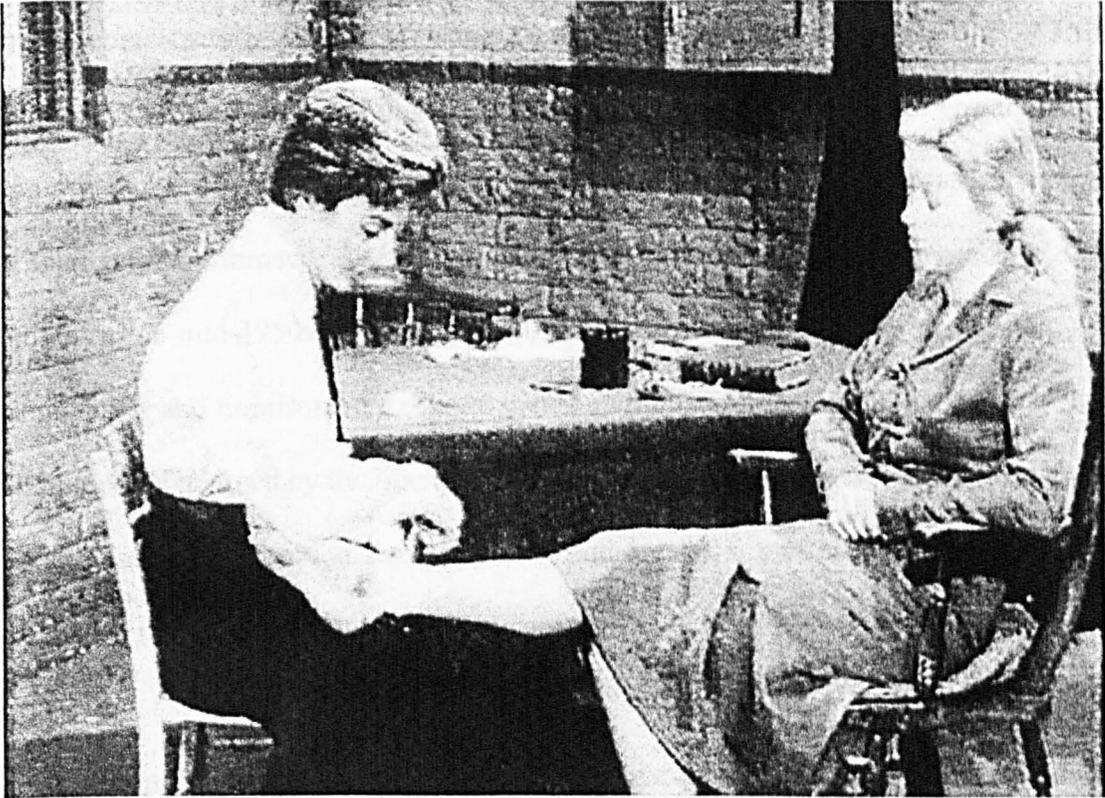
Still 16. Mary's 'castrated' foot is bandaged in *Yield to the Night* (1956)

The film, whilst it fulfils the director's stated intention of entering the debate on capital punishment, reveals a great deal about the nature of femininity, and masculinity, in post-war Britain. Jim inhabits a fractured masculinity; obsessive, neurotic and mentally unstable. Mary, who has limited economic and cultural capital, is confident, ambitious and sexually desiring in a society that is ambivalent towards such concerns. Both films offer interesting comments on gender in 1950s British society. They provide strong roles for their female protagonists and the women narrate their own stories, particularly Dors in *Yield to the Night* whose voice-over dominates. They illustrate many of the complexities and contradictions that relate to female desire. Jean Raymond in *The Weak and the Wicked* is shown to be rehabilitated and accepting of her proper gendered role but the film's many inconsistencies regarding the theme of rehabilitation remain unresolved and the suggestion

lingers that gambling is more exciting than heterosexual marriage. *Yield to the Night* is more complex because of the casting of a sex symbol such as Dors who encapsulated so many contradictory meanings. What is on trial in the film is Diana Dors/Mary Hilton and the extent to which societal boundaries of femininity, sexuality, class, social mobility and morality can be pushed. The pleasures offered to female spectators are complex and contradictory: intimacy, desire, envy and wish-fulfilment. The emergence of these two films in the mid-1950s and the contemporary interest they evoked is revealing. Female criminality and imprisonment did not increase in this period, although the belief that it had can in part explained by the liberation thesis. What was at issue were questions concerning gender, class, affluence and social mobility and these films offer an oblique reflection of the many ambiguities relating to these concerns.

In the films discussed in this chapter the female protagonists are criminalised for their active femininity and encounter rehabilitation or punishment. In the next chapter I shall analyse the figure of the female prostitute and the challenges that her representation brings to bear to discourses of normative femininity, in particular, heterosexual marriage.

Chapter 5: The Female Prostitute

In this chapter I shall consider two films that dramatise the character of the female prostitute, *The Flesh is Weak* (1957) and *Passport to Shame* (1959). The figure of the female prostitute is of interest to research on divergent femininity because she is a marginalised, deviant figure occupying a position within society that challenges the paradigm of heterosexual marriage and normative female sexuality. In the first section of this chapter I shall consider the socio-historical context in which these films emerged, with particular reference to the Wolfenden Report of 1957 that reported on criminal law and prostitution in post-war Britain, and related debates about sexuality, the family and marriage. In my analysis of the films I shall explore the prevalence of the romance motif, and make reference to the social problem genre and the casting of European actresses in the central role of the prostitute, to argue that the primary concern of these films is ultimately the depiction of normative femininity.

In the post-war years, a number of documents, articles, novels and reports emerged that focused on the subject of prostitution, some feeding into and others a response to the Report of the Wolfenden Committee of 1957. The remit of the Committee was to make recommendations, in relation to criminal law, regarding homosexuality and prostitution. Before considering the Report in more detail I shall briefly outline some of the background against which it emerged, to place the Report in context. Amongst the publications referred to at the opening of this paragraph were *Women of the Streets, A Sociological Study of the Common Prostitute* published in 1955 by the British Social Biology Council (BSBC),[1] based on the findings of research carried out approximately between 1946-1953.[2]

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[1] The Council was one of the bodies that submitted a written memorandum to the Wolfenden Committee.
[2] The research comprised of an analysis of statistical information held by the Metropolitan Police District relating to prostitutes and prostitution and fieldwork leading to 69 case studies of women working as prostitutes in the Metropolitan area. Although it makes no recommendations about how prostitution should

In 1959 *Streetwalker* was published, an autobiographical (and anonymous) account of a 23-year old woman working as a prostitute in London. It is not known what the critical or commercial response was to the work but certainly the publishers must have believed that a market for it existed.[3] In the 1960s, Kingsley Davis' work on homosexuality and prostitution, originally published in 1937, was revised and expanded for its publication in an anthology entitled *Contemporary Social Problems*. Davis' work draws on the two Kinsey Reports[4] in his attempt to quantify male sexual activity. He argues that there is a reduction in the prevalence of prostitution, with men using the services of prostitutes less frequently than their fathers' generation. For Davis this cannot be adequately explained by legal or educational initiatives; rather, '[t]he change in the present century seems more likely to be due to the greater sexual companionship, on a temporary and friendly basis, available to men from ordinary women' (1966: 368). Davis' conclusion is that men are having the same amount of sex overall but are having more of it with non-prostitute women and less with prostitute women.

These publications illustrate that the subject of prostitution had a high profile during the post-war period. Despite Davis' claims about a reduction in the use of prostitution, the

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be managed, the report recognises the economic impetus governing many women's decision to become prostitutes and the limits of legislation.

[3] It is not written as a salacious account of prostitution. Anyone purchasing the book with a desire for titillation would have been sorely disappointed as the text's focus is the woman's loneliness and despair and the violence inflicted upon her by customers and particularly her pimp. It was published in the same year as *Passport to Shame* was released and the Street Offences Act was passed, possibly in an attempt to capitalise on the popular currency of its subject matter. The cover of the book includes a quote by Sir John Wolfenden: '[o]ne of the difficulties we had while the Departmental Committee was sitting was to get a first-hand account of the life and attitude of the prostitute herself. I only wish this book had been available then.' The inclusion of such a statement is presumably intended to afford the text a certain gravity and legitimacy but it inadvertently, and simultaneously, raises a number of issues regarding the Wolfenden Committee. Why did the committee fail to elicit responses from prostitute women, when other researchers, notably the BSBC, succeeded in conducting fieldwork and negotiating barriers between interviewer and interviewees? Furthermore, if the Committee had read the text, what might they have learnt and how might it have influenced their report? The writer was an intelligent, articulate woman who detailed a particular set of circumstances that led her to prostitution. She was also acutely aware that she operated in a hypocritical society whereby many men reviled her whilst simultaneously availing themselves of her services. Perhaps the Committee's failure to engage with prostitutes themselves stemmed from the belief, implicitly held but not explicitly acknowledged, that they already understood the prostitute woman and her behaviour, a point to which I shall return shortly.

conviction rate for soliciting in England and Wales increased dramatically in the ten years between 1942-1952, from 2,122 to 10,291, and stood at 11,878 by 1955.[5] To understand the emergence of the Committee one must locate it within wider post-war debates about sexuality, morality, the family, and marriage. Concerns about the divorce rate and reconstruction of the family were widespread. Indeed Smart argues that, as a consequence of wartime dislocation, 'the 1950s was a decade that was apparently fearful of an imminent collapse of the family' (1981: 47). Strategies to stem what was believed to be an encroaching tidal wave of familial dislocation included blocking law reform for divorce. Alongside this concern reports such as Kinsey were radical in the challenges they brought to heterosexuality by their suggestion that masturbation and same-sex relationships might prove more sexually fulfilling for women (Wilson, 1980: 87-8). In balancing these two seemingly disparate views there emerged an acceptance of the 'ideal of mutual sexual pleasure, but very much within the context of a stable marital relationship' (Weeks, 1989: 237). Wilson argues that such an ideal was evident in many popular publications on sexuality in the 1950s that strove to 'domesticate the Kinsey findings and fit them to Western monogamous marriage' (Wilson, 1980: 88). Smart identifies this as the 'eroticisation of the family,' with sex becoming the 'cornerstone of family stability' (1981: 48).

Against this background of what Hill has termed 'the "new sexual morality" and its emphasis on the importance of satisfying sexual relations within marriage' (1986: 20), what challenges did prostitution bring? Weeks argues that the increased significance attached to 'monogamous heterosexual love' in the 1950s gave rise to a 'growth of official concern and public anxiety' in relation to the wide-spread belief that the post-war years had witnessed a 'decline in moral standards' (1989: 239-40). The Wolfenden Report

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[4] *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953). Although American, these studies were published and widely read in Britain.

accepts the argument that there was a 'general loosening of former moral standards,' and argues that 'emotional insecurity, community instability and weakening of the family, [are factors] inherent in the social changes of our civilisation' (1957: 20).[6] Increases in the conviction rate for prostitution and homosexuality were put forward as evidence of this decline and in so doing the need for the Committee and its Report was justified. The number of convictions for prostitution, however, is now widely thought to be indicative of increased police activity rather than increased prostitute activity. Weeks for example argues that the conviction rate was the consequence of 'an increase in police zeal' (1989: 240) brought about by official and public concerns. The Committee itself was aware that the increase in the conviction rate might be due to the 'demand of public opinion that "the streets must be cleaned up" rather than any increase in actual activity' (1957: 81). If police activity increased it seems that this was because prostitutes were an affront to the post-war ideology of heterosexual monogamous marriage. Prostitutes served as a challenge to this ideology and it was their very visibility that the Committee sought to address.

The remit of the Wolfenden Committee was clear: '[o]ur primary duty has been to consider the extent to which ... female prostitution should come under the condemnation of the criminal law' (1957: 9). To address this it was necessary to decide '[w]hat acts ought to be punished by the State' (ibid) a decision that was informed by drawing a distinction between public and private spheres. The Committee believed it had no remit to legislate in the private arena. This should be governed by an individual's own sense of morality.[7] As the transaction between prostitute and client occurred in the private sphere it was considered to fall outside the scope of regulation. The concern of the Committee then, in

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[5] See *The Wolfenden Report*, 1957, Appendix II, Table XII: 143.

[6] The Report makes these comments specifically in relation to the impression that homosexual activity had increased. They also illustrate the ideological slant with which the Report approaches the subject of prostitution.

[7] The Committee hoped that ending the 'evil' of prostitution was a goal that could be achieved through a general 'raising of the social and moral outlook of society as whole' (1957: 80). Churches and various welfare agencies were thought to be instrumental in facilitating such a goal.

relation to prostitution, was the extent to which the criminal law should protect the public from that which is 'offensive or injurious' and to protect those who were disadvantaged, either psychologically, physically or economically, from exploitation (1957: 9).

The focus of the Committee was the visible presence of prostitutes and their main address was towards women working as prostitutes on the street. These, the Committee argued, 'do parade themselves more habitually and openly than their prospective customers, and do by their continual presence affront the sense of decency of the ordinary citizen' (1957: 87). The behaviour of female prostitutes in public was deemed problematic unlike male kerb-crawling which the Committee considered but made no recommendations that it should be treated as a criminal offence.[8] Indeed, the Committee argued that 'the difficulties of proof would be considerable, and the possibility of a very damaging charge being levelled at an innocent motorist must also be borne in mind' (Wolfenden, 1957: 90).[9] The spilt between public and private behaviour meant that 'the legal penalties for public displays of sexuality could be strengthened at the same time as private behaviour was decriminalised' (Weeks, 1989: 243). The gendered implication of this position was that female prostitutes, rather than their male clients, remained the problem, a position enshrined in the 1959 Street Offences Act which increased the severity of both fines and imprisonment for women convicted of soliciting. What the Committee and the subsequent act sought to do was to reduce the visibility of female prostitutes, rather than the amount of prostitute activity.[10]

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[8] It was not until the 1985 amendment to the Sexual Offences Act that the offence of 'persistent kerb-crawling' was added to the statute books (Phoenix, 2001: 23).

[9] The concern for 'innocent motorists' illuminates a profound gender bias in relation to criminal behaviour and prostitution. Such beliefs recall the work of Pollak who argued that it is precisely because we live in a society that castigates those who engage in illegitimate sex that men are at the mercy of women, particularly prostitutes, who can steal from and blackmail men without fear of reprisal (1961: 152).

[10] Indeed the act was largely successful in reducing visibility as it brought about a 'reorganisation of prostitution', leading to the proliferation of 'commercial prostitution agencies' which subjected prostitute women to an 'increased rate of commercial exploitation' (Weeks, 1989: 244). Basically many women moved from the street into brothels and in doing so lost some of their autonomy.

In its exploration of strategies to reduce the visibility of prostitution the Committee necessarily engaged with an underlying question to which it repeatedly returned: what kind of person is the prostitute? Chadder argues that the Report 'approaches a problem to which, in a Freudian manner it continually returns, the unknowable element of female sexuality' (1999: 75). Phoenix states that the Committee, in its concern to avoid the wrongful arrest of non-prostitute women, continually drew on a distinction between 'prostitutes and "innocent" women', a distinction that was grounded in the belief that the former 'are not the same as other women because they operate with a fundamentally different set of sexual values' (2001: 25-6).[11] These moral and sexual differences were accompanied by a belief that prostitute women are in some respects pathologically different from 'ordinary' women and the Committee argued that socio-economic disadvantages are only 'precipitating factors ... there must be some additional psychological element in the personality of the individual woman who becomes a prostitute' (1957: 79).[12]

The belief that prostitute women were different from non-prostitute women was consistent with the arguments put forward by criminologists such as Lombroso and Ferrero who attribute prostitute behaviour to biological defectiveness.[13] Such an approach makes it easier to designate prostitute women as 'other' and therefore to castigate them. One of the recommendations of the Committee was that 'research into the aetiology of prostitution should be undertaken' (1957: 98). Furthermore, powers were extended to the courts to

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[11] Testimony from women working as prostitutes does not support the statement that they are different from 'ordinary' women or that they have a different set of values. In *Streetwalker* (1959) and Sunny Carter's article 'A Most Useful Tool' in Jagger (1994) both women place themselves in a position of choice whereby preferred clients are those who are clean, undemanding, relatively generous and have respect for them. Although prostitute women exchange sex for money, Marxist and Radical Feminists would argue that housewives exchange their domestic and sexual labour in return for financial security. In this respect the difference between 'prostitute' and 'ordinary' women is challenged.

[12] Such a statement echoes the concerns raised earlier about whether the Committee were really interested in eliciting the views of prostitute women, or whether they were content to assume that prostitute women were different by virtue of their 'psychological make-up' (1957: 79).

remand women, on the occasion of their first or second conviction, for a 'social or medical report' which might include a 'medical or psychiatric examination' in an attempt to identify the 'personal problems' that led women to prostitution and strategies that could be employed to dissuade her from it (1957: 93-4). The Report then evokes a medical discourse that sees prostitution as a disease, one that is suffered by certain individual women, and caused by biological and psychological factors.

In conclusion the Wolfenden Committee emerged against a background of post-war debates concerning sexuality and the family, which saw prostitution as a very visible attack on the ideology of monogamous, heterosexual marriage. The privileging of this type of marriage, whilst not new, was, in the post-war period, concerned with addressing issues of familial dislocation whilst simultaneously recognising and domesticating female sexual pleasure. The Committee therefore was primarily concerned with reducing the visibility of prostitutes and exploring the nature of the female prostitute. It is this second question, what kind of woman is the female prostitute and what leads her to prostitution, that both films which I shall discuss engage with at some level, and in doing so provide particular answers.

The Flesh is Weak (d. Don Chaffey, 1957) and *Passport to Shame* (d. Alvin Rakoff, 1959) are both films that seemingly have at their centre a theme that bears a direct relation to contemporary societal concerns. The films have as their protagonist an 'innocent' young woman who arrives in the city and becomes inadvertently embroiled in organised prostitution. She is coerced or blackmailed into working (or almost working) as a prostitute before she is rescued and rehabilitated. Both films in their choice of titles deliberately exploit the potential salaciousness and moral indignation that can be

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[13] Lombroso and Ferrero understood normative femininity as sexually passive. Therefore prostitutes were believed to be a defect of nature, an abnormality within the system, rather than women exercising a rational

associated with their subject matter, and both reviews and publicity material picked up on these apparently opposing characteristics.

The Flesh is Weak was made by Eros, a small-scale distribution company, under the guidance of producer Raymond Stross. In a manner similar to *The Weak and the Wicked* and *Yield to the Night*, the reviews and material for the film illustrate, implicitly, the tension between realism and melodrama that I have suggested is a common feature of British film criticism. Both the film's press pack and publicity material suggest it to be a hard-hitting expose of those involved in organised prostitution, and the film was marketed partly on its alleged realism in its approach to its subject. The press pack for example carries the header 'THEY THREATENED US "DO NOT MAKE THIS FILM!"' referring to the fact that Stross took out £20,000 of insurance against recriminations from those involved in organised crime in London (Chadder, 1999: 76). An article in *Photoplay* continues the theme of realism and artistic integrity at the expense of both personal safety and professional disapproval. An interview with Stross comments on his 'courage' in 'exposing our greatest social problem' and leads with the header, 'AT LAST – A BRITISH FILM WITH GUTS' (Ferguson, 1957: 12). Despite the claims for realism (and by association honesty and integrity) which the film's publicity material trumpets, the promise of sex is clearly signalled. The poster used to advertise the film juxtaposes the banner-line 'THEY THREATENED US "DO NOT MAKE THIS FILM!"' with the figure of Italian actress Milly Vitale in a tight sleeveless sweater and skirt, hand on hip, smoking a cigarette with her blond hair offset by the dark brick wall against which she stands. Realism and its connotations here of integrity and social conscience are used to justify the promise that what the film will deliver is the corruption and debasement of the beautiful Milly Vitale.

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choice shaped by particular socio-economic circumstances.

Reviews of the film engage with the notions of realism and melodrama. *KineWeekly* describes it as a 'sex melodrama' with a script 'compounded of fact and fiction ... [which] ruthlessly exposes the white slave traffickers' (25 July 1957: 21). As melodrama is not a derogatory term in the *KineWeekly* lexicon, the review of the film has a generally positive tone. It is acceptable to merge fact and fiction and, as with the reviews for *The Weak and the Wicked*, verisimilitude can be achieved through melodrama. In a less favourable review *Monthly Film Bulletin* deemed the film 'crudely melodramatic' suggesting that it fails to be 'gravely concerned about, the real life problem of organised prostitution' (Sept. 1957: 114). Such comments imply that the film privileges sensationalism and melodrama over realism which, it is implicitly suggested, is the appropriate approach to take to the subject matter. The film is judged to have failed because of a lack of honesty and integrity and its failure to eschew melodrama to achieve verisimilitude.

Passport to Shame was made by British Lion, a production company that was floundering somewhat following the death of its head Alex Korda in 1958. This lack of direction had some advantages in terms of gender representation. Harper argues that, for want of a better policy following Korda's death, it operated a 'blunderbuss technique: fire enough pellets and some of them might hit. Accordingly, the range of female representations was extremely broad' (2000: 88). It was under these production conditions, and against the backdrop of the Wolfenden Report, that *Passport to Shame* emerged. As *The Flesh is Weak* before it, the reviews suggested that the film trod a line between realism and melodrama, and the privileging of one over the other was the point on which the reviews made their critical judgement. Publicity posters for the film in *KineWeekly* carried the heading 'EXPOSED! The shame of LONDON VICE!' whilst the image of Diana Dors in the foreground with hands on hips, and pelvis and tightly-sweatered breasts, thrusting forward suggested a lascivious sexuality in which shame played no part (5 Feb. 1959: 15,

see still 19, p. 190). Indeed what the publicity material suggests - and indeed promises - will be exposed is the figure of Diana Dors. *Monthly Film Bulletin* dismissed *Passport to Shame* for its lack of realism, decrying it as a 'wildly incredible story ... wholeheartedly absurd' '[m]otivations are mysterious and characterisations grotesque' (quoted in Hill, 1986: 192). In contrast the review in *KineWeekly* praised its realism, suggesting that it 'vividly reveals the tricks of London's white slave traffic', with 'principal characters [that] ring true' (quoted in Hill, 1986: 192). *KineWeekly* explicitly tied the subject matter of the film to the Wolfenden Report which is claimed provided '"heaven-sent" publicity' for the film (ibid).

Here again, as I suggested with the reviews for *The Weak and the Wicked* and *The Flesh is Weak*, two differing understandings of realism are employed. Publications such as *KineWeekly*, which were written with a mainstream film audience in mind, believed that melodrama was no barrier to verisimilitude whilst for more esoteric publications such as *Monthly Film Bulletin* realism, as the only appropriate aesthetic approach, can only be sullied by the introduction of melodramatic elements. In contrast to the reviews, the posters for both the films certainly foreground a patriarchal depiction of female sexuality to publicise the film, suggesting the exposure, not of organised crime, but of a beautiful young woman. Despite the arguments made by the publicity material and reviews in relation to the realistic or melodramatic depiction of prostitution, both films deal with prostitution in a particular way, and I will explore how they do this in my analysis.

The Flesh is Weak stars Italian actress Milly Vitale as Marissa, a young woman who arrives in London seeking employment and excitement. She meets and falls in love with Tony Giani (John Derek) who, unbeknownst to her, runs prostitution and other criminal rackets with his brother. The Gianis are under investigation by Buxton (William

Franklyn), a journalist with a social conscience, who is determined to expose them. Tony's intention is to recruit Marissa as a prostitute, a goal in which he succeeds by means of a complex plan which exploits her love for him and her desire to please him. Arrested for soliciting as a 'common prostitute' she receives the usual fine of £2 and decides at this point to leave Tony and work for herself. Incensed Tony frames her for a vicious knife attack on another prostitute, for which she serves six months in Holloway. Upon her release, she is offered protection from Buxton in return for testifying against the Gianis, and the film ends with her entering court to give evidence against Tony.

The film opens with Marissa arriving alone and wide-eyed at a London train station. Dressed in a mac, sensible shoes and a headscarf, and carrying a small suitcase and a parcel, she checks into a hostel for young women. During her search for work she meets a couple, Gracie and Henry, who set her up with a hostess job at a club, The Golden Bucket, where she dances with men in return for money. It is here that she meets Tony who rescues her from a belligerent customer and who initially installs her as his lover in his Brighton flat before moving her to London to inveigle her into prostitution.

During their time together in Brighton, and beyond, Marissa engages with a fantasy of heterosexual romance. The film is thus less concerned with prostitution and more with Marissa's inability to read masculinity accurately. What Marissa desires from Tony is romance and marriage and they both play their respective roles of normative masculinity and femininity and read and respond to each other accordingly. Tony is assertive and protective towards Marissa whilst she is adoring and compliant. When Tony first rescues Marissa from her hostess job he takes her to a 'respectable' restaurant (indicated by the plush furnishings and deferential waiters) and regales her with tales of adventure and heroism, to which she listens misty-eyed and enraptured. He drives her home, kisses her

gently and tells her to go in as it is 'past midnight.' At this point Marissa asks him if he visits 'that club' (The Golden Bucket) often in an attempt to ascertain what kind of person he is. Tony does not answer but instead murmurs 'what soft hair ... you're a very pretty girl Marissa.' She fails to elicit an answer to this crucial question and is instead won over by his romantic whisperings. He plays the ardent suitor, she the adoring and chaste maiden.

Such a dynamic is indicative of the romance motif and the theme of the woman needing to choose the right man with whom to align herself. Both *The Flesh is Weak* and *Passport to Shame* are, in many respects, informed by this motif. The central theme of the romance genre, as identified by Radway in her analysis of popular romance literature, is 'one woman-one man' and the 'evolution of love' (1991: 123). Radway argues that the heroine must find a man who understands and appreciates her and is a worthy recipient of her love. The female protagonist must learn to distinguish between worthy and unworthy suitors, legitimate and illegitimate masculinity, and romance novels are therefore frequently populated with male foils and villains as well as male heroes (Radway, 1991: 132-3). Learning to read masculinity correctly is an essential but difficult task as 'the heroine initially sees no difference between these individuals and the hero' (ibid).[14] Marissa mistakenly reads Tony as a worthy and honourable suitor and engages in her romantic fantasy, in which he initially and calculatingly plays a willing and complementary role. The scenes in the Brighton flat clearly indicate this. Marissa places his slippers by the fire, lays the table for dinner, embraces him upon his return from 'work', gently chastises him about his lateness and enquires about his day. Tony responds with a request for a drink,

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[14] Radway argues that this theme is a reflection of its centrality to the concrete social reality of women's lives. Women's economic dependence on men, due to their reduced status in the sphere of paid work, makes it imperative that they pick the right man. For Radway 'it becomes absolutely essential that she learn to distinguish those who want her sexually from that special individual who is willing to pledge commitment and care in return for her sexual favour' (1991: 140). In this respect Radway's argument shares some similarities with the idea of femininity as cultural capital and the necessity for women to invest in their femininity to ensure their marketability as prospective wives and mothers.

gently mocks her for sounding as though 'we were already married', and chastises her for 'nagging' when she enquires about the progress of his divorce. Indeed these scenes exhibit many of the characteristics of what Smart termed the 'eroticisation of the family' except crucially Marissa and Tony are not married therefore the scenario is illegitimate.

Tony engages with Marissa's romantic fantasy for some considerable time. Indeed, when he asks her to entertain men in return for money to support his 'ailing business' he works to mollify her concerns by claiming, 'no-one expects you to like it ... it's for us', allowing her to hold on to her romantic dreams for a little longer. The turning point in the narrative occurs after she has entertained Ricco, a 'business acquaintance' of Tony, and Tony responds by suggesting she entertain further men. During this scene Marissa lies on the bed crying whilst Tony stands in the small en-suite bathroom, smoking a cigarette. He turns on the sink tap and the camera cuts between Marissa, Tony, and the water swirling down the plug-hole. The scene functions on a number of levels. Turning on the tap affords Tony the pretence of 'doing something' in the bathroom, providing a degree of cover. It serves moreover as a distancing device between himself and Marissa. It means that he is not in the same room as her when he asks her to prostitute herself further. By casualising their conversation he can avoid engaging with her emotions and the erosion of her romantic ideals. Indeed, on a symbolic level, the disappearance of the water down the plug-hole can be read as a comment on both Marissa's idealism and naivety.

It is at this point that Marissa's romantic dream starts to disintegrate, although she retains hope, in the face of adversity, for some considerable time. This is because her emotional investment in Tony as a suitable husband is considerable and therefore difficult to undermine. It is only when Marissa, following her arrest and conviction for street walking, is informed by Buxton of Tony's true identity that she begins to question her judgement.

Tony's threats of physical violence convince her to carry on prostituting herself but she eventually breaks down in tears and instigates a confrontation with Tony. During this scene Tony makes it clear to Marissa in a violent outburst that he never loved her and always intended to prostitute her. Despite this, she clings to the remnants of the possibility that he might really love her. Even when she receives a six month jail sentence, framed by the Gianis' for the armed assault of another prostitute, she steadfastly refuses to testify against Tony, in a kind of ironic parody of the loyal wife. Indeed she only agrees to Buxton's demands when she is released from Holloway and sees the face of her former friend Doris who has been mutilated by the Giani gang. In the penultimate scene, prior to her giving evidence against him, Tony tries one last attempt to dissuade her by claiming his love for her. Marissa becomes misty-eyed and listens enraptured, wanting to believe him but knowing that she cannot. Despite her emotional ties she eventually accepts that Tony is an unworthy suitor and learns to read his version of masculinity for what it is.

That Marissa makes the shift from romantic fantasy to a more pragmatic understanding of gender relations and her changed position in relation to them is signified by her relationship in the film with cigarettes. In cultural terms smoking by women has historically denoted a degree of divergence in relation to femininity. Although smoking by women had, by the end of the Second World War, become increasingly socially acceptable it retained certain associations with independence and autonomy which, for some, indicated a dubious morality in relation to women.[15] Marissa steadfastly refuses to smoke throughout the film up to the scene where Tony violently denounces his love for her. The

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[15] Historically, smoking, in the mid-Victorian era and into the early twentieth century, was a symbol of divergent femininity which stood as a challenge to norms of respectable femininity. As Hilton argues 'the cigarette ... gave rise to associations of deviant sexuality and wanton morality' (2000: 140). These associations for the middle-class and 'respectable' working-class continued to resonate into the early twentieth century where smoking was linked to 'pioneering new women and ... those operating outside conventional respectability (prostitutes and actresses)' (Hilton, 2000: 143). Greater economic and social freedom for women in the years between the wars led to an increase in cigarette consumption and its representation in popular films as an icon of sophistication and glamour elevated its status to that of signifier of autonomous adult womanhood.

next scene opens with Marissa in her negligee, smoking. Cigarettes, like clothes, have a narrative significance that is linked to Marissa's behaviour. Smoking signifies her recognition that Tony is an unworthy suitor and her gradual realisation that he never loved her and always intended to prostitute her. It is linked to her acceptance of her dreams, in relation to Tony, as fantasy and recognition of her own naivety and erring judgement in relation to masculinity. In semantic terms smoking constitutes the symbol of streetwise adulthood and cigarettes are used to signal Marissa as no longer a naïve innocent but a 'knowing' woman.

Interestingly, Tony, likewise, is equally deluded in his reading of Marissa. Despite Marissa's repeated protestations that she does not care about material goods Tony insists that she does not love him but rather, 'my money and the things I can give you.' In response to Marissa's protestations Tony argues, 'what do you want me to say, every time I see you my heart stands still?' His comments illustrate his reading of her romantic fantasy and his role within it. Radway argues that the romance novel utilises the 'female foil' as an alternative to the heroine (1991: 131). The foil 'views men as little more than tools for her own aggrandizement ... [and is] perfectly willing to manipulate them by flaunting her sexual availability' (ibid). Tony reads Marissa in this manner and fails to understand her femininity accurately.[16] Indeed he appears genuinely confused by her. When she realises that he never loved her she becomes sullen and withdrawn. Tony responds with anger and bemusement claiming, 'haven't I given you everything a girl could want', as he throws a fur wrap at her. It is because he mistakenly reads her as materialistic rather than romantic that he cannot understand why she is not satisfied with the material goods she derives from her association with him.

