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# **Towards Diversity**

## **Tracing Changing Constructions of Masculinities in some Twentieth Century Film and Fiction**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
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## **Abstract**

The theory that masculinities are plural (more than one possible version), socially constructed, and historically produced is supported in this analysis of masculinity in selected American, English, Australian and New Zealand texts of film and fiction across the twentieth century.

Post-structural thinking and the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan, applied to close readings of the selected texts, show that the moment of sexual division must be understood as a product of intense cultural mediation – an event experienced at the suggestion of the society in which men find themselves.

The liberal humanist notion of a fixed and coherent self which traditionally was a male self is shown to be increasingly (as the century progresses) displaced by plurality: masculinity is represented diversely, and also increasingly as changing and relational.

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## INTRODUCTION

Scholarly work on feminism has been around for thirty years while little has been written on masculinity outside the popular press. Yet there are many good reasons why both men and women should benefit from a close examination of masculine codes of behaviour and the images of manhood promoted by Western culture. I believe, first of all, that the discourse of radical feminism deserves a continuing response, and, secondly, I am affected by Peter Middleton's contention in *The Inward Gaze* that modern men have suffered greatly in a series of wars and that such study might be a useful step towards preventing their endless repetition (3). War is seldom absent from the texts I examine in this project.

There are many reasons for the paucity of material on the topic. There is a gender question within authorship for a start. As Middleton writes in the introduction to his book: "Women writers know there are men writers, and black writers know there are white men writers but we white men writers... often don't see our own condition." He goes on to quote American sociologist, Michael Kimmel who said in a newspaper interview: "When I look in the mirror... I see a human being – a white middle-class male – gender is invisible to me because that is where I am privileged. I am the norm. I believe that most men do not know they have a gender" (qtd. Middleton, 11). The usual reason given for men's lack of both political discourse and academic scholarship, when compared to feminism is that, as Middleton concedes, men have a vested interest in silence. But a more important reason involves the lack of a language for such reflection:

Masculine bias in many existing concepts of subjectivity and power is an obstacle to such gender reflection. Men after all have written plenty about their subjectivity and power, but they have constantly universalized it at the same time, and assumed that the rationality of their approach was the sum total of rationality. Universality and rationalism were built into these concepts to avoid such disturbing self-examination by men. (3)

Perhaps this gives me, as a woman, enough justification for writing a thesis largely about men. I say 'largely' first because masculinity and femininity are relational terms – to speak of one is to make reference to the other, and secondly I qualify the

statement because in writing this thesis I have discovered that to write about men or masculinity is to write much more broadly – it is to write about history, sociology and ideology, and to extend to questions of class, race and nation.

I have narrowed the project to the construction of masculinity in a range of twentieth century texts in film and fiction, texts produced by both men and women in Australia, New Zealand, Britain, Europe and the United States. I argue that the changes in masculinity that took place across this century can best be understood when seen alongside challenges to the long-held humanist's notion of self and subjectivity which saw the individual as a coherent, autonomous and immutable entity, subject to rational thought and argument. Literary and cultural works are often the first sites in which changing notions of self and society are developed or negotiated; it is for this reason that post-structuralist theorists have often used modernist or avante garde creative works (from the early twentieth century) to illustrate their ideas.

To discuss masculinity at all requires some attention to definitions. But to ask what is a man? (or a woman) leads one inevitably on to dealing with wider questions of subjectivity and to wrestling with theories of what constitutes the self. Stuart Hall, in an article entitled 'Brave New World' writes:

We can no longer conceive of 'the individual' in terms of a whole and completed Ego or autonomous "Self." SELF is experienced as more fragmented and incomplete, composed of multiple "selves" or identities in relation to the different social worlds we inhabit, something with a history, "produced",... in process. (qtd. Grant, 15)

Knowledge about gender involves the biological, the intuitive (the 'deep masculine' for example), the God-ordained, the socially constructed and the everyday commonsense knowledge acquired by simply living in the world. R. W. Connell discusses all of these claims to knowledge of masculinity in the early chapters of his book *Masculinities* (1995). His preference for the plural term arises from his claim that masculinities are historical, coming into existence at particular times and always subject to change. Informed by his research I have constantly asked myself: what practice has enabled this or that knowledge to emerge and whose interests are/were served by this social practice?

Peter Middleton, in his definition, brings up the question of backroom power. He maintains that "The term 'masculinity' is almost as elusive as 'subjectivity' but whereas subjectivity has been in the glare of intellectual attention for centuries, masculinity has

been left behind the scenes, writing the scripts, directing the action and operating the cameras, taken for granted and almost never defined” (152, 3). My selection of stories by Katherine Mansfield shows the effects of this ‘taken for granted’ power. These stories also interrogate some of the compelling cultural myths of their time including the idea of the fixed self and the immutable nature of sexual identity.

The idea of a fixed self is questioned by Mansfield’s insistence on multiple perspectives which suggest that everything should be looked at through multiple lenses. In ‘Prelude’ the little girl Kezia looks out on the garden/world through two coloured glass panels in the dining-room window. Through one a blue lawn and blue arum lilies appear; through the other, a yellow lawn with yellow lilies... Then her sister appears – to dust the dining-room tables and chairs on the lawn – “a little Chinese Lottie”... as she seems through the yellow glass: “Was that really Lottie? Kezia was not quite sure until she looked through the ordinary window” (225). It is hard for her to see Charlotte for what she really is – assuming (an)other is ever truly knowable. Kezia, however, feels reassured of truth/reality/normality when she returns to the clear glass but the certainty offered has already been subtly undercut by the incongruity of the indoor furniture being seen in an outdoor setting. In fact the family is house-moving but the scene (Part II in the sequence) gently foreshadows many terrifying incidents of insecurity, misunderstanding and confusion to come. And most of these are suffered by women or girls as a result of the actions – unconscious or deliberate – of men or small boys.