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[16] Indeed that Tony reads Marissa as a 'female foil' might reveal something of post-war male anxieties in relation to femininity. Tony's violent outburst where he denounces Marissa, accusing her and all women of using love to achieve material gains at the expense of men, is suggestive of something that cannot be entirely

The film dramatises one of the central themes of the romance motif in its depiction of a female protagonist who must learn to read masculinity. Another of the mainstays of the motif is female virginity. Snitow, in her analysis of Harlequin romances, argues that '[v]irginity is a given here; sex means marriage and marriage, promised at the end, means, finally, there can be sex' (1983: 248). Marissa however disturbs the romance motif by engaging in non-marital sex, although presumably she thinks of it as pre-marital sex. The scene where Tony and Marissa have sex in the Brighton flat occurs early in the film and follows on from the scenes where they 'play' at being married. It is interesting that, in a film about prostitution, it is the only scene where sex takes place. As Tony lies on the bed reading, his shirt unbuttoned, a negligee-clad Marissa drapes herself across him, pushing open his shirt and kissing his bare chest. His attention arrested Marissa moves to kiss his mouth but Tony instead pushes her head down his body creating the suggestion of oral sex (see still 17 below).
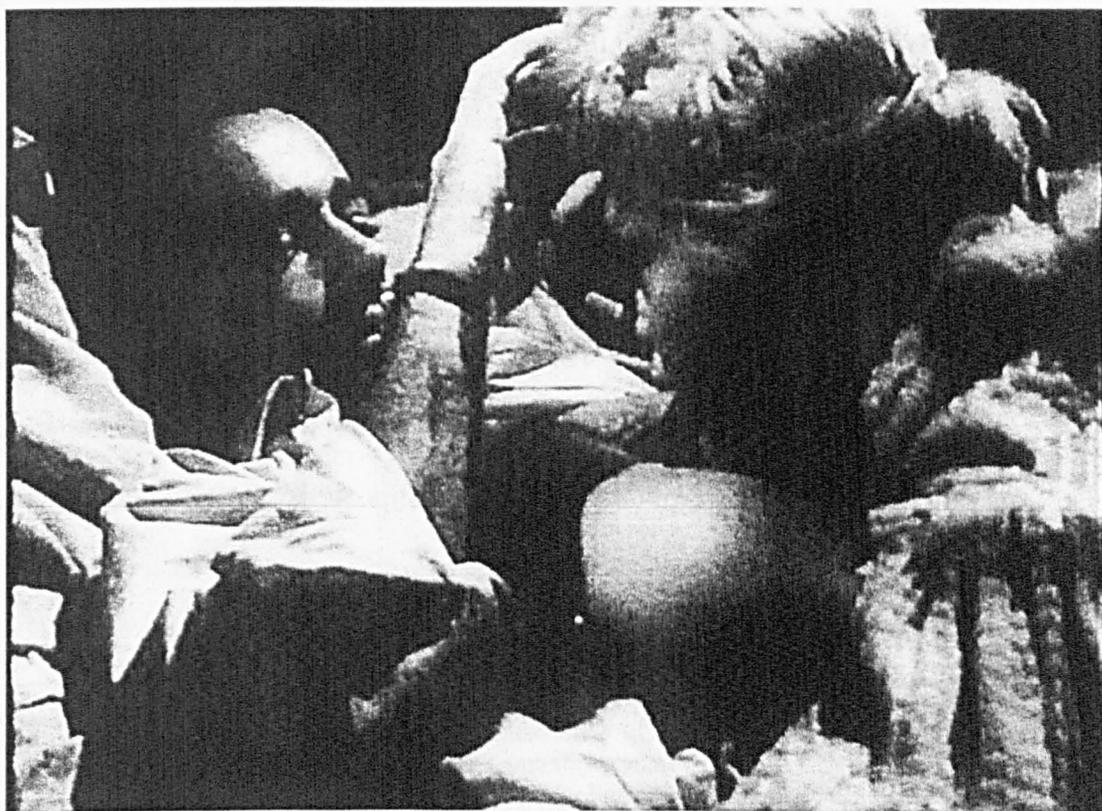
Still 17. John Derek and Milly Vitale in *The Flesh is Weak* (1957)

accounted for by the narrative. In a manner similar to the outburst by Bedelia, what is hinted at in this scene

The scene is interrupted by a ringing telephone and, as Marissa leaves the bedroom, Tony continues to stroke his naked chest. Marissa returns to the room after the telephone call is finished and begs Tony not to return to London at least, the inference being, until they have had sex. Tony, torn between sexual desire and duty, somewhat reluctantly agrees and the scene closes as he pushes Marissa to the bed.

In engaging in non-marital sex there are some parallels to be drawn between the character of Marissa in the film and the theme of the 'fallen woman' whereby a married woman commits adultery and subsequently loses her place in 'respectable' society.[17] The fall is the consequence of some form of sexual transgression, usually engaging in illicit sex of some description. Jacobs however, in her analysis of the theme in 1930s Hollywood films, argues that many 'invert the downward trajectory, proposing a rise in class' (1987: 101). Class rise, for Jacobs' argument, is not about social but monetary status with the female protagonist gaining, during the process of her fall, the accoutrements of wealth, that is, 'furs, automobiles, diamonds' (Jacobs, 1987: 102). Class however is never just about money and material goods but includes cultural capital and Marissa, as Mary Hilton before her, lacks both economic and cultural capital. Her only real asset is her femininity which she sells, initially as a hostess in The Golden Bucket, and then in her relationship with Tony, whom she mistakenly assumes will be her husband. In doing so she does gain, albeit temporarily, some of the signifiers of wealth and an analysis of Marissa's clothes

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is the displacement of male anxiety regarding gender roles.

[17] Auerbach has identified many of the key characteristics of the fallen woman motif in her analysis of nineteenth-century literature and art. The woman commits some sort of 'sexual trespass' and as the narrative progresses she moves from the private sphere of the family home to the public sphere of the street (Auerbach, 1982: 155). Ostracised from society she is forced into prostitution or other ignominious positions before the narrative concludes, usually with her death. The fall however has a 'transforming power' whereby the woman is 'irretrievably metamorphosed' (Auerbach, 1982: 160). This can lead to the presence of two contradictory discourses, 'an explicit narrative that abases the woman, an iconographic pattern that exalts her' (Auerbach, 1982: 168). Marissa's wardrobe in *The Flesh is Weak*, even whilst she denies her interest in material goods, functions as an iconic pattern that undermines the narrative that punishes her for sexual transgressions.

illustrates how they may function visually as compensation for aligning herself with the 'wrong' man, as well as an index of her progress in the film.

Marissa's initial appearance at the start of the film in a nondescript mac, flat shoes and a headscarf is soon replaced with a new wardrobe of luxurious clothing and jewellery. Installed in the Brighton flat, warming Tony's slippers, she wears a stunning evening-gown, pale in colour and embroidered with an intricate design. Her gown is accessorised with high heels, diamond drop earrings and a diamond ring on her engagement finger with her hair pinned-up in an elegant chignon, secured with a beautiful slide. Her accumulation of fine clothing continues throughout the film as she moves from the Brighton flat to the terraced house in London where she works as a prostitute. She first arrives at the terraced house dressed in a dog-tooth jacket over an elegant black halter-neck evening gown accompanied by pearls and brooch. For her first encounter with prostitution, entertaining Tony's 'business acquaintance,' she is again dressed in a beautiful evening gown, elaborately decorated and accessorised with expensive jewellery and furs (see still 18 overleaf). Her first night walking the streets sees her in an evening-dress with a bold contrasting bodice and skirt, chandelier earrings and an elaborate necklace, a black satin bolero jacket with diamanté trim with a full length cream wool coat across her shoulders. She acquires a host of glamorous dresses and a fleet of fur coats, half a dozen of which are laid out over the bed and are abandoned when she leaves Tony and decides to work alone. During the course of the narrative she moves from the women's hostel, flat shoes and raincoat, to Tony's house, high heels and fur coats.

Still 18. Marissa's beautiful wardrobe in *The Flesh is Weak* (1957)

Her acquisition of economic capital is eventually arrested when she receives a six-month

spell in Holloway for the (framed) knife attack on another prostitute. Upon her release she

makes the decision to help Buxton and at this point reverts to plain clothes and shoes with

heels of a medium height, the fur coat having made its last appearance. In the final scene,

where she arrives at court to give evidence against Tony, she is dressed in a dark checked

coat over a dark, plain, suit. Marissa is 'rewarded' for her transgression of non-marital

sex, and her poor judgement, with the accumulation of luxurious material goods. Luxury,

however, is associated in the narrative with the choice of the wrong man. What motivates

Marissa is not a desire for luxury goods but a romantic fantasy and an over-investment in

the wrong man. What happens as a by-product of this motivation is that she acquires a

glamorous wardrobe, even though she is at pains to insist it has no meaning for her. What

the film seems to dramatise is that a glamorous wardrobe is no compensation for the failure

to marry the right man, whilst it (inadvertently, ironically and simultaneously) illustrates the desirability of such a luxurious wardrobe.

In terms of economic capital, very little belongs to Marissa. Tony thinks of the clothes and jewellery he has given Marissa as his, to be sold or confiscated at his discretion. Marissa leaves Tony and, in a bold move for independence, decides to work as a prostitute for herself. She strikes out alone, walking the streets in a clingy dress, high heels and a fur bolero. This outfit represents all the economic capital she has accumulated during her time with Tony. Her claim for independence is short-lived. The Gianis soon frame her for the knife attack and she is imprisoned. Upon her release, she finds both the Giani's and Buxton waiting for her outside the prison. There is no space for her to secure an independent living and she cannot operate outside male control, although her willingness to do so is evident. She eventually accepts that she must take Buxton's offer of help if she is to survive. Indeed it is at this point that she learns to read Buxton's version of masculinity correctly, having previously refused to help him on the basis that he was seemingly no different from other men. She learns to align herself with the right man; not having a man is never presented as a viable option.

One of the questions that the film attempts to address is what makes a woman become a prostitute and in so doing it echoes the concerns of the Wolfenden Report. It is a question that Buxton asks Marissa, Marissa's first client asks of her, Marissa herself asks the maid Trixi, and upon which Tony has very clear opinions.[18] In the case of Trixi it is claimed that she was 'born to it.' Such a statement might be used to describe an innate predilection, a biological predisposition of the kind favoured by Lombroso and Ferrero. Certainly Trixie's tale of an unknown father and a drunken mother who initiated her into

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[18] Tony, who reads Marissa incorrectly, argues that it is her weakness for money and material goods that leads her to prostitution.

prostitution is reminiscent of the case histories put forward in research from the 1950s.[19]

In relation to Marissa it is suggested that she was duped as a result of her naivety and misguided love for Tony. Marissa's first client certainly sees her as a naïve innocent commenting, 'you're not what I expected. You're nice and well ... you could almost be like me. I wanted the real thing and you're not the real thing, are you?' Her customer, a well-spoken, middle-class young man, sees Marissa as his social equal and is as unable to have sex with her as she is with him. Likewise Buxton sees Marissa as a 'nice' girl and finds it difficult to reconcile this impression of her with her role as a prostitute asking, 'how did a decent girl like you, from an apparently normal background, get tangled up in this business ... was it a man?' The comments by both men reiterate the divide upon which the Wolfenden Report draws, between 'ordinary' women and prostitute women. Written into the figure of the prostitute then is the idea of 'difference.' The suggestion is that Marissa has (inadvertently) crossed over to the 'wrong' side. Such an action is attributed to her naivety and her inability to successfully negotiate both her environment and her understanding of masculinity.

Marissa's failure to be the 'real thing' is used to imply that there remains the potential for her to be saved and the story is in part a redemptive narrative. Unlike the fallen woman who, once she has transgressed, moves towards almost certain death, Marissa can be rehabilitated. Redemption however is two-fold, both personal and social. The film suggests that Marissa can be rehabilitated because she learns to read masculinity correctly and no longer aligns herself with the wrong man. Personal redemption seems assured. In contrast, the question of social rehabilitation is deliberately left unanswered. Marissa's statement, towards the end of the film, to Buxton that, 'I have no future' is entirely valid. With a conviction as a common prostitute and a prison sentence for violent assault her

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[19] In *Women of the Streets* the case histories were marked by a 'depressing sameness' with the proposed solution one of 'happy homes' in childhood (1955: xv).

future role in society is uncertain, and the film closes on her courtroom testimony against Tony. In this respect there are similarities between her character and that of Jean from *The Weak and the Wicked* which also raises questions about the extent to which women are permanently marked by their experiences. In contrast to Jean however there is no Michael character waiting in the wings for Marissa, ready to recuperate her to her 'proper place' in the gendered social economy.[20] The closing shot with credits proclaiming 'this is not the end' is ambiguous and offers contradictory readings. It could be seen as a failure to engage with the question of what would be an appropriate response towards both Marissa and Tony. Alternatively, such an open ending could be seen as a courageous challenge for the audience to provide their own answers to the question of whether Marissa should have a future and also whether Tony should be punished. Indeed whilst we have witnessed Marissa's punishment for her transgressions, Tony remains unpunished. His punishment rests on Marissa's testimony but her slight faltering at the courtroom door hints of a failure of nerve which may undermine her ability to give evidence against him. This suggests a lingering doubt that he may not be punished, because of an unspoken belief that Marissa is culpable. She may be, as I have argued, an ordinary woman who has inadvertently strayed to the 'wrong side,' but, as with all women, she evokes a degree of suspicion.

The questions of gender relations in the context of prostitution can be further analysed with reference to Geraghty's work on the European woman, Harper's notion of the 'foreign floosie', and Dyer's arguments about the social problem genre. The character of Marissa, a young Italian woman, is played by the Italian actress Milly Vitale, who had starred in several American films before *The Flesh is Weak*.[21] The character of Tony Giani, the Italian gangland leader, is played by the American actor John Derek, a well-known leading man in American films during the post-war period. The film's producer Raymond Stross

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[20] Although I have suggested that this ending can be read in an ironic manner it can also be understood at face value as a traditional happy ending.

suggested in an interview with *Photoplay* that the leads were chosen to attract a non-domestic audience for the film (Ferguson, July 1957: 13). Whilst this was no doubt the stated intention behind the casting, the choice of 'foreign' actors had resonance beyond the commercial aspirations of the film. Harper argues that 'British films of the 1950s required "outsiders" to express forbidden repertoires of desire. Foreign Floosies were recruited in droves to play characters with negotiable morality ...[whose] narrative function was to operate as sexual proxies for respectable British girls' (2000: 98-9). For Geraghty, the European woman is found in many British films from the fifties in genres as diverse as war films, thrillers, comedies, romance, and the New Wave at the end of the decade (2000: 93). In relation to sexuality the European woman figured as the quintessential 'beautiful, free and sexy foreign woman', the exotic 'other' that simultaneously 'repels and fascinates' her audience (ibid). She was part of the British cultural imaginary that perceives the Continent as the location of sexual emancipation and licence.[22]

Milly Vitale is a good example of Harper's 'foreign floosie' and Geraghty's European woman, a character type whose sexuality was allegedly less inhibited and more expressive than that typically attributed to the British woman. As such she was more open to become inveigled in prostitution because her sexuality was already marked on the surface as exotic and 'other.' Other characteristics that Geraghty identifies include the European woman's impulsiveness and her ability to 'surrender to passion' and these are part of Marissa's personality that, in her case, are linked to her sexuality (2000: 107). She surrenders completely to her passion for Tony and indeed it is her wholehearted surrender that blinds her, for a long time, to his true nature. Furthermore, her impulsiveness is linked to her passionate nature. In one scene she kisses Tony in the car outside the hostel. The next time she appears, shortly afterwards, she is installed as his mistress in his Brighton flat.

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[21] The most prominent of these was probably *The Seven Little Foys* in 1955 with Bob Hope.

Geraghty comments on the familial dislocation experienced by the European woman, and likewise Marissa's family and their experiences of the war elicit only a brief mention. Marissa comments that her father, a sailor with the Merchant Navy, was killed during the war. Her mother is referred to but she has no physical presence in the film and Marissa, in common with the female protagonists discussed in the previous chapters, is without family and friends and therefore socially isolated, vulnerable, and expendable.

The casting of John Derek in the role of Italian gangland leader Tony Giani can be linked to post-war concerns about crime and immigration. Smart argues that '[i]n the 1950s the "problem of prostitution" became linked with the "problem of immigration"' (1981: 50). In post-war London many of the pimps were Maltese, Italian and West Indian, and this combination of black or foreign men, said to be '"living off the bodies of white women," was utilised to enrage public opinion' (ibid). Creating the characters of an Italian female prostitute and male pimp served to both underscore their sexual divergence from British women and men, and strategically distance Britain from the problem, placing it at the door of outsiders.

In terms of genre, *The Flesh is Weak*, as with the films discussed in the previous chapter, is most often identified as a social problem film (Hill, 1986; Dyer, 1993). The focus of these films are concerns associated with the private realm, namely familial and sexual relationships, subjects which, as Dyer argues, 'have traditionally been thought of as being "outside of" history, and therefore class struggle' (1993, 100). In focusing on such subjects however they do not then necessarily engage with class. Dyer argues that the social problem genre draws on ahistoric notions of femininity[23] and, in so doing, social

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[22] Britain's understanding of the figure of the Continental young woman draws on a tradition that can be traced back through the earlier image of 'decadent Berlin in the 1920s' (Geraghty, 2000: 94), and beyond.

[23] Dyer draws on Claire Johnston's argument of 'the basic opposition which places man inside history, and woman as ahistoric and eternal' (1993: 101).

problems such as prostitution are afforded a place outside society. A consequence of locating them thus is that the issue of prostitution 'is seen to be essentially the same ... regardless of social class or economic circumstance' (Dyer, 1993: 102). Class dynamics are side-stepped and the presence of prostitution is seemingly less to do with societal factors and more to do with what might be described as the 'eternal problem of women.'

The Flesh is Weak supports this argument (although my analysis of *Passport to Shame* suggests the limits of this position). The use of an Italian actress/character in *The Flesh is Weak* further strengthens this dynamic. As Harper argues, the use of foreign actresses serves to place them 'outside the class arena' (2000: 99). By abdicating responsibility and recognition of social context the problem of prostitution becomes the problem of women and furthermore of an individual woman who has, in this case, a predisposition towards naivety and romantic fantasy which leads to her sexual exploitation. Indeed the film is 'topical' in a literal sense in that it focuses on an individual, a specific woman and in doing so constructs the criminal world of which she is a part as a world separate from the 'real' one. This compounds the abdication of responsibility for what is alleged to be a social problem, as prostitution can be understood as something that happens 'elsewhere.' In this respect the film is less about prostitutes and prostitution and more concerned with individual 'problem' women and how they might leave themselves open to exploitation. At the same time, the narrative drive of the film is the depiction of gender relations in the more traditional arena of heterosexual romance and it reworks the theme of prostitution into the theme of hetero-romance. It is in this manner that the film enters the contemporary debate about 1950s femininity and the alleged consequences of failing to channel female sexual desire into heterosexual monogamous marriage.

So far I have considered how the romance motif informs the filmic narrative, some of the conventions of the fallen woman cycle, and how notions of foreignness and femininity are used by the social problem genre to circumvent issues of class and economics within Britain itself. I have also suggested that the film does not engage with the figure of the prostitute but rather with the theme of hetero-romance. I will now explore these, and other themes, in *Passport to Shame* and consider what conclusions can be drawn from these films about post-war society, femininity and the representation of prostitutes in films from the period.

In *Passport to Shame* young French waitress Malou (Odile Versois) is framed for stealing a café's takings and is rescued by an English woman Aggie (Brenda de Banzie) who brings her from France to London as her companion. Aggie and her accomplice Nick Biagi (Herbert Lom) arrange a *mariage blanc* between Malou and London taxi driver Johnny (Eddie Constantine) to ensure that Malou receives a British passport. Nick is in fact an East End gangster and with Aggie's assistance intends for Malou to work as a high-class prostitute from one of his brothels. Malou refuses and Nick forces her into the role of common prostitute, walking the streets under the protection of one of Nick's experienced 'girls' Vicki (Diana Dors). Whilst on the streets Malou's husband Johnny rescues her, only for Nick to steal her back and reinstall her in his brothel. At this point Johnny, with the assistance of his cab-driving colleagues (led by his friend Mike) and Vicki, launches an assault on the brothel to reclaim Malou. During the course of the raid a fire breaks out and Nick dies, despite the efforts of Johnny to save him. The film ends with Malou and Johnny reconciled, Aggie tending Nick's body, and Vicki and Mike pairing off together.

The motif of heterosexual romance that was evident in *The Flesh is Weak* is also present in *Passport to Shame* and this film too reframes the issue of prostitution in terms of the ability

of the characters to read masculinity and femininity correctly. The film, utilising the common narrative device of doubling that I discussed in Chapter 3, is based around a series of differences in relation to gender. There are the two gangs of men; the cabbies and the foreign criminals.[24] The cabbies are represented as 'decent' working men trying to make a living under difficult circumstances. In contrast the criminals make their living through prostitution, illegal loans and money laundering. These groups are headed by two differing versions of masculinity: Johnny, who is trying to earn a living as a cab driver, and Nick, an East End gang leader from an Italian background. Both men through the course of the narrative must learn to read femininity accurately, a task in which they both initially fail. Nick invests a significant amount of time, money and effort in Malou, labouring under the mistaken conviction that he can make her a high-class prostitute and, in his own words, 'rescue her from the gutter.' He fails furthermore to read Vicki correctly. He assumes that Vicki is motivated by money, but what she really desires is revenge for his treatment of her sister. His failure to learn makes him expendable and the film closes with his death. Johnny likewise initially misreads Malou and assumes she is a prostitute whose motivation is financial greed. In contrast to Nick however, Johnny does reassess his opinions and learns, in the course of the narrative, to read Malou accurately and recognise her as a suitable wife.

The film engages with questions of masculinity within a moral framework of legitimacy and illegitimacy. Nick believes that Johnny can be bought for the price of a taxi cab (Johnny's ticket to economic self-sufficiency) and indeed is initially proved correct when Johnny agrees to participate in the *mariage blanc* in return for £200.[25] Johnny's morals however are challenged by his friend Mike who disapproves of his actions and questions his judgement. Johnny defends his choice claiming, 'all my chances got smashed when the

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[24] In this respect there are parallels between the film and *West Side Story* (1961) which depicts two warring factions.

cab got smashed ... it's a glorified rat race and I'm gonna start running 'til I get out in front with all the smart guys, and I don't care how rough it gets.' Getting ahead by criminal means however is not rewarded in the film and Mike's morals are vindicated. Johnny is rehabilitated only when he returns the money, rescues Malou, and risks his life trying to save Nick.[26]

The film dramatises two different versions of femininity through the characterisation of the two women; the petite Malou and her double, the buxom Vicki. The brothel in which they reside is an extension of this doubling, being spatially split in two and comprising the respectable side where Malou is installed and the 'bad' side where the rest of the girls, including Vicki, are housed. The 'bad' side can be understood as the 'criminal underworld mirror' just as Vicki is the 'underworld reflection' of Malou (Chadder, 1999: 79). The 'good' and 'bad' sides of the house seemingly represent the traditional madonna/whore dichotomy of femininity. Vicki however is not the exact opposite of Malou. A connecting door joins the two sides of the house and only Vicki has the ability to pass effortlessly between the two halves, without fear of reprisals, and appear equally at home in either sphere. Vicki's ability to move between the two houses suggests an adaptability that is not possessed by either Malou or any of the other women. Indeed Vicki is something of a liminal figure, neither (or both) madonna or whore. In this respect she is constructed as different from the 'real prostitutes' who hang off the balconies. The depiction of these women seems to reference the brothels found in many Western films. The film fails however to engage with this group and, as *The Flesh is Weak* before it, deals with prostitution only at the level of mistaken identity. Malou never actually becomes a

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[25] Johnny in fact 'prostitutes' himself more than Malou ever does by selling his name in return for money.

[26] Indeed Johnny's initial argument that life is a 'rat race' to be surmounted at all costs is similar to the post-war portrayals of masculinity found in films such as *The Good Die Young* (1954) where civilian life fails to live up to the excitement and promise of war-time resulting in disillusionment and alienation for the men which leads them to a life of crime which ultimately is shown not to pay. In contrast *Passport to Shame*, with its hetero-romance motif, leads to a 'positive' conclusion where the values of hard-work and honesty are rewarded.

prostitute and Vicki is more reminiscent of the 'tart-with-a-heart' figure whose tartiness is redeemed through her heart. Although they inhabit different versions of femininity the narrative suggests that both women are ultimately redeemable and, in doing so, constructs an opposition between the two women and the 'real' prostitutes on the balcony, thus leaving the conventional assumption of the accuracy of that differentiation intact.

In terms of femininity Malou exhibits key differences from Marissa in the previous film. As Malou does not engage in non-marital sex she does not transgress in the way that Marissa does. With no emotional investment in the 'wrong' man Malou can resist all attempts to inveigle her into prostitution. Indeed Malou quickly invests emotionally in the 'right' man. Back at the 'good' house following her arranged wedding to Johnny she engages in a romantic fantasy, confiding to the cat, 'I wouldn't have minded if it had been a real marriage.' The 'fallen woman' cycle is not in evidence in her characterisation and Malou refuses the accoutrements of wealth that accompany transgression.

A brief analysis of her wardrobe illustrates this point. Malou has a certain fondness for fine clothes, evidenced by her somewhat extravagant purchase of a hat during the opening sequence. It is, however, a very delicate 'feminine' hat, not in any way striking or bold, therefore its style is in keeping with Malou's personality.[27] This fondness does not extend to being a weakness however and we never see her wear the fine clothes which Aggie provides for her. As Marissa before her, Malou arrives in London wearing a plain mac and her only dress, which is a sober and comfortable-looking affair. Malou continues to wear clothes indicative of normative femininity throughout the film, with the exception of one brief scene. When Aggie first takes her back to the apartment she throws open the doors of

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[27] Winship, in her analysis of the stories in women's magazines, describes the hat as 'that item of '50s clothing which most neatly summed up women's mode of femininity: frivolous, sober, sensible ...?' (1981: 21). Malou's hat, like the one belonging to the female protagonist in the story that Winship discusses, signifies a 'care-free femininity' (ibid) but not an overtly divergent femininity.

a wardrobe filled with glamorous and seductive gowns, pressing one upon Malou. Malou is taken aback and somewhat excited by the sight of such luxury and slips out of her own dress to try on the gown, in doing so revealing her plain white 'virginal' under-slip.[28] At this point Nick arrives and Malou moves into an anteroom. The only glimpse offered of Malou in the gown is through a half open door, her back towards the camera as she looks at herself in a full length mirror, its image reflected towards the viewer. Although this allows the audience to view Malou both front and back, she is captured only in long-shot, in the background of the frame. This makes it impossible to scrutinise her and get the full effect of her in the gown or indeed, crucially, to see clearly her own response to her image. This is the only shot of Malou in one of Aggie's glamorous gowns and for the rest of the film Malou appears in the 'sensible' dress of normative femininity. Even for her one abortive attempt at streetwalking she is dressed in an outfit more reminiscent of a schoolteacher than a prostitute. She wears a plain white blouse, a dark, full, skirt that comes to just below the knee and a pair of medium height heels (see still 19 overleaf). The only concession to her new career as a prostitute is a pair of bright, dangly, earrings which she removes immediately when Johnny first rescues her and she is safely installed in his taxi cab. As in *The Flesh is Weak* cigarettes, like clothes, function as a comment on Malou's behaviour and morality. Whilst she waits outside the solicitors' office with Johnny, she initially refuses his offer of a cigarette. During the taxi ride to the registry office however, she accepts one and in doing so seems to acknowledge that her actions are questionable, reminiscing, 'my mother said marriage is forever.' In character terms cigarettes are used here to denote compromised innocence and a move towards streetwise adulthood for Malou. In contrast to Marissa however who smokes her first cigarette alone,

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[28] Indeed this scene of women in their underwear is exactly mirrored later when Vicki appears in black basque and stockings in a ruse to distract the guard at Malou's door whilst a rescue attempt is instigated.

Malou shares her smoking experience with Johnny, an action which denotes its function as

'a common ritual of courtship[29]' (Hilton, 2000: 147).

Still 19. Publicity poster for *Passport to Shame* (1959), *KineWeekly* 5 Feb. 1959

[29] Although there remains the lingering possibility that cigarettes imply questionable morals. It is noteworthy that one of the tactics Nick uses to inveigle Malou to prostitution is an opium laced cigarette, the implication being here that her move towards knowing womanhood still leaves her open to corruption, as she is not yet fully contained within the confines of heterosexual marriage.

Indeed the suggestion of courtship between Johnny and Malou is further supported by the fact that Malou has (inadvertently) married the 'right' man rather than formed an emotional attachment to the 'wrong man.' For this reason she can be redeemed and the marriage honoured. She is however presented as a fairly passive victim. She has enough resolve to resist the attempts to bribe her with luxury and, up to a point, the physical violence and threats delivered by Nick, but ultimately she needs the actions of Johnny and Vicki to save her.

Malou is in fact, as Chadder has argued, the 'preferred model of 1950s femininity' and this femininity does not seem particularly 'European' in her case (1999: 79). Indeed Malou does not seem to fit Geraghty's paradigm of the European woman. Although some of its characteristics are in evidence, she is beautiful, French and blonde, is she therefore more open to sexual divergence? During her first meeting with Johnny he asks her whether Paris is as gay as its reputation suggests, to which she replies, 'Paris isn't gay when you're hungry and frightened.' This, and the death of her brother in the war, serve the purpose of alluding to a war-time past, but undermine any notions of sexual expressiveness in her character. Malou's associations with Paris are wholly negative and are not indicative of the sexual freedom the city holds in the British cultural imaginary. She does not exhibit the passion or the sexuality that characterises Marissa.

Malou's capital is her reticent femininity and what she does possess are beauty, innocence, integrity and domestic skills, all the attributes of the 'perfect' wife. Her facility for maternity is indicated by her adoption of the cat, upon which she lavishes love and attention.[30] After Johnny first rescues her she informs him that 'nothing did happen to me

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[30] Semantically the cat signals, in a manner similar to Bedelia, Malou's openness to divergence but there the analogy between the two women ends. Rather than overtly seeking an exotic pet such as a Siamese, Malou adopts the local housecat and treats it as a confidant and outlet for her maternal drives. In contrast Bedelia's cat is less a confidant and more an accomplice.

in that dreadful house.' Assured of her sexual purity she remains a worthy wife for Johnny, who tucks her up in his spare room bed, the one used by his visiting mother.[31] Johnny is rewarded the following morning when Malou dons an apron, cooks a breakfast of eggs for him, and makes plans to wash the living-room curtains: the perfect housewife. Part of the narrative drive of the film is the race to save Malou's 'virginity' or her sexual favours for their 'rightful owner', her husband Johnny. During the course of the film Malou is passed between Nick and Johnny and whilst in the hands of Nick there is the ever-present threat that she will be 'spoiled' either by Nick or by one of the boys in the gang. The characterisation of Malou conforms to Snitow's romance paradigm that equates sex with marriage, in contrast to Marissa who undermines the paradigm by engaging in non-marital sex.

The film, in its depiction of Malou, continues the theme of the ordinary woman versus the prostitute woman that was foregrounded in the Wolfenden Report. Nick asks Vicki whether she thinks Malou can be made into a prostitute, to which Vicki replies, 'I don't think so, she's just not the type.' Such a comment suggests that there is something specific about those who become prostitutes and that Malou is fundamentally lacking in whatever quality this might be. This is recognised by Vicki and means that the question 'what makes a woman a prostitute' is never applicable to Malou and indeed all 'ordinary' women who are not marked by the notion of 'difference' that is believed to characterise the prostitute woman. Malou's reward for her lack of divergence is a husband, one who has already proved himself to be loyal, hard-working and brave and who, by returning the money given to him by Nick for marrying Malou, demonstrates the same moral code as his wife.

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[31] The mention of his mother makes Johnny a 'worthy' husband for Malou as it grounds him in familial responsibility, suggesting he will make a good husband and father. It also affords Malou the same status as

In contrast to the petite Malou, the buxom Vicki presents a very different version of femininity (see still 19 above, p. 190). Their two styles are perfectly captured in the publicity material for the film. In comparison to Malou's full skirt, smaller heels and somewhat worried expression, Vicki stands in the foreground, her body encased in a tight, belted, sweater dress. The position of her hand on her hip draws attention to her pelvis, her chest is thrust forward and she stands proudly on high heels with peek-a-boo toes, her body adorned by ankle chain,[32] bracelet, and earrings, a look of steely determination on her face. She is sexually confident, outspoken and determined, insisting that, for example, Aggie provide her sister with a new bed. The character of Vicki cannot be separated from the star persona of Diana Dors and the image Vicki presents in this film is typical of the usual Dors persona which I discussed in some detail in Chapter 4, that is, glamorous, sexy and confident, and accredited with being experienced in life, love and sex. Indeed the character is a return to the usual roles played by Dors following the deglamorisation exhibited in *Yield to the Night* in 1956. In this respect the actress Dors brings her star persona of sexual confidence and independence to the role of Vicki.[33]

Vicki as the quintessential 'tart-with-a-heart' demonstrates a strong moral code. She is instrumental in bringing about Malou's rescue by Johnny and the other cab drivers, stops to attend to an injured Mike, and turns down Nick's bribe of money when locked in the burning bedroom with him at the end of the film. It is Mike who asks of her the inevitable question, 'why's a girl like you on the game?' Vicki's reply that she needs quick access to ready money for her sister's operation removes any suggestion of greed, misplaced desire or inherent weakness. Indeed her motivation is loyalty towards her sister and the

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his mother, and indicates he is prepared to wait sexually for his new wife.

[32] Vicki's ankle-chain is reminiscent of that worn by Phyllis Dietrichson in *Double Indemnity* (1944). Schickel argues that the chain signifies Phyllis' 'lower middle-class commonness, just the sort of adornment a former nurse who has married upward might favour' (1992: 41). Vicki's chain is, by the standards of normative femininity 'tarty' and perhaps suggests the class background and social aspirations of both the character and Dors the actress.

implication is that, as a result of blackmail, she is exploiting both her main form of capital in the gendered economy, her sexuality, and men's weakness. The death of her sister Maria provides the opportunity for her to 'do the decent thing' both in terms of exacting revenge from Nick[34], whilst simultaneously removing the need for her to prostitute herself. In terms of redemption, the suggestion at the close of the film is that Vicki has been rehabilitated, certainly at a personal level, through her alignment with Mike as a prospective husband. His suitability has already been confirmed. He shares a similar moral code, as evidenced by his disapproval of Johnny's marriage for money.

Having discussed femininity and masculinity, I want to explore how relevant Dyer's comments about the social problem genre are to a reading of *Passport to Shame*. For Dyer, women's general status as ahistorical, and their central role in the genre, serve to locate social problems such as prostitution outside society and, in so doing, override concerns regarding class (1993, 100-2). The social problem becomes the problem of women and specifically the problem of individual women. Class consciousness is further eradicated by the casting of foreign actresses who, by virtue of their 'foreignness,' are outside class debates. To what extent are these arguments relevant to *Passport to Shame*? Harper's argument about 'foreign floosies' acting as 'sexual proxies' for British girls is not in evidence because the foreign actress Odile Versois inhabits normative femininity. This is presumably because she is cast alongside Diana Dors, an actress and sex symbol for whom it is hard to imagine which other actress might act as her sexual proxy. Dors casting in this film may seem to undermine Dyer's argument that women's ahistoricism locates issues such as prostitution as a problem outside society and without class resonance. This is because Dors' star image, as I have argued, signifies class awareness, social mobility and

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[33] Indeed the characterisation of Vicki as a 'tart-with-a-heart' is all the more believable because of the obvious parallels between this image and the one that Dors as an actress both projected and played with.

[34] That it is Vicki who starts the fire and locks Nick in the burning bedroom suggests both her agency and her ability to solve her own problems.

active sexuality, her 'knowingness' and agency challenging the notion of ahistoricism. For Landy, 'her star persona is far more complex than that of a passive, ahistorical, and excluded victim (2001: 150). Whilst this is the case in *Yield to the Night*, which is a more complex study of female subjectivity, the casting of Dors in *Passport to Shame* draws greater emphasis from the associations with sexuality that Dors' image denotes. It is Dors' associations with 'earthiness' that *Passport to Shame* utilises to suggest that the character of Vicki shares with Dors both an active sexuality and a common-sense approach that informs her moral code. The poster and the publicity material for the film promise that the 'shame of London vice' will be exposed but what is really promised is the exposure in this film of Dors, although Dors' confident pose is a challenge those who would judge her. Whilst Dors' star image is interwoven with class associations from which it cannot be divorced they are used in this film to signify divergent sexuality in the character of Vicki, rather than to introduce and explore economic concerns and motivations for prostitution.

I have suggested that Malou's foreignness is not used to denote sexual divergence and that this marks her as different from Marissa.[35] *Passport to Shame* however, as *The Flesh is Weak*, does use a non-British actor in one of the central male roles and makes use of the notions of 'otherness' that this evokes. Herbert Lom was cast in the role of Nick Biagi, an East End Italian gangster, who heads a prostitution and money-laundering business. Lom was a Czech actor who came to Britain in 1939 and became a stalwart of British films.[36] His star image was one that was equally suited to either 'villainy or kindliness' (Halliwell, 2001: 273), with his role in *No Trees in the Street* an example of the former and *Hell Drivers* an example of the latter. As an East European, Lom's 'foreignness' was always evident. Moor, in his discussion of the Austrian actor Anton Walbrook, argues that British

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[35] Malou may exemplify normative femininity but, as I suggested in the introduction to this thesis, a question mark always hangs over normative femininity which can be used to explain why Malou found herself in such dire circumstances.
[36] Including roles in *The Ladykillers* (1955) and as Chief Inspector Dreyfus in the Pink Panther series.

film-makers adopted a number of approaches to handle Walbrook's 'otherness.' In some films Walbrook's 'foreignness' was used as the 'occasion for romance' whilst in others 'that same exoticism [was] demonized' (2001: 82). There are parallels with Lom's star persona whose 'otherness' can suggest a dangerous sexuality, especially when it draws on the tradition of his early career of casting him as a 'foreign mobster' (Spicer, 2001: 136), and it is this that is exploited in *Passport to Shame*. Nick Biagi is an East End Italian boy made good, achieving success as a career criminal. He is not an immigrant in the same way as suggested of Tony in *The Flesh is Weak*.[37] The link therefore between prostitution and immigration that is referred to by Smart and is evident in the character of Tony Giani, does not apply in quite the same way to Nick Biagi. However, Nick's Italian (and Lom's Czech) heritage function to create a distance between his character and British national identity and, in doing so, British culpability with regard to prostitution is minimised. Furthermore, Biagi's 'foreignness' in terms of his sexuality makes it more credible that he could head a prostitution racket, and also reinforces the veiled yet ever-present threat that he might rape Malou.

In my analysis of *Passport to Shame* I have argued that the film is constructed around a number of gendered differences in relation to masculinity and femininity, and that the character of Malou, who represents normative femininity, engages with the romance motif and learns to align herself with the 'right' man. As Marissa before them, both Malou and Vicki can be redeemed, although in contrast to Marissa, both have men waiting for them (as Jean in *The Weak and the Wicked*) who can recoup them to their 'proper place' in the gendered social economy. In conclusion both films rework the theme of prostitution into the theme of heterosexual romance and the main thrust of the narrative is the necessity for women to learn to read masculinity correctly and by doing so to be redeemed and

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[37] Nick's indigenous status is signalled during discussions with Aggie. Tony's reminiscing about Italy suggests that he has recently entered Britain, perhaps during the 1950s immigration drive.

rehabilitated into heterosexual monogamous marriage. In this respect they are less about sexual divergence, offering instead conservative narratives about normative femininity. What this suggests is that popular culture cannot engage with 'real' prostitutes, the women who hang off the balconies, and therefore, as in the case of the Wolfenden Report, cannot answer the questions it claims to raise. This is because, underlying the figure of the prostitute is the persistent idea of 'difference', the belief that the prostitute woman is different from 'normal' women and that this 'other' therefore cannot be represented. This conventional assumption of a differentiation between 'normal' women and prostitute women remains unchallenged in these films. What the films do engage with is the idea that women who lack social embeddedness are in danger of leaving themselves open to becoming inveigled into prostitution. Their vulnerability makes it essential that they learn to read masculinity correctly and, as for all women, choose a suitable husband.

It would appear that within popular culture only some types of divergent femininity can be represented and in the conclusion to this thesis I will consider the impact of censorship. This thesis demonstrates that female murderers, criminals and (as the next chapters will establish) 'bad' mothers and sluttish housewives can be represented in mainstream culture, but the figure of the prostitute is largely unrepresentable. The character of Vicki, played by Diana Dors, would seem to inhabit some shared space with the 'real' prostitutes but as a liminal figure (and in this film a secondary character) the parallels between the two are of limited value and soon break down, leaving the differentiation between 'normal' woman and prostitute women intact. Popular culture can engage with divergent female sexuality in the form of adultery (Vivien in *Dear Murderer*) or non-marital sex (in *Madeleine* for example or Marissa in *The Flesh is Weak*) but prostitution remains a taboo that cannot be confronted. As a challenge to the paradigm of heterosexual marriage and normative female sexuality the figure of the prostitute remains unrepresentable.

In chapters 3, 4 and 5 my analyses have focused on female characters who stand, to varying degrees, as significant challenges to the social order. In Chapters 6 and 7 I consider characters whose roles as housewives and mothers are associated with traditional femininity and explore the extent to which they conform, or challenge, the paradigm of normative femininity.

Chapter 6: Framing the Mother

In this chapter I shall discuss two films that are concerned with mothers and their relationships with their child, *The Rocking Horse Winner* (1949) and *Mandy* (1952). I shall briefly outline some key social theories relating to motherhood and children that were prevalent in the post-war period and that illustrate contemporary preoccupations with the theme. The centrality of the adult/child relationship in cinematic representation in the fifties will be highlighted before considering in detail how the two films negotiate the relationship between mothers and their children, and what this may say about gender relations in the post-war period.

The mother and the concept of 'the family' was a key theme of the post-war period; indeed, its centrality cannot be underestimated as the idea of 'the family' encapsulated debates concerning women and employment, the declining birth-rate, the role of the housewife and ultimately the future of the nation. Not surprisingly after a period of war, 'children represented hope for a future' (Geraghty, 2000: 138). The family was understood to have been fractured due to the war-time experiences of evacuation, working mothers and absent fathers, and its reconstruction was thought to be of paramount importance. Initial fears about a declining birth-rate[1] (and the associated assumption of 'female selfishness') soon abated when the birth-rate began to rise from 1946 onwards. At this point the debates switched their focus to the concept of mothering techniques. Titmuss, lecturing in 1955, argued that the survival of the domestic population under blitz conditions had highlighted the importance of recognising the 'psychological and physical state of civilians' as well as the armed forces (Geraghty, 2000: 138). In relation to the family, no longer did child-care end with a focus on the physical care of children but there was an extension of

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[1] Which were such that a Royal Commission was inaugurated to report on population whilst the 1945 Mass Observation survey 'Britain and Her Birthrate' was steeped in concerns about the decline in women producing large families (Wilson, 1980: 26).

responsibility into the 'psychological aspects of maternal care' (Birmingham Feminist History Group, 1979: 54). Theories about good mothering techniques and the effective socialisation of children proliferated and the influence of theorists such as Winnicott and Bowlby was wide-spread. The role of mothers in the post-war period was in the home, providing care for their children and taking responsibility for their socialisation and psychological health.

Bowlby's research, first published in 1953, was concerned with the effects of 'maternal deprivation' on child mental health.[2] He argued that mental health could only be assured where the child enjoyed a 'warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother' (Bowlby, 1965: 77). Bowlby's belief that 'mother-love ... is as important for mental health as are vitamins and proteins for physical health' (1965: 240) suggests what was at stake if mothers failed to meet the psychological needs of their offspring. Indeed the relationship between mother and child was deemed essential to the mental health of both parties as it was through mothering that the woman would find 'an expansion of her own personality in the personality of her child' (Bowlby, 1965: 77), a statement which suggests that a woman was not a fully-rounded individual until she had experienced mothering her own child.

For Winnicott, it was through meeting the physical needs of children, in particular ways, that psychological needs would be met; 'the right kind of meal at the right temperature at the right time (right from the baby's point of view) ... this is psychological care' (1957: 138). It was in these ways that the mother, who had a 'biological orientation to her own baby,' would succeed in 'fostering healthy psychological development' in her child

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[2] Bowlby's theories were grounded in a Freudian psychoanalytic approach to child-care which he believed provided evidence that a child's future mental health and welfare could be assured if it received appropriate parenting. Failure to deliver the required parenting, the 'deprivation of mother-love' (Bowlby, 1965: 21), would place the child at significant risk of social and emotional problems in later life.

(Winnicott, 1957: 14-5). Indeed Winnicott believed that it was the woman's role in the home that afforded her the greatest opportunities in life for '[t]alk about women not wanting to be housewives seems to me to be just nonsense, because nowhere else but in her own home is woman in such command' (quoted in Birmingham Feminist History Group, 1979: 56). This discourse of maternity prevailed despite women's widespread participation in the labour market. The importance of such opinions should not be underestimated, with Bowlby's ideas gaining the 'status of essential truth' (Lewis, 1992: 22) in the post-war years and influencing policy-making concerning employment, the welfare state and children in care.

Thus the question of appropriate mothering gained hold not least in the cultural imaginary of Britain where parents' relation to their children became a subject in post-war films. In relation to the care of the child, its needs were considered to take precedence over parental convenience. The child, particularly in middle-class homes, was expected to be able to express him or herself to his or her parents and should expect to be listened to (Geraghty, 2000: 139). Parenting became more complex. Mothers could be absent or over-indulgent, fathers could be too authoritarian or lacking in discipline. Any of these approaches could be held responsible for the development of delinquency in the child (ibid). Underlying these beliefs was the implicit understanding that children had 'wild origins' and the goal of those with parental responsibility was to tame the child's wildness through the application of discipline (Gorer, 1955: 163). Further the relationship between child and parent should be characterised by appropriate and regulated attachment. Failure to do so would result in a child developing a 'bad character', something for which its parents or guardians would be blamed (ibid).

Whilst there was nothing intrinsically new about the belief that character flaws in a child were the fault of the parent, what did change in the post-war years were ideas about what constituted good parenting techniques. Parents, particularly mothers, were charged with the responsibility of recognising and responding to the psychological life and needs of their child.[3] In order to achieve this successfully they had to be able to read their child accurately which involved the ability to relate to the world of the child, in effect, to be able to enter the child's world. The success or failure of mothers in respect of these concerns is the driving force of the narrative in the films that I shall discuss below.

Both the younger child and the delinquent were present in post-war British cinema. The delinquent was a staple feature of social problem films such as *The Blue Lamp* (1950) and *Cosh Boy* (1953). In such films the depiction of the attraction of consumerism and sexual desire was coupled with a lack of appropriate parental authority to produce juvenile delinquency in the young adult. The main aim of the narrative was the rehabilitation of the delinquent which could only be achieved, Hill argues, by 'a suppression of sexuality, a reduction of sensation' (1986: 77). The delinquent was usually male, although notable female exceptions included Jean Kent as Gwen Rawlings in *Good Time Girl* (1949).[4]

In addition to the focus on the young adult and the emerging category of the 'teenager' British cinema also engaged with the theme of the young child and the particular difficulties that were thought to face him or, less frequently, her. Durgnat suggests that 'child heroes ... abound during the period' and it is the quest by the young boy 'for a satisfactory father-figure' that the cinema of this period explores (1970: 145). Platt argues

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[3] Oswell's analysis of post-war discussions concerning children's television viewing demonstrates how 'psychological discourse' began to shape understandings of the family, indeed psychology was 'a means of correctly governing the domestic' and addressing 'a common problem: the mental health of the child' (1999: 72).

[4] Female delinquency was presented differently from male delinquency. It was portrayed as the result of the young girl's desire for autonomy and freedom, and the failure to contain these desires through appropriate

that the 'sensitive relationship between males, adult and child' is a recurring 'motif in British post-war cinema' (2003: 99). Platt's analysis focuses on *The Fallen Idol* (1948), *The Spanish Gardener* (1956), *The Winslow Boy* (1948) and *The Browning Version* (1951), and their negotiation of the relationships between father, son, and father-son surrogates, usually and interestingly a domestic servant. In the supposedly more democratic and egalitarian post-war society the central role afforded the domestic servant in shaping the next generation might suggest a critique of the bourgeois family model, where emotionally-distant parents rely on domestic servants to meet the needs of their children. That these needs are met by male servants however does not offer a critique of the concept of the *pater familias*.

The two films that I analyse here suggest something of an alternative to the dominant cinematic theme of male adult/male child relationships. In *The Rocking Horse Winner* the young boy Paul has an unsatisfactory relationship with his ineffectual father and turns to the male handyman Bassett for solidarity, but the relationship between the mother Hester and Paul is of equal importance. Platt argues that *Mandy* is one of a much smaller number of films that deals with the relationship between a young girl and an adult male, which includes *Tiger Bay* (1959), *Jacqueline* (1956) and *The Shiralee* (1957) (2003: 99).[5] In *Mandy* the respective relationships between the girl and her father Harry, and father-surrogate Searle, are important but the dominant relationship is between the two females, that is, Mandy and her mother, Kit.

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patriarchal channels. As Chadder has argued, 'female desire, in the form of sexual immorality and rebelliousness against the social roles expected of women, [was] itself criminalised' (1999: 68).

[5] The relatively small number of films that deal with female children and their relationship with adults, either male or female, is interesting and worthy of further analysis, something that is outside the scope of this study. The prevalence of the male child as hero (Platt, 2003: 99) might be an example of gender bias and the importance attributed to the father/son relationship, certainly as a subject for exploration within cinema. Although the mother/child relationship was paramount within post-war social discourse, it was thought to be biologically grounded and perhaps therefore less contentious. Harper argues however that in the case of *Mandy* the film's 'emotional power is vitiated by its suspicion of her gender' (2000: 92) which illustrates patriarchy's difficulty in dealing with femininity, a factor which may account for the prevalence of the male child protagonist.

In terms of genre, both films may be broadly considered family-centred melodramas[6] which means that, amongst other concerns, the focus is the domestic sphere, usually a middle-class family. Oedipal conflict is foregrounded and the house assumes a particular symbolic significance within the narrative that links it to the figure of the female. Broadly speaking, as a genre, the audience addressed by such films was female. Byars for example argues that melodrama is 'most often associated ... with female audiences' (1991: 13) in contrast to more 'masculine' modes such as realism, and genres such as the western. That these films, as family-centred melodramas, were imagined for a female audience may in part explain their focus on the figure of the mother and the relation between mother and child.

The Rocking Horse Winner dramatises events in an upper middle-class family where a weak father, Richard (Hugh Sinclair), has a predilection for gambling, whilst a domineering mother, Hester (Valerie Hobson), satisfies her desire for luxurious living irrespective of the welfare of her three children. The eldest child Paul (John Howard Davies) befriends the family handyman Bassett (John Mills) who has a keen interest in horse-racing. The boy receives a rocking-horse as a present and by riding it in a frenzied manner successfully predicts the winners at race meetings. He accumulates a large amount of money, which he secretly gives to his mother in an attempt to make her happy, but his last and largest win culminates in his ill-health and eventual death.

The film was directed by Anthony Pelissier for Rank/Two Cities, with Pelissier also producing the script adapted from the short story of the same name by D. H. Lawrence. Two Cities, under the headship of Joseph Somlo, was in tune with female audiences and

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[6] *Mandy* is more of a hybrid, combining elements of both social realism and melodrama, a point I shall discuss in more detail later.

confident in handling genres such as melodrama (Harper, 2000: 65).[7] Pelissier had already worked for Two Cities with John Mills on *The History of Mr Polly* (1949) and, whilst no claim is made for Pelissier as auteur, he was a competent and experienced director of the period, although he did not have the 'feminist' sensibility exhibited by J. Lee Thompson.[8]

Reviews of the film were generally positive. *KineWeekly* singled out the acting of John Howard Davies (Paul), Pelissier's direction and the 'feminine angle' of the subject matter as the strong points of the film. It argued that '[d]espite its nearness to the Turf, it is primarily domestic whimsy, bordering on the classic through its fine acting and direction' (1949: 24). *KineWeekly*, for whom melodrama, as I previously argued, was not a derogatory term, read the film as a superior piece of melodrama where the relationship between the child and his mother was of primary concern, with horse-racing operating as a secondary plot device. *KineWeekly's* comments suggest the imagined appeal of the film for a female audience. Its appeal however is not one where they are invited to identify with the female protagonist Hester. The casting of Valerie Hobson in this role suggests a woman who is emotionally distant. Hobson was one of post-war British cinema's 'Ice Maidens' (others included Ann Todd, whom I discussed in Chapter 3) who, Harper argues, 'assumed the male prerogatives of control and impassivity' and whose 'roles do not encourage audiences to identify with them' (2000: 70). Hobson's performance in this film certainly conforms to this paradigm and her portrayal of Hester as reserved, controlled and with minimal emotional display invites a reading of the character as a woman who is

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[7] Somlo's success was in contrast to his predecessor at Two Cities, Del Giudice, who Harper argues failed to understand melodrama and sought to endow it with a 'historical verisimilitude' which was unpopular with audiences, for example *Beware of Pity* (1946) and *Hungry Hill* (1947) (2000: 64).
[8] This 'feminist sensibility' was not recognised at the time and indeed it has only recently been explored in academic criticism, most notably in the work of Melanie Williams (2004).

undeserving of sympathy. The appeal of the film for female cinema-goers might then be the plight of the child.[9]

Mandy follows the struggles of a young deaf-mute girl played by Mandy Miller. Born into a middle-class family the discovery of her deafness causes distress to her mother Kit (Phyllis Calvert) and father Harry (Terence Morgan). Harry's sense of shame at his daughter's imperfection motivates him to withdraw Mandy from public life and seclude her at home. Mandy's mounting frustration at her imprisonment and her inability to communicate convince her mother to place her, against Harry's wishes, in a residential school for the deaf. Here Mandy eventually flourishes although Kit and Harry's marriage comes under increasing stress. The couple finally resolve their problems and the film concludes with a scene of Mandy playing with hearing children.

The film was directed by Alexander Mackendrick for Ealing, a production company whose gender politics are generally considered conservative.[10] The film does not fit easily into the Ealing canon and like *The Divided Heart* (1954) which is also concerned with the figure of the mother, seems to offer some challenge to the gender paradigm of Ealing's post-war output. Mackendrick was both at the time and subsequently considered an important figure in the history of British/Ealing film-making and achieved wider recognition as a result of his later work in Hollywood. Claims for auteur status have been sufficient to warrant a book dedicated to the director and his films (Kemp, 1991). *Mandy* was well received critically and was nominated at the 1952 British Film Academy Awards in five categories; best British actress (Phyllis Calvert), best British actor (Jack Hawkins),

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[9] Harper and Porter's article on weeping in the cinema suggests that about a quarter of female respondents in a Mass Observation survey cried at scenes depicting 'unhappy children ... [and] death scenes' (1996: 157). The death of a child in *The Rocking Horse Winner* suggests this as a particularly emotional scenario.

[10] Harper (2000: 90) takes this position although it is contested by Geraghty who considers that 3 of Ealing's post-war films show a more dynamic engagement with the role offered women in the post-war world (2000: 76-92).

most promising newcomer (Mandy Miller), best British film, and best film.[11] It was considered significant enough to warrant a review in *Sight and Sound* which, whilst praising the film, criticised a split in the film between melodrama and social realism (1952: 77-8). Such criticism, as I have argued in previous chapters, is not uncommon in British cinema. Hill argues that the success of *Sapphire* (1959) for example at the 1959 British Film Academy Awards was in part due to its engagement with 'important social issues' rather than 'mere entertainment' (1986: 68). Such comments are equally relevant to *Mandy* and are illustrative of the continuing, hierarchical, and arguably gendered, split in British cinema between realism and melodrama. The melodramatic mode and the focus on the child suggests this as a film that would have had an appeal for female cinema-goers.[12]

In *The Rocking Horse Winner* the young boy Paul is a lonely, isolated child. He lives with his parents, two younger sisters and nanny in a large house. As indicated above critical writing on British cinema of the 1950s has tended to divide films that are centrally concerned with children into two categories; those that address the issue of the newly emergent category of the 'teenager,' and those that focus on the younger, pre-teenage child (Hill, 1986; Geraghty, 2000). Paul is interesting because in some important respects he falls between these two categories. Geraghty, in her analysis of the 'vulnerable child' in fifties British cinema, argues that young boys are usually 'pre-teenage, slight, fair' (2000: 141). The notion of the boy being slight and fair adds to his association with qualities of vulnerability and innocence. Geraghty comments that in a number of films from the period the male child protagonists have fair hair that contrasts with the dark hair and complexions of their fathers or father-surrogates, an opposition that utilises the cultural conventions of

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[11] Although it did not win any of these awards it received the Special Jury Prize at the 1952 Venice Film Festival (Kemp, 1991: 87).

[12] Certainly the casting of Phyllis Calvert would have evoked memories of her roles in numerous popular British melodramas made during the war where she frequently played, like Patricia Roc, a 'good girl' in opposition to Margaret Lockwood's 'bad girl.' Braun describes Calvert as 'essentially nice ... without being "prissy"' (1973: 32). Annette Kuhn's article on *Mandy*, in part inspired by her memories of watching the film

good and evil in relation to colour (2000: 142).[13] Paul certainly fits this paradigm with his slim body, pale skin and blond hair. Indeed his colouring is used to good effect in key scenes that utilise chiaroscuro lighting to evoke a sense of dread. Here Paul's pale face and hair provide a sharp contrast to the dark, gloomy shadows that surround him.

For Geraghty, the characterisation of pre-teenage boys in British cinema allows the question of sexual desire to be side-stepped, in contrast to the teenage boys (and girls) of social problem films such as *Cosh Boy* and *Good Time Girl* where criminality and sexuality are inter-linked (ibid). The character of Paul however troubles this distinction somewhat, as there are many indicators that suggest he is on the cusp of adolescence. His uncle comments that he should be attending school, his father complains that he is too old for the nursery and, during the course of the film, he moves from the shared nursery into his own bedroom in the attic. Paul's impending adolescence is further indicated by the quasi-masturbatory manner in which he rides his rocking-horse. Paul therefore combines elements of both childish vulnerability and burgeoning sexuality.

Paul's isolation and loneliness is enhanced by the representation of the family home. A significant proportion of the film's action takes place in the house or its grounds, a common melodramatic device. In the opening sequence the credits appear against a backdrop which depicts, in long shot, a large house, encircled by a brick wall, flanked on three sides by equally large houses that appear in the margins of the frame. The camera moves in to reveal snow on the ground whilst the focus shifts to the left of the main house towards an outbuilding. The camera then cuts to the shadowy figure of a boy in wellington boots cautiously making his way through the snow and into the outbuilding. The opening credits are accompanied by dramatic and sombre music that suggests an ominous presence.

as a child, 'brought along by her mother to see this picture everyone is talking about' (1992: 233), suggests that the film had an appeal for women.

This opening sequence clearly indicates the house as a hermetically sealed space and Paul as a somewhat lonely and insular individual within that space. The symbolic significance of the house and its links to the maternal female body are points I shall explore later.

Paul's insularity is compounded by the fact that the majority of his interactions take place with adults, either his mother Hester, his Uncle Oscar, or Bassett, the family handyman. With the exception of a few brief shots which depict Paul playing alongside his sisters in the nursery before an adult interrupts the action, his only human contact throughout the film is with adults. He neither attends school nor interacts with any children in his neighbourhood. The thrust of the film concerns how the various adults in his life relate to him in particular, and gendered, ways, and in the next section I want to consider the adult world, first the male realm and then the feminine world inhabited by his mother Hester.

The Rocking Horse Winner, in common with other family-centred melodramas, is in part concerned with the successful negotiation of the Oedipal complex. The boy child must give up his love for the mother and identify with the father and the mechanism that persuades him to do so is the fear of castration by the all-powerful father. But if the father is weak and impotent and cannot enforce the patriarchal order, the boy will continue to identify with the mother. In *The Rocking Horse Winner* the Oedipus complex cannot be successfully negotiated. The weakness of the father Richard is clear; he is constantly belittled by his wife Hester and loses his job. The father's role as patriarch is appropriated by both Hester's brother Oscar (Ronald Squire) and by Bassett the handyman. It is significant that there are no scenes whatsoever between Paul and his father; rather, the adult male world for Paul is inhabited by Oscar and Bassett. The use of domestic servants in this film is important as they are positioned to disrupt the proper social order in terms of adult/child relationships. I have argued that the relationship between adult and child was

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[13] Geraghty's examples include *The Spanish Gardener*, *The Scamp* and *The Yellow Balloon*.

subject to appropriate and regulated attachment. Paul attaches himself to Bassett, thereby challenging propriety, an attachment that is brought about by the particular and gendered ways in which his parents interact with him.

The adult world is split along gender lines and this is evidenced by recourse to capital and notions of the self. As parents in an upper middle-class family both Hester and Richard are guilty of indulging the self at the expense of others, although they do so in different and gendered ways. Richard engages in the more masculine pursuit of gambling, whilst Hester exhibits a feminine love of consumerism, a characteristic that plays on the traditional association between women and consumption.[14] Although their outlets are different both exhibit a lack of self-control, a behavioural pattern that is duplicated in their son Paul and his frenetic riding of his rocking-horse.

In terms of gendered capital, the male and female worlds of this film are exclusive and Paul is aligned with the male world of his Uncle Oscar and Bassett. The male world is characterised by its relationship to the financial economy. Within the film it is the men who, to varying degrees of success, make money. Thus they represent a productive economy whereas women, in particular Hester, are constructed as spenders, unproductive users. Even Richard attempts to earn a regular salary and Oscar is fully immersed in the finances of his sister and her family. Other male figures such as Bassett, the bailiff and the pawnbroker, although all from a different class background from Richard and Oscar, are fully versed in the operating mechanisms of the financial economy. Bassett, who describes himself as a 'poor man', develops a profitable relationship with Paul and refuses to burn what Hester refers to as 'blood money' at the end of the film. Hester is outside this financial economy and has no understanding of how it operates. She struggles, for

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[14] In this respect Hester is perhaps the antithesis of Jean Raymond from *The Weak and the Wicked* who indulges in the more masculine pursuit of gambling at the roulette table.

example, to negotiate successfully with both the bailiff and the pawnbroker. She has no awareness that the bailiff will require payment for his services, or that sentimental value has no financial value for the pawnbroker. Indeed she fails to realise that the taxi-driver relies on tips to supplement his income. She is in every respect outside this male financial economy. It is the men who make the money and this is something that is embryonic in the male child Paul who takes over the father's role as provider for his mother.

In terms of masculinity and financial capital, Paul is aligned with his Uncle Oscar and Bassett. Paul can enter the male adult world of the financial economy through his ability to pick race winners and translate this success into financial gain. Both Bassett and Oscar to varying degrees exploit the boy. A class and therefore power dynamic exists between Bassett and Paul which makes it difficult for Bassett to refuse Paul's request that he place a bet on his behalf, although Paul's interest in the subject perhaps operates as a form of flattery for Bassett. Certainly the relationship between Bassett and Paul allows Bassett to indulge his love of horse-racing and provides him with a willing audience for his anecdotes.

Paul is quickly accepted into the male world of first Bassett and then Oscar through his willingness to conform to their values and his ability to produce financial capital. Both men recognise his potential for future development and respond to him accordingly. Oscar for example demonstrates no special interest in his nephew until he accidentally learns of Paul's predilection for horse-racing. At the request of nanny, Oscar accompanies Hester to the nursery to witness Paul's frantic riding of the rocking-horse. Afterwards, Paul mentions the name 'Sandorino' which Oscar recognises as a recent winner at a race-meeting. Hester confirms that Paul and Bassett are always talking about racing, something that she claims she does not understand, and cuts short Oscar's quizzing of Paul to hurry

the boy into bed. At this point Oscar proclaims, 'that promised to be the most adult and enjoyable conversation for a long time,' indicating that he recognises in the boy qualities and interests that he values. As Oscar has previously been reclining in the garden with Hester this also indicates the gendered divide of the adult worlds. For Oscar there is no adult and enjoyable conversation to be had with his sister. It is after this exchange between Oscar and Paul that Oscar extends an invitation to Hester to take the boy out the following day. The relationship between uncle and nephew develops rapidly and Oscar joins Bassett in partnership with Paul, creating an all-male world characterised by secrecy and codes. This homosocial enclave, like other male clubs such as the Freemasons, is governed by sworn oaths to secrecy ('Honour-Bright') and the exclusion of others, notably females and feminised males such as the father Richard who, although aligned with the male world of capital fails to compete successfully within it.

The partnership between Paul and the men however is marked by escalating greed and exploitation of the boy by the adult men whose behaviour towards Paul is inappropriate and who, through their actions, do not encourage him to retain his position as a child. That Paul takes over the role of the father (male provider) is evidenced by his desire to make money for his mother. Although masculinity is productive in opposition to femininity, Oscar and Bassett are users not producers in relation to the finance that they make as they are constructed as bachelors and therefore make the money for themselves. Masculinity in part resides in the ability to provide for women and Paul utilises his uncle and Bassett to achieve this in relation to his mother.

The men's relationship towards the boy is exploitative. Oscar's interest in his nephew is motivated purely by Paul's prowess in racing predictions. During their brief trips to the beach and the river Oscar's conversation with Paul revolves around either horse-racing or

their latest bet, whilst Paul expresses concern about the house and how to help his mother. Paul becomes increasingly unhappy during a prolonged period of non-productivity and his failure to satisfy the whisperings of the house caused by his mother's financial dissatisfaction. Oscar and Bassett discuss the situation in the garden. Oscar bemoans their lack of success and the necessity for a big win, but has limited knowledge of Paul's internal psyche, asking Bassett to comment on Paul, who mentions the boy's current lack of enjoyment in their venture.[15] At this point Paul appears and Oscar attempts to placate him by suggesting he take a break from the cycle of gambling and prediction. Paul however has overheard their previous conversation and can recognise both the emptiness of his uncle's platitudes and the continuing need for financial success. He pushes himself to predict the winner of the forthcoming Derby and then falls critically ill. Oscar and Bassett continue to exploit the boy whilst he lies on his deathbed. Oscar learns from Hester that Paul repeatedly called out the name 'Malibar' whilst in a state of delirium. Hester has no knowledge of the significance of this but Oscar immediately recognises it as a horse running in the Derby. Oscar stands alone in the drawing-room and, as Bassett walks by an open window, calls him over and imparts the information, adding, 'what are you going to do?' The fact that Oscar leaves the decision of whether to place the bet with Bassett indicates that he knows his actions are wrong, he is aware that he is exploiting the boy and is culpable in his downfall, but his desire for financial success overrides any concerns for his nephew. He wants the money but does not have the courage to place such a large bet himself. Furthermore, Bassett also excuses himself from responsibility by claiming that he will place the bet because it is what Paul would have wanted him to do. Both men are equally guilty of deflecting responsibility away from themselves.

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[15] Whilst this might appear to be explained by the argument of proximity, Bassett and Paul are frequently seen together, Oscar is also a frequent visitor to the house and spends prolonged periods of time in Paul's company, a scenario which would allow him access to Paul's thoughts and feelings, if Oscar chose to take an

Oscar places a second bet of £200, a 'little extra' which he does not reveal to anyone. As Bassett goes off to place the main bet, Oscar is again left alone in the drawing-room. He turns away from the window and the camera captures his face in close-up, a slightly sinister expression on his features. The camera cuts to the telephone and then back to a medium-shot of Oscar, thumbs in waistcoat pocket with fingers drumming against his portly stomach (which in this case denotes greed), as he contemplates placing an additional bet. The remainder of the scene is shot from the point-of-view of the telephone. It remains in the foreground of the scene whilst Oscar paces the room in the background, at one point casting a glance upwards towards Paul's room as he weighs his conscience against his greed. After some deliberation Oscar walks towards the telephone and the scene closes with a medium-close-up of his dialling finger and then his fingers drumming on his stomach whilst his voice, off-screen, places a final illicit bet. That the telephone appears to draw Oscar to it seems to offer a comment on the nature of addiction and the failure of restraint.[16] Landy, in her analysis of the film, argues that Oscar and Bassett attempt to ameliorate the worst excesses of the mother's influence (1991: 311). However, I would argue that this scene illustrates that Oscar also suffers from a lack of self-control as do Hester and Richard, and bears some responsibility for the destructive behavioural patterns of his nephew.[17] Ultimately, Oscar is the only person to benefit financially from Paul's final prediction. Hester refuses to take the shared winnings of £80,000 and Bassett, rather than burn the money, intends to pass it to the family solicitor to be put to good use. Oscar will have secured winnings of £2,000 from his private stake and there is no suggestion that he surrenders this money to Bassett for charitable disposal.