The difficulty of arriving at precise definitions is further addressed by Peter Middleton when he comments on the term ‘masculinity’:

Its relation to other nouns like male, man, manhood, manliness and virility is far from obvious. As adjective, the term ‘masculine’ moves between the identification of a person’s sex as male and socially validated norms of acceptable behaviour for males. As noun, its referent will depend on what assumptions about subjectivity and society determine its context. For some sociologists masculinity is a role, for some post-structuralists it is a form of representation. Central to all the usages seems to be an element of acculturation. Masculinity is socially constructed, but how and why will depend on the theory we use, as well as the significance given to the idea of social construction. (153)

Connell, as a sociologist, endorses these views on masculinity as a social construct. His claim that “definitions of masculinity are deeply enmeshed in the history

of institutions and economic structures” (29) is borne out in my analysis of the novel *Man Alone* (1939). Here we look at masculinities both produced and modified by the historical, political and economic forces at work in New Zealand in the early settler years. Jock Phillips’ research into colonial and twentieth century New Zealand is commended by Connell for its focus on “social relations on the widest possible scale – the global expansion of European power” (29). In particular Phillips’ book *A Man’s Country?* (1987) demonstrates the role of the state in fostering if not creating specific models of masculinity. Early in the book Phillips discusses the effect of men outnumbering women in the new society. All-male work-places and noisy, unruly drinking establishments created a masculine subculture which resulted in serious problems of social order. But the colonial state, in promoting the family farm as the basis for agricultural settlement, gradually tied masculinity into marriage and thus modified the model of masculinity that threatened to become the norm. Later, however, the demands of social control changed. At the turn of the century when things were much quieter – when the male/female ratio was more balanced, the Maori people almost conquered, and urbanisation on the increase – “the state reversed course and set about the incitement of a violent masculinity”:

First for the Boer War, then for two World Wars, white New Zealand men were mobilized for the British imperial armies. In fascinating case studies of public rituals around arrival and departure, Phillips shows how politicians and press fabricated a public account of New Zealand manhood. This linked a farmer-settler ethos with racist notions of imperial solidarity. Maori men, at the same time, were mobilized for Maori battalions with appeals to a separate warrior myth. (Connell, 29, 30)

Such contradictory messages about manhood were bridged by the promotion of organized sport – especially rugby – to produce an exemplary kind of masculinity. When the 1905 All Black touring team returned from England they were met by the Prime Minister at a civic welcome-home ceremony. In Connell’s words “the exemplary status of sport as a test of masculinity, which we now take for granted, is in no sense natural. It was produced historically, and in this case [the 1905 All Black case] we can see it produced deliberately as a political strategy” (30).

In the preface to the revised edition of his book Phillips comments on the mixed reception it has enjoyed since its first publication in 1987. He claims that literature

students influenced by post-structural theory have found much in it to interest them “as it deals extensively with structures of discourse” and “it was within such structures that masculinity came to be understood in New Zealand” (viii). Psychoanalytic theory can suggest ways in which these historical/cultural discourses become attached to the individual at the moment of sexual division.

In their depiction of masculinities the specific texts I have chosen for this project illustrate a movement towards recognition of diversity, plurality and the post-structuralist’s notion of meaning – one which arises from the infinite play of differences within a closed system. Early in the century – in Mansfield, for example, the process is covert but the hints are there and the writing strains to reveal the hidden. Only recently has the double sidedness of her stories been exposed. By the late nineties *The Full Monty* celebrates freedom (for women at least) and presents, however cautiously, new gender options, new models of masculinity for the millennium.

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At the beginning of the century the humanist notion of ‘man’ began to be deconstructed and the values of autonomy and stability when applied to the self, called into question. Freud’s discovery of the unconscious had a profound effect on twentieth century thinking, as did his ‘narrative’ of the Oedipus complex. As Connell notes, Freud’s early work coincided with “a ferment in the European intelligentsia that produced modernist literature, avant-garde painting and music, radical social ideas, spirited feminist and socialist movements, and the first homosexual rights movement” (*Masc.*, 8). He maintains that Freud was sufficiently open to this ferment to question almost everything European culture had taken for granted about gender. He sees Freud’s work as the starting-point of modern thought about masculinity and laments the tendency of later masculinity researchers to disregard those ideas. Disrupting the “apparently natural object ‘masculinity’, he made enquiry into its composition both possible and necessary” (*Masc.*, 8). Connell claims that Freud understood that sexuality and gender were not fixed by nature but were constructed through a long and conflict-ridden process. Increasingly he saw the Oedipus complex as the key moment in this development – precipitated in boys by rivalry with the father and terror of castration. In ‘Little Hans’ and the ‘Rat Man’, two case studies, these ideas were documented in 1909. They illustrated the dynamics of a formative relationship. But he argued also that

homosexuality was not a simple gender switch – that male inverts often retain the mental quality of masculinity. At this point he offered the hypothesis that humans were constitutionally bi-sexual – that currents of masculinity and femininity coexisted in everyone. As Connell sees it, this implied that adult masculinity was a complex and precarious construction. In the Wolf Man case he identified a pre-Oedipal narcissistic masculinity which underpinned castration anxiety. The case is famous for the clinical method of separating layer after layer of emotion and ‘mapping the shifting relationships between them’ (*Masc.*, 9). He sees the study as a challenge to all later research on masculinity since it documents, above all, the tensions *within* masculine character and its vicissitudes through the course of a life.

Later Freud developed his theory of personality structure. By internalizing the parents’ prohibitions the super-ego is formed in the aftermath of the Oedipus complex. What is most significant here is that Freud saw it as having a *gendered* character, arising as it does from the child’s relation with the father, and more distinct in boys than in girls. He also identified a sociological dimension in the super-ego, treating it as the means by which culture obtains mastery over individual desire, especially aggression. “Here was the germ of a theory of the patriarchal organization of culture, transmitted between generations through the construction of masculinity” (*Masc.*, 10). Connell claims that the point Freud most insistently made about masculinity was that it never exists in a pure state. Layers of emotion coexist and contradict. He always saw femininity as part of a man’s character – but later psychoanalysts were to abandon his theory of bisexuality.

Kaja Silverman, in *The Subject of Semiotics* (1983), makes similar observations. She also points out that Freud notes in “An Outline of Psychoanalysis (1940)” the difficulty of attributing any absolute value to the terms ‘male’ and ‘female’ because they do not correspond to any human essence. In doing so, she claims that “he comes very close to suggesting that the categories of male and female only acquire meaning through their opposition to each other – in other words, that they comprise a binary set analagous to antonyms in language, and must be understood as belonging to a closed system of signification” (39). Only within the confines of this system could oppositions like aggressivity/passivity designate two different sexual positions, “just as if it is there and there alone that the penis signifies ‘plenitude,’ and the vagina signifies ‘lack’” (39). Lacan, she explains, extended the notion of lack to include the male subject as well as the female by distinguishing between penis and phallus – where phallus designates the

privileges of the Symbolic, privileges from which the son is temporarily excluded. But, she points out, even the Freudian paradigm makes clear the inadequacy of the male subject, in its acknowledgement that he relies for his authentication upon the felt inferiority of the female subject. She cites Hollywood melodramas and the ease with which they challenge the male subjects' potency by putting it repeatedly into crisis. *Rebel Without a Cause* is a text I examine which focuses on male inadequacy, and *The Best Years of Our Lives* is a movie of the forties which opens the curtain on male castration. These texts go to show that the moment of sexual division must be understood as a product of intense cultural mediation - an event experienced in retrospect and at the 'suggestion' of the society in which men find themselves.

## Chapter One

### A Cry Against Corruption

Katherine Mansfield, like other Modernists, was grappling with new ideas about self and identity before 1920. In her stories she delivers a broad challenge to the mores of early twentieth century life, targeting the class system, the family, marriage, and the inferior status of women, but above all she challenges the humanist belief in the coherent self. I begin this project by looking at Mansfield's work, focusing chiefly on her male characters since they offer a rich diversity of masculinities across three countries, New Zealand, Britain and Germany. Ironically, the reader is constantly at one remove from these paterfamilias figures who are represented *indirectly* through the negative effects they have on the women in their lives. By studying women, Mansfield reveals men.

Mansfield's male characters are generally overbearing, predatory or marginal – marginal where her concern is for women and the lives they are required to lead in a world run by men largely for men. 'The Woman at the Store' provokes anger at a female spirit broken by isolation and ill treatment in rural New Zealand. It resonates with the cry 'Wot for?' (115), the same cry taken up by Frau Brechenmacher in Europe who is also a victim of marriage as an institution. The latter story is partly based on Mansfield's own observations of life in Bad Worishofen, Bavaria, where she herself suffered a miscarriage in lonely circumstances. In some of the early stories of the German Pension series the depiction of male characters can seem over simplified or even caricatured. These stories are characterized by what has tended to be identified as Mansfield's 'immature' style, told from a single perspective and motivated by the author's personal outrage.

The theme of power relations between the sexes becomes more complex in her later stories where a shifting narrative voice supplies a multiplicity of view points, and in which the author's concern for the male condition/situation grows. Stories which dramatise women's powerlessness in a patriarchal society include 'At the Bay' and 'Prelude' where I focus on Stanley Burnell in terms of his position in the extended family and then on Jonathon Trout, whose gentler model of masculinity is viewed with disapproval even by those who suffer the direct effects of male oppression. I include a

close reading of 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel' in which power continues to be exerted even after the character's death. Others, like 'A Birthday', examine the male psyche directly and register the level of self interest that was the common condition of men revered as heads of family, household or occupation. Finally I examine 'Je Ne Parle Pas Francais' which interrogates the liberal humanist notion of the integrity and stability of the human self. Not only did Mansfield conceive of a multiple and shifting self but of the possibility of an unknowable self, even a self without essence.

In a Journal entry in 1920 she wrote a response to a familiar line from Shakespeare which appeared in family autograph albums at the time: *This above all, to thine own self be true*. The advice of course was Polonius' to his son, Laertes in *Hamlet*. The same line in my father's handwriting appears in the Book of Common Prayer given to me by my parents at Confirmation in 1954. Mansfield's note to herself reads:

True to oneself! Which self? Which of my many – well, really, that's what it looks like coming to – hundreds of selves? For what with complexes and repressions and reactions and vibrations and reflections, there are moments when I feel I am nothing but the small clerk of some hotel without a proprietor, who has all his work cut out to enter the names and hand the keys to the wilful guests.

Up against this she presents the contradictory wish for something permanent and absolute – that...

persistent yet mysterious belief in a self which is continuous and permanent; which, untouched by all we acquire and all we shed, pushes a green spear through the dead leaves... until, one day, the light dissolves it and shakes the flower free ... delineating what was to become a prevailing topic of twentieth century thinking (qtd. Fullbrook, KM, 131).

Her own divergence of views about the self is reflected in the two styles juxtaposed in this journal entry – the colloquial tone of the first moving into the more seriously crafted lyricism of the second, with its organicist imagery and patterned phrases.

In general the stories of the collection *In a German Pension* paint an ugly picture of men. In many of the stories there is a correlation between food and sexuality or, to be more explicit, between eating and the sexual devouring of women. Once the reader becomes attuned to the pervasive subtext the very title of a story like 'Germans at

Meat' announces its theme. A young English woman in this story is sharing a dinner-time conversation with other guests at the pension. While the story presents as an expose of German eating habits which the narrator despises, its interest for my purpose lies in the tension which develops between the rather prim young woman and the coarse, overbearing Herr Rat as the two engage in seemingly harmless small talk.

Herr Rat begins characteristically by drawing attention to himself. The bread soup he declares to be exactly the right consistency for his "magen" (liver) which "has not been in order" for several days. 'I am a good cook myself,' he announces, turning to the narrator who makes an effort to respond to such an opening. "'How interesting,' I said, attempting to infuse just the right amount of enthusiasm into my voice." But the German continues with an even more outrageous boast: 'O yes – when one is not married it is necessary. As for me I have had all I wanted from women without marriage.' He tucked his napkin into his collar and blew upon his soup as he spoke (28).

What he wants from women is not spelt out but he then proceeds to detail the quantities of food he needs to satisfy his appetite. The young English woman's general revulsion grows as Herr Hoffman, another guest, wipes soup drippings from his coat. Conversation around the table continues and the eating habits of the English (pig's flesh, cold fish, kidneys and liver...for breakfast) come under attack, forcing the narrator, who happens to be vegetarian and whose accustomed breakfast is a coffee-on-the-run, on to the defensive. Clearly her own sexual appetite is under scrutiny here too. She sidesteps – with a protest that at least she can make good tea, for she knows the secret lies in the warming of the pot. But Herr Rat is quick to mock:

'What do you warm the teapot for? Ha! ha! that's very good! One does not eat the teapot, I suppose?'

He fixed his cold blue eyes upon me with an expression which suggested a thousand premeditated invasions. (29)

And a German widow joins in the humiliation of the English girl with: 'Whoever heard of having children upon vegetables?' (30). The food/sex equation takes on its most bizarre turn when the widow says that while she herself has had nine children, she has a friend who "had four at the same time. Her husband was so pleased he gave a supper-party and had them placed on the table" (30).

While men are the aggressors in these stories women are strangely complicit, it might seem, their response sometimes involving resignation to a pre-ordained fate as is evident in the next story. The sketch ends "with the narrator confessing she does not

know her husband's favourite meat" – an admission, which as Pamela Dunbar puts it, is "not merely of general lack of intimacy but, on the level of metaphor, of a total lack of 'carnal' knowledge of him" (22).