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interest. This provides further support for the argument that Oscar's interest in Paul is financially motivated and his behaviour towards his nephew is inappropriate.

[16] Indeed the fragmentation of Oscar's body at this point is reminiscent of Mary Hilton's fragmented body which I discussed in Chapter 4. In that chapter I suggested that fragmentation undermines agency and that the body part is responsible for the action rather than the person as a whole. The focus here on Oscar's finger suggests the compulsive nature of his gambling addiction.

Having discussed the male adult world and Paul's relationship with it, I want to consider the female adult world, represented by the mother Hester, and the interaction between mother and son. In contrast to the male world, which is characterised by its relationship to the financial economy, Hester has no financial capital, would not be expected to retain any, and cannot enter the male adult world. Her role is one of decorative embodiment of male productivity, a role that she fulfils very successfully and that links femininity to the role of woman as consumer, for both the home and the self.[18] Hester is beautiful and elegantly dressed, well-mannered and exhibits 'refinement' and 'taste' in her home decoration. Femininity and consumption are something she understands and indeed femininity is something she expects to have to exploit to achieve her goals. In one scene for example she returns home from the pawnbrokers, looking weary and dispirited, having spent the afternoon raising money to reimburse a bailiff. She sees Oscar outside her house and, although tired, makes the effort to check her make-up and pull a lipstick from her handbag to freshen her lips before approaching her brother. She tries to engage Oscar in conversation about his day trip with Paul using flattering phrases such as 'Oscar darling ... must you rush off like this' but underlying her approach is the suggestion that she may ask Oscar to provide the money she has just raised. Her experience as a woman has taught her that success is more likely if such a task is approached with a pleasing and pretty (to the male eye) face.

Hester, as an upper-middle-class woman, has fulfilled her gendered obligations by marrying and producing three children, one of whom is a son. Her role is one of visual display of male financial success. She has no understanding of either the male adult world or the world of her children. In relation to the male adult world I have illustrated Hester's

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[17] Perhaps the only difference between Oscar and Richard is that Oscar is either richer or luckier than Richard is, in relation to his gambling.

failure to comprehend the needs of the bailiff, the pawnbroker or the taxi-driver. In relation to the world of the children, Hester's incomprehension is clearly signalled from the outset. In the opening scene Hester attempts to put the children to bed whilst the nanny completes her Christmas shopping. Her actions are perfunctory and ineffectual and the children climb out of bed as soon as she vacates the nursery. However, the important point is that she believes she has completed the task effectively. It is this belief that demonstrates that she has no understanding of the detail of the lives of her children. She cannot comprehend their world. Indeed in relation to Paul she frequently comments that she does not understand him and cannot get close to him.

In many respects she is not bad. A positive reading of her character would be that she is a product of her class and upbringing and is merely operating within her class paradigm. The film then may offer a comment on the poverty of the adult-child relationship within this paradigm. By this I mean that within the social class Hester inhabits, children would have been expected to be brought up by a nanny and to have rather distant relations to their parents. Hester's behaviour is inflected through her class and the attachments that her child forms with the adults in his life are shown to be inappropriate. The film of course wants her to be condemned as a negative and destructive figure in the life of Paul and indeed the wider family. She is constructed as a woman without resourcefulness and blind to the follies of both herself and those around her. Her only strength, according to Oscar, is a 'runaway talent for spending money' and she does not rise to Oscar's challenge that she find herself a job to alleviate the family's hardship. In this respect the screenplay departs from Lawrence's story where the mother earns a small living as a sketch artist for drapery advertisements, an omission that further reinforces a negative reading of Hester's

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[18] She is repeatedly shown to prioritise consumption above her children, detailing plans for redecorating the dining-room and buying herself 'a mass of new clothes' before considering that 'we really ought to get Matilda's teeth fixed – what a bore.'

character. She stands in sharp contrast to Kit, the female protagonist of *Mandy*, who exhibits a keen degree of resourcefulness.

It is Hester's lack of comprehension and her inability to enter the world of the child that means she fails to understand what is happening to Paul. In contrast Paul is acutely sensitive to the feelings and needs of his mother. After the opening credits, Paul enters the outbuilding and strikes up a conversation with Bassett, the newly-appointed handyman. Bassett chats with Paul about horseracing whilst an engrossed Paul listens, his whole body (and attention) turned towards Bassett. However, whilst his body is still facing Bassett his expression suddenly changes, from open and smiling to closed and worried. He then turns to acknowledge the presence of his mother, she stands in the doorway behind him, though no audible clue was given to indicate her arrival. Paul feels her before he sees her; he is extremely sensitive to her presence, a sensitivity that does not extend to his interactions with the men in his life. Paul is thus constructed as a child who recognises adult female need.[19]

In this respect Paul is a good example of the 'gifted child' as defined by Alice Miller. Miller argues that parents who failed to receive due recognition in their childhood are 'narcissistically deprived' and spend their lives searching for 'the presence of a person who is completely aware of them and takes them seriously, who admires and follows them' (1987: 22). The person best able to attempt to fulfil such a function is the 'parent's own children' because of their total dependency on their parents (ibid). Such parents produce children who are highly sensitive to the needs of their parents, whilst those parents are

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[19] Evidence of Paul's sensitivity towards his mother is present throughout the film. When his father loses his job and returns home in the middle of the day, he meets Paul and Hester at the gate to the house. Paul immediately senses, by the demeanour of his mother, that something is wrong and his pale face becomes worried and anxious as he stares at Hester. He is also observant of his mother's actions although he does not yet fully understand the significance of the knowledge he holds. When a bailiff calls to serve a writ on his mother he innocently informs the man that 'mother burns most of her letters.' Paul is being inappropriately initiated into the adult world.

simultaneously unaware of the needs of their child. Paul is such a child and Hester such a parent. She is not, for example, a demanding mother, that is, she does not demand time of him, rather she ignores him and functions as a fantasy for Paul.[20]

His sensitivity makes Paul vulnerable to the house and its whisperings as a verbal manifestation of his mother's dissatisfaction. Crucially it is only Paul, whose world comprises his mother, who can hear the whisperings. The house has a particular symbolic significance in the film. Landy argues, in her discussion of family melodramas, that 'the external image of the house, the use of internal space, and the use of objects within the house are extensions of the psychological conflicts involving the characters' struggle for power' (1991: 290). The house then becomes an 'agent of threat' (ibid). Furthermore there are important links between femininity and the house. For Landy, one of the conventions of the woman's film is that 'the house assumes significance in the narrative as an extension of the maternal figure' (1991: 230). In her analysis of *The Rocking Horse Winner* Landy argues that 'the house as the maternal symbol is engulfing and threatening' (1991: 311) and its insidious echo infiltrates all aspects of the house, but only for Paul. In terms of the maternal house, Paul is not so much engulfed by it but killed by his sensitivity to his mother's need. He projects, in his imaginary, what he perceives to be his mother's need, onto the house. This is of course a misreading on Paul's part as it should be the father who responds to the needs of the mother, not the child but, as I have illustrated, Paul has not been encouraged by any of the adults to retain his position as a child.

Paul's final journey, where he travels from the living-room to his attic bedroom for his last frenzied ride on the rocking horse, illustrates his sensitivity to the house as maternal figure. His journey commences in the living-room where the camera pans, from his point-of-view,

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[20] In her haste to pay the bailiff Hester brushes aside Paul's claims that he can help, stating to him 'I simply haven't the time.' A crestfallen Paul is comforted by nanny whose platitudes of 'she's very busy ...

across the room, lingering on the myriad bunches of flowers on display which seem to suggest, particularly the lilies, his own impending death and funeral. As he begins his ascent, the corridors and stairs become increasingly menacing (see still 20 below).

Still 20. Paul begins his ascent, *The Rocking Horse Winner* (1949)

Indeed 'staircases' and 'attic rooms' are melodramatic sites that are used to depict 'entrapment and claustrophobia' (Landy, 1991: 193). Furthermore, they have a certain vaginal symbolism that suggests a fear of femininity.[21] Hester's omni-presence is signalled throughout by the house with its winding corridors, stairs and gloomy passageways.

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remember I told you ...?' suggest that Hester's actions towards Paul regularly take such a form.

[21] Such symbolism is evident in the horror genre where the monstrous feminine may be portrayed as an archaic mother. In her analysis of *Alien* (1979) Creed argues that the presence of the archaic mother is signalled by 'womb-like imagery, the long winding tunnels leading to inner chambers' (1993: 19). The mother-ship in *Alien* and the house in *The Rocking Horse Winner* both represent a maternal home that cannot be trusted.

The failure of the family to negotiate the Oedipus complex and Paul's continued over-identification with, and sensitivity to, the needs of his mother compounds the reading of the house as an extension of the maternal figure. The oppressive dimension of the stairs and corridors is heightened by the use of chiaroscuro lighting that intensifies the sense of menace and dread as Paul moves through shadow, the sporadic lighting illuminating his pale and clammy face, fair hair and beads of perspiration on his brow. In her analysis of the paranoid woman's film, Doane argues that 'the staircase ... becomes the passageway to the "image of the worst"' and that chiaroscuro lighting magnifies the 'sense of foreboding' that accompanies the ascent (1987: 136). Likewise Paul's ascent is marked by a sense of doom and presentiment that this is his final journey.

I have suggested that both parents and, to a lesser extent, Oscar and Bassett exhibit a lack of self-control and that this behaviour is duplicated in Paul. Paul is on the threshold of adolescence, his sexuality further confirmed by his riding, which Landy describes as 'masturbatory' (1991: 311) and, in this respect, he is marked as different from Geraghty's 'vulnerable child.' The frenetic nature of Paul's riding does not go unnoticed by the adults. Nanny requests that Hester and Oscar witness Paul's activities with the horse which she describes as 'very unnatural ... unhealthy ... a sort of frenzy.' Paul's appearance changes during his encounters with the rocking-horse. No longer the neat and somewhat vulnerable little boy, his pyjama top is pushed open to reveal his torso, his brow is beaded with sweat, and his fair hair is tousled. Interestingly this suggests the 'phallic economy' of the film. Paul and his parents engage in activities such as gambling, consumerism and rocking-horse riding that lead to non (re)productive expenditure, that is expenditure without issue or profit as masturbation might indeed be described. Furthermore, Paul's interactions with his mother reveal a particular dynamic between the mother, the rocking-horse and the nursery/bed-room, where the majority of their

interactions take place. On a literal level Hester's presence in the nursery or at Paul's bedside can be read as the fulfilment of her limited maternal duties for a woman of her class background. On a symbolic level, that Paul's gaze shifts from his mother to the rocking-horse, can be read as his continuing failure to negotiate the Oedipus complex which leaves him 'dominated by phantasy involving possession of the mother' (Alsop, 2002: 44). However, Paul does not so much possess the mother as is possessed by her. His quasi-masturbatory riding is thus not directly for himself but for another, the mother, for whom he exhausts his energies, even if, as the film demonstrates, such actions are incongruous. Paul tries, through his own endeavours, to replace the role of the father as provider, whilst the film depicts the futility of such an action.

The film culminates in Paul's death, that is, the sacrifice of the child. The mother's reading of the male child is shown to be inadequate, her failure to enter the world of the child means that she cannot save him. Interestingly though, the men (Oscar and Bassett) who do share an affinity with the boy are no more able to help him than Hester is. Bassett understands that Paul is unhappy and Oscar knows that Paul is driven to help his mother, but neither is able to use this information to effect any change in Paul's life. Oscar's limited knowledge of Paul's inner life suggests his own failure to enter the world of the child. Whilst the men are shown to be culpable in the demise of the child it is the mother ultimately who is blamed for the death of her son. She proves herself unable to recognise and respond to the psychological life and needs of Paul and exhibits, along with her family, a lack of restraint that proves fatal for the child. It is in this respect that the film enters post-war debates about motherhood and the family. To put the needs of the child above parental convenience involves a degree of sacrifice, *ergo* female sacrifice is necessary for children to flourish. Failure to conform to this is constructed as provoking the direst of consequences for the child. The blindness of Hester and indeed all the adults in

recognising their own flaws means that those very flaws are then duplicated in the child. Furthermore, the film suggests the importance of not prematurely initiating the child into the adult world, and for adults to understand their children and not the other way round. The role of provider, of both money and emotional care, must lie with parents and not with children. The film then stands as a comment on the failure of adults to respond in an appropriate manner to children and the consequences of inadequate socialisation of the child by a mother who seeks in her child the fulfilment of her own needs at the expense of her son. As a critique of mothering techniques the film is uncompromising and may therefore serve as a comment on maternity in the post-war context, both how it has been conducted and how it should be re-imagined. *Mandy* shares a similar concern.

In *Mandy* the child is as insular and lonely as Paul from *The Rocking Horse Winner* although her insularity is, at a literal level, attributable to her deafness. The main story revolves around Mandy and her struggle to speak, although there are a number of sub-plots involving various relationships between the adults. Deaf from birth, Mandy's condition is discovered by her parents when she is two years old. Her mother Kit wants her to attend a specialist school but her father Harry refuses, preferring the child to be tutored at home. To achieve this end, the family moves in with Harry's aged mother, Emily (Marjorie Fielding), and father (Godfrey Tearle), into their upper middle-class home. Four years pass and Mandy is unable to speak, cannot play with the local children, and is growing increasingly frustrated. Against the wishes of Harry and his family, Kit places Mandy in a school run by the dedicated but bullish headmaster Searle (Jack Hawkins) and an elderly deaf doctor, Jane Ellis (Nancy Price). Despite initial difficulties, Mandy begins to thrive under the guidance of her 'adoptive' family who demonstrate more understanding of, and insight into, Mandy's world than her 'natural' family. Mandy finally learns to speak and Harry and his family seemingly overcome their resistance to Kit's actions and Mandy's

schooling. Alongside the main story a number of sub-plots emerge that include a possible relationship between Searle and Kit, the escalating marital disharmony between Kit and Harry, and an antagonistic relationship between Searle and the school's governor, Ackland (Edward Chapman). These sub-plots develop alongside the story of Mandy and at times are used to threaten or impede her progress. Mandy's story is her struggle to shape her identity and find a place for herself in society, and the struggle of her mother to enter the world of her child and to take the necessary steps to release Mandy from her confinement.

The story of Mandy and the related story of her mother Kit highlights one of the frequent criticisms of the film, that is, that there is a fracture between the discourse of social realism and the discourse of melodrama. Kemp comments that it has 'generally been treated as a schizoid movie ... a powerful study of a handicapped child on to which has been grafted a routine marital melodrama', an argument that the director Mackendrick supported to a certain extent (1991: 73-3). Kemp's own criticism of the film is that the scenes that fall within the social realism mode are superior to those that depict the domestic disharmony between Kit and Harry.[22] This argument was prevalent in reviews of the film at the time[23] and rehearses the debates about realism and melodrama that I have covered elsewhere in this thesis. In her analysis Cook argues that the film is an illustration of Ealing's attempt to 'straddle contradictions', both in terms of genre and within the wider post-war society (1986: 357). The critically derided but commercially successful melodrama genre is afforded a degree of 'respectability' whilst the popular appeal of what she terms the 'social realist mode' is broadened by its association with melodrama (ibid). In terms of locating the film within a wider socio-historical context, for Cook, the constant shifting between the

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[22] Whilst Kemp is right to identify variable quality within the film his language betrays his own uncomfortableness with the realm of melodrama. In his discussion of the novel which was the source for the film (*This Day is Ours* by Hilda Lewis) Kemp outlines its melodramatic content of guilt, suffering and spiritualism which he reports was 'junked' when the screenplay was written (1991: 69). Such a term suggests both Kemp's critical view of such elements (junk) and, by association, his sense of relief that they did not make it into the film.

domestic and the social is one of the key binaries within the film. Mandy's story allows a working through of the difficulties and differences between the 'public and private ... past and future,' the traditionalism of Harry's family versus the 'democratic, egalitarian ideal' represented by Searle, Mandy and her mother (ibid). In a similar manner Kuhn argues that located within the '*mise-en-scène* of the bombsite' is the film's implicit theme of 'the relation between past and future' (1992: 242). Encapsulated within the story of Mandy and her struggle to enter society it seems is the wider concern of rebuilding a society in post-war Britain, what kind of society that might be, a negotiation between the past and the future, and the role of gender in relation to these concerns.

In *The Rocking Horse Winner* I argued that the world was split along gender lines with the men as producers of capital whilst the woman functioned as consumer. The male child Paul was able to enter the all-male world of financial capital whilst the mother Hester had no comprehension of her son's life and was unable to understand him and therefore help him. In *Mandy* the predominant relationship depicted is between mother and daughter. Mandy and Kit are equally frustrated; Mandy because she cannot communicate with the world and Kit because no one will listen to her demands on Mandy's behalf. The film is about Mandy's struggle to speak and her mother's attempts to understand the child in an effort to help her. Motherhood is associated with traditional femininity but in this film the role is shown to be under pressure. It is Kit's readiness to do battle in relation to the role of mother that suggests her as a divergent figure. Indeed her divergence is in part signalled by the fact that it is her perspective that governs the film. Kit's voiceover introduces Mandy and the family at the start of the film and appears again later commenting on scenes that occur at key points in the process of Mandy's development. Female voiceover is rare, certainly in British cinema of the 1950s, although this thesis has already commented on

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[23] Kemp mentions the reviews of *Sight and Sound, The Monthly Film Bulletin* and *The Times* which all make very similar comments in relation to this issue (1991: 86).

Mary Hilton's voiceover in *Yield to the Night*. Whilst not as extensive as Mary's, Kit's commentary is still noteworthy. Female voiceover, where it exists, is sometimes negated and Kemp argues that Kit's voiceover 'isn't necessarily wholly reliable' (1991: 76). His argument is based on the fact that Kit has already decided that Mandy should attend the deaf school but her voiceover implies that she makes the decision after a row with Harry about Mandy's education which culminates in Harry slapping Kit. After Harry hits her Kit's actual words are 'it was that that made up my mind, I knew what I had to do,' a statement which is open to interpretation. An equally valid reading would be that up until Harry's act her goal was that Mandy's attendance at the school should have the support of the entire family. At this point she makes the decision that it is necessary for her to take charge of the situation with Mandy. In this respect her voiceover is reliable.

Indeed the relationship between daughter and mother is crucial. Kemp argues that it would have been difficult to successfully depict such a strong relationship if the child had been cast as a boy because the stories of daughter and mother are 'entwined' (1991: 75). For Cook this is because the film is in part a working through of concerns about 'the role of women in the new Britain' (1986: 360). That the relationship between mother and daughter should be so intense can in part be explained by the very nature of Mandy's disability. What Mandy needs is access to language, an order to which, Lacanian psychoanalysis would argue, all women have a complex relationship.

Mandy's story, as Kuhn has argued, is the story of all children, the story of the 'child's entry into language' (1992: 239). For Lacan it is the acquisition of language that allows the child entry from the Imaginary into the Symbolic. Furthermore, entry into the Symbolic is driven by the recognition that the mother is absent and 'words allow us to represent absent objects' (Morris, 1993: 104) and provide a sense of control of a situation. It is only

through entry into the Symbolic and the acquisition of language that subjectivity can be formed. In relation to gender, Lacanian theory argues that the entry of the girl into the Symbolic follows a different path from that of the boy because the girl child 'lacks the legitimising primary signifier, the phallus' (Minsky, 1996: 153), a painful realisation that is repressed into the newly forming unconscious. Furthermore language, as an existing patriarchal system, is marked by rules and taboos which mean that its function as a form of compensation for the Oedipal trajectory may be of less relevance for the girl. As Minksy argues, the girl may find 'that she has no connection with these linguistic clothes, they don't fit her properly' (1996: 154). It is for these reasons that the girl (and woman) is alienated somewhat from language and therefore retains some affinity with the unconscious and Imaginary realms associated with the mother.

The story of *Mandy* is, as Kemp has argued, 'the child's fight to assert her own identity' (1991: 71). Mandy's inability to access language means that her subjectivity cannot be fully formed. As Kuhn notes, Mandy 'names herself ... placing herself apart ... from the world' (1992: 239) by articulating 'Mandy' and 'Mummy' but must use language, the very tool that shapes and carves the world, as the link between self and other. Until she can speak, she remains locked in her symbiotic relationship with her mother and the Imaginary (see still 21 overleaf).

Still 21. Mother / daughter relationships, *Mandy* (1952)

Her sense of frustration is due to her inability to access the system that would give her any sense of control of her situation. The relationship between Mandy and Kit does not pass unnoticed. Jane Ellis comments that Mandy's initial slow progress at the school is in part due to the fact that 'she was wholly dependent on the mother.' This comment hints at a belief that Kit is in some way culpable for Mandy's condition and if mother and daughter are indeed 'entwined' is there not then a question mark or some misgiving surrounding Mandy?[24] In this respect the film implicitly draws on a belief of the inherent untrustworthiness that is thought to mark femininity and in so doing demonstrates a degree of conservatism in gender politics.

For Landy, it is not only Mandy who is ostracised from language but also the mother Kit who must 'gain access to it in order to free the child' (1991: 458). Kit's mounting sense of frustration is perhaps an example of women's oblique entry into language, what Minksy

identified as the ill-fitting 'linguistic clothes.' Kit's access to language is the crux of the film as Mandy's chances of success rest with her mother. In *The Rocking Horse Winner* Hester could not enter the all-male world of her son and therefore could not help him. In *Mandy* Kit attempts to understand her child. Crucially Kit recognises what it is that Mandy needs. In a key scene which occurs before Mandy has attended the deaf school, she follows her dog out into the street and is nearly knocked down by a van. She rushes into the house, weeping and frightened, and into the arms of her mother. As Kit attempts to comfort her she remarks to Harry, 'I can't go on like this ... there's just no contact.' There is, of course, contact of a kind in that Kit is able to recognise how wrong things are for her daughter. Kit is able to enter the world of her child and understand what needs to be done to release her from her imprisonment. Her ability to do this can be explained by the close, and gendered, relationship between mother and daughter whereby they both, as females, share a gendered affinity in the Imaginary.

It is worth mentioning here very briefly the work of Julia Kristeva. Kristeva converts the Lacanian Imaginary and Symbolic into the semiotic and symbolic and argues that the woman has a closer connection with the semiotic because of its connotations with the maternal body. For Kristeva, the symbolic is an order imposed upon the semiotic which, in a manner similar to the Freudian unconscious, may equally declare itself in 'dreams, madness, excess, slips and fissures in discourse' (Leighton and Shaw, 1987: 15). The symbolic for Kristeva is a necessary structure without which language would become no more than 'psychotic utterance' (Morris, 1993: 145). In relation to the film, there are two occasions where Mandy and Kit have volatile outbursts which can be read as an example of the Kristevan semiotic. Mandy's visit to the park with her parents ends in disaster when, relentlessly teased by a boy and his sister for her inability to ask for the return of her

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[24] Indeed the concept of entwining suggests, somewhat perversely, Bowlby's statement that the mother would find 'an expansion of her own personality in the personality of her child' (Bowlby, 1965: 77).

ball, she erupts in fury and beats the boy to the ground. Immediately following this incident Kit has a similar outburst and verbally attacks Harry for his failure to recognise Mandy's situation and send her to school. For Kit the semiotic declares itself in her outburst at Harry. Mandy's inability to access the structure of the symbolic in language places her closer to the semiotic and the danger of 'psychotic utterance.' Such utterance calls her identity as a member of the symbolic order into question and it is noteworthy that one of the teachers at the school, Miss Crocker, refers to Mandy as a 'wild animal'[25] whilst the mother of the boy she attacks in the park calls Mandy 'insane.'

The ability to speak is linked to the ability to hear and the issue of communication is, not surprisingly, central to the film. As Mandy struggles to communicate, so the adults in the film are marked by their failure to communicate with each other. The school's headmaster Searle and its governor Ackland are locked in a hostile relationship, to the detriment of the school. Harry's father has retreated from conventional communication to a world of postal chess whilst Harry's mother Emily speaks but has nothing to say, delivering only 'emotional gush' (Kemp, 1991: 79). Harry himself is the person least able to listen to what is said to him. He remains deaf to the attempts of Kit to communicate Mandy's situation to him and cannot hear what she tries to tell him. As Kemp has noted Harry's family suffer from 'an accumulated heritage of emotional blight – the habit of non-communication, of refusal to hear, that in her [Mandy] has surfaced as the inability to hear' (1991: 77).[26]

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[25] Such a comment evokes Gorer's statement at the beginning of this chapter that children have 'wild origins' that only parental discipline can tame. Of course language as a patriarchal structure is a key disciplinary mechanism.

[26] In Michael Meyer's preface to Ibsen's *Ghosts* he claims that the play explores 'the devitalizing effect of inherited convention' (quoted in Kemp, 1991: 77). Kemp argues that *Mandy* shares with Ibsen's *Ghosts* the 'metaphor of congenital syphilis' (ibid). Mackendrick himself commented that '[o]ne of the effects of inherited syphilis is often deafness in the child. Not that that was implied in *Mandy* as such – but it was in the background of my mind' (ibid). Mandy's deafness then serves as a comment on the Garland family and the necessity for the future generation to break with the oppressive nature of convention, itself a comment on post-war society and the need for outmoded conventions to be challenged.

The failure to listen or hear, whether voluntary or involuntary, is represented in the film by what Kuhn identifies as a 'leitmotif: a point-of-view angle on the back of a character's head ... suggesting not-hearing' (1992: 235). This leitmotif is used to depict two of the deaf characters, Mandy and Janet Ellis, at points throughout the narrative but it is also used, crucially, to represent Harry and his refusal to hear. This is not to argue that only Harry fails in communication. Searle, for example, is guilty of failing to understand the underlying cause of Ackland's hostility towards him. Harry however is the only hearing person with whom the leitmotif is used, suggesting that it is most crucial that he, of all the hearing characters, learns to listen. Indeed, at the end of the film Searle visits Harry at the Garland home and says, 'I have something to say, will you listen to it?' Harry turns away from Searle and the leitmotif is used suggesting Harry's continued stubborn refusal to listen. It is the intervention of Harry's father that legitimates Searle and Kit's discourse for Harry and at this point he turns to face Searle, finally prepared to listen.

Harry's inability to listen and communicate, and Mandy's struggle to progress, is paralleled by the experience of one of the school's new teachers, Miss Crocker. She joins the school on the same day as Mandy. Mandy initially fails to fit in with her peers, she remains lonely and unhappy and at night-time cries in her bed. Equally Miss Crocker fails to fit in with her colleagues and understand the needs of deaf children. During night-time supervision duties, she loses her temper with a crying Mandy and shouts and shakes her. Chastised by the staff for her behaviour she tenders her resignation. Miss Crocker's failure (in a manner similar to Harry) is her inability to enter the world of the child. It is for this reason that, when Mandy says her first letter 'b' and rushes out to repeat it to her mother, the camera pans back to capture in deep-focus, long shot, the reaction of Miss Crocker to Mandy's achievement. As it is already clear that Kit can enter her daughter's world, there is less narrative motivation to capture her reaction to Mandy. What is made clear by this

scene is the ability of someone else to learn to do so. The implicit message of this is that, if someone as initially reluctant as Miss Crocker can learn to relate to the child, so can Harry.

Indeed Harry's ability to understand Mandy and Kit is crucial, but his problem, like that of Tony from *The Flesh is Weak*, is his failure to read femininity accurately or consistently. He oscillates between approval and disapproval of Kit's actions and the impact they have on him. He comments to his solicitor for example that there would be no point denying Kit financial support as she could secure a job and support herself. It is these attributes of resourcefulness and agency that mark Kit as different from Hester. Harry concludes, with a small smile of pride, that Kit is 'not the type to be bullied.' Indeed Kit's agency extends to the expression of an active sexuality. Kit's decision to take Mandy to school creates a geographical separation between husband and wife. When Harry visits the sexual nature of their relationship is clearly evident. An embrace between the couple is depicted in close-up with the camera focusing on Kit's face whilst the back of Harry's head is shown, moving in towards her. Her lowered eyelashes seductively signal a shyness that is heavily laden with sexual desire and when the scene fades to black and is followed by a breakfast scene, the connotations are clear. Kit's active sexual desire is also in evidence when she spontaneously engages Searle in a frank open-mouthed kiss after Mandy has spoken her first word, her joy and appreciation merging with her desiring nature although, in this case, it is inappropriately directed at the 'wrong man' and is partly responsible for Harry removing Mandy from the school. Harry's pride at Kit's independence however is tempered by the realisation of its inconvenient consequences for him and his notions of patriarchal authority. During the same conversation with his solicitor he complains bitterly, 'surely, as the child's father, I must have some say in the matter.' In this respect Harry is caught between the old world that his family represents and the new world that

Cook termed the 'democratic, egalitarian ideal' (1986: 357). The interaction between these worlds, the extent to which they influence each other, and which is the more dominant depends on how the final scene is interpreted, a point which I shall discuss shortly.

Having discussed gendered access to language and explored the theme of communication I want to consider how the house and its wider location are represented. A recurring motif of the film is a camera view out of an upper window in the Garland house that incorporates the walled garden, the wasteland beyond where the local children play and, in the distance, a bridge over which traffic flows (see still 22 below). This image occurs at a number of points throughout the film.

Still 22. The wasteland as the future, *Mandy* (1952)

Indeed images of bars and barriers that suggest Mandy's imprisonment proliferate throughout the film. We initially glimpse Mandy through the bars of her cot, which

foreshadow the bars on her nursery window at the Garland house. The walled back garden encloses both the house and its inhabitants, including Mandy, holes in the wall are covered with chicken wire, and twice the camera depicts Mandy, first in medium close-up, and then close-up, peering forlornly through the wire at the wasteland beyond. Parallels are drawn between Mandy and her rabbit. During a heated argument between Harry, his mother and Kit, Harry insists that Mandy cannot attend school, 'she's staying where she belongs.' The camera cuts to Mandy outside feeding her rabbit through the mesh of the cage door, an action observed and interpreted by her mother, but not her father. Indeed Kit accuses Harry's mother of treating Mandy as no more than a pet. Mandy's imprisonment is clearly signalled as both literal and symbolic.

The choice of the house and the *mise-en-scène* is interesting. The Garland house is a large, imposing Victorian terrace located in a crescent that was once an upper middle-class enclave. The recent war has reduced the crescent to a shadow of its former glory and the Garland house is flanked by a bomb-site. Broken houses and piles of rubble provide a fertile playground for the local children. In contrast, the garden that belongs to the Garland house is a barren place where nothing, including Mandy, can grow. Whilst the *mise-en-scène* of the wasteland can be read as a literal depiction of the ravages of a recent war, it also has a symbolic resonance for Mandy. As the place where the local children play Mandy's aspirations and hopes for the future rest on her ability to join them in their games. As Kuhn comments '[i]f this space stands for the future towards which Mandy is striving, then is there not some measure of ambivalence about that future: on the one hand a wasteland of destruction, on the other a *tabula rasa* for the construction of the new' (1992: 242). This space is, as Kuhn comments, an example of the Freudian uncanny. The impossibility of marking clear distinctions between the 'interior and exterior' means that what is 'familiar, homely' is also 'threatening, fearful' (Dolar, 1991: 5-6). The uncanny is

always ambiguous and, in this film, the wasteland stands as a comment on that future, what shape or form it will take.

For Kuhn, the wasteland is 'motivated by, and mediated through, the house' and for Mandy to reach the wasteland 'separation and distancing from the house must take place' (1992: 242). The difficulty of achieving this is precisely because the house stands as something of an extension of the maternal body.[27] With its myriad rooms, stairs, corridors and barred windows the house entraps Mandy. It seems to function as an extension of the Garland family and the notion of 'inherited convention', its s/mothering ostracising Kit and suffocating Mandy. It is noteworthy that Harry, Kit and Mandy are allocated the top floor in the Garland house. Whilst on a literal level this can be explained as affording them a degree of privacy, the connotations of the attic in relation to femininity and infantalization require comment. Mandy's father and grandmother object to placing her in a deaf school because it suggests institutionalism which, when provided by the state carries a distinct 'social stigma' (Kemp, 1991: 77). Their preference to keep Mandy at home, whilst partly driven by their class ideology, reveals also their sense of shame at the dis-abled child. Kemp argues that the family wants Mandy 'to be screened from public gaze like a mad aunt in the attic' (ibid). Such a choice of phrase is insightful. The attic has a dual function. Firstly, female hysteria, refusal to speak, and chronic illness are all forms of female protest against a patriarchal system, representations of which proliferated in nineteenth-century literature and beyond, where female creativity and agency struggled to speak within phallogocentric discourse. Indeed 'excessive femininity' (female agency) is what Doane argues is contained in the attic in *Jane Eyre* (1987: 134). The attic is a means of containing female agency which has been suppressed and has been forced to emerge in other discourses such as illness. If the house is an extension of the maternal body, and

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[27] In this respect it differs slightly from *The Rocking Horse Winner* where Paul is acutely sensitive to the needs of his mother which he then projects onto the house.

over-identification with that body (the semiotic) leads, in Kristevan terms, to psychosis then Kit's fight to keep Mandy away from the attic is entirely justified. Secondly the attic, as well as a feminine space, is also at a literal and symbolic level a space for the infant. So the attic infantilises Kit and her family, which is why she dislikes it.[28] Both feminisation and infantalization are about disempowerment, making Kit determined to keep Mandy out of the attic and to assist her in opening up a space for her subjectivity. The narrative is driven by the extent to which Mandy and Kit can successfully negotiate the barriers of both language and the house.