Many critics believe 'Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding' to be the finest story in the collection. In terms of exposing gender inequality it is one of the most extreme. Herr Brechenmacher whose name translates as a 'breaker of things' is established as an authority figure well before he makes his entrance. He is at work as a postman when the story opens and his wife is making all the necessary preparations for the wedding the couple are to attend. She cleans his boots, irons a shirt, puts a stitch in a necktie and puts four babies to bed. An older daughter, who is to babysit, receives training for a future life of female servitude when entrusted with the polishing of her father's uniform buttons and later given the mother's lamp and black shawl... "passing the standard of womanhood to the prematurely adult creature who has already been denied a childhood" (Fullbrook, 54). When the husband gets home he is abrupt and demanding: "Where are my clothes?... Nothing ready, of course" (43)... remarks which are intended to establish the unpleasant nature of the man but which might subtly suggest, too, that this man is a victim, himself, of a wider system of commercial exploitation. He is made the centre of bustling attention by both wife and daughter but loses any sympathy we might have had for him immediately after, when he banishes his wife to the hallway to dress so that he can have the mirror. "There isn't room to turn. I want the light." (The Frau will be humiliated later by the placket left open as a result of dressing in the dark.) As Fullbrook observes, this incident reflects the way the male gaze has no regard for the ageing woman... "now she is no longer the object of desire Frau Brechenmacher must become invisible" (33). But the bride at the wedding who *is* still 'sexually desirable' is subjected during the evening to jeering and insults from both Herr Brechenmacher and her new husband.

Continuing the symbolism of food, Mansfield describes the bride in her white dress as "an iced cake all ready to be cut and served in neat little pieces to the bridegroom before her" (4). The theme of marriage-as-sacrifice is played out through the three women, the Frau who has endured many years of marriage, the bride on the eve of wedlock, and Rosa, whose willingness to accept her fate is foreshadowed in her resolution to wear her mother's shawl to bed, if her evening of responsibility must end at half-past eight. The Frau herself has learned to tolerate a physically dominant husband whose attentions she fears – and with whom she pointedly refuses to eat when

they return home. Eating greedily, the husband, who has drunk a great deal, reminds her with some relish of “the trouble” she gave him on their own wedding night. The Frau remembers it well but protests that it is all too long ago. In the last lines of the story she “lay down on the bed and put her arm across her face like a child who expected to be hurt as Herr Brechenmacher lurched in” (48).

If Herr Brechenmacher is vain, self-centred and demanding it is no doubt partly because the subservience of the women allows or even invites it. When he stands in the kitchen “puffing himself out” and asking, ‘How do I look?’ the Frau replies, ‘Wonderful’ ... and .. ‘Rosa, come and look at your father’ (44). She requires nothing of him. When they leave the house it is the Frau who attends to the lamp, closes the door and is left behind in the snow. ‘Wait, wait!’ she cried. No I’ll get my feet damp – you hurry’ is the reply (44). In Kate Fullbrook’s opinion, “Katherine Mansfield sees the failure of many human relationships as ground in a collaboration of victim and victimiser who are caught in a cycle of self-falsification that can only be broken by a confrontation of the bankruptcy of the terms of submission” (9). The moment of realisation, she claims, “is a moment of ethical terror” involving a clash between “the self that exists in the world in its masked and inauthentic form and the vulnerable, confused and unstructured self beneath the mask” (9). Oppression is thus contingent on the acceptance of a fixed identity, she explains. It is in acquiescing to such fixture that Mansfield believes women have betrayed themselves most deeply.

At the Gasthaus other male characters are introduced. The landlord is in full cry *booming* instructions, ‘Up the stairs – up the stairs!’ (44) to the guests. So overawed is Herr Brechenmacher by “the landlord’s grand manner” that he “so far forgot his rights as a husband as to beg his wife’s pardon for jostling her against the banisters in his efforts to *get ahead* of everybody else” (44). [My emphasis.] Here Mansfield ruthlessly exposes Herr Brechenmacher for the self-centred, odious man he is while alluding also to the conventions of a society which allows such behaviour. The bridegroom who wrenched the Herr’s insulting wedding gift (of a teapot containing babies’ cradles) from his new wife when she dared to show that she felt humiliated, wears a suit of white clothes “much too large for him” (45), signalling that he is not yet a Herr Brechenmacher but is bound to become one.

In ‘A Birthday’ Mansfield inhabits directly the consciousness of a male character. Here psychology and biology come together as the writer rejects once again the idea of a biologically determined destiny for women – but the focus this time is on a

businessman, Andreas Binzer, a character believed to be modelled on Harold Beauchamp, Mansfield's father. Binzer's life is being disturbed by the birth of his third child. He has had to sleep overnight in the spare room with the broken blind where there wasn't even a chair for his watch and chain! His wife is upstairs in the final stages of labour. His mother explains:

Anna has been in pain all night. She wouldn't have you disturbed before because she said you looked so run down yesterday. You told her you had caught a cold and been very worried. Straightway Andreas felt that he was being accused. (59)

He runs the bathroom taps to drown the sounds of Anna's screaming. He looks at a photo and laments the difference in Anna that four years of marriage and child-birth have made. But while the story emphasises his self centredness this man is not just another Herr Brechenmacher. Binzer is a milder creature altogether who sees himself as sensitive (even though the world regards sensitivity as a fault). 'I'm too sensitive for a man – that's what's the matter with me.' But self knowledge has its limits, it would seem, for he then picks a quarrel with the doctor whom he finds "riddled with conceit, like all those professionals" (61).

Binzer wins some sympathy from the reader for, as Fullbrook observes, his is a personality under stress: "Saddled with work all day, and couldn't shake it off in the evening, like other men" (64). Duress in this case is expressed by an obsession with cleanliness. He is offended by the smelly garbage in the gully, by the maid who is breathing germs into the soup and spitting disease on to the boots he has required her to clean. His rising paranoia is halted only by the birth of a healthy baby which, rapturously, is a boy – a future partner for the firm! Herr Brechenmacher and Binzer are later to coalesce in the character of Stanley Burnell, a much more mellow head-of-the-family figure of settler society in 'Prelude.'

'The Daughters of the Late Colonel,' which Mansfield regarded as her most mature piece, builds a powerful picture of a masculine figure by focusing totally on two women whom she draws in meticulous detail. Set in England, the story examines the effect of a lifetime of paternal tyranny on two ageing women. Colonel Pinner, a former officer of the Indian Army, is a formidable presence in the story though as the title indicates, he is dead before it begins. A week after his passing Josephine and Constantia, who have secretly wished him dead for years, are surprised at how easy it

has been to cry. Josephine has replied to twenty three letters of condolence, breaking down each time she came to the 'We miss our dear father so much' part:

Strange! She couldn't have put it on – but twenty three times. Even now, though, when she said over to herself sadly 'We miss our dear father *so* much,' she could have cried if she'd wanted to. (387)

The truth is the two elderly women, now alone in the world, are in shock; their tears are in fact a response to terror, guilt and uncertainty, a fatal combination that may render them powerless to move on.

As the story opens they are talking across the room to each other from their respective beds – whispering, squabbling and exchanging confidences as they have done since childhood in their shared bedroom. Josephine has had to reproach herself when she suppressed a giggle at an image of the porter in her father's top-hat (for now, as well as assuming responsibility for their own lives, they must dispose of their father's things.) 'Remember,' she chides herself, "terribly sternly" ... but the word 'remember,' while it returns Josephine to the immediate past, takes on a greater significance for the reader as the story unpicks the *distant* past, exposing a lifetime of neglect and repression. Total dependence on a strong father figure has left two women with none of the resources necessary for coping with a future alone. Of three Pinner children only the son has been allowed an independent existence since the mother died from snake-bite; out in Ceylon Benny is following in his father's footsteps, a bored wife swinging in a cane rocker behind him, as she flicks over the leaves of the Tatler (394). Submission to their father's rules and his moods has kept the women in the permanent childhood we find them in. They have spent their lives "looking after father and at the same time keeping out of father's way" (40), responding to his shouting and his thumping stick, his objections to noise (even the sound of a barrel organ) and to the cost of everything. Even now that he is dead they are still in awe of him and, as C. A. Hankin observes:

they fear virtually everything: the objects within the house, the people with whom they come in contact, the unknown outside world, and, worst of all their own repressed emotions. Years of holding back their hostility toward father have caused them habitually to avoid facing things – in effect to evade reality. (2)

In the days immediately following the death, however, there was plenty to do: "The week after was one of the busiest of their lives" (386). They throw themselves into purposeful activity, making funeral arrangements, letter writing and ordering mourning

clothes, even while, as Heather Murray puts it, “Constantia remembers more typical times of indecision in the past, of ‘running out, bringing things home in bags, getting things on approval, discussing them with Jug, and taking them back to get more things on approval’” (68). These women are more than equal to the task of carrying out the rituals of mourning – of doing what the world expects – for deception has become second nature to them. Josephine, at least, would like to accept the invitation to come alive that the colonel’s death offers. The more assertive of the two, she first of all scotches her sister’s suggestion that they should dye their dressing gowns black: after all ‘nobody sees us’ (387). Dealing with Nurse Andrews whose “laugh was like a spoon tinkling against a medicine glass” (389) proves more difficult. Having invited her to stay a week longer as a guest, (“there was no getting over the fact that she had been very kind to father”) (389), Josephine is not up to dealing with the irritations she causes them. For example:

Nurse Andrews was simply fearful about butter... Josephine got very red when this happened, and she fastened her small, bead-like eyes on the tablecloth as if she saw a minute strange insect creeping through the web of it. But Constantia’s long, pale face lengthened and set, and she gazed away – away – far over the desert, to where that line of camels unwound like a thread of wool. (388)

Unable to deal directly with such problems, both women withdraw into private worlds of the imagination as they have done habitually over the years to protect themselves from their father’s contempt and unpleasantness. The servant girl, Kate, is yet another dominant personality whose rudeness in this case must be faced. Do they trust her? (Constantia was almost certain that Kate went to her chest of drawers when she and Josephine were out, not to take things but to spy.) Do they need her, even, now that father is gone? But Hankin thinks the sisters are unable to give Kate notice because being “not able to cook, and hence to *sustain life independently*, Josephine and Constantia are rendered unable by their past conditioning to make this decision or any other” (26). [My emphasis.]

The most terrifying prospect of all remains on Josephine’s “list of things to be done” (391). It reads: ‘Go through father’s things and settle about them.’ But “Father would never forgive them. That was what they felt more than ever, when two mornings later, they went into his room to go through this things” (391). Just entering his room is overwhelmingly daunting particularly so if performed *in the morning* for “It had been a

rule for years never to disturb father in the morning, whatever happened. And now they were going to open the door without knocking even” (392)... Father’s spirit is very much alive and it is a violent spirit, the spirit of a man who ‘shot his eyes’ (397) rather than glanced at people and whose dying eye “wasn’t at all a peaceful eye” (390). While Constantia glances nervously at the bed, Josephine believes “He was watching there, hidden away – just behind the door-handle – ready to spring” (393). Constantia wants to back out, to just ‘leave things’ as they have done in the past but when Josephine admonishes her for being weak Constantia suddenly:

did one of those amazingly bold things that she’d done about twice before in their lives; she marched over to the wardrobe, turned the key, and took it out of the lock. Took it out of the lock and held it up to Josephine, showing Josephine by her extraordinary smile that she knew what she’d done, she’d risked deliberately father being in there amongst his overcoats. (393)

Heather Murray writes:

Thus their chance to save themselves by radical action recedes. Constantia reveals a streak of suppressed violence which causes her ‘to breathe in a queer, panting way’ (393). Once, perhaps goaded by Benny beyond endurance, or, feeling he had all their father’s love, she pushed him into Round Pond, without staying to check whether he drowned or lived, leading Josephine off ‘with that awful callous smile’ which breaks out again after her shutting father in with his overcoats. (69, 70)

Disposing of the Colonel’s gold watch now surfaces as an unspoken imperative yet its execution is as fraught with difficulty as touching his clothes. Posting it to Benny in Ceylon was risky. Would the parcel get there? Could you trust a native with a watch? (For there is no real post, only runners ‘out there’.) Having no personal experience of matters outside of England both sisters immediately build a mental picture of the runner:

Josephine’s black man was tiny; he scurried along glistening like an ant. But there was something blind and tireless about Constantia’s tall, thin fellow, which made him, she decided, a very unpleasant person indeed. (394)

The true terror, of course, lay in the making of contact with brother Benny whose “right hand shook up and down *as father’s did* when he was impatient” (394). [My emphasis.] Much better, then, to give the watch to nephew Cyril for whom, Constantia recalls, ‘there was some little trouble about the time’ (398) at his last visit. But ‘trouble’ regarding time centres more on Constantia herself. ‘I say, Auntie Con, isn’t your clock a bit slow?’ Cyril had asked on his last visit. Constantia “couldn’t make up her mind if it was fast or slow. It was one or the other, she felt almost certain of that. At any rate it had been” (396). Time is a crucial factor in the story. Imprisoned for so many years in the present, in a reality Constantia identifies as ‘a kind of tunnel’ which in fact ‘wasn’t real’ (402) at all, leaves her confused and uncertain at the end of the story:

It was only when she came out of the tunnel into the moonlight or by the sea or into a thunderstorm that she really felt herself. What did it mean? What was it she was always wanting? What did it all lead to? Now? Now? (402)

Constantia is stuck fast in the ‘now’ but the story hints at the possibility of another kind of time. Marianne Dada-Buchel claims that in the last two sections of the story the daughters are trying to break away from the monopoly of linear, ‘male’ time:

The two temporal dimensions, linear and female time reinforce the opposition between the male and female in the text, which essentially portrays “Mansfield’s outcry against a universe in which the clock is a masculine principle”. (Klein, 436 qtd. Dada-Buchel, 105)

Constantia’s emergence from the tunnel “suggests a movement from a life or sphere based on masculine principles into a female space, with moon and sea as striking female imagery” (105). Such images connoting repetition, cycles and rhythms reinforce the concept of cyclical and female time. Supporting this, too, is the reference to Constantia’s secret-holding Buddha figure with its association with reincarnation, rebirth and hence, repetition. “Diametrically opposed to the moon is the image of the sun which was used as a measurement of linear time, and which, among other images, represents the tyrannic father in the story” (Grenfell-Williams, 79 qtd. Dada-Buchel, 105).

It is a ‘thieving’ sun that ‘presses’ into the Pinners’ window to touch Josephine gently just moments after the sound of the barrel-organ with its “perfect fountains of

bubbling notes” (401) prompts sexual awakening in Constantia. Temptation comes too late for both and in too ‘dangerous’ a guise:

She [Constantia] remembers the times she had .... crept out of bed in her nightgown when the moon was full, and lain on the floor with her arms outstretched, as though she was crucified. Why? The big, pale moon had made her do it. The horrible dancing figures on the carved screen had leered at her and she hadn’t minded. (402)

Constantia’s sexuality is clouded by the image of crucifixion. Her need for a loving relationship may be with another woman – she is the one who pushed Benny in the pond, who symbolically gets rid of father, whose image of the black runner was ugly ... who has never known her mother. Her capacity for defiance at the ‘horrible dancing figures’ has passed. Similarly, the note of transgression in Josephine’s ‘thieving sun’ leaves us unsurprised as she watches the sun linger on their mother’s photograph, thereby aligning them once again with the past: ‘If mother had lived, might they have married?’ (401). Mansfield reiterates here the women’s tendency to avoid self-reliance, to look for outside agencies to determine their courses of action. They do not escape her censure, despite the tragedy of their lives. Colonel Pinner, though figured as the one-eyed Cyclops devouring their lives, does not have to shoulder all the blame for the seeming inability of his daughters to take up independent womanhood after his death.

A picture of true courage is presented in *Life of Ma Parker*, a story of a single woman which ends in total despair. As in other pessimistic portrayals of lonely women, Mansfield here criticises society which is ultimately responsible for their marginalised lives. Ma Parker, a working-class woman, is seen here in relation to her employer a young ‘literary gentleman’, whose social position allows him to treat his elderly char as a creature devoid of humanity. Ma Parker comes in on Tuesdays to clean his flat:

It would take a whole book to describe the state of that kitchen. During the week the literary gentleman ‘did’ for himself. That is to say, he emptied the tea leaves now and again into a jam jar ... and if he ran out of clean forks he wiped one or two on the roller towel. Otherwise, as he explained to his friends, his ‘system’ was quite simple, and he couldn’t understand why people made all this fuss

about housekeeping. 'You simply dirty everything you've got, get a hag in once a week to clean up, and the thing's done'. (404)

The floor is always littered with toast crusts, envelopes and cigarette ends but Ma Parker expects no better. On odd occasions the literary gentleman listens to her talk of the 'hard life' she has had but to the world "[it] was just as if you were to say she lived in the basement-back at Number 27. A hard life!" (404). Of her thirteen children she has raised only six; her husband died of his baker's trade; her daughters went 'wrong'; her boys 'emigrated'; she cared for her sister's child for five years and finally was left to bring up a grandson, Lennie. On such occasions the literary gentleman "would [lay] aside his tomes and [lend] an ear, at least, to *this product called Life*" (405). [My emphasis.] Lennie was not a healthy child and on the morning of the story when asked after her grandson, Ma Parker replies, 'We buried 'im yesterday, sir' (403). The literary gentleman, unable to respond sensitively, is distant, detached and condescending. ("Poor old bird! She did look dashed," 403). Finally, as he leaves the house he remembers that a spoonful of cocoa seemed to be missing from the tin and he accuses her – gently and indirectly – of theft. Ma Parker continues her cleaning. Finally when she can bear thinking of Lennie no longer she stumbles out into the cold street wanting somewhere to go to cry out all the years of misery. But there is nowhere. The story turns on the plaintive phrase, 'I ain't got nothing', murmured earlier by the little boy whose grandma, wanting a kiss, had said, "Well, what'll you give your gran?" (404). Having now lost that last 'nothing,' her grandson's love, she indeed has nothing and no-one.

Stanley Burnell is probably the most well known of the Mansfield men. New Zealanders can place him affectionately into a specific moment in their economic and political history – an 1890's Liberal whose hard work and business acumen assured him of wealth and success in the new colony. He appears in 'Prelude' when the family are shifting house – itself a symbol of his upward mobility – and note that every member of the household (servants as well as family) is aware of an indebtedness to him. Stanley is a benevolent overlord, but an overlord nevertheless, who is conscious of his power and auspicious in his use of it. We note his considerateness towards servants as he asks Mrs Fairfield to see that Fred, the storeman, 'has a bite of something in the kitchen' (229) after delivering the children on the dray, but a day later we see him consciously check an impulse to give Pat, the coachman, a cherry as a reward for *not being too servile*

(240). This enables Stanley to remain comfortable with his current level of paternalism in the new liberal environment.