Mandy does succeed in transcending the myriad difficulties she faces. In the final scene she leaves the house and walled garden and enters the wasteland where the children play. Invited by the children to join them Mandy must speak her name to be accepted by the group, something she succeeds in doing, much to the joy of her watching parents. Kit and Harry observe Mandy's interaction with the other children. Kit moves towards Mandy, seemingly to intervene, but is held back by Harry who uses his hand to block her movement. The parents then stand alongside each other. Kit looks up at Harry adoringly as they turn to watch their daughter run off with the other children, the film closing with a long shot that encapsulates the parents, the children and the *mise-en-scène* of the wasteland.

Two contrasting interpretations have been offered for this ending in relation to Mandy and her mother and what this might have to say about gender relations and the nature of the future in post-war British society. For Kemp the ending is 'affirmative' certainly in relation to Mandy (1991: 87). He argues that Kit's achievements are 'appropriated,

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[28] Paradoxically, Paul's move to the attic can on one level be read as affording him a degree of privacy that is associated with taking steps towards adulthood. His attic bedroom however isolates him from the rest of the household and he becomes increasingly sensitive to the needs of his mother which, I have argued, he projects

defused and absorbed by patriarchal structure' and that the final gesture of Harry's hand on Kit's arm illustrates that 'Harry has reasserted his controlling influence over Mandy's progress' (1991: 83). Mandy's progress is tentative and there are no guarantees that the same fate that befell Kit will not absorb Mandy at some later date. Despite these disclaimers Mandy's final achievement, although 'precarious,' should be afforded due recognition (1991: 87). For Cook however, the restraining arm of patriarchy is indicative of a 'new social order' that has no place for gender equality[29] and which ultimately subscribes to a 'gradualist philosophy' of change (1986: 361). Kuhn's arguments about the degree of ambivalence evoked by the wasteland suggest the mixed feelings about the old world and the new, about the past and the future. The older generation represented by Harry and his family have struggled to communicate whilst the new generation represented by Mandy have learnt to use language and communication to enter society. Kit is the person who mediates between the two, who is able to recognise and respond to the psychological life and needs of her child, and open up a space for Mandy to be able to articulate her own needs. However, in order to ensure the possibility of a future Kit must to some extent sacrifice herself to redeem the child and ensure that that child will flourish. Kit's achievement is to open up the world for Mandy, to facilitate her progress and to engender relevant change in Harry. Whilst a lack of restraint means that the child is lost for Hester, the ability to both recognise and respond to the needs of the child in *Mandy* is only achieved through the sacrifice of the mother. The ending shows Harry taking what can be read as an appropriate, gendered, form of intervention which, in this case, is shown to be correct as Mandy plays with her new friends. The 'rightful' patriarchal order is restored with Harry's taking up his role and Kit submitting to his intervention. What is

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onto the house. It is his over-identification with the house as maternal body that leads to his psychosis and which ultimately kills him.

[29] The film for Cook draws on post-war notions of the 'New Woman – equal to, but different from, men' (1986: 360). Harry's restraining hand is sufficient to undermine any positive reading of this admittedly dubious gender dynamic because Harry's restraint of Kit means that equality cannot be achieved under such conditions. For Cook it seems what happens is the integration of female desire.

important in the film is that Harry changes and arrives back, in the closing scene, at his rightful role. However, whilst Mandy's achievements are provisional, equally there is no guarantee that Kit's absorption is total and complete, or that Harry can sustain the patriarchal order. Kit's acceptance of Harry's restraining arm is dependent on Harry's continuing acceptance of Mandy's needs, as defined by Kit. Harry's discourse of 'inherited convention' has been critiqued but there are lingering misgivings surrounding Mandy and Kit because of their femininity. It is this ambivalence which marks the ending of the film.

The final seconds of the film also do not completely undermine the previous achievements of Kit. It is noteworthy that when Kit leaves Harry she does not move in with her friends the Tabors, an obvious choice as they live in Manchester where the school is located. Whilst this is a plot device to allow for the development of an emotional relationship between Kit and Searle it has the paradoxical effect of making Kit seem more independent, prepared to set up a home for herself and Mandy and work for a living if necessary. Although there is little articulation of the needs of the mother as an independent person in her own right and outside the role of mother, Kit's ability to enter the world of her child provides her with some opportunities for independence from her husband. If, as Bowlby argues, the mother's personality is expanded by her relationship with her child, then it is somewhat ironic that this relationship should lead to female autonomy that stands as a challenge to the concept of *pater familias*. Kit's divergence then is her ability to do battle in relation to the role of mother, an ability which in this film has some surprising consequences.

In this chapter I have explored the representation of the mother in popular culture and her responsibility for ensuring the psychological health and wider needs of her child. In a

post-war world split along gender lines the success of the mother is constructed as depending on her ability to enter the world of her child and understand and respond to its needs. Both films use, although in slightly different ways, the melodramatic device of the house as an extension of the maternal figure and the necessity for the child to successfully negotiate the house to ensure survival. The purpose of the woman is to have the necessary skills to facilitate in the child the ability to effect this negotiation but the child's success can only be achieved at the expense of the mother. Childcare for women demands sacrifice and failure to conform, as in *The Rocking Horse Winner*, will have dire consequences.

The films also have something to say about masculinity. That one child survives whilst the other dies may suggest, in the latter film, a critique of the paternal role. Both the father and the father-surrogates in *The Rocking Horse Winner* fail Paul whose subjectivity therefore cannot be fully formed. In *Mandy* the child's success is provisional and the future ambivalent. The suggestion of ambivalence and uncertainty is interesting not least because it signals some of the tensions present in the maternal role and indicates some of the fissures of post-war ideologies as they relate to the dominant paradigm of the heterosexual family. The films then seem to dramatise a number of fears and concerns, both conscious and unconscious, held by a nation in relation to the future, its children, and the role of women and men.

In the next, and final, chapter of this thesis my discussion will focus on the figure of the housewife. This is a role which, in a manner similar to that of the mother, has a long cultural association with traditional femininity. What emerged in the post-war era however was the nuancing of the housewife's representation in culture through discourses of

affluence and classlessness, which suggests a more complex figure than perhaps might be immediately associated with traditional femininity.

Chapter 7: The Drama of the Housewife

In this chapter I shall discuss two films that are concerned with the concept of the housewife: *Woman in a Dressing Gown* (1957) and *Young Wives' Tale* (1951). I shall briefly outline the central role afforded the housewife in post-war social discourse, and how she functioned symbolically in relation to wider debates regarding affluence, classlessness, and Americanisation. I shall offer a brief feminist critique of housework before exploring how these themes are negotiated in popular culture texts.

The idea of the woman as housewife was a key strand of dominant post-war discourses of femininity. I have already discussed in my previous chapter the centrality of the concept of the family and women's role within that family as wife and mother. Winnicott's frequently quoted statement regarding female goals beyond housewifery as 'nonsense' illustrates how this concept became a subject for general debate and indeed how it gained a hold in the post-war cultural imaginary. As Wilson argues: '[d]omestic work was very widely seen after the war as a problem', and Beveridge was concerned that the travails of the 'tired housewife' be alleviated (1980: 19).[1] This was to be achieved by removing the 'drudgery' of housework whilst simultaneously ensuring that housewifery remained women's primary role (Wilson, 1980: 20). The strategies employed to achieve these ends were unique to the post-war period. To address the issue of drudgery, immediate post-war discussions of broadly 'socialist' solutions such as communal eating halls soon floundered (Wilson, 1980: 20).[2] The Labour Government tried to re-launch domestic service as a viable paid job for women but the numbers in service continued to decline rapidly throughout the 1950s.

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[1] As Wilson illustrates, the decline in employment of domestic servants meant that the housework undertaken by middle-class women was similar to that of working-class women and for this reason the 'harsh conditions' of housewifery were *'noticed'* (1980: 20).

Ultimately, drudgery, it was thought, had been alleviated by the expansion of the new consumer goods from the mid-1950s onwards; so-called 'labour-saving' household appliances and products such as washing machines, vacuum cleaners and cleaning products.[3] As I discussed in Chapter 2 there was a commonly held belief that household appliances required limited efforts to operate them; therefore, as Wilson argues, 'the myth became that housework hardly was housework any more' (1980: 30). Indeed, Hopkins clearly illustrates this belief in his discussion of detergents which for him were evidence of a domestic revolution which brought considerable 'saving[s] in physical wear-and-tear for the average woman' (1963: 325). Winship, in her analysis of women's magazines from the period, argues that the language used in advertisements suggests that 'commodities are seen to do "work by themselves" ... in ads which conceal all trace of the real labour of domesticity performed by women' (1981: 17).[4] As Winship argues however, 'the purpose of most purchases is to aid further work, e.g. polishing' (ibid) although this is rarely recognised in magazines and advertisements. With the decline of domestic service and the proliferation of household appliances, the workload of working and middle-class housewives was believed to be similar. As I argued in Chapter 2 domestic technology functioned, within British culture, as a signifier of classlessness, affluence and post-war equality so that 'the woman wielding the hoover ...[was] the symbol of the social revolution that had obliterated inequality' (Wilson, 1980: 12). The housewife therefore

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[2] During the 'housewives debate' in the House of Commons in 1947 Jim Callaghan argued against the notion of 'public feeding', a belief that seems to have been supported by the male public in general (Wilson, 1980: 24).

[3] Refrigerators and washing-machines were initially only readily available to those with high incomes. However, as evidence from the 1949 Royal Commission on Population illustrates, 'the tin opener and birth control' offered some small respite for women from drudgery (quoted in Wilson, 1980: 23). That the housewife resorted to such measures was seen, by the Standing Joint Committee of Working Women's Organisations, as a regrettable but necessary consequence of society's failure to adequately support her (ibid).

[4] As I argued in Chapter 2 the belief that commodities 'work by themselves' was widely-held but the operation of Olga the doll demonstrates that this is a fallacy. Furthermore, household commodities and the effacement of female labour have certain parallels with the ways that make-up can be used to produce a 'natural' beauty that has the effect of covering over the 'work' of femininity, ideas that I discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to the character Mary Hilton and the actress Diana Dors.

was the embodiment of the concept of classlessness, one of the key features of post-war social discourse.

In addition to the removal of drudgery woman's primary role as homemaker took on new meanings, as the language of management practices from industry was extended to the home. Indeed the workplace and the home were in many respects conceptualised as mirror images and were an extension of the separate but equal discourse of gender relations. Winship argues that, for women's magazines, '[c]onsumption, as work, has its own procedures, rites, planning and measurements of efficiency in the same way, it is represented, as the work of production' (1981: 15). Stacey comments, 'management of the household required skill and "knowhow"' and the housewife was expected to become an 'expert' in this area (1994: 221).[5] Housework in a sense became fetishized.

This discourse of expertise elevated housewifery beyond drudgery to a new sphere where the housewife was re-valued as a creative being, working in harmony with the new consumer goods to create a domestic haven for her family. Indeed, the ideological meanings associated with the domestic realm underwent radical changes in the 1950s. Stacey argues that 'the home ...[became] the key site of leisure and pleasure in 1950s Britain' (1994: 222). Hopkins suggests that the combination of television, rehousing and the 'consumer revolution' brought about 'a return to the home and a preoccupation with the home' (1963: 331). Women's magazines, whose circulation increased dramatically in the 1950s, demonstrate how women were addressed as consumers for the domestic realm. The market leader *Woman*, for example, doubled its sales between 1945-50 (Ferguson, 1983: 23). *Woman* was credited with being the 'tradepaper for women' (a statement which captures the notion of housewifery as a career and the housewife as someone in possession

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[5] The discourse of expertise applied to woman's domestic role was paralleled by the elevation of motherhood to 'specialist status' in the 1950s (Haste, 1992: 152 cited in Geraghty, 2000: 30).

of specialist knowledge) and its function was to help women explore and address their 'domestic concerns, personal problems and consumer choices' (Ferguson, 1983: 30-1). The family and the home were central to this address and women were provided with advice and information on a diverse range of issues related to the domestic realm including consumer goods, dressmaking, and the expanding market of DIY.[6] Interestingly, the leading weeklies in the field all demonstrated 'editorial rationales of female homogeneity,' that is, they assumed that the audience they were addressing was 'cohesive' and had a shared 'identity of interest' (Ferguson, 1983: 32). This imagined homogeneity illustrates again the housewife as the embodiment of the classlessness discourse which permeated the post-war imaginary of British society (although the homogenised female was in fact distinctly middle-class).

For Hopkins, these magazines were evidence of the failure of feminism in post-war Britain. He argues that, '[f]or the old-time feminists – and indeed for new ones, if there were any – the women's magazines must have been the bitterest pill of all. The world they offered their readers was exclusively female; they enclosed them in a sort of portable purdah' (1963: 328). The magazines are, for Hopkins, evidence of how women returned to occupy the traditional, separate, sphere of the home in the post-war world, a move that he considers antithetical to the perceived goals of feminism. What has emerged in more recent feminist theory however is recognition of the 'contradictory meanings' associated with consumption for women in this period, and a realisation that '[d]iscourses of consumption addressed women as subjects and encouraged their participation in the "public sphere"' (Stacey, 1994: 223). Such an approach illustrates how women could

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[6] Women's magazines, in part, provided instruction on topics that were a new concern to British society and the woman as consumer, for example, '[w]hat is a washing machine? What is a steam iron?' (Ferguson, 1983: 31). The magazines furthermore instructed women in how to decorate their homes, which patterns and papers would complement the new designs in furniture for example (Winship, 1981: 16). In this respect their address was intended to inculcate in their readers certain notions of 'good taste' although, as I argued in the introduction to this thesis, the norms of taste which were privileged were bourgeois and working-class female consumers did not necessarily conform to these paradigms (Partington, 1995: 252).

exercise a certain degree of agency, albeit within limited parameters, in relation to consumption and breaks the assumed link between female consumers and passivity which I outlined in the introduction to this thesis.

Despite the elevation of the housewife's role, the importance of the home created something of a tension between women's position as housewives and the necessity to purchase consumer goods. The dominant discourse of housewifery belied the fact that the boom in consumer spending was in part funded by female wages. In Britain, the number of women working outside the home increased, and for many their wages were used to purchase the new consumer goods. Byars argues that in the US materialism won out over domesticity (1991: 82), and a similar situation was evident in Britain. The beautification of the home was in part funded by female employment, although the dominant discourse in relation to femininity imagined women primarily as men's dependants, that is, as wives and mothers.[7]

The housewife then was a complex symbolic figure in post-war British society. Housework was seen as an essential and increasingly meaningful role. There was recognition of drudgery but a belief that it was rapidly being eradicated. Consumer goods were important in this process but their wide-spread acquisition also functioned as evidence of society's classlessness. The housewife was positioned, as Hopkins argues, as the 'essential pivot of the People's Capitalism, and its natural heroine' (1963: 324). Simultaneously, there was a concern that consumer goods designed along 'American lines' would lead, in Britain, to a '"leveling down" of moral and aesthetic standards' and the destruction of specifically British values and beliefs (Hebdige, 1988: 47). Hebdige, in his discussion of post-war British culture, illustrates how writers from differing political

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[7] Stacey argues that 'women were ... primarily addressed in terms of their positions as wives and mothers in "the family"' (1994: 222).

positions (Evelyn Waugh, Richard Hoggart, George Orwell and T. S. Eliot) shared very similar concerns regarding the cultural impact of what were widely, and pejoratively, termed American values (1988: 50-2).[8] Briefly, Hebdige illustrates how the 'spectre of Americanisation', as a signifier of 'cultural imperialism', haunted post-war Britain and was used as an umbrella term to capture concerns about immorality, conspicuous consumption, cultural impoverishment and social homogenisation (1988: 52).[9] Women's status therefore relative to the home and the acquisition of consumer goods, and as a signifier of classlessness, was not unproblematic and some of these tensions are evident in the films I shall discuss.

Whilst concerns about the housewife as purchaser of consumer goods speaks of debates about the broader condition of British culture, they do not engage with any discrepancy between the housewife as a figure of supposedly heroic proportions and the reality of her lived experience. A final point needs to be made to introduce the observations of Simone de Beauvoir, writing in 1949, who offered a scathing critique of housewifery. For de Beauvoir housewifery led to the spiritual, mental, and emotional impoverishment of woman. The housewife's life is reduced to the home which 'becomes the centre of the world and even its only reality' in opposition to the 'confused outer world that becomes unreal' (1949: 469). Her horizons are limited in a sphere that 'provides no escape from immanence and little affirmation of individuality' (de Beauvoir, 1949: 470).[10] De Beauvoir argued that '[f]ew tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework,

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[8] Whilst Hoggart and Orwell were broadly committed to class equality, a situation which horrified Waugh who was a staunch advocate of class privilege, all were concerned that Americanisation would destroy those elements of British culture that they most valued.

[9] Britain's existing resentment towards America, partly as a result of the war-time stationing of American soldiers, was augmented in the post-war period by America's increasingly affluence and status as political world leader, relative to Britain's vicissitudes, of which the Suez crisis of 1956 is the key example (Hebdige, 1988: 53).

[10] De Beauvoir's central argument is that, whilst recognising that femininity is socially constructed, women must strive to enter society on male terms. To achieve this the body, so problematic for women, must be transcended to acquire the attributes of reason and rationality that are the distinguishing features of humanity. To fail to strive for transcendence is to remain located in immanence (the body). As de Beauvoir argues,

with its endless repetition' (ibid). The housewife engages in a thankless and non-productive task: 'she makes nothing, simply perpetuates the present' (ibid). Akin to the notion of the expert, the housewife attempts to endow her endeavours with significance, aiming 'to give some individuality to her work and to make it seem essential' through the deployment of 'her rites, superstitions, and ways of doing things' (de Beauvoir, 1949: 473). This attempt to stamp her individuality on her work is, for de Beauvoir, only 'a vague and meaningless rearrangement of disorder' (ibid). De Beauvoir's writing prefigures Betty Friedan's 1963 work *The Feminine Mystique* which explores in detail what Friedan described as the 'problem with no name', that is, the chronic dissatisfaction and alienation felt by many middle-class housewives.

Since the work of de Beauvoir and Friedan, housework has been subject to a significant amount of feminist theorising. Oakley (1974), Hartmann (1976) and Delphy (1984) have all contributed to an increased understanding concerning women's role in relation to housework, and the production of capital. Oakley for example identifies three key features of the housewife's role: that her 'primary economic function is vicarious,' that she is the family's 'main consumer,' and that her role cannot be classified as 'work' because it attracts no 'wage or salary' (1974: 3). The comments by Oakley capture the invisibility of the housewife as an individual in her own right (rather her individuality is expressed only through her home) and the perception of her central role in society as consumer rather than producer. The films that I discuss in this chapter are important not least because they are part of the beginnings of a critical re-evaluation of the figure of the housewife.

Whilst de Beauvoir, as a French feminist philosopher, was not specifically writing about post-war Britain, her work - in its depiction of the housewife figure - is a useful starting

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'[e]very time transcendence falls back into immanence ... there is a degradation ... of liberty into constraint and contingence' (1949: 29).

point for discussing the representation of the housewife in British cinema. In my readings of the films I shall explore that figure, her domestic space and how she operates within it, and how she functions as a manifestation of some of the broader concerns about post-war society and culture.

Woman in a Dressing Gown (1957) was directed by J. Lee Thompson, a director who, I have already argued, exhibited something of a feminist sensibility. The film was made by the production company of Godwin-Willis[11], a satellite of ABPC, and a situation that allowed the team a greater degree of creative freedom. The critical success of *Yield to the Night* in 1956 meant that Thompson was a directorial force to be reckoned with in British cinema. ABPC were keen to retain his skills whilst Thompson was equally eager to take advantage of the studio's policy of freelance production to exercise some creative autonomy (Chibnall, 2000: 140). The film allowed Thompson to work again with other key personnel; photography was provided by Gilbert Taylor and editing by Richard Best, both of whom had worked with Thompson on *The Weak and the Wicked* and *Yield to the Night*. In genre terms *Woman in a Dressing Gown* has been read as social problem film (Hill, 1986) and as a woman's film (Landy, 1991) which suggests that genre boundaries are porous and that the themes of domestic unhappiness and marital problems are cross-genre. In its depiction of domestic disharmony the film supports the argument of Lloyd and Johnson, in their discussion of the post-war housewife in Hollywood films, that it is '[b]ecause domestic labour is invisible to the economy and culture ... such labour is very rarely documented on film, unless it is aberrant, unusual or strange ... housewives on film ... are troubled, lazy, bored, or mad' (2003: 21).

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[11] Frank Godwin was an accountant working in Rank with some knowledge of production whilst Ted Willis had worked extensively as a writer for stage, film and television (Chibnall, 2000: 142). Despite the wealth of experience held by the trio they made little money from the critical and commercial success of *Woman in a Dressing Gown* as they were 'comprehensively shafted by ABPC head Robert Clark, who negotiated a labyrinthine deal which they were too naïve to see through' (Harper, 2000: 83).

The focus of the story is Amy Preston (Yvonne Mitchell), a working-class housewife, who lives with her husband Jim (Anthony Quayle) and their son Brian (Andrew Ray). Amy repeatedly fails at housewifery; meals are either late or burnt, and the family home is strewn with a jumble of washing, darning and newspapers. Despite these shortcomings Amy remains seemingly cheerful. The frustrated Jim however has fallen in love with the organised and efficient Georgie (Sylvia Syms) and decides on divorce. Amy then makes a number of attempts at domestic and personal reform in the hope of saving her marriage, whilst Jim procrastinates between duty and love. Ultimately duty prevails and Jim and Amy remain together.

The film was in general well received. Reviews were positive, with critics such as C. A. Lejeune for *The Observer* describing the film as 'utterly true to life down to the smallest detail' whilst *The Times* claimed it as a 'true, complete and wholly convincing portrait of a woman' (Chibnall, 2000: 155).[12] Mitchell's performance in particular was singled out for praise and for these reviewers the film succeeded because it convinced in terms of realism, that is, it achieved verisimilitude in its rendering of the female protagonist's life. Mitchell won the Silver Bear for Best Actress at the Berlin Film Festival, where the film was also awarded the International Critics Prize (Harper and Porter, 2003: 87). The most infamous critic of the film was Jean-Luc Godard who criticised the film's aesthetic style (a point to which I shall return) as 'maddening ... silly and meaningless', although for Williams his critique can be attributed to 'Anglophobia ... and virulent misogyny' (2003: 144-5). *KineWeekly's* classification of the film as a 'DOWN-TO-EARTH domestic melodrama' (26. Sept. 1957: 17) suggests its engagement with the non-pretentious, ordinary and everyday things in life, that is the domestic and mundane, the woman's sphere.

It is these aspects which may, in part, account for its commercial success. The film was profitable, relative to the standards of the day, taking £450,000 on its release (Williams, 2003: 152). Its melodramatic mode suggests a female audience despite claims from Thompson that he had not thought of it as a 'woman's film' (Chibnall, 2000: 171). Certainly *KineWeekly* recognised that its 'feminine appeal [was] compelling' (26. Sept. 1957: 17). If, as Harper and Porter argue, '[w]omen judged films according to the intensity of their involvement' (1996: 156)[13] then the commercial success of *Woman in a Dressing Gown* may be due to the resonance its themes held for female audience members. The casting of Mitchell is interesting because she was, as Williams' argues, 'half in and half out of the dominant film culture' of the 1950s (2002b: 33). Her middle-class background, work in the theatre and frequent roles in social problem films placed her within the mainstream (Williams, 2002b: 33). It was the link between her ethnic Jewish background and her 'emotionality' in film performances which, for Williams, marked her as an outsider (2002b: 33-9). The casting of Mitchell in *Woman in a Dressing Gown* draws on the actress' 'emotionality' and it is this quality, placed in a domestic setting, that may account for the commercial success of the film.

The appeal of the film was achieved, *inter alia*, through aspects of the *mise-en-scène*, especially music and directorial style, that were used in particular ways to depict Amy's role as a housewife and her inner emotional life. It also related to how the domestic space was portrayed visually, both subverting straightforward audience/character identification, and furthering the theme of domestic entrapment. After discussion of these issues I shall

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[12] Chibnall cites reviews from a range of diverse sources in the popular press including *The Star*, *The Evening News*, *Daily Worker* and *The Evening Standard* that all praised the film especially Mitchell's performance (2000: 173).

[13] Harper and Porter explore audiences' gender differences in relation to 'weeping' in post-war British cinema. In contrast to women, men practised an 'extreme detachment' to deliberately interrupt the process of identification and thereby stave off tears which were broadly seen as effeminate (1996: 155).

consider how femininity is represented in the film and argue that the character of Amy

dramatises many of the concerns de Beauvoir raised about the domestic realm.

The film is dominated by both the strategic placement of objects and deliberate camera

angles and movement which function in such a manner that the spectator is prevented from

obtaining a clear view of the action. It has been argued that Lee Thompson's work on

Woman in a Dressing Gown draws on the subversive potential of melodrama that

characterises the films of Douglas Sirk and other directors from the 1950s (Chibnall, 2000;

Hill, 1986; Williams, 2003). Such films were reappraised by critics from the 1970s[14] as

examples of mainstream Hollywood film that subverted the dominant ideology of the

bourgeois family. The link between the genre of melodrama and its evocative use of *mise-

en-scène* is well documented.[15] As a genre that is in essence inward-looking,[16] it makes

use of *mise-en-scène* to explore and articulate the emotional life of the characters. As

Elsaesser argues, there is 'a sublimation of dramatic conflict into décor, colour, gesture,

and composition of the frame, which in the best melodramas is perfectly thematised in

terms of the characters' emotional and psychological predicaments' (1987: 52). This

richly evocative *mise-en-scène* can be used to draw the audience's attention to emotional

aspects of the characters' lives and their social context, aspects that the characters

themselves may be unaware of or unable to articulate. This can be achieved through the

'distanciation effect' (Gibbs, 2002: 75) whereby the audience is made aware of textual

construction and in doing so is invited to critically reflect on the character and the social

factors that mould them.[17] Hill, in his discussion of *Woman in a Dressing Gown*, likens

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[14] Thomas Elsaesser discusses the films of Douglas Sirk (*Written on the Wind*), Vincente Minnelli (*The Bad and the Beautiful*) and Nicholas Ray (*Bigger Than Life*) in his seminal essay 'Tales of Sound and Fury' (1972) that was at the vanguard of the critical reappraisal of Hollywood melodrama.

[15] Mulvey, for example, considers melodrama to be 'the genre of *mise-en-scène*' (cited in Gibbs, 2002: 67).

[16] This is in opposition to action genres such as the western or crime thriller where the emotional conflict of the characters can be 'externalised and projected into direct action' (Gibbs, 2002: 71).

[17] This stands in opposition to the concept of *suture*, a Lacanian term used in film theory to indicate how classic narrative cinema stitches the spectator into the filmic text in a manner whereby the signs of the film's construction are effaced, through mechanisms such as the eye-line match and continuity editing.

the film to the 'Sirkian style [which] operates upon a dialectic of involvement and alienation, of drawing an audience into identification with characters whilst maintaining a critical distance' (1986: 98). For Chibnall, *mise-en-scène* in Sirk's films are augmented by 'visual distancing devices, dynamic cameras movements and ironic musical counterpoint' which serve to disrupt identification (2000: 149).

Lee Thompson employs such strategies. In my analysis of the opening sequence of *Yield to the Night* I discussed how objects such as stone pillars, iron gates, and statues were used to signal the alienation of the character Mary Hilton from wider society and to interrupt audience identification in a manner which invites critical reflection. *Woman in a Dressing Gown* introduces Amy in a very similar manner. The film opens with Amy sitting with a newspaper at the table in her living-room, surrounded by piles of clothing, newspapers and other assorted paraphernalia. The medium-long shot places Amy in relation to the room and portrays her as the centre of the chaos, thus commenting on her lack of domestic skills. The shot however is taken through a china cabinet. The two spindles of the cabinet and the ornamental animals obscure a clear view of either the room or Amy. Further the cabinet and its spindles frame her, boxing her in and creating the impression that she is contained by the room. The scene then prevents complete identification with Amy and invites the audience to critically consider how social factors, namely domesticity, function in an oppressive manner for her (see still 23 overleaf).

Still 23. Domestic entrapment, Amy in *Woman in a Dressing Gown* (1957)

Further scenes support this reading. As Amy cooks breakfast for her husband and son the camera is positioned at the back of the cooker, looking through at the burning toast under the grill as Amy runs towards it. The shot gives the impression of peering through something like a prison grill looking into a prison cell. This letter-box effect suggests an extremely confined and cramped space beyond, the kitchen effectively becoming a prison cell for Amy, whose background figure is captured and tightly framed. Such a shot from a clearly 'impossible place' (behind the cooker) is the point where subversion occurs[18] and which again suggests that perhaps domesticity itself is problematic, rather than Amy's response to it.

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[18] Heath argues that 'to the extent that the camera is located in an "impossible" place, the narration questions its own origins, that is suggests a shift in narration' (1993: 86). The 'impossible place' creates a 'disturbance' which is a 'disjunction of the unity of narration and narrated', that is, between form and content, and it is in this 'disjunction' that subversion occurs (ibid).

The film is obsessed with depicting visually (and aurally) the oppressive nature of domestic and marital life. It is important to recognise that scenes between Georgie and Jim are presented in a similar manner, implying that they too are hemmed in by societal constraints, and that their relationship may prove to be equally problematic. When the couple share an illicit Sunday lunch at Georgie's flat, the table-scene is shot from outside, through the bars of the windows, and the camera pans down to focus on a brick wall, sodden with driving rain. The couple share office space at work and are frequently shot through the office door window with a window frame obscuring them, indicating an oppressive space similar to the domestic one Jim shares with Amy.[19] In the scenes that I have discussed, frame composition indicates, as Elsaesser argued, 'the emotional and psychological predicaments of these characters.'

These techniques prevent unproblematic identification between audience and character. For Chibnall this is evidence of the camera 'urging the spectator to concentrate but discouraging the simple identification with one character' (2000: 150). The presentation of the three adults prevents there being a simple spilt between Amy as a victim and Georgie and Jim as immoral perpetrators. Indeed exploring how the two women are represented allows further analysis of this point.

Femininity is primarily represented in the film by the characters of Amy and Georgie. There is a degree of doubling evident between the two characters although it is not the case that they are diametrically opposed rather, like Bedelia and Ellen in *Bedelia*, each woman has both convergent and divergent features. Certain elements of the film's *mise-en-scène* are used to distinguish the women, namely, voice, dress, and performance. Sartorially,

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[19] This shot introduces a scene where Jim tells Georgie that he has, once again, failed to ask Amy for a divorce. The tight framing of the couple in their office continues as they move out into the timber yard. Here, a medium-shot captures them through a set of timber shelves which spatially hem them in. The couple

Georgie is elegantly dressed in skirt, blouse and court shoes with her hair arranged in a sleek chignon. In contrast, Amy shuffles around the flat in carpet slippers, shrouded in the eponymous dressing gown (complete with stains), lank hair falling about her face. A difference in emotional register marks the two women. Georgie's demeanour is controlled and she is frequently described as 'efficient.' Amy refers to her as 'cold, like a fish.' She is depicted as restrained through her pinned hair, buttoned blouse and minimal use of gesture, of either face or hands (see still 24 overleaf). After her lunch with Jim for example Georgie clears the table and empties the crumbs from the breadboard out of the window. This is done with a purposeful and deft flick of the wrist. The gesture is exact, perfectly calculating the required amount of pressure to complete the task and signifies that efficiency is a key feature of her personality. Further her voice is softly spoken with rounded vowel sounds. Such a depiction is at odds with her displays of sexual desire in Jim's company and her status as a mistress, a position that suggests, in normative terms, a lack of restraint.

Amy in contrast is, in emotional terms, the opposite of Georgie. During the course of the film she is effusive, hearty, cheerful, introspective and angry. Indeed Mitchell's performance has repeatedly been described as 'bravura' (Williams, 2003; Harper and Porter, 2003). It is this 'emotionality' that Williams argues is a feature of Mitchell's performance in this and her other film roles.[20] Amy gesticulates wildly (spilling beer over Jim in one scene), eats noisily, and laughs maniacally. Her voice, at times, is loud and she repeats key phrases ('it's Billy Dean,' and 'no, not my Jimbo') *ad nauseam*. Her relationship with her husband is platonic, as evidenced by the cheek-kissing and cheek-

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move to a pub and are framed in a similar manner as they sit with their drinks in a snug, projecting not intimacy but oppression.

[20] Indeed, part of the emotional opposition between the characters of Georgie and Amy is in the casting, with Mitchell's 'emotionality' markedly different from Sylvia Syms' who, as Williams' argues, fits a paradigm associated with other British actresses such as Phyllis Calvert, 'well-bred, well-spoken middle class (2002b: 39).

pinching, actions usually conferred by adults on small children. Finally, Amy is a chaotic and disorganised housewife whilst Georgie is efficient and orderly, both in her workplace and at home.

Still 24. Georgie (Sylvia Syms) and Amy (Yvonne Mitchell) in *Woman in a Dressing Gown* (1957)

Each woman has a number of convergent and divergent elements, in relation to femininity. Although Amy fails to satisfy on several levels she does conform to normative femininity in her role as wife, housewife, and mother. Georgie inhabits normative femininity in terms of dress, emotions, and appropriate sexual desire[21], but her status as a working woman and mistress disrupts normative conventions. Marriage to Jim is the mechanism through which Georgie's divergent elements would be reconciled. The representation of the two women makes evident Jim's frustration with Amy and his desire for Georgie. Further it

problematises any simple attempts to castigate Georgie as the 'other woman' or Jim as a philanderer, and elevate Amy to the status of martyr. That said, the main focus of the film is Amy, her world, and how the stultifying nature of housework has limited her physical and psychological horizons.

Having discussed how distanciation is evoked through visual elements of the *mise-en-scène* and how voice, dress and performance are used to elaborate characterisation I want to consider the use of music in the film. Amy's world is permeated by sound, delivered mainly through the radio, which Amy plays loudly and persistently. She enjoys a fairly eclectic range of music including pop, classical and jazz (although she most often listens to popular music) and is knowledgeable about what she listens to, whether it is Billy Dean at the local pub or Tchaikovsky on the radio. She is discerning about her choice of music, which functions as more than background noise to her. The music operates within the narrative at a number of levels and I shall discuss each of these in turn.