With the extended, and largely female family Stanley's status as provider allows him to be demanding – his stick must be found, his slippers brought, gratitude shown and flattery offered. But while Stanley boasts of his personal happiness with hearty self-satisfaction, currents of violence, discontent and yearning for escape seethe within others of the household, just under the surface. Self absorption blinds Stanley to others' needs and feelings but he tends to be saved from the reader's condemnation by his outward shows of expansive warmth and generosity of spirit along with his evident love for his wife, Linda. Linda's is a divided self, however, which both hates and loves him; she does not share his appetites for food, sex and vigorous activity, finding his physicality overbearing and sometimes frightening. She copes with it all by making him her big Labrador puppy which can be fondled, teased or even mocked. Emotionally she finds his dependence wearisome: he has to be constantly rescued as if from a burning house – from anxiety, from disappointment, and even from sister-in-law Beryl's flirtations. While Beryl too escapes only in fantasy, she faces the reality of entrapment within Stanley's household until she marries. His decision to move the family out of town makes this even harder to achieve but in the meantime she, like the rest, will bolster his ego. In typical Mansfield style two paragraphs in the story are tellingly juxtaposed. Beryl appears in one, standing by the window yearning for the amorous attentions of young men she conjures up in her imagination; immediately following this is a paragraph which begins: "The thing that pleases me," said Stanley... "is that I've got the place dirt cheap, Linda," (233). Thus illusion (Beryl's dreams) and reality (Stanley's property bargain) are juxtaposed in a way that uncovers the exploitative nature of Stanley's dealings – and deals – at home as well as at work. (Beryl's labour comes cheap, too, the reader notes, and Linda is indeed a business asset, albeit one that requires some skills in management.)

If the Burnell women are materially dependent on Stanley his need of them is just as great, for his identity is bound up with notions of expansion and continuance. Above all Linda must produce a son to inherit the dynasty he needs to establish. This brings us to the heart of Stanley's power, the power of the patriarchal father, not outwardly tyrannical but self-seeking and grounded in the hegemony of masculinity that will be reinforced and perpetuated by family structures. Such power is susceptible to challenge and change, however. As an individual Stanley is both an inheritor and a user

of his power-position. In withholding the cherry from the driver he retains, however temporarily, a measure of the power that is currently his, making an unconscious contribution to the construction of future paterfamilias figures and therefore to masculinity in general. In this example class and family overlap; the women in the household follow patterns of respect that are astonishingly similar to those of the servants.

In terms of the new Freudian theory of the time Stanley's story represents a successful negotiation of the Oedipus Complex for in psychoanalytical terms penis becomes phallus when desired by the mother. Hence Stanley "becomes powerful when desired by Linda and when he looks forward to being the father of a son" as Mary Paul explains in *Her Side of the Story* (69).

The double sidedness of Linda's personality brought out in response to Stanley's pressing needs is expressed partly by the image of the mirror. If logic and linearity are characteristic of masculine discourse Mansfield can be seen to challenge them as she develops procedures to break down the perceived incapacity of language to convey more than one meaning at a time. One technique involves a mirror to convey the idea of a dual self where the unconscious is the deeper, submerged self wielding an invisible power over the superficial, conscious self. Ironically these new Freudian concepts worked to confine as well as liberate female characters since the oedipal narrative privileges boy children over girls.

In 'Prelude' the mirror provides a visual image of two different selves to which characters are attracted or from which they are repulsed. Linda avoids mirrors, afraid to be betrayed by the unconscious self that dreams of escape, and in need of the imaginative protection of the prickly thorns of the aloe; Beryl adores the youthful good looks reflected by her mirror but her other self can be mocking or it can voice thoughts she dreads to entertain. In Raoul Duquette, of 'Je Ne Parle Pas Francais' a much more duplicitous character, the deeper, autonomous ego leads its own life "chasing up and down out in the dark there" (280). Personalities under stress (male as well as female) are the ones singled out for this more in-depth Mansfieldian scrutiny.

In Jonathon Trout we get a glimpse of a gentler model of masculinity. He is a less competitive, less materialistic man given to more contemplative pursuits. He exemplifies, perhaps, what a man could be if he had the courage to break free from the role society has traditionally imposed on him. Jonathon has dreams, loves music, reads books and is attracted to the unorthodox. In 'At the Bay' he is Stanley's foil, a skinny

bearded man who loves to talk, who can lie fully stretched on the water and let the waves pass under him. Stanley's morning dip, however, is a preparation for the day at the office, an exercise in fitness, competitiveness and splendid performance: 'First man in as usual! He'd beaten them all again' (443). But on this occasion Jonathon Trout with his 'mania for conversation' is there before him. His swim is spoilt.

At the end of the same day we see Jonathon in relaxed conversation with Stanley's wife, Linda, a close friend with whom he can share his deepest feelings. Compelled to return to his office on Monday, Jonathon feels his life is being wasted. He describes himself as an insect blindly dashing itself against walls, windows, and ceilings and never flying out again, while outside is a 'vast dangerous garden.... Undiscovered, unexplored' (464). Yet the opportunity to escape is not taken. To Linda who listens sympathetically, he gives the reason: 'Weak...weak. No stamina... No guiding principles' (465). But these, we suspect, are not Jonathon's words. They are the words of the world he has been acculturated into, Stanley's world. And as for Linda – as much as she longs to escape Stanley's world of action and bustle and the prospect of endless childbearing, her languid personality is suited to the comforts Stanley's income can provide. She too is trapped in its values. Wondering why such a talented man as Jonathon should remain a clerk, earning only half as much as Stanley, she reflects: 'What was the matter with Jonathon?' (464). In doing so she repeats the exact words used by her husband at the early morning swim. 'What was the matter with the man?' (443). Unsited to the energy and drive of the society that dominates their lives, Jonathon and Linda take refuge from time to time in these moments of togetherness. Mansfield puts the natural world in sympathy with them as the setting sun whose beams usually seem threatening and accusing to Linda, are tonight "infinitely joyful and loving" and the sea "breathe[s] softly as if it would draw that tender, joyful beauty into its own bosom" (465). Jonathon's voice, intoning, 'It's all, it's all wrong,' is a 'shadowy' voice signalling that he, like Linda, will not be one to initiate change in the world.

The chilly waters of Wellington Harbour leave him blue with cold at the end of the story. The encounter with Stanley has been unsatisfactory for both of them. Jonathon (being a Trout) is more than a match for Stanley as a swimmer but there is no joy for him in competition – or confrontation.

Traditional beliefs about gender roles and 'normal' sexual orientation are challenged throughout Mansfield's work. As she presents them, they are at least in part

the result of acculturation and experience. In an early New Zealand story, 'The Woman at the Store,' a settler woman suffering from isolation and neglect adopts aggressive 'male' characteristics when she takes the gun and shoots her husband for 'ruining' her life. Two predatory male visitors to the store misread the self-reliant vengeful figure she has become, seeing only the blue-eyed, if aged, blonde who has the reputation of knowing one hundred and twenty-five different ways of kissing. 'What's the old bitch got in store?' the question asked by one of them (112), takes on more than a double meaning and is set to backfire on Jo who is destined to be the next murder victim by the end of the story. 'In-store' is food, and embrocation for the horses; in store for Jo are not only sexual favours but an unexpected fate. Certainly the inhospitable character of the landscape whose "savage spirit walked abroad and sneered at what it saw" (112) is offered as partial explanation for the travesty of a human being the woman has become since the coach ceased calling at this remote rural store, but responsibility is also laid at the feet of others (men?) for in the puppetry image of sticks and wire there is a strong hint of manipulation. And in the final analysis there is no approbation for the forthright stance the woman takes. As Pamela Dunbar observes, "in appropriating the power of man" she does not acquire his status; her role simply changes "from that of passive Object to alien and inhuman Other" (48).