Music is an integral aspect of the melodramatic *mise-en-scène* and can be used in an ironic manner to undermine the film's overt message. In the opening scene Amy's frantic attempts to cook breakfast for her husband are juxtaposed with the mood of tranquillity evoked by the piece of music on the radio which is dominated by strings. The romanticism of this music and its evocation of domestic harmony also stands in stark contrast to the blackened meal that Amy serves of burnt toast, bacon and eggs. The use of lyrical music therefore ironically counters Amy's activity, the results of that activity, and the concept of romanticism. Indeed music is used almost constantly throughout the film. The exception to this are two key scenes. The first is when Jim asks Amy for a divorce, the second when Amy, Jim and Georgie meet to discuss their domestic entanglements. In an inversion of

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[21] Although her heterosexual desire should be channelled into monogamous marriage to fully conform to the normative paradigm.

the conventional use of film music (which is to underline the emotional dynamics of a given scene) the <u>absence</u> of music here (in a film crowded with aural stimulus) underscores, in a non-ironic manner, the emotional gravity of those scenes.

Amy frequently changes between radio channels to get the music of her choice. This flitting from one channel to another parallels her approach to housekeeping. Landy suggests that Amy's 'frenetic housekeeping activities ... are orchestrated to the music' (1991: 235). She starts one task (for example, making Brian's tea) only to drop it moments later in favour of another (reading a relative's postcard) and in doing so fails to complete either in a satisfactory manner. For this her husband and son denigrate her. Brian comments that 'nothing's ever organised, you work like a horse but you never seem to get anywhere ... you do a bit of this and a bit of that, but nothing's ever finished.' This critical statement serves as a comment on the housewife's approach to work, from a patriarchal perspective. Perkins however argues that 'the capacity to keep shifting attention back and forth, and changing skills, is characteristic of a housewife's job' (cited in Byars, 1991: 75).[22] The men mock Amy for taking the very approach that is demanded by the nature of her job. Amy's 'flitting' led to her character being described by *KineWeekly* as 'scatterbrained' and as a housewife 'whose mind will not permit her to settle down to one thing at a time' (26 Sept. 1957: 17). This suggests that Amy is at fault and further, that *KineWeekly* describes the film as '[h]umerous and moving in turn ... [it] will shatter many a housewife's complacency' (ibid) indicates that Amy's scatterbrain personality can stand as a source of both amusement and caution for audiences.[23] Whilst I have suggested that

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[22] Perkins' argument concerns stereotypes and the 'determining influences material conditions have on consciousness' (cited in Byars, 1991: 75). She uses the example of the 'flighty woman' stereotype, that is, the woman characterised by her 'inability to concentrate ... [and her] mental flightiness' (ibid). For Perkins, this (denigrated) mental approach is fostered by the 'material condition' of housework that demands a piecemeal approach but stereotypes function by inversion, so what was effect becomes cause and is used to 'establish it as an innate female characteristic' (ibid).

[23] Blaming the woman for failing to maintain her mind and physical appearance is not uncommon. Winship, in her analysis of women's magazines, identifies a story that appeared in a 1960 copy of *Woman* entitled 'Girl with the dressing gown mind' (1981: 22) where a once intelligent and sartorial secretary allows

the film's aesthetic can function in a way that invites the audience to consider the social forces that have shaped Amy and <u>made</u> her 'scatterbrained,' (that is, the oppressive nature of domesticity), audiences and readings are pluralistic not homogenous.[24]

Amy also uses music as a defence mechanism to avoid the demands placed on her by Jim and Brian who repeatedly request food, ironing and darning. She hides behind the loud music as a strategic device to counter the tyranny of domesticity in a patriarchal world. Indeed music divides the family along gender lines. Both men frequently express their irritation about the constant music; Jim, according to Georgie, does not like music, and Brian comments: 'just for once can't we listen to our own voices.' The men's voices however only ever make repeated domestic demands of Amy. Both men turn the radio off, or down, and by doing so attempt to control Amy and reconcile her to the demands of domesticity. Chibnall argues that the Prestons' flat is a 'sonic battlefield' with the 'aural environment … as confused and cluttered as their domestic space' (2000: 150). Music certainly signifies how estranged the couple have become and reveals the 'hidden dimensions' (Chibnall, 2000: 151) of their relationship.

The music also functions for Amy at a symbolic level. Kristeva's theories of the semiotic and symbolic facilitate an understanding of this process. I argued in the previous chapter that the semiotic has connotations with the maternal body, and the symbolic is the

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domesticity to entropy her. Her 'appearance … [in a] "grey dressing gown" … is seen to reflect her mind' and '[t]ypical of the period she, <u>personally</u> is to blame for her "failure" and her husband's retreat from her' (ibid). A woman's success or failure in relation to femininity (that is her roles as wife, housewife and mother) is constructed as a personal affair. Further, Winship suggests that the magazine story is an implicit reference to Lee Thompson's film. The publication of the story 3 years after the film indicates that the idea of a 'dressing gown mind' had cultural meaning.

[24] Indeed the focus of this thesis is not audience studies and therefore only tentative speculations can be made about audience response to the film. Certainly it is the case that the film use devices that interrupt the identification processes and invite a more nuanced reading. Williams suggests that 'recognition of Amy is not *personal* identification but *outward* identification; she is not like them, but someone they know' (2003: 153). Perhaps in this film spectatorship is very mobile and there is a recurring tension between identification and dis-identification, between being like Amy and not like her, between experiencing revulsion and empathy for her character. This ambiguity is a feature of post-war British cinema and one to which I will return in the conclusion of this thesis.

necessary system, imposing structure and order on the semiotic, without which language would become 'psychotic utterance' (Morris, 1993: 145). For Kristeva, the infant during the semiotic process experiences a variety of disparate sensations, or an 'endless flow of pulsions' that are 'gathered up in the chora (from the Greek word for enclosed space, womb)' (Moi, 1986: 12). Although the semiotic is necessarily repressed by the symbolic, women retain a special relationship to it, because of both its association with the mother's body, and women's oblique entry into the symbolic and language. Women must guard against too great a desire for the semiotic however as it leaves one 'open to the full force of unconscious desire, of which the most powerful is always the death drive' (Morris, 1993: 148). Kristeva argues then that an over-identification with the semiotic might lead to a descent into madness.

Music has particular connotations and Amy's choice (within a particular set of constraints) of constant, loud music can be understood as a challenge to the symbolic order. Hill argues that 'the world of music and dance is associated with sexual desire and social or family disruption' (1986: 74). Further, 'music and dancing is inextricably bound up with the primal and the dionysiac, consistently upsetting rational order and control' (ibid).[25] Music, in Amy's case, undermines the symbolic. Its association with the primal invites parallels to be drawn with the Kristevan semiotic and it challenges patriarchal familial structures. Amy's music functions as an expression of the eruption of the semiotic, which challenges the demands for rational order and control required by the symbolic. It is noteworthy that Amy demands <u>constant</u> music, to the extent that she will switch channels to avoid the interruption of dialogue; phallogocentricism alienates her. The music parallels her housekeeping activities, whose frenetic rhythms seem to embody the unstructured chora of Kristeva's theory with its 'endless flow of pulsions' (Moi, 1986: 12). If, as de

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[25] Hill applies this observation to the films of Basil Dearden, a key director of British social problem films of the 1950s, and a contemporary of J. Lee Thompson and Ted Willis.

Beauvoir argues, the horizons of the housewife shrink to the extent that there is 'no escape from immanence' (1949: 470) Amy is close to over-identification with the pre-Oedipal mother. She appears to be engaged in an unconscious revolt against the domestication of her desires. It is not that she rejects the symbolic, indeed she persists in her attempts to function within it. She is however alienated from it and music becomes an expression of that alienation. For Amy the semiotic, which in any person ebbs and flows, erupts to such an extent that it threatens to overwhelm her and she can be read as a woman on the brink of a nervous breakdown. Indeed Amy's cheerfulness and laughter, which dominates the first half of the film,[26] borders on the manic and indicates perhaps, psychosis.

Concerns and fears about the effects on the nation's consciousness, of constant popular music had a particular post-war resonance for many social commentators and were part of the debate about Americanisation and British culture. Orwell's essay 'Pleasure Spots' (first published in 1946), which imagined the leisure resorts of the future, is interesting because of the elements he considered integral to his dystopic vision. Of crucial importance for Orwell was a constant supply of music. 'Its function is to prevent thought and conversation ... [t]he radio is already consciously used for this purpose by innumerable people ... manipulated ... to make sure that only light music will come out of it ... music ... prevents the onset of that dreaded thing, thought' (Orwell, 1968: 80). Orwell's remarks, in some respects, are portentous: Amy does use music to avoid 'that dreaded thing, thought', because to think about her life is too depressing. Orwell and Hoggart would read this as a comment on the impoverishment of British (working-class) culture in the face of a malignant Americanisation (of which piped music was an integral feature), and would consider Amy as evidence of the degradation of cultural life. The

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[26] Prior to Jim's confession Amy is predominantly cheerful. However, as Williams rightly identifies, her wistfulness as she listens to Tchaikovsky whilst discussing Jim's chips signals an 'edge of melancholy' (2003: 149) that does not derive from her husband's unfaithfulness but her own unhappiness with her situation in life.

music however actually serves as an indictment of domesticity. It is not constant music that has reduced the quality of Amy's life; rather, she uses what is available to her in a complex and imaginative way to form an unconscious challenge to the patriarchal symbolic.[27]

In the final section of my analysis I shall briefly consider three key scenes. The first dramatises the concept of the housewife as expert and uses music in a particular way, the second is concerned with the failure of the housewife to function beyond the domestic sphere, whilst the third scene critically considers the closure of the film. In the first scene, Jim returns home determined to ask Amy for a divorce whilst Amy meanwhile has cooked Jim a special meal. The couple sit by the fireplace, Jim in a chair, Amy on the floor, Jim's slippers warming by the fire whilst he eats, the perfect picture of supposed domestic harmony. The camera is positioned to capture both in the frame; Jim face-on slightly in the background with Amy in profile in the foreground. Amy engages Jim in a banal conversation about chips. 'I tried a new way with the chips ... cooked them for a minute or so, then take them out, leave them for another minute and then put them back in.' Jim asks, 'what's that supposed to do?', to which Amy replies, 'makes them crisp, do you think it makes them crisp?', she asks Jim. Jim responds with a half-smile, a nod and a crunch of the chip in his mouth. The scene is accompanied by the sound of Tchaikovsky on the radio. After receiving Jim's approval of her cooking prowess the camera cuts to an intimate close-up of Amy's face and the music swells as she says: 'it's Tchaikovsky, it makes me want to cry, did you know that? It's so sad.'[28] Her face and voice both soften

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[27] Orwell argues that the 'unconscious aim' of pleasure spots is to evoke feelings akin to the 'return to the womb', which is fundamentally about an abdication of responsibility as the womb effaces all concerns with its 'continuous rhythmic throbbing' (1968: 80). As I have already argued, the 'throbbing' of Amy's music and her parallel housekeeping is indicative of her over-identification with the semiotic and *chora* and the related threat of psychosis.

[28] The piece is the composer's sixth and final symphony (completed shortly before his death), the *Pathétique* (1893), widely considered one of his most autobiographical works in its bleak concern with the transience of life (bbc.co.uk/proms). That Amy is clearly moved suggests she recognises in the music themes that have some emotional resonance with her own life.

and she has a wistful, dreamy look as she stares off screen, her eyes unfocused, lost in the moment. She pulls her arms closer to herself, as though for comfort. The scene operates on a number of levels. It illustrates the discourse of the housewife as expert and how, according to de Beauvoir, the housewife deploys her 'rites, superstitions and ways of doing things' (1949: 473) in an attempt to define herself as an individual. De Beauvoir argues further that '[t]he validity of the cook's work is to be found only in the mouths of those around her table; she needs their approbation' (1949: 474). Hence Amy turns to Jim for his approval of her work and can only be satisfied when he responds appropriately.[29] The juxtaposition of high culture and domesticity could be read in an ironic manner that undermines Amy and presents her as a pathetic figure whose sense of self has been reduced to crispy chips. However, because of the previous use of distanciation, a sense of the destructive social forces shaping Amy's life is also evident. The scene then works as a critical comment on the nature of domesticity and the associated impoverishment of Amy's life. Her recognition of, and familiarity with, the composer is evidence of her cultural capital. The close-up of her, and her identification with the music, suggests an emotional inner life and capacity for profound feeling that has not previously been expressed in the film. Indeed it signals a life that perhaps Jim does not understand as he never responds to her question 'it makes me want to cry, did you know that?'

That the horizons of Amy's life as a housewife have shrunk is evidenced by her brief and unsuccessful forays into what de Beauvoir named the 'confused outer world' (1949: 469). In an attempt to salvage her marriage Amy decides to make-over her self in preparation for a discussion she intends to hold at the flat between herself, Jim and Georgie. The make-over includes attention to physical appearance (hair and dress), and the organisation of the domestic space to effect a change of character, indeed one that might more properly

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[29] Indeed Amy's need for approval in relation to her cooking is echoed in other scenes with Brian where she anxiously elicits his response to her food by asking, 'is it alright' and visibly relaxes when he replies in the

function in the symbolic. It is interesting to note briefly that, although post-war discourses fetishised the home, Amy prefers newspaper competitions that focus on the beautification of the self. Despite being slovenly in personal appearance Amy is twice depicted filling in a fashion competition for a £500 prize. She writes her answers down with authority and a confidence that indicates an interest in and preference for fashion, rather than the domestic, even if it remains an outlet which Amy does not act upon.

To achieve her reinvention Amy borrows money from Brian, pawns her engagement ring, has a shampoo and set, and buys whiskey and soda to facilitate the evening's events. Her interactions with the outside world are characterised by confusion and bewilderment. She struggles to negotiate with both the pawnbroker and the hairdresser, although she does eventually achieve her aim with both. The journey home proves too much and Amy ricochets like a pinball from one hostile encounter to another. In pouring rain she is repeatedly turned away; the bus is full, as are shop doorways and taxis, pedestrians impede her progress and a man refuses to share his umbrella. Amy walks home in the downpour, her hair ruined. She finds the outside world a hostile place and her reality is the domestic milieu. As de Beauvoir argued, for the housewife home is 'the centre of the world' (1949: 469). Amy, for so long confined to the private, domestic sphere, can no longer function effectively in the public realm. As she hurries home the camera lingers on her feet, her flat lace-up shoes filled with water. Her feet stand in sharp contrast to those of her rival, Georgie, who exhibits a smart court shoe. Indeed Amy's footwear continues a J. Lee Thompson theme. I argued in Chapter 4 that the foot and shoe in particular are fetishised because, according to Freud, they have significance as a sexual symbol. Amy's usual domestic attire is the carpet slipper whose soft shuffle around the flat evokes echoes of Mary Hilton in her prison cell exchanging high-heels for slippers in *Yield to the Night*. For Mary, the foot and the shoe, as symbolic of female desire, are subject to '[a]n oedipal

affirmative.

castration' (Chadder, 1999: 74). Amy's shoes likewise signify a curtailment of her subjectivity.

Amy's make-over is unsuccessful. Her physical appearance ruined she returns home, gets drunk on the whiskey and soda, tears her only good dress and has to receive Georgie and Jim (whom she has invited to discuss 'the future') whilst suffering from a hangover. The confrontation scene between the three adults is marked by both a lack of music and Amy's emotional insight. As I have suggested, in a film crowded with aural stimulus, the lack of music in this scene underscores, in a non-ironic manner, its emotional gravitas. Amy's anger and bewilderment at her present situation is channelled into verbally attacking Jim and Georgie with insightful barbs. Her question of Georgie, 'he's not handsome or clever … he'll be old in 10 years, what did you pick on him for?' is one to which no really convincing answer is offered. Her revelation of a baby daughter that died in infancy suggests the emotional ties that bind and keep a couple together. Amy also demonstrates in this scene an increased self-awareness of what the future might be like and a sense of herself as an agent in her life, 'I don't need you any more Jimbo, I can work … I don't want to sit down and weep for the rest of my life.' As Williams argues these are the scenes where 'the *melos* takes over' and Amy acquires 'dignity and poise' (2003: 151-2). Certainly Mitchell's 'emotionality' comes to the fore in this scene and it is for these reasons that it is hard to reconcile the confrontation scene with the apparent banal 'happy ending' where Jim returns home within minutes of leaving, is accepted by Amy and the film closes with a shot of the family re-established around the living-room table, sharing a pot of tea.

The film's closure has been broadly read as a caricature of the narrative convention of the 'happy ending' (Hill, 1986; Williams, 2003). The camera moves from inside the living-

room to outside the window, capturing the final scene of 'domestic harmony' through an opening in the curtains. The camera then pans left across the closed curtains as the sounds of easy-listening music emanate from Amy's radio and the credits roll. The framing of the scene in this way invites reflection on how this happy ending might be understood. Is it a happy ending? What sort of resolution has been achieved for the characters? As Amy unpacks Jim's suitcase she implores 'it'll be alright Jim, I *promise*' although it is not at all clear <u>how</u> this situation will ever be alright. In terms of the events which have preceded it the ending is, like *The Weak and the Wicked*, narratively unmotivated to the extent that it suggests itself as artifice. The presence of Amy's 'romantic' music suggests that the final scene, which seems to support the restoration of the domestic status quo, be read as ironic. Although no alternatives are offered, a space has been created which allowed the characters, particularly Amy, to express something of their feelings and emotional insights.

Thus far I have explored how the elements of music, camera and performance interact in a complex way to serve as a critique of domesticity. An understanding of the oppressive nature of domestic and marital life for all the adults is evident, but the film is primarily concerned with Amy and how her physical and psychological world are limited by social structures. Amy uses music as a revolt against the rational order of the symbolic because her role in that world curtails her subjectivity. Her use of music signals a degree of agency, but only within limited parameters. In my discussion of *Young Wives' Tale* I shall explore how men's understanding of the role of the housewife is demonstrated to be a fallacy and how female characters dramatise post-war concerns about Americanisation.

Young Wives' Tale (1951) was directed by Henry Cass for Associated British Picture Corporation (ABPC). I have already argued that the satellite companies attached to ABPC, such as Marble Arch and those that made use of the talents of J. Lee Thompson, depicted

gender in ways that offered some challenge to the normative paradigm. In contrast ABPC's in-house productions were disappointing, with the exception of *Young Wives' Tale* whose script, Harper argues, 'mounts a fierce attack on the sexual division of labour' (2000: 84). In contrast to *Woman in a Dressing Gown*, which uses music and self-conscious camera work to dramatise the emotional life of its characters, especially Amy, *Young Wives' Tale* is stylistically quite staid and the *mise-en-scène* is not as richly evocative.[30] One of the more striking aspects of the film is the script by Anne Burnaby, a writer with a 'keen feminist sensibility' (Harper and Porter, 2003: 79), who collaborated with J. Lee Thompson on the script of *The Weak and the Wicked.* The film is one of a number of 'comedies of marriage' (Geraghty, 2000: 167) or 'middle-class romantic comedies' (Spicer, 2001: 88) which were a feature of British cinema in the early-mid 1950s. For Landy these 'family comedies' overlap with melodramas and the social problem genre in their concern with themes such as 'marital conflict ... and domestic entrapment' (1991: 381). Whilst others in the cycle such as *Genevieve* did well at the box office Harper suggests that *Young Wives' Tale* was not a commercial success in part because of its 'savage feminist irony' (2000: 84) which can be attributed to Burnaby's script.

The film centres on two middle-class couples, each with a small child, who share a house due to the post-war housing shortage; Rodney and Sabina Pennant (Nigel Patrick and Joan Greenwood), and Mary and Bruce Banning (Helen Cherry and Derek Farr).[31] Mary and Sabina represent differing versions of femininity. Mary is organised, efficient, and works outside the home, whilst Sabina is chaotic, melodramatic and a hopeless housewife. Domestic or marital harmony is difficult to secure as the children cry, ironing is never

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[30] This is, in part, because ABPC in general were 'more interested in scripting and thematic issues than visual matters' (Harper and Porter, 2003: 201) although Cass is a less visually distinct director than Thompson.

completed, cooking is piecemeal, and domestic help difficult to find. The couples briefly swap partners, lose their Nanny (Athene Seyler), and the film ends in chaos as the children flood the house and the neighbour's dog steals the Sunday roast.

The primary concerns of the film are tensions surrounding the concepts of marriage, domesticity and femininity. Interestingly these tensions are grounded in wider post-war arguments about modernity and the threat of what was termed 'Americanisation', a term that I have already argued was used by many cultural commentators to signal a negative interpretation of post-war society. In this film, concerns about life becoming overtly mechanised and therefore too predictable are related to femininity. The role of the housewife, her ability to function effectively, and her desires beyond her role as wife and mother are also explored.

In relation to femininity a degree of doubling is evident in the characters of Sabina and Mary although, like Georgie and Amy, they too exhibit a number of convergent and divergent elements. Sabina has given up her career as an actress to stay at home and take the role of wife and mother. Her personality is scatty and melodramatic and she constantly fights and then makes up with her husband. Her melodramatic nature is signalled by her flamboyant use of exaggerated gestures, for example, she flings her arms around her friends and kisses them in thanks, and collapses dramatically on the sofa and weeps when things go wrong. Indeed she provokes fights with Rodney to add some melodrama and interest to her life. Her approach to housekeeping is erratic and chaotic, which infuriates her husband. She spends her days wearing practical trousers and jumpers but also appears in elegant gowns in the evening, presenting a softer, more 'feminine' appearance. In contrast, Mary works outside the home and whilst her exact role is never articulated it is

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[31] Both Greenwood and Cherry as actresses are broadly associated with a middle-class version of femininity in British cinema.

signalled as a senior position in a scientific environment. Indeed her work role as a 'scientist' is used to suggest the personality of her character as overtly rational and lacking in appropriate, gendered, emotion. She wears tailored suits (comprising skirt and jacket) for the majority of the film which signify her efficient and 'controlled' nature. Indeed she shares more than a passing resemblance with Georgie, in the presentation of an organised and restrained exterior. Emotionally she is the opposite of Sabina; she refuses to shout or argue and is generally undemonstrative, in either what she says or how she says it.

Two different types of marriage are juxtaposed. Rodney works from home as a playwright and he and Sabina therefore spend a significant amount of time in each other's company. The couple frequently argue, hug and kiss, and go out to dinner together. In contrast, Mary and Bruce work outside the home, spend less time together, are not especially demonstrative towards each other, and evenings out are a sandwich at the local pub. Concerns about the concept of marriage are made explicit and openly debated by the women. Sabina worries whether 'the romance in marriage [can] survive the sort of life we lead.' Mary's responses are pragmatic; 'I never deluded myself you could take romance into marriage' and 'you can't live forever on a diet of wedding cake.' The men also raise reservations about their home-life and express their admiration of their wife's double. Bruce hankers after a 'buxom wife' who would be mother to his six children, who would stay at home, and who would adore him. In contrast Rodney wishes Sabina were more organised and 'less fluffy.' There are a number of obvious examples that illustrate how the gendered division of labour favours men. Although Mary, like Bruce, works outside the home, it is she and Sabina who prepare the evening meal. We see Mary tidying away toys whilst Bruce sits with the paper. Bruce asks her if she has looked in on their daughter after work, although it is not clear whether he has. Rodney tells Sabina that it would be a 'lot less trouble' if she, rather than the nanny, bathed their son, to which Sabina astutely

replies, 'less trouble for whom?' During the course of the film, the men's opinions on femininity, domesticity and marriage are queried, and the validity of the concept of marriage is, at least implicitly, critiqued. Ultimately the couples stay together, but the difficulties they face remain and are evident in the final scene.

A number of concerns relating to femininity and modernity in the post-war period are worked through in relation to the women. I have already suggested that Sabina's erratic nature infuriates her husband. The main set of the film is a living-room with double-doors that open out into a large kitchen. The opening scene depicts Rodney typing at a table whilst Sabina moves between the rooms, bringing in washing from the garden, going upstairs to attend to her child, assisting nanny in the kitchen, and working at the ironing-board in the living-room. It is this constant movement that leads to Rodney's outburst: 'I can't concentrate with you flitting in and out all the time.' Sabina's erratic approach is of course indicative of the piecemeal nature of housework. As indicated earlier, Perkins argues that it is the constant shifting of attention that characterises housework. It is not that Sabina fails to concentrate, but rather, that she must respond to household tasks as they arise. Children are unpredictable and one task must be laid down when another emerges. In this scene, the ironing is abandoned when Sabina goes to help nanny with her supper, ironically a task of which Rodney was asked (and forgot) to remind her. Rodney fails to understand the nature of housework and considers the fault to lie with Sabina. He responds to her with a mixture of exasperation and paternal indulgence. He comments to Bruce, 'dear Sabina, so delightfully incompetent, a really womanly woman. She can do it when she concentrates but she can't, she's always wishing she was doing something else, she has a fluffy mind.' Indeed the concept of the fluffy mind evokes Perkins' example of the 'flighty woman' stereotype, with Rodney's phrase, 'a really womanly woman,' functioning to connote incompetence as an 'innate female characteristic' (cited in Byars, 1991: 75).

Bruce's defence of Sabina, 'she's the fluffy type ... a thoroughly feminine wife', suggests that fluffiness can either be approved or disapproved of, but it is an essential feature of normative femininity as defined by patriarchy.

In contrast to Sabina, Mary is characterised by a lack of fluffiness, a lack that is seen by husband Bruce as a problem, at least for him. For Bruce, Mary exhibits a restraint that he considers antithetical to his view of femininity. Sabrina and Bruce share an illicit kiss and are forced to confess to Mary the following morning at the breakfast table. Mary refuses to respond in a way that is deemed 'normal.' Sabina begs her, 'don't just sit there drinking coffee, say something, shout at me at least.' Bruce, in contrast, chastises her for her restrained behaviour: 'there we go, the perfect machine at work, am I in danger of losing my self-control, press button B and get it back.' The parallel he draws between Mary and machinery is particularly illuminating in the context of post-war concerns about Americanisation and the perception of its negative effects on the cultural consciousness. Hebdige argues that much of the writing about Americanisation was grounded in 'Fritz Lang-like fantasies of an inhuman fully automated society' (1988: 52). This speaks of a fear that technology was divorcing man from reality, that excessive automation, or indeed, excessive use of any of the myriad technologies would dull the human spirit, and humanity, as a whole, would be impoverished. Orwell's 1946 essay 'Pleasure Spots' raised concerns about what he deemed the 'excessive mechanisation of life' and argued that 'the products of science and industrialism [be used] eclectically, applying always the same test: does this make me more human or less human' (1968: 81). Bruce's concerns regarding Mary are a manifestation of these fears. He thinks she functions on an emotional level as a robot and that her femininity is impaired because of it. Indeed Mary's robotisation and the anxieties it raises is very similar to the robotisation of Cavendish and Ramshead in *The Perfect Woman* as they attempt to interact with the doll Olga. Further,

Mary's failure to be a 'womanly woman' suggests the female automaton Olympia in 'The Sandman' who fails to convince as a woman because she lacks human idiosyncrasies. For Bruce, Mary the scientist is an emotional automaton which is an affront to his masculinity. He wants to respond to Mary within a paradigm of normative masculinity and femininity. For this reason he is pleased when Mary finally breaks down and cries at the end of the film. He reads this as indicative of her jealousy and vulnerability, traditional feminine qualities to which he knows how to react. Mary cries, 'I didn't want to make a fool of myself,' to which Bruce responds, 'Oh darling do!' His admiration for Sabina is grounded in the fact that, as far as he is concerned, 'there's no modern nonsense about Sabina, she knows where a woman's place is.'[32] Sabina exhibits a version of femininity that Bruce understands, that he approves of and, crucially, to which he knows how to respond.

Bruce's reading of Mary's version of femininity illustrates wider fears. He functions as the voice of conservatism in the film. When Mary proposes dinner out of a tin, Bruce explodes with, 'that's what our civilisation has brought us to, canned food, canned music, potted psychology, it makes me sick.' Mary's response is, 'dear old reactionary, you should have lived a hundred years ago.' Bruce's list of pet hates is illuminating and evocative of the many things that incurred the wrath of cultural commentators such as Orwell and Waugh. 'Potted psychology' is an obvious reference to the spread of psychoanalysis in the post-war period but further, the use of the term 'potted' suggests something divorced from its context and reduced to the palatable and easily digestible. Canning for Bruce, whether food or music, is suggestive of something sullied by technological procedure, and which stands in opposition to something that is real (uncontaminated) and therefore preferable.

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[32] Rodney's ironic reply to Bruce's statement is, 'Yes, The Savoy!' indicating that Bruce's idea of Sabina as an exemplar of his 'buxom wife' is a fantasy. For Sabina, the fact that the best thing about dinner at The Savoy is that someone else does the washing-up, clearly indicates her distaste for housework, her desire to

Like Orwell's essay, which is fundamentally concerned with artificiality and the impoverishment of the human spirit, Bruce is concerned with the invasion into all areas of his life of elements that he considers are antithetical to what he understands it is to be human and therefore to be a man, or a woman. The things that affront him most are those most readily associated with women, because of their particular symbolic significance. Although he admires Sabina for being a 'thoroughly feminine wife', he disapproves of her conspicuous displays of consumption and overtly feminine adornment. When Sabina enters the living-room in an elegant evening-gown for example he is clearly arrested by her image but argues that 'attractive women shouldn't need artificial aids to beauty.' His statement functions on a number of levels. His preference for a 'natural' beauty (which connotes modesty and restraint) is consistent with dominant discourses of normative femininity of the period. Sabina's glamour and her use of 'artificial aids' signals the 'work' of femininity. Indeed her femininity is a masquerade, with elements that provide Bruce with both comfort and uncertainty. Her behaviour as a 'thoroughly feminine wife' provides reassurance to Bruce whilst the artificial aids used to construct her beauty (something she does for her own satisfaction) are a source of unsettlement for him. Sabina's previous career as an actress further suggests femininity as masquerade in that being a 'thoroughly feminine wife' or a 'a really womanly woman' are nothing more that roles that she elects to play. Sabina's 'artificial aids' are from Bruce's perspective something in excess of need and enter, obliquely, into the post-war debate about 'streamlining.' Concerns about streamlining and its 'appropriate' use in the design profession are well documented (Hebdige, 1988: 59). It is sufficient for my purposes here to state that items such as the streamlined refrigerator and the Cadillac tailfin were an affront to the 'most fundamental principle of "good design" – that "form follows function"' (Hebdige, 1988: 60). Indeed they were 'a hymn to excess' (ibid). Bruce, the

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avoid it where possible and her awareness, through experience, of the female labour that goes into producing a meal.

reactionary, objects to the production of 'glamorous' femininity because, as far as he is concerned, it is in excess of need, as the function of a 'real' wife is to stay at home with children, a role which, for him, does not necessitate make-up and expensive dresses.

Sabina's glamorous femininity makes a mockery of Bruce's suggestion that she do something as functional as 'take a bus' to meet Rodney at The Savoy, and therefore subverts the principles to which Bruce adheres. This point is further illustrated by the disagreement that breaks out between Bruce, Sabina and Mary about soap. Sabina's friend Victor (Guy Middleton) offers to get the women some Chanel gardenia soap (presumably on the black market). This incenses Bruce, who advocates the use of Wrights Coal Tar. Chanel, as a 'hymn to excess' and an artificial aid to femininity, is an affront to Bruce because it signifies that function, the need to wash, comes second to luxury. The importance that Sabina attributes to beautiful dresses and her, and Mary's, desire for Chanel soap illustrates a desire for commodities that beautify the self rather than the home.

Stacey in her study of British post-war female spectatorship, argues that there is a wealth of historical knowledge on 'the role of woman as consumers for the domestic benefit of others (such as husbands and children)' (1994: 220)[33] but much less is known about female consumption for the self although, as Steedman argues, (quoted in Chapter 4) there were plenty of 'women longing for a full skirt' (1986: 32). Stacey goes on to suggest that 'the consumption of commodities connected to Hollywood stars can be seen as a rejection of, or an opposition to, the domestic roles of self-sacrificing wife and mother' (ibid). Whilst Stacey's study is specifically interested in how British women understood Hollywood stars and negotiated discourses of glamour, her general premise that 'consumption offered women the possibility of the production of self and of agency in the

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[33] Stacey suggests that little is known about the 'consumption of clothes, cosmetics and other items connecting female spectators with their star ideals' (1994: 220).

public sphere' (1994: 223) holds true for my analysis. Chanel gardenia soap is a luxurious item for the self that has nothing to do with Sabina's role as housekeeper, wife and mother. Luxurious items stand in literal opposition to post-war austerity but they also signify, symbolically, a refusal to accept some of the particular values and ideologies associated with Britain[34], represented in this film by Bruce. Chanel does not tie in with the discourses of Americanisation that I have discussed but it is French and therefore signifies to the British cultural imaginary (as I have argued earlier that foreign actresses do) sexual freedom and excess.

Stacey refutes the argument that 'consumer markets merely prepare women for their roles as wives and mothers' through the construction of a normative femininity displayed for 'heterosexual male approval', because 'something in excess of the needs of dominant culture' is produced (1994: 223) and women are therefore agents.[35] Sabina's beautification of her 'self' supports Stacey's argument. After a row with Rodney Sabina appears on the stairs dressed in an elegant, floating chiffon creation to which Rodney responds, 'What are you all dolled up for?' Sabina replies, 'for psychological reasons you couldn't imagine. You can't imagine the effect it has on a woman going about all day looking like a drab. Putting on real clothes and doing your face has the effect of a champagne supper.' In this way Sabina constructs a glamorous self that stands in opposition to her domestic self. Sabina's statement speaks of the demoralising effect of housewifery on one's sense of self ('a drab'). Rodney, like Bruce, does not see the necessity for Sabina's outfit. Indeed, it functions as something in excess of need and in so doing stands as a challenge to the requirements of normative femininity in relation to domesticity, and therefore speaks of female agency. It also undermines the assumption that women adorn the self to elicit

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[34] Stacey draws on Hebdige's argument that particular American commodities, such as the streamlined refrigerator and the Cadillac, represented a challenge to post-war ideologies (1994: 223).

'heterosexual male approval' as crucially it has been made clear that Rodney is attending a meeting that evening and Sabina is alone in the house, therefore her glamorous appearance is for her <u>own</u> satisfaction.

I have argued that Bruce is concerned with the tension between artificiality and the natural, and fluffiness and restraint in relation to femininity, and that the women, in varying ways, and to diverse degrees construct themselves in opposition to normative definitions of femininity. Bruce's desire for normative femininity, and his position as 'dear old reactionary' is constantly mocked and the values for which he stands are challenged. He is portrayed as something of a fool. Firstly, he is taken advantage of by Victor who makes him carry a heavy screen into the house and position it for Sabina. Secondly he is depicted playing horsey with the Pennant's son Valentine. This is to facilitate the pretence of marital swap (a father playing with 'his son'), act as punishment for his having kissed Sabina (an act which necessitates the need for pretence), and finally to portray him in an unflattering light in a position where he is clearly not enjoying himself. In both situations he is reduced to the role of 'work-horse', blundering around and unable to take control of the situations in which he finds himself.

Indeed, it is interesting to note that both men have significant trouble negotiating the living space. As in *Woman in a Dressing Gown*, the marital home is presented as something of a trap. The *mise-en-scène* of the main set which encapsulates the living-room and kitchen is, during the opening scene, portrayed as a domestic midden. Clothes stand on racks in front of the fireplace, which are precariously balanced and fall down at the slightest disturbance. Piles of washing and an ironing board clutter the domestic space. In the kitchen a large rack for drying clothes is suspended from the ceiling and draped in assorted garments that

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[35] Indeed this link between female consumption and agency is one which I briefly introduced in Chapter 1 of this thesis where the work of Partington demonstrates how working-class women were active in their use of

augment the general untidy impression the room evokes (see still 25 below). Children's toys and roller skates are scattered across the space. There are gender differences in how this space is negotiated. Both Bruce and Rodney, on separate occasions, trip over the children's discarded toys and injure themselves. In the living-room Rodney reaches for a ringing telephone, trips, and goes crashing to the floor in spectacular style, upsetting the telephone table in the process. Bruce's attempts to deceive nanny about which bedroom he is entering are thwarted when he falls over a stray toy.
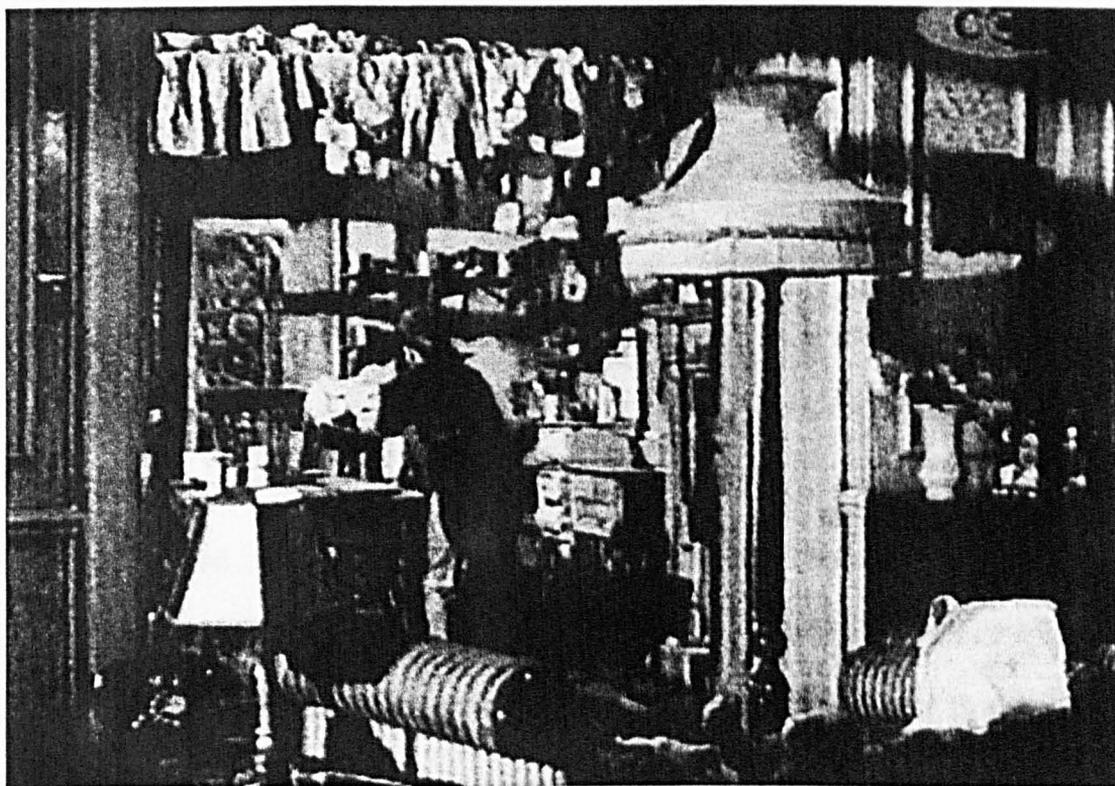
Still 25. Domestic space in *Young Wives' Tale* (1951)

In contrast, the women have less trouble moving around the domestic arena. The space between the kitchen and the ironing board in the living room is obstructed by the *chaise-longue* and an unwieldy standard lamp. In order to move between the two rooms Sabina must either jump over the *chaise-longue* or duck under the lamp, both of which give the impression of negotiating an assault-course. Twice Sabina is shown leaping over a *chaise-longue*, in response to nanny's calls for assistance, and to rescue a burning meal.

the New Look.

Likewise, Mary, on her return from work, must tidy away an assortment of children's toys and move laundry into the kitchen before commencing preparations for supper.[36] This suggests that the space is not unproblematic for women, but that they manoeuvre around it more effectively than the men do. It indicates the men's unfamiliarity with the domestic terrain rather than standing as a comment on the home as women's innate sphere. This is because the men fail to understand the true nature of housework (reading it as flitting, rather than piecemeal) and incorrectly assume, as Rodney does, that the fault lies with the individual, in this case with Sabina and her 'fluffy mind.' Sabina repeatedly challenges Rodney's understanding of the role of the housewife and his own indignant claim that 'I work every day.' Sabina responds with, 'not like I do, if you don't feel like writing you don't write, how would you feel if I said to you, "there's no dinner, I didn't feel like cooking?"' In housework there is little agency and Sabina's statement evokes de Beauvoir's claims that housework is like 'the torture of Sisyphus' (1949: 470).

What Bruce and Rodney want is to negotiate a line between predictability and unpredictability in relation to femininity, marriage and domesticity. Rodney complains to Sabina that the household problems lie with her unpredictability whilst Bruce finds Mary too predictable by virtue of her self-control. Rodney desires organisation that is not impaired by fluffiness whilst Bruce prioritises fluffiness over self-control. The final scenes illustrate the poverty of their visions and neither version of patriarchally-defined femininity is validated. A brief truce is called between the couples. Mary's tears end in a passionate kiss between her and Bruce, whilst downstairs, Sabina and Rodney, bodies entwined, peel potatoes together. Such marital harmony is short-lived. The neighbour's dog steals the Sunday roast, Rodney gashes his arm on broken glass, and his son floods the locked bathroom. Chaos ensues and the film ends with a radio voiceover claiming: 'World

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[36] Sabina's attempts to clear away the washing and ironing before Bruce and Mary return from work suggests an effacing of the traces of labour, intended to give the (false) impression that housework is no work at all.

security can never be achieved without peace at home. The Minister of Food said … the country can never repay the debt it owes the British housewife.' The final scenes suggest that the difficulties faced by the couples are unresolved. Housework and marriage remain problematic, and the notion of domestic harmony is revealed, ironically, to be a fallacy with any attempts to achieve it done at the expense of exploiting women's labour.

Young Wives' Tale is a critique of how normative understandings of marriage and domesticity are gendered in ways that privilege men at the expense of women. Both husbands have particular ideas about the concept of the housewife, and the kind of femininity she should inhabit, but these ideas are not validated. In both films, the men criticise the women for their lack of organisation in relation to housework: Amy's freneticism and Sabina's flitting. The men wonder why the women cannot function effectively as housewives and in so doing perpetuate dominant discourses that housework is woman's work, that it is no work at all, and that women's failure to organise is an inherent female weakness. Alternatively, Bruce's reading of Mary suggests a fear of too much organisation, rationality and efficiency. The women illustrate the fallacy of the male arguments and demonstrate the true nature of housework as repetitive and boring. Indeed Amy in *Woman in a Dressing Gown* represents the effects of long-term domesticity, something which Mary and Sabina are trying to resist. They exhibit an awareness and articulation of the negative aspects of the role and are committed to exposing and subverting them. All the women have a certain degree of female agency and strive for resistance, albeit within limited parameters. *Woman in a Dressing Gown* illustrates that conforming to normative femininity in the domestic sphere has dire consequences for women whilst *Young Wives' Tale* illustrates that female failure to conform is a legitimate position in relation to boring and un-rewarded work that is taken for granted and goes unnoticed by men. The implication is that only radical solutions can facilitate change, but

identifying what those solutions are is elusive. Both films offer a critique of the post-war domestic realm and its positioning of women and suggest that domesticity, in that form, involves male culpability in the exploitation of female labour. The logical extension of this argument is that men should change, but this is something that cannot be explicitly stated. What the films do clearly express however are the gendered consequences of the status quo.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to analyse representations of divergent femininity in British films from the post-war period and to explore the ways in which normative femininity might be challenged through these. I have sought to critique the widespread assumption that the 1950s were a period of conservatism in gender relations and suggested a more dynamic model. In this chapter I will provide first a synopsis of the findings of the previous chapters before considering, in a reflective manner, those findings and their implications. I shall explore the issue of censorship, the limits of what is representable in relation to femininity during the period and the need within the constraints of representations of femininity for redemption or, where this is not possible, punishment of the female.

In Chapter 2 I considered the attempts of male scientists and medical doctors to create the 'perfect woman' through various technological and surgical means. The narrative drive in the films was the attempt to produce a controllable female but all the creations failed to function as anticipated in the social sphere. In *The Perfect Woman* the robotic doll actually robotised those seeking to control her and her spectacular demise forced those around her to reassess their creative vision, albeit by implication only. In *Stolen Face* the surgeon Ritter embarked on a Pygmalion project in which he transgressed ethical and moral boundaries in an attempt to satisfy his own misguided desire. In a similar manner the scientist of *The Four-Sided Triangle* misused his scientific invention in an attempt to meet his own emotional needs, with disastrous consequences. All three male inventors invested their intellectual energies in ill-thought-out projects, the effectiveness of which was undermined by the emotional variable of love. These films can be read as narratives of male anxiety and desire for control in a post-war society that was engaging with the realignment (both real and imagined) of gender roles. The genderisation of science and

women's function as exchange objects is only too self-evident in these films. What is most interesting is the use to which the scientists put science, something that reveals their ineptitude in relation to their subject. The male scientist uses science to articulate and address the emotional landscape of his inner life. That this approach has such disastrous consequences stands as a critique of the male scientist and his application of his knowledge. His poor conception of the 'perfect woman' further shows him as illiterate regarding his own needs.

Where the man-made woman represented one kind of divergent female, the murdering woman represents another. Chapter 3 was concerned with the depiction of murderous women and the extent to which divergent female behaviour was explained through criminalisation and, in some cases, attributed to psychological factors. In *Dear Murderer* Vivien was portrayed as a *femme fatale*, an archetypal criminal woman who finds monogamous marriage restraining and men interchangeable. Her sexual promiscuity led her to criminal activities and eventual mental breakdown as her desire for autonomy was constructed as antithetical to the patriarchal order. In both *Bedelia* and *Madeleine* the central female characters were portrayed as inscrutable and enigmatic, their identity coded as unknowable. Bedelia's sanity was increasingly questioned in the course of the film, and it was implied that she murdered her husbands not only for their money but perhaps to exact some form of gendered revenge on men. Madeleine tried to negotiate a path between the two polarities of normative and divergent femininity but was ultimately punished for her transgressions by being outcast from society, although male culpability in female oppression was suggested.

Chapter 4 analysed the incarceration of the female criminal in prison, a relatively new theme to emerge in the 1950s, and the extent to which divergent femininity could be

rehabilitated through the prison process. In *The Weak and the Wicked* the central character Jean had both to learn for herself and to inculcate in others the values of altruism and appropriate risk-taking. However, the excitement of her former life as a gambler remained largely unchallenged and the extent to which she finally accepted her proper place in the gendered social economy was questionable. In *Yield to the Night* societal revenge rather than rehabilitation awaited Mary Hilton and the process of incarceration neutralised her divergent femininity through procedures which infantilised her. Revenge was exacted from Mary (and, by extension, the sex symbol of Diana Dors) for her confident sexuality, her conspicuous consumption and her fierce desire for something better from her life. Both films dramatised the expression of female desire for autonomy, excitement, glamour and social mobility and the ultimate curtailment (with varying degrees of success) of that desire. In this respect they spoke of the fear and fascination evident in post-war society of changes in gender relations.

In Chapter 5 I analysed the extent to which the figure of the prostitute could be represented in popular culture, against a climate of post-war concerns about prostitution and related debates about sexuality, the family and marriage. In *The Flesh is Weak* Marissa was inveigled into prostitution by her lover Tony whom she sought to please in the mistaken belief that he would marry her. She engaged in a fantasy of heterosexual romance and the film dramatised the consequences of her failure to read masculinity correctly and implied that her investment, emotional and sexual, in the wrong man had led her to prostitution. The film made clear that Marissa was not a 'real' prostitute, therefore drawing a distinction between prostitutes and 'normal' women. In *Passport to Shame* the motif of heterosexual romance was again evident as the French waitress Malou and her 'husband' Johnny learnt to read masculinity and femininity appropriately. Although two differing versions of femininity were represented in Malou and her double Vicki, neither woman was

constructed as a 'real' prostitute, and the films engaged with prostitution as a case of mistaken identity. The opposition between 'normal' and 'prostitute' women went unchallenged.

Chapter 6 was concerned with mothers in the post-war period and the extent to which they could enter the world of their child and understand and meet its needs. In *The Rocking Horse Winner* the adult world was split along gendered lines and both the child's mother, Hester, and his uncle, Oscar, attempted to initiate the child Paul into the adult world rather than entering his world, with disastrous consequences. Hester produced a 'gifted child' in Paul who was attuned to her needs rather than his own. Her failure to socialise Paul appropriately meant that he was killed by his sensitivity to his mother's need, which he projected onto the house. In *Mandy* both mother and daughter had to learn to access language, something from which they experienced varying degrees of alienation as they retained a (gendered) affinity with the Kristevan semiotic. The mother Kit was able to enter the world of her child and facilitate the meeting of her needs. This involved a certain amount of sacrifice on behalf of the mother and the hard-won success evident at the end of the film, and signalled symbolically by Mandy's move into the child's playground on the 'uncanny' wasteland, was provisional, tentative, and indicative of a degree of ambiguity in relation to maternity and the post-war family.

Chapter 7 focused on the housewife and her symbolic position within wider post-war debates about consumerism, Americanisation and femininity. In *Woman in a Dressing Gown* Amy was portrayed as chaotic, loud and disorganised, and locked within the private sphere of the home where domesticity and married life oppressed her, a state depicted by the *mise-en-scène* and camera work. The use of constant music functioned ironically to undermine the notion of romance and domestic harmony but it was also used by Amy in an

active way; it signalled her unconscious revolt against the symbolic patriarchal order. In *Young Wives' Tale* two different versions of femininity were depicted by the central female characters Mary and Sabina, the former being organised and efficient whilst the latter was disorganised and melodramatic. Male criticism of the women focused on a dichotomy between efficiency and fluffiness, and concerns about artificiality and consumption for the self. These criticisms were shown to be fallacious and there was recognition of the demoralising effect of housework on women and how it goes unnoticed by men, and male culpability in the exploitation of female labour.

Assessing critically the representations of femininity across the chapters it is evident that a number of central themes are at play. Femininity is, by patriarchal standards, at times inscrutable, difficult to control, unpredictable and downright troublesome for many of the male characters in the films. These women will not do what pleases men and through their struggles against patriarchal norms demonstrate, to varying degrees, divergent femininity. There is an expression of female desire for autonomy and independence and some acknowledgement of male culpability in the limiting role associated with the normative femininity of the period. Furthermore, that some of the characters, most notably Madeleine, Sabina and Mary Hilton, demonstrate an awareness of the masquerade of femininity suggests a degree of female agency. In this respect women's 'proper place' in the gendered social economy is questioned, to an extent, in these films.

In relation to the key characteristics of normative femininity that I outlined in Chapter 1, there are no female characters that encapsulate the preferred ideal of womanhood or indeed any that are wholly divergent. Rather, the films frequently present figures that represent the contestation of the feminine. They shore up certain ideals of womanhood whilst simultaneously challenging those ideals. In this section I want to reflect on the extent to

which normative femininity can be challenged, the limits of what is representable, and the need for either redemption or punishment at the end of the films. The key post-war concerns of motherhood, marriage and sexuality will be used to shape this discussion.

In relation to motherhood, Kit the mother in *Mandy* conforms to normative ideals in putting the needs of her child above her own, but in order to successfully meet those needs she must rail against her husband and his family and the patriarchal model of domestic relations which they represent. In this respect the existing model of the family is challenged and is demonstrated to be in need of change if the next generation is to thrive, a clear allegory for post-war society. The heterosexual nuclear unit survives as the preferred model but it is suggested that its success is provisional and subject to future reassessment. *The Rocking Horse Winner* depicts the poverty of existing familial norms where adults of both genders are shown to fail the child. That the child turns to domestic servants as surrogate parents and develops attachments that are shown to be inappropriate stands as a critique of the bourgeois family model. The severest criticism however is reserved for the mother Hester. The mother's crime of seeming not to love her child is considered so heinous that no redemption can be offered. Her punishment, in the form of his death, is brutal and complete. Not loving one's child results in retribution, but what is suggested in these films is the difficulty of parenting.

In *The Weak and the Wicked*, the demanding situation facing the young mother Babs, who is left to raise her children without adequate support, is sympathetically dramatised. Likewise in *Young Wives' Tale* the contradictory demands placed on the women by childcare, work and domesticity are evident, whilst the obvious delight they exhibit when the new nanny happily takes over routine tasks such as bathing the children suggests a recognition of the boring nature of much childcare and the desire for it to be alleviated.

Further, the fact the Mary does not immediately greet her child upon her return from work and that her portrayal remains sympathetic indicates an engagement with the notion that it may be fallacious to assume that the mother is wholly fulfilled through maternity (a key characteristic of normative femininity). It is noteworthy that both the films which offer some challenge to hegemonic maternity are scripted by Anne Burnaby who, as I have already argued, exhibited proto-feminist sensibilities within the confines of ABPC. Whilst the difficulty of motherhood is recognised this does not extend, in the films of the period, to a serious or sensitive engagement with not wanting to be a mother, something which was only raised in 1961 when *A Taste of Honey* depicted Jo's (Rita Tushingham) depression at the prospect of her maternity.

In addition to the theme of motherhood and family, and the limits this can impose on women, the role of the housewife was also presented as problematic. In the housewife dramas women struggle to succeed in scenarios where the odds are weighted against them. In *Young Wives' Tale* Sabina and Mary represent two different versions of femininity but their characterisation makes clear both the drudgery of housework and the need for it to be recognised, by men, as work. Further, both search for an identity beyond that of housewife, whether it is, as for Mary, a career, or, for Sabina, to be something other than 'a drab.' Neither woman is castigated or alternatively, advocated as the preferred model of femininity, although Mary has her 'abnormal' femininity (working, rational) softened by tears and the display of emotional vulnerability, which suggests the limits that are placed on the challenge she brings to bear as a working mother. As I have argued Amy, in *Woman in a Dressing Gown*, is the logical conclusion to a lifetime devoted to housewifery. Unable to function effectively outside the home, her state of confusion and depression is occasionally shot through with flashes of insight whereby a space is opened up for the articulation of Amy's feelings. A new beginning cannot be sustained however for Jim and

Amy, either separately or together. The closing scene may convincingly depict the prison-house of heterosexual, monogamous marriage, but it cannot offer any alternatives, it can only comment on the poverty of their existence under these constraints. Both films stop short of proposing radical solutions.

In this respect the films stand as a comment on how central yet troubled the theme of marriage was in post-war British cinema. Wanting something more from life than the role of wife and mother really meant wanting something in addition to those roles, which remain of key importance. This suggests the limits of what is representable in mainstream films from the period. All of the central female characters see marriage as their appropriate goal, indeed the majority of them are married, with the exception of Madeleine, Jean Raymond and Marissa who are all expecting, or expected, to get married in the near future.[1] Vivien in *Dear Murderer* sees it as a necessary evil whilst it allows the eponymous heroine of *Bedelia* to fulfil her desires for revenge against men. There is limited space, within mainstream cinema, to represent the desires of single women of marriageable age who aspire to something other than marriage. The prison dramas offer some insight here. In *The Weak and the Wicked* Jean apparently learns to be socialised into normative femininity which, in this film, is defined as a desire for heterosexual marriage, obedience to male authority figures, and a belief in the values of gendered altruism. In this respect she is offered redemption from her earlier transgressions of prioritising gambling over the romantic attentions of a worthy suitor. What is not fully recuperated however is the excitement associated with gambling and the suggestion that

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[1] Secondary characters such as Georgie in *Woman in a Dressing Gown* also anticipate marriage. She complains to Preston that 'we can't go on like this ... you must make a decision.' Unmarried women such as Ellen in *Bedelia* may be efficient assistants to Charley but it is clearly implied that she would make him the ideal wife. Vicki from *Passport to Shame* is ultimately redeemed by the suggestion of a relationship with Mike whilst the character played by Audrey Hepburn in *Young Wives' Tale* may initially espouse a life of gender separatism but ultimately desires love and romance. There are no women in these films that cannot be accounted for within a heterosexual paradigm.

marriage to Michael may not be able to compete with the lure of the roulette wheel. In this respect Jean's 'conversion' to normative femininity is neither complete nor fixed.

Mary Hilton in *Yield to the Night* aspires to something more from life than that which is allotted her. Her relationship with Jim represents one aspect of her aspirations and longing, for love, social mobility and the acquisition of cultural capital, but it is not wholly representative of it. In leaving her husband Fred she refuses to settle for what she has when she feels there is so much more to be gained from life. The space opened up for the articulation of her desires cannot be sustained and, unlike Jean, she cannot be redeemed but must be punished.

If marriage and motherhood remain central to femininity in the period (although they can be augmented by other roles) sexuality is also a key concern. Sexuality in these films means heterosexuality, as there is no place for same-sex desire, for example.[2] Active female heterosexuality can be depicted but only in particular ways and with particular consequences. Vivien in *Dear Murderer* for example is the *femme fatale* who uses her sexuality to manipulate men to her own ends. The narrative culminates in her punishment as the mechanism of paternal law exacts its revenge. Madeleine is depicted as sexually

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[2] It is not the case that female same-sex desire was never depicted in British cinema. I have already mentioned in Chapter 4 brief scenes between PO Arnold who desires the young inmate Miriam and Arnold's jealousy of Miriam's friend Tina, which is sexually motivated. Dating back to the 1930s Bourne argues that Cicely Courtneidge frequently played roles involving 'cross-dressing or "butch" behaviour' (1996: 20), not dissimilar to Jessie Matthews' role in *First A Girl* (1935), roles which Harper identifies with the tradition of 'Mannish Women' in the 1930s who challenged normative boundaries of gender and sexuality (2000: 24-7). In the 1940s David MacDonald's *Good Time Girl* (1948) clearly signals same-sex reciprocal desire between the protagonist Gwen (Jean Kent) and head-girl Roberta (Jill Balcon) who wrestle in the reform school dormitory. It was not until the 1960s that lesbian desire could be more openly expressed however. In *The L-Shaped Room* (1962) Cicely Courtneidge plays Mavis who openly talks about her (deceased) lesbian partner and her love for her. In Wolf Rilla's *The World Ten Times Over* (1963) the two female characters Billa (Sylvia Sims) and Ginnie (June Ritchie) develop a mutual emotionally supportive relationship with scenes of tenderness and love between the women which clearly suggest same-sex desire and the potential of a relationship (Bourne, 1996: 180). In a less sympathetic portrayal Beryl Reid plays June Buckridge in Aldrich's *The Killing of Sister George* (1969), a TV soap star who lives with Alice (Susannah York) with whom she has a tempestuous relationship (Bourne, 1996: 208-13). Overt displays of female same-sex desire were not a feature of British film between 1945-59, despite the 1953 Kinsey report that suggested masturbation and same-sex relationships might prove more sexually fulfilling for women than

desiring but, in a manner similar to Marissa in *The Flesh is Weak*, engages with Emile in what she thinks of as pre-marital rather than extra-marital or non-marital sexual expression. Both women are punished for transgressing the boundaries of normative femininity; Madeleine becomes a social outcast whilst Marissa is forced to prostitute herself. Mary Hilton's adulterous extra-marital sex with Jim is shown to have disastrous consequences and it is clearly one of the reasons why she is so virulently punished. Georgie's passionate affair with Preston in *Woman in a Dressing Gown* ends unhappily for her. Only Kit in *Mandy* is allowed to express any form of sexual desire. She exhibits a passionate nature and an active sexual desire although it is only when the object of her attention is her husband that such desire can be legitimately expressed. In this respect her desire is channelled into heterosexual marriage, a strategy consistent with post-war discourses concerning the family, marriage and female sexuality. In terms of female sexual expression it is the character of Alice Aisgill (Simone Signoret) and her scenes with her socially ambitious young lover Joe Lampton (Laurence Harvey) in *Room at the Top* (1959) which are credited with being the first in British film to show extra-marital sex 'honestly' (Harper and Porter, 2003: 241, Geraghty, 2001: 109-11).[3] Indeed the inability of British cinema to depict sexuality in an 'honest' way can in part be explained by the influence of censorship which placed certain limits on representation.

Censorship of British films dates from the 1912 creation of the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) whose remit was to ensure consistency in relation to exhibition across the UK.[4] Sexual content was always a concern for the Board whose 1926 annual report lists

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heterosexuality (Wilson, 1980: 87-8). The depiction of female sexuality in popular culture remained, at this time, resolutely heterosexual.

[3] As Geraghty argues it is in part the casting of French actress Simone Signoret, who brings an emotional and sexual gravitas to the character of Alice, that allows the portrayal of a sexually desiring woman (out of marriage) to be convincing. The first convincing portrait of female sexual desire by a British (in fact Welsh) actress in a British film was Rachel Roberts in *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* (1960).

[4] Prior to this the 1909 Cinematograph Act gave censorship powers to local authorities (Harper and Porter, 2003: 217).

the grounds on which films could be censored for their depiction of sexuality.[5] The proliferation of scenarios that the BBFC found unacceptable in the 1920s[6] is indicative of the extent to which film producers attempted to push the boundaries of what could be depicted on the screen. As Robertson argues, 'the demands of film-makers ... always grew bolder whenever box office receipts fell' (1985: 61).[7]

In the 1950s censorship in Britain entered a new phase with the introduction of the 'X' certificate in 1951. This was intended to complement the existing 'U' and 'A' certificates, and create an adult-only category which was broader in theme than the existing 'H' certificate, which it absorbed.[8] Its introduction can be explained as a response to cinema's declining popularity and as an attempt to extend artistic freedom to film producers whilst at the same time extending protection, ostensibly in relation to children. The new certificate meant that themes of a sexual nature, such as prostitution, could in theory be engaged with. My analysis of *The Flesh is Weak* and *Passport to Shame* (both of which received 'X' certificates) suggests this was not the case. Their depiction of their subject matter was presented as either salacious, titillatory or sordid. Critics of the 'X' certificate accused cinema exhibitors of exploiting its rapidly acquired notoriety to get audiences into cinemas and, as the decade progressed, audiences increasingly came to expect it to deliver 'sex, violence, and horror' (Harper and Porter, 2003: 225).[9] The two prostitute films I discussed

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[5] These included scenarios which ranged from 'procuration', 'degrading exhibitions of animal passion' to 'indecent wall decorations' (Robertson, 1985: 182).

[6] Robertson's list illustrates how busy and imaginative the censors had been, identifying objections to the depiction of or allusion to the themes of miscegenation, abortions, naked girls' legs, dancing of a sexually suggestive nature and female infidelity (and male acceptance of it) to name but a few (1985: 60).

[7] Hollywood films of the 1930s frequently portrayed prostitution, the 'fallen woman' theme and sexually adventurous women, although the Hays Production Code of 1931 attempted to curtail what were considered the worst excesses of the industry. The Code was relaxed in the mid-1950s when American film-makers, increasingly pushing boundaries with 'social problem' films such as *Bigger than Life* (1956), saw the code 'officially revised to allow references to drug addiction, abortion, prostitution and miscegenation' (Holmes, 2001: 387).

[8] Respectively, 'U' was for unaccompanied children, 'A' for adult accompanied children and 'H' for adult-only horror (Harper and Porter, 2003: 218).

[9] Indeed, Harper and Porter argue that in the early 1950s 'the public soon became uncertain whether it [the X certificate] indicated the sober treatment of an adult theme or the exploitative treatment of a commonplace story' (2003: 221).

certainly presented, through their publicity material, their subject matter as titillatory.[10] Their narratives are both salacious and conservative and in this respect offer nothing new as they are, not surprisingly, governed by existing cultural codes that shape certain ways of looking at a figure such as the prostitute. In *The Flesh is Weak* the negligée-clad Marissa (Milly Vitale) who performs fellatio on her lover Tony is then humiliated and exploited by the same lover. Her failure to read masculinity correctly is responsible for her downfall, and the film translates prostitution into the conservative theme of hetero-romance. In *Passport to Shame* we are offered the figure of Vicki (Diana Dors) in lacy underwear and the prospect of Malou (Odile Versois) being raped by Nick (Herbert Lom) but the 'real prostitutes' are absent from the narrative which is concerned only with the redemption of the 'normal' woman through the mechanism of heterosexual romance. Diana Dors as Vicki does represent something of a liminal figure, moving between the two sides of the house, but there is a sense that she can understand 'their' world without being 'one of them.'

The representation of 'real prostitutes' in British cinema did not occur until the 1960s, as censorship was relaxed and the British New Wave gathered pace. Two prostitutes appear, albeit as secondary characters, in *The L-Shaped Room* (1962), whilst in *The World Ten Times Over* (1963) Billa and Ginnie (referred to as 'hostesses') are the central characters and the film explores in some detail their emotional lives and their justifiable estrangement from the 'hypocritical and contradictory society' (Murphy, 1992: 83).[11]

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[10] In Chapter 5 I discussed some of the publicity material for the films, which combines elements of realism and melodrama. I suggest however, that the material uses realism in a salacious manner to both entice the audience with the promise of the corruption and debasement of beautiful females, and to justify the spectacle of female debasement. What the publicity material promises will be exposed is not organised crime, rather, beautiful young women.

[11] Importantly, as Murphy highlights, Ginnie is not presented as 'psychologically disturbed ...[rather] society allows her no proper outlet for her talents and aspirations' (1992: 83). Prostitutes are present in British cinema prior to the 1960s. *The Fallen Idol* (1948) and *I Believe in You* (1952) are just two examples, but here prostitution is euphemistically signalled and not explored.

It may be that the film-makers intentionally translated the theme of the prostitute into that of conservative hetero-romance. It is also the case that censorship and existing cultural norms governed ways of looking and placed limits on how things could be represented. Thus the films dealt with prostitution only at the level of mistaken identity, indeed the 'prostitutes' were effectively 'tarts-with-a-heart' and 'fallen women', stock characters in popular culture, that could be redeemed, or conveniently die. Within a binary between 'normal' women and 'prostitute' women the narrative concern was how the problems of individual women (i.e. a lack of social embeddedness, failure to align oneself with the right man) might leave them open to prostitution. There is a contradiction at the heart of the belief therefore that there is a difference between normal and prostitute women as it suggests that a woman might pass from the former to the latter. This contradiction speaks to the earlier mentioned integral component of normative femininity, woman's fundamental 'unknowability.' Within a binary that castigates the 'prostitute' woman there remained a suspicion of the 'normal' woman and what she might become if femininity was not funnelled into appropriate channels. The absolute necessity for women to continue to invest (wisely) in hetero-romance and to take their proper place in the gendered social economy remained central.

The binary between normal and prostitute women, outlined above, was duplicated in the films in the opposition between British and foreign actresses and the response of the censors to them. As the 1950s progressed and an increasing number of continental films were screened it became clear that there was a difference between depicting Brigitte Bardot in various states of undress and giving due consideration to sex outside marriage. As Harper and Porter argue, '[i]n the eyes of the Board, nudity, especially foreign nudity, was one thing, but the serious treatment of pre- and extra-marital sex, especially that between consenting British adults, was something else' (2003: 238). The former was for

male titillation whilst the latter required a preparedness to engage with female sexual desire.[12]

Kristeva's theory of abjection helps to explore the role that foreign actresses played in British cinema of the decade. Harper, as I have already argued, suggested that foreign actresses acted as 'sexual proxies for respectable British girls' (2000: 99). Within British cinema female sexual excess was often projected onto a foreign 'double' or 'other.' Kristeva argues that human societies have a notion of abjection which allows them to define what is human from that which is not. Abjection, for Kristeva, is caused by 'what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (1982: 4). Abjection occupies a central place in societies because it allows, through the process of engaging with and then dispelling the abject element, what is accepted as human to be defined and in so doing identity can be explored and the appearance of stability maintained. Any notion of stable identity is precarious however because 'abjection is above all ambiguity ... while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger' (Kristeva, 1982: 9). Recognising this 'perpetual danger' accounts for the simultaneous fear and fascination of the subject for the abject 'other.' Ritualistic mechanisms for 'purifying the abject' were primarily found in religions but are now increasingly found 'with that catharsis par excellence called art' (Kristeva, 1982: 17). Popular film is one such ritualistic mechanism.

In post-war British cinema foreign actresses functioned as the abject other to normative British femininity in the arena of sexuality. If abjection is caused by that which 'disturbs identity' and does not 'respect rules' then foreign actresses such as Milly Vitale, Odile

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[12] *Room at the Top* succeeded in challenging the censor in part because of the ingenious machinations of its producer John Woolf who shot the film without first submitting the script to the BBFC for approval. The

Versois, Lizabeth Scott and Barbara Payton disturbed the boundaries of normative female sexuality. Their 'foreignness' signalled otherness to the British cultural imaginary as the Continent was associated with sexual emancipation and the United States with loose morals. They were therefore already marked as different and 'open' to the possibility of divergent sexuality. Normative female sexuality for example could be inhabited by an actress such as Phyllis Calvert whilst divergent sexuality was the preserve of Milly Vitale or Brigitte Bardot.[13] But foreign actresses were not solely 'other.' Milly Vitale as Marissa both signalled openness to sexual divergence but also invested in heterosexual romance and for a while played the role of 'good wife', an appropriate channel for normative femininity. In this respect she functioned as an 'in-between' as her character contained elements of both normative and divergent femininity. In a similar manner the concept of the 'perfect woman' and the associations of normative femininity are challenged by the casting of Barbara Payton, an actress who brings a degree of sexual tension to the role.

This 'in-between' status or ambiguity suggests the 'perpetual danger' threatening normative femininity, indeed the danger that is thought to be *within* femininity. In the introduction to this thesis I suggested that underpinning many of the dominant theories of femininity were beliefs that women were inherently 'unknowable' which gave rise to a degree of suspicion in relation to femininity. Femininity is a question of the *degree* of unknowability and the *extent* to which divergence is held in check. Dominant discourses of normative femininity are located at the centre, divergent femininities towards the margins.

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film is credited with being a 'watershed' in terms of British film censorship (Harper and Porter, 2003: 241).

[13] In relation to the immediate post-war period it is noteworthy that *femme fatales* in British cinema were frequently played by Greta Gynt, the Norwegian-born actress who plays Vivien in *Dear Murderer*. The idea of abjection and otherness might explain why some critics, both of the time and subsequently, found Margaret Lockwood unconvincing as a 'wicked lady' as her white, middle-class, suburban femininity was antithetical to their notion of divergence. The popularity of films such as *The Wicked Lady* however suggests that she inhabited an 'otherness' that female audience members could imagine for themselves.

The identities of both foreign and British actresses and the female characters they play contain a number of convergent and divergent elements. Odile Versois as Malou for example had the foreign dimension that signalled her potential susceptibility to active sexuality but this was tempered by her dress and her relationship with her cat, as well as through the co-casting of Diana Dors. Yvonne Mitchell's ethnicity pushes her broadly middle-class version of femininity more towards the margins and is used to signal an unsettling emotion in the character of Amy. Diana Dors exhibited a number of divergent elements of femininity that signified her as an abject figure and which placed her at the margins. Firstly her femininity did not conform to the 'natural' or 'discreet' paradigm outlined in Chapter 1. Rather, her platinum blonde hair, heavy make-up and voluptuous figure referenced the constructed nature of femininity, its status as masquerade, the suggestion of artifice being the diametric opposite of naturalness. The description of her as a 'frivolously inflatable beach toy'[14] is suggestive of something overblown and exaggerated, constructed of artificial materials, and associated with play rather than 'serious' work. These were all factors which for some signified the negative associations attributed to conspicuous consumption and the affluence of the decade.[15] Secondly, Dors' frequent casting in working-class roles was used to highlight her sensuality rather than to explore any economic motivations for prostitution. Class was used as a signifier of otherness. Thirdly, Dors as a star was associated with affluence and social mobility. This in itself made her an abject figure as people acting outside their 'proper place' or 'station' in life trouble borders and boundaries; they are profoundly ambiguous.[16] Dors' status as an abject figure was further evidenced by her being cited by teenage boys as both their favourite and least favourite movie star. Such a response captured the fear and fascination

[14] The comments are from a reviewer for the *Financial Times* and are quoted by Geraghty in her article on Diana Dors (1986: 344).

[15] Hebdige in his analysis of Evelyn Waugh's novel *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* (1957) identifies similar concerns in the protagonist / Waugh's list of hates and their associations which include '*plastic* (..."inauthentic" mass culture); ... *sun-bathing* (increased leisure/national inertia)' (1988: 50).

the abject other holds in the cultural imaginary. Abject figures such as Milly Vitale and Diana Dors represent the limits of what is permissible in relation to femininity, how far towards the margins it is possible to move within popular culture. Indeed Dors, who inculcated such mixed and oppositional feelings, is probably the best example of the extent to which representation could be challenged in British cinema of the decade.

I have suggested that in British films divergent sexuality was primarily the preserve of foreign actresses, with the exception of Diana Dors whose star persona was, for a variety of reasons, already marked as 'other.' In related areas of femininity however ambiguity was not limited to foreign figures. Many of the characters in the films contain a number of convergent and divergent elements which suggests a tension between the centre and the margins and the struggle to hold divergence in check. Madeleine for example in her dealings with her lover Emile and suitor Mr Minnoch is both the hunter and the hunted quarry. In *Mandy* it is the determination of Kit to do battle in relation to the role of the mother that challenges the paternal family. This speaks of the simultaneous shoring up and challenging of ideals of womanhood that I have suggested is a characteristic of 1950s British cinema. Furthermore, the main female characters are juxtaposed with characters who function as 'doubles' and which themselves contain a number of elements that are oppositional to the main character. The eponymous heroine of *Bedelia* for example is beautiful and fulfils the role of housewife but she is also exotic and unpredictable. Conversely Ellen is pragmatic and sensible, qualities that are valued, but is a career woman. In a similar manner the characterisations of Amy and Georgie in *Woman in a Dressing Gown* function in relation to a number of dualisms; married/mistress, housewife/working, platonic/sexual. *Young Wives' Tale* dramatised similar binaries in the characters of Mary and Sabina; working/housewife, emotional/rational. Vicki and Malou

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[16] Indeed the breakdown of class barriers caused Waugh significant angst. A staunch supporter of class privilege his exchange with Nancy Mitford regarding speech was an attempt 'to clarify and redefine

in *Passport to Shame* seemingly represent good and bad femininity but ultimately both women have convergent elements that redeem them and which place them in opposition to 'real' prostitutes. The three films from Chapter 2 have as their primary focus the male creation of a double of an existing female but one which seeks to improve upon the original by making the copy controllable in relation to male desires. In *Stolen Face* for example the key binary between Alice and Lily is one of availability versus unavailability in relation to Ritter but, as the project mutates, other distinctions assume a more central role: working-class/middle-class, desirable/undesirable.

It is the presence of convergence and divergence both within and between characters that suggests ambiguity. Indeed the concept of the double, as with the abject figure, is associated with what Hutchings termed 'reassuring and threatening characteristics' (2001: 49). This resonates with a national cinema that was reflecting, obliquely, key concerns of the cultural imaginary in the arena of femininity. These contrasting figures represent the contestation of the feminine. They demonstrate the operation, in Foucaultian terms, of discourses of femininity as 'blocks … different or even contradictory discourses' which are manoeuvring 'within the same strategy' (1990: 101-2). It suggests that femininity is not homogenous and the notion of a single hegemonic image of femininity is difficult to sustain. My research therefore supports the argument proffered by Stacey and her analysis of female spectatorship (1994) that plural femininity was a feature of the period. This is not to deny elements of gender conservatism. Femininity may not have been homogenous but neither was it open to endless possibilities or imaginings. Stacey's argument that feminine identities are both fluid and, at the same time, 'fixed by particular discourses, however … contradictorily' (1994: 226) captures the simultaneous consolidation and transformation of femininity in the period. I have demonstrated how new identities for women were explored but these were considered to be in addition to the role of wife, and

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boundaries rendered opaque by post-War "affluence"' (Hebdige, 1988: 48).

then mother, rather than as a substitute. Indeed my analysis suggests that the role of wife and mother remained the dominant discourse that anchored femininity in the 1950s, albeit in increasingly uncertain waters and with varying degrees of success.

The idea of femininity being both consolidated and transformed is consistent with a reading of post-war British film generally as an 'anxious cinema, which worried away at the new social and sexual boundaries' (Harper and Porter, 2003: 272). All the female characters that I have explored in this thesis are, to a greater or lesser extent, liminal figures that occupy positions at the boundaries of normative femininity.

In industry terms it is interesting to explore the kind of cinema in which these liminal figures are most likely to be found. It seems that divergent femininities are more prevalent in B-films and melodrama than they are in the mainstream genres of war and comedy or in those films with a more overtly realist aesthetic. Indeed Petley's concept of a 'lost continent' of British cinema (1986: 98), comprised of crime dramas, melodramas, science fiction and horror, appears to be the natural home for liminal female figures. As this thesis has demonstrated divergent females have a greater screen presence in low budget features (*The Perfect Woman*), the early science-fiction/horror films of director Terence Fisher (*Stolen Face*), crime dramas (*Dear Murderer*) and those films that slipped under the ABPC radar largely due to the creative talent of directors such as J. Lee Thompson and writers such as Anne Burnaby. Furthermore, despite drawing films from a range of genres, the dominance of melodrama and the focus on the domestic is clearly evident. This foregrounding of a melodramatic mode indicates an address to a female audience. Indeed surveying the critical reviews of these films in both specialist and generic publications suggests that a broad appeal to female cinema-goers was certainly imagined for the majority of these productions. Some of these films found an audience and were

undeniably popular whilst others did not. Although the main aim of this thesis has not been to trace or explain box office popularity I want to suggest that the particular success of one of the films allows some interesting conclusions to be drawn about the wider context.

Woman in a Dressing Gown, as I indicated in the previous chapter, was a critical and commercial success upon its release in 1957. In particular it found favour with female audience members at a time when women were less inclined to visit the cinema. Harper and Porter's article on crying at the cinema suggested that women preferred to be intensely involved and enjoyed films which had an emotional resonance for them, something which was best achieved when the film matched the viewer's 'psychological disposition' (1996: 173). On one level the success of *Woman in a Dressing Gown* can be explained by its dramatisation of the marital and domestic vicissitudes of a middle-aged housewife, but it also functions I believe at a psychological level. Harper and Porter argue that as the decade progressed British cinema was increasingly characterised by two symbolic worlds: one which was 'regular, dry, tidy, and empty' and one which was 'asymmetrical, wet, viscous, disorderly, and full-to-bursting' (2003: 271). The latter was associated with the sphere of modernity, which was presented in favourable terms. Hammer horror films from the second half of the 1950s were commercially successful for example because they dramatised the 'modern ... mess, slime, and bodily disorder ... as endlessly fascinating' (ibid). I would argue that *Woman in a Dressing Gown* functions in the same manner.[17] It depicts the mess and disorder of Amy, her physical appearance and her domestic milieu, in ways which suggest it maps onto the emotional states of the audience. There is both empathy for, and a lurid fascination with, her character. In this respect the film functions

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[17] Indeed my argument is in part shaped by the response of myself and others to viewing the film. Although it has been broadly categorised as a combination of social realism and melodrama, my response to it is more consistent with that of the horror film as the genre has been understood by Creed (1993). The film has a

as a symptom of a post-war cultural imaginary that was responding and working through some of the tensions and contradictions of the emergent modern society.

It is these very contradictions that make the period so rich for analysis in terms of gender representations. Far from being a conservative period this thesis has demonstrated the extent to which normative femininity was challenged in mainstream cinema, often in ways that were unusual and unpredictable. Rather than understanding it as a period where women failed to capitalise on the economic and social gains made during the Second World War and were forced back into a domestic role until the advent of the more radical 1960s, the period between 1945-59 can be more productively understood as a time of profound shifts in gender relations. Indeed this shifting suggests both a working through of women's pre and war-time experiences and an anticipation of subsequent social changes and, in this respect, points to the limitations of the concept of periodisation as the parameters that are erected around periods such as 'the 1950s' are shown to be porous. In sum, this thesis had provided a 'persuasive' account of the interesting depictions of femininity that emerged in post-war popular film as a result of this shifting between elements of consolidation and transformation.

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powerful visceral quality to it and evokes the contradictory feelings of fear and fascination often associated with the horror film.

Filmography

Bedelia (1946). *Dir*. Lance Comfort, *Dist*. Eagle Lion, *Pro. Co*. British National Films, *Prod*. Isadore Goldsmith, *Cast* Margaret Lockwood, Ian Hunter, Barry K. Barnes.

Beware of Pity (1946). *Dir*. Maurice Elvey, *Dist*. Two Cities, *Prod. Co*. Two Cities, *Prod*. W. P. Lipscomb, *Cast* Lilli Palmer, Albert Lieven, Cedric Hardwicke.

The Blue Lamp (1950). *Dir*. Basil Dearden, *Dist*. General Film Distributors (GFD), *Pro. Co*. Ealing, *Prod*. Michael Balcon, *Cast* Dirk Bogarde, Jimmy Hanley, Jack Warner.

Bride of Frankenstein (1935). *Dir*. James Whale, *Dist*. Universal, *Pro. Co*. Universal, *Prod*. Carl Laemmle Jr., *Cast* Boris Karloff, Colin Clive, Elsa Lanchester.

The Browning Version (1951). *Dir*. Anthony Asquith, *Dist*. GFD, *Prod. Co*. Javelin, *Prod*. Teddy Baird, *Cast* Michael Redgrave, Jean Kent, Nigel Patrick.

The Cabinet of Dr Caligari (1920). *Dir*. Robert Wiene, *Dist*. Decla-Bioscop, *Pro. Co*. Decla-Bioscop, *Prod*. Rudolf Meinert, Erich Pommer, *Cast* Conrad Veidt, Werner Krauss.

Caged (1950). *Dir*. John Cromwell, *Dist*. Warner, *Pro. Co*. Warner, *Prod*. Jerry Wald, *Cast* Eleanor Parker, Agnes Moorhead.

Carve Her Name With Pride (1958). *Dir*. Lewis Gilbert, *Dist*. Rank, *Pro. Co*. Keyboard/Daniel M. Angel and Lewis Gilbert Prods., *Prod*. Daniel M. Angel, *Cast* Virginia McKenna, Paul Scofield, Jack Warner.

Casablanca (1942). *Dir*. Michael Curtiz, *Dist*. Warner, *Pro. Co*. Warner, *Prod*. Hal B. Wallis, *Cast* Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, Paul Henreid.

The Constant Husband (1955). *Dir*. Sidney Gilliat, *Dist*. British Lion, *Pro. Co*. Individual Prods., *Prod*. Sidney Gilliat, Frank Launder, *Cast* Rex Harrison, Kay Kendall.

Cosh Boy (1953). *Dir*. Lewis Gilbert, *Dist*. Independent Film Distributors (IFD), *Pro. Co*. Romulus, *Prod*. Daniel M. Angel, *Cast* James Kennedy, Joan Collins, Hermoine Baddeley.

The Criminal (1960). *Dir.* Joseph Losey, *Dist.* Anglo Amalgamated, *Pro. Co.* Merton Park, *Prod.* Jack Greenwood, *Cast* Stanley Baker, Sam Wanamaker, Patrick Magee.

Darling (1965). *Dir.* John Schlesinger, *Dist.* Anglo-Amalgamated, *Pro. Co.* Vic/Appia, *Prod.* Joseph Janni, *Cast* Julie Christie, Dirk Bogarde, Laurence Harvey.

Dead Reckoning (1947). *Dir.* John Cromwell, *Dist.* Columbia, *Pro. Co.* Columbia, *Prod.* Sidney Biddell, *Cast* Humphrey Bogart, Lizabeth Scott.

Dear Murderer (1947). *Dir.* Arthur Crabtree, *Dist.* GFD, *Pro. Co.* Gainsborough, *Prod.* Betty Box, *Cast* Greta Gynt, Eric Portman, Dennis Price.

Devil Girl from Mars (1954). *Dir.* David Macdonald, *Dist.* British Lion, *Pro. Co.* Gigi, *Prod.* Edward J. Danziger, *Cast* Hugh McDermott, Hazel Court, Patricia Laffan.

The Divided Heart (1954). *Dir.* Charles Crichton, *Dist.* GFD, *Pro. Co.* Ealing, *Prod.* Michael Truman, *Cast* Yvonne Mitchell, Armin Dahlen, Cornell Borchers.

Double Indemnity (1944). *Dir.* Billy Wilder, *Dist.* Paramount, *Pro. Co.* Paramount, *Prod.* B. G. DeSylva, *Cast* Barbara Stanwyck, Fred MacMurray, Edward G. Robinson.

Down With Love (2003). *Dir.* Payton Reed, *Dist.* Twentieth-Century Fox, *Pro. Co.* Regency, *Prod.* Bruce Cohen, *Cast* Renèe Zellweger, Ewan McGregor.

The Fallen Idol (1948). *Dir.* Carol Reed, *Dist.* British Lion, *Pro. Co.* London Film Productions, *Prod.* David O. Selznick, Carol Reed, *Cast* Ralph Richardson, Michèle Morgan, Bobby Henrey.

Fire Maidens from Outer Space (1956). *Dir.* Cy Roth, *Dist.* Criterion Films, *Pro. Co.* Eros, *Prod.* George Fowler, *Cast* Susan Shaw, Anthony Dexter, Harry Fowler.

The Flesh is Weak (1957). *Dir.* Don Chaffey, *Dist.* Eros, *Pro. Co.* Raystro, *Prod.* Raymond Stross, *Cast* Milly Vitale, John Derek, William Franklyn.

Forbidden Planet (1956). *Dir.* Fred M. Wilcox, *Dist.* MGM, *Pro. Co.* MGM, *Prod.* Nicholas Nayfack, *Cast* Walter Pidgeon, Leslie Nielson, Anne Francis.

The Forgotten Woman (1939). *Dir.* Harold Young, *Dist.* Universal, *Prod. Co.* Universal, *Prod.* Edmund Grainger, *Cast* Sigrid Gurie, Eve Arden.

The Four-Sided Triangle (1953). *Dir.* Terence Fisher, *Dist.* Exclusive, *Prod. Co.* Hammer, *Prod.* Michael Carreras and Alexander Paal, *Cast* Barbara Payton, Stephen Murray, John Van Eyssen.

Frankenstein (1910). *Dir.* J. Searle Dawley, *Dist.* Edison, *Pro. Co.* Edison, *Prod.* Thomas Edison, *Cast* Charles Ogle, Augustus Phillips.

Frankenstein (1931). *Dir.* James Whale, *Dist.* Universal, *Pro. Co.* Universal, *Prod.* Carl Laemmle Jr., *Cast* Boris Karloff, Colin Clive, Mae Clarke.

Gallant Lady (1942). *Dir.* William Beaudine, *Dist.* Pathè, *Prod. Co.* Pathè, *Prod.* Lester Cutler, *Cast* Rose Hobart, Sidney Blackmer.

Genevieve (1953). *Dir.* Henry Cornelius, *Dist.* GFD, *Pro. Co.* Sirius, *Prod.* Henry Cornelius, *Cast* Kay Kendall, John Gregson, Kenneth More.

The Golem (1920). *Dir.* Paul Wegener, Carl Boese, *Dist.* United Film Artists (UFA), *Pro. Co.* UFA, *Prod.* Paul Davidson, *Cast* Paul Wegener, Albert Steinruck, Ernst Deutsch.

The Good Die Young (1954). *Dir.* Lewis Gilbert, *Dist.* IFD, *Pro. Co.* Remus, *Prod.* Jack Clayton, *Cast* Richard Basehart, Gloria Grahame, Laurence Harvey.

Good Time Girl (1948). *Dir.* David MacDonald, *Dist.* GFD, *Pro. Co.* Triton/Rank, *Prod.* Sydney Box, *Cast* Jean Kent, Dennis Price, Herbert Lom.

Hell Drivers (1957). *Dir.* C. Raker Enfield, *Dist.* Rank, *Pro. Co.* Aqua, *Prod.* Benjamin Fisz, *Cast* Stanley Baker, Herbert Lom, Patrick McGoohan.

The History of Mr Polly (1949). *Dir.* Anthony Pelissier, *Dist.* GFD *Pro. Co.* Two Cities, *Prod.* John Mills, *Cast* John Mills, Sally Ann Howes, Meg Jenkins.

Hungry Hill (1947). *Dir.* Brian Desmond Hurst, *Dist.* Two Cities, *Prod. Co.* Two Cities, *Prod.* William Sistrom and Filippo Del Giudice, *Cast* Margaret Lockwood, Dennis Price, Dermot Walsh.

I Believe in You (1952). *Dir.* Basil Dearden, Michael Relph, *Dist.* GFD, *Pro. Co.* Ealing, *Prod.* Michael Relph, Basil Dearden, *Cast* Celia Johnson, Cecil Parker, Joan Collins.

Jacqueline (1956). *Dir.* Roy Baker, *Dist.* Rank, *Pro. Co.* Rank, *Prod.* George H. Brown, *Cast* John Gregson, Kathleen Ryan, Jacqueline Ryan.

The Killing of Sister George (1969). *Dir.* Robert Aldrich, *Dist.* Associates and Aldrich, *Pro. Co.* Palomar, *Prod.* Robert Aldrich, *Cast* Beryl Reid, Susannah York.

The L-Shaped Room (1962). *Dir.* Bryan Forbes, *Dist.* British Lion, *Pro. Co.* Romulus, *Prod.* Richard Attenborough, *Cast* Leslie Caron, Tom Bell, Cicely Courtneidge.

Ladies of the Big House (1931). *Dir.* Marion Gering, *Dist.* Paramount, *Prod. Co.* Paramount, *Prod.* None credited, *Cast* Sylvia Sidney, Gene Raymond, Wynne Gibson.

The Ladykillers (1955). *Dir.* Alexander Mackendrick, *Dist.* Rank, *Pro. Co.* Ealing, *Prod.* Seth Holt, *Cast* Herbert Lom, Peter Sellers, Alec Guinness.

Latin Quarter (1945). *Dir.* Vernon Sewell, *Dist.* British National, *Prod. Co.* British National, *Prod.* Louis H. Jackson and Derrick de Marney, *Cast* Derrick de Marney, Joan Greenwood.

Laura (1944). *Dir.* Otto Preminger. *Dist.* Twentieth Century Fox (TCF), *Pro. Co.* TCF, *Prod.* Otto Preminger, *Cast* Dana Andrews, Gene Tierney.

Life Without Soul (1915). *Dir.* Joseph W. Smiley, *Dist.* State Rights, *Pro. Co.* Ocean Film Corp. *Prod.* John I. Dudley, *Cast* William W. Cohill, Percy Darrell Standing.

Lost (1956). *Dir.* Guy Green, *Dist.* Rank, *Pro. Co.* Rank, *Prod.* Vivian A. Cox, *Cast* David Farrar, David Knight, Julia Arnall.

Madeleine (1950). *Dir.* David Lean, *Dist.* GFD, *Pro. Co.* Cineguild, *Prod.* Stanley Haynes, *Cast* Ann Todd, Ivan Desney, Leslie Banks.

Mandy (1952). *Dir.* Alexander Mackendrick, *Dist.* GFD, *Prod. Co.* Ealing, *Prod.* Leslie Norman, *Cast* Phyllis Calvert, Terence Morgan, Jack Hawkins.

Metropolis (1926). *Dir.* Fritz Lang, *Dist.* UFA, *Pro. Co.* UFA, *Prod.* Erich Pommer, *Cast* Brigitte Helm, Alfred Abel, Gustav Fröhlich.

Mildred Pierce (1945). *Dir.* Michael Curtiz, *Dist.* Warner, *Pro. Co.* Warner, *Prod.* Jerry Wald, *Cast* Joan Crawford, Jack Carson, Zachary Scott, Ann Blyth.

Mona Lisa Smile (2003). *Dir.* Mike Newell, *Dist.* Sony, *Prod. Co.* Columbia, *Prod.* Elaine Goldsmith-Thomas, *Cast* Julia Roberts, Kirsten Dunst, Julia Stiles.

The Mouse that Roared (1959). *Dir.* Jack Arnold, *Dist.* Columbia, *Prod. Co.* Open Road, *Prod.* Carl Foreman, *Cast* Peter Sellers, David Kossoff, Jean Seberg.

No Trees in the Street (1959). *Dir.* J. Lee Thompson, *Dist.* Associated British Pathé (ABP), *Pro. Co.* Allegro, *Prod.* Frank Godwin, *Cast* Sylvia Sims, Herbert Lom, Melvyn Hayes.

Now Voyager (1942). *Dir.* Irving Rapper, *Dist.* Warner, *Pro. Co.* Warner, *Prod.* Hal B. Wallis, *Cast* Bette Davis, Paul Henreid, Claude Rains.

Passport to Shame (1959). *Dir.* Alvin Rakoff, *Dist.* British Lion, *Pro. Co.* United Co-Prods, *Prod.* John Clein, *Cast* Odile Versois, Diana Dors, Herbert Lom.

The Perfect Woman (1949). *Dir.* Bernard Knowles, *Dist.* Eagle Lion, *Prod. Co.* Two Cities, *Prod.* Alfred Black, George Black, *Cast* Patricia Roc, Nigel Patrick, Stanley Holloway.

Pitfall (1948). *Dir.* André de Toth. *Dist.* United Artists, *Prod. Co.* United Artists, *Prod.* Samuel Bischoff, *Cast* Dick Powell, Lizabeth Scott.

Prison Without Bars (1938). *Dir.* Brian Desmond Hurst, *Dist.* Columbia *Prod. Co.* London Films, *Prod.* Arnold Pressburger, *Cast* Edna Best, Corinne Luchaire, Barry K. Barnes.

The Rocking Horse Winner (1949). *Dir.* Anthony Pelissier, *Dist.* GFD. *Prod. Co.* Rank/Two Cities, *Prod.* John Mills, *Cast* Valerie Hobson, John Mills, John Howard Davies.

Room at the Top (1959). *Dir.* Jack Clayton, *Dist.* IFD, *Pro. Co.* Remus, *Prod.* John Woolf and James Woolf, *Cast* Laurence Harvey, Simone Signoret.

Sapphire (1959). *Dir.* Basil Dearden, *Dist.* Rank, *Pro. Co.* Artna, *Prod.* Michael Relph, *Cast* Nigel Patrick, Michael Craig, Yvonne Mitchell.

Saturday Night, Sunday Morning (1960). *Dir.* Karel Reisz, *Dist.* Bryanston/British Lion, *Pro. Co.* Woodfall, *Prod.* Tony Richardson, Harry Saltzman, *Cast* Albert Finney, Shirley Ann Field, Rachel Roberts.

The Scamp (1957). *Dir.* Wolf Rilla, *Dist.* Grand National, *Pro. Co.* Lawrie, *Prod.* James H. Lawrie, *Cast* Richard Attenborough, Colin Peterson, Terence Morgan.

Seven Days to Noon (1950). *Dir.* John Boulting, *Dist.* British Lion, *Pro. Co.* London Films, *Prod.* Roy Boulting, *Cast* Barry Jones, Olive Sloane, André Morell.

The Seven Little Foys (1955). *Dir.* Melville Shavelson, *Dist.* Paramount, *Pro. Co.* Paramount, *Prod.* Jack Rose. *Cast* Bob Hope, Milly Vitale.

The Shiralee (1957). *Dir.* Leslie Norman, *Dist.* MGM, *Pro. Co.* Ealing, *Prod.* Jack Rix, *Cast* Peter Finch, Elizabeth Sellers, Dana Wilson.

Simon and Laura (1955). *Dir.* Muriel Box, *Dist.* Rank, *Pro. Co.* Group, *Prod.* Teddy Baird, *Cast* Kay Kendall, Peter Finch, Muriel Pavlow.

Spaceways (1953). *Dir.* Terence Fisher, *Dist.* Exclusive, *Pro. Co.* Hammer/WH Prods. *Prod.* Michael Carreras, *Cast* Howard Duff, Eva Bartok, Alan Wheatley.

The Spanish Gardener (1956). *Dir.* Philip Leacock, *Dist.* Rank, *Pro. Co.* Rank, *Prod.* John Bryan, *Cast* Dirk Bogarde, Jon Whiteley, Michael Hordern.

Stolen Face (1952). *Dir.* Terence Fisher, *Dist.* Exclusive, *Prod. Co.* Hammer/Lippert, *Prod.* Anthony Hinds, *Cast* Lizabeth Scott, Paul Henreid, Mary Mackenzie.

Sunset Boulevard (1950). *Dir.* Billy Wilder, *Dist.* Paramount, *Prod. Co.* Paramount, *Prod.* Charles Brackett, *Cast* Gloria Swanson, William Holden, Erich von Stroheim.

A Taste of Honey (1961). *Dir.* Tony Richardson, *Dist.* British Lion, *Prod. Co.* Woodfall, *Prod.* Tony Richardson, *Cast* Dora Bryan, Murray Melvin, Rita Tushingham.

They Drive By Night (1940). *Dir.* Raoul Walsh, *Dist.* Warner, *Prod. Co.* Warner, *Prod.* Mark Hellinger, *Cast* George Raft, Humphrey Bogart, Ida Lupino.

Third Time Lucky (1948). *Dir.* Gordon Parry. *Dist.* GFD, *Pro. Co.* Alliance-Anglofilm, *Prod.* Mario Zampi, *Cast* Glynis Johns, Dermot Walsh.

Tiger Bay (1959). *Dir.* J. Lee Thompson, *Dist.* Rank, *Pro. Co.* Independent Artists, *Prod.* John Hawkesworth, *Cast* Hayley Mills, John Mills, Horst Buchholz.

A Town Like Alice (1956). *Dir.* Jack Lee, *Dist.* Rank, *Pro. Co.* Vic Films, *Prod.* Joseph Janni, *Cast* Virginia McKenna, Peter Finch.

Turn the Key Softly (1953). *Dir.* Jack Lee, *Dist.* GFD, *Pro. Co.* GFD/Chiltern, *Prod.* Maurice Cowan, *Cast* Yvonne Mitchell, Terence Morgan, Joan Collins.

2000 Women (1944). *Dir.* Frank Launder, *Dist.* GFD, *Prod. Co.* Gainsborough, *Prod.* Edward Black, *Cast.* Phyllis Calvert, Flora Robson, Patricia Roc.

The Weak and the Wicked (1954). *Dir.* J Lee Thompson, *Dist.* ABP, *Prod. Co.* Marble Arch, *Prod.* Victor Skutezky, *Cast* Glynis Johns, John Gregson, Diana Dors.

West Side Story (1961). *Dir.* Robert Wise, Jerome Robbins, *Dist.* Panavision 70, *Prod. Co.* Mirisch/Seven Arts, *Prod.* Robert Wise, *Cast* Natalie Wood, Richard Beymer, Russ Tamblyn.

While I Live (1947). *Dir.* John Harlow, *Dist.* Edward Dryhurst Prods. *Prod. Co.* Edward Dryhurst Prods. *Prod.* Edward Dryhurst, *Cast* Tom Walls, Sonia Dresdel, Carol Raye.

The Wicked Lady (1945). *Dir.* Leslie Arliss, *Dist.* GFD, *Pro. Co.* Gainsborough, *Prod.* R. J. Minney, *Cast* Margaret Lockwood, James, Mason, Patricia Roc

The Winslow Boy (1948). *Dir.* Anthony Asquith, *Dist.* British Lion, *Prod. Co.* London Films, *Prod.* Anatole de Grunwald, *Cast* Robert Donat, Cedric Hardwicke, Margaret Leighton.

Woman in a Dressing Gown (1957). *Dir.* J Lee Thompson, *Dist.* ABP, *Prod. Co.* Godwin-Willis, *Prod.* Frank Godwin, J. Lee Thompson, *Cast* Yvonne Mitchell, Sylvia Sims, Anthony Quayle.

Women in Prison (1938). *Dir.* Lambert Hillyer, *Dist.* Columbia, *Prod. Co.* Columbia, *Prod.* None Credited. *Cast*, Wyn Cahoon, Sarah Padden, Ann Doran.

The World Ten Times Over (1963). *Dir.* Wolf Rilla, *Dist.* Cyclops, *Pro. Co.* Cyclops, *Prod.* Michael Luke, *Cast* Sylvia Sims, June Ritchie.

The Yellow Balloon (1952). *Dir.* J. Lee Thompson, *Dist.* ABP, *Pro. Co.* Marble Arch/ Associated British Picture Corporation (ABPC), *Prod.* Victor Skutezky, *Cast*, Kenneth More, William Sylvester, Kathleen Ryan.

Yield to the Night (1956). *Dir.* J Lee Thompson, *Dist.* ABP, *Prod. Co.* Kenwood/ABPC, *Prod.* Kenneth Harper, *Cast* Diana Dors, Yvonne Mitchell, Michael Craig.

Young Wives' Tale (1951). *Dir.* Henry Cass, *Dist.* ABP, *Prod. Co.* ABPC, *Prod.* Victor Skutezky, *Cast* Joan Greenwood, Nigel Patrick, Helen Cherry.

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