A curious slippage in terms of gender identity occurs in this story which is highly developed in later stories. The Narrator appears at first to be male, riding in with two companions, Jo and Hin. Jo's name is not spelt 'Joe' as is usual for a male. This is perhaps a subtle suggestion of personal vulnerability helpful for the plot – as this character is going to be outwitted by the woman. At the same time it can operate on a more general level as an oblique reference to his instability as 'male' subject. The Narrator, almost dropping off to sleep on his/her horse is greeted with, 'Been bye-bye?' (110) in baby talk usually reserved for children (or women?). This is the first hint of the narrator's identity. Sexual transgression is then alluded to in two incidents (the daydream and Jo's story) and in each case a mother figure appears in an inhibitory role. Then the Narrator bathes alone in the stream watched by the child concealed in the bushes. When Els later agrees to draw for them her offer comes in the form of a threat of exposure:

I'll draw all of you when you're gone, and your horses and your tent, and that one – she pointed to me – with no clothes on in the creek. I looked at *her* where *she* couldn't see me from. (114) [My emphasis.]

Only now is the reader certain of her gender. The effect of such blurring of gender identity here can demonstrate how the feminine can become subsumed into the masculine, given a harsh environment where 'macho' attitudes prevail. The character of the Narrator in this context serves as a foil to the Woman herself.

In 'Je Ne Parle Pas Francais' all the reader's certainties are destabilized. It is a story about corruption and everywhere we are faced with falseness, duplicity, revelation and concealment. With the story's title in our minds we meet Raoul Duquette, a young French writer and sexual procurer, who finds these exact words on a scrap of pink blotting paper in the café where he operates. For the would-be writer they may represent the artist's grand moment of 'flowering', the one moment of direct feeling referred to earlier in Mansfield's journal entry. But they also form the words of the first phrase uttered to Raoul by Mouse, the English woman who elopes to Paris with Raoul's friend, Dick Harmon, and from the circumstances surrounding them we are led to suspect that she may indeed speak French! We know she has already spoken to the porter though we can't be sure she used French; Raoul says in response to her, 'I'm sure you do,' and Dick, 'Of course she does.' So, does 'speaking French' refer to something more sinister, to the 'language' of Raoul's world of corruption? Would Mouse's 'I don't 'do' corruption' assertion parallel the modern-day youth's 'I don't do drugs', producing in the listener about the same level of scepticism, given the cultural improbability of such innocence? Just who are we to trust here? We view events entirely from the perspective of Raoul who, as the author of such works as *Wrong Doors* and *False Coins*, may well be the least reliable of the three. Mouse may not be the personification of victimhood we are led to believe; she too may be contaminated by the (English) society that produced her - as the constant pairing of Englishness and Frenchness might suggest. Certainly she is less upset when Dick deserts her than we might have expected. And her corruptibility exists at least in Raoul's mind when he fantasises about being her pimp to some 'dirty old gallant' - for, unable now to return to England since her friends think she is married, she may yet be forced into prostitution.

While the identity of Raoul's childhood seducer, the African laundress, is made crystal clear - she is black and female and thus doubly 'other' from the viewpoint of a white European male, the identities of the three major characters are never quite secure. Firstly Dick and Raoul can be read as alter egos. Dick in his Oedipal attachment to his mother and brutal rejection of Mouse parallels Raoul's unbreakable ties to the laundress and his dislike of women. Dick has a particular interest in modern French literature,

Raoul in English literature; Raoul has an English writing desk, Dick writes a letter that is ‘a shade too French.’ While the men’s national characteristics are overlapped, the gender characteristics of Mouse and Raoul are aligned. Raoul describes himself in terms of femininity – long eye lashes, small hands, plump, “almost like a girl, with smooth shoulders” (283) – and he is sexually attracted to Dick. Mouse is associated with boyishness. The two are linked by a reference to butterflies and their association with the stage show *Madame Butterfly*, recalling the trauma of desertion in that opera and conjuring up images of role play or acting a part – which points to the notion of gender as a social or artificial construct. Raoul wears a kimono embroidered with flowers (cross dressing?) while Mouse is a tiny creature half butterfly, half woman on the bottom of a cup (suggesting possible metamorphosis?). The humiliation and desertion common to *Madame Butterfly* and to the three characters’ lives combine to suggest the modern condition of both men and women as one of exile, whether figurative or literal.

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In this chapter I have shown that Mansfield’s fiction reveals the psychological effects that rigidly defined gender roles can have on both men and women. In particular I have chosen stories in which the power accorded by society to its men has had disastrous, even tragic consequences for women. The women characters’ rebellion in these stories is of a particular kind. In Kate Fullbrook’s words:

This is not the kind of fiction in which heroic individuals pit themselves against an obviously unjust society but a fiction in which the individual discovers herself as socially constructed, or is revealed to the reader as socially constructed, and yet possessed of previously unrecognised and unregarded elements of consciousness whose very presence indicates the potential difference of the self from how it has been perceived. The radical incompleteness and selectivity of social definition is thereby revealed. (32)

The potential for a different world that Fullbrook refers to here has been indicated in the character of Jonathon Trout – for a less aggressive and competitive masculinity. It appears in the principle of ‘female’ as distinct from ‘male’ time in ‘The Daughters of the Late Colonel’ and in the possibility of an alternative kind of discourse to the linear and logical in ‘Prelude.’ Much more tentatively Mansfield explores the possibilities

involved in bisexuality or the blurring of gender identities to produce more 'masculine' women or 'feminine' men. Mansfield is regarded as one of the few women writers who have gone beyond what *is* to what might be.

## Chapter Two

### Both Lover and Butcher of Trees

*Working Bullocks* (1926), a novel from the Australian bush tradition, could be expected to epitomise male mastery and sufficiency. Here we enter the predominantly male world of the karri forests of Western Australia, a world where mateship and competitiveness are paramount, where a man's physique determines the respect a community gives him and where women again function largely as background people, facilitating men in their endeavours. But the typically masterful male characters of Katharine Susannah Prichard do not carry the heavy authorial disapprobation we have observed in Mansfield's depiction of similar types. Prichard was working, albeit unknowingly, within the Australian nationalist code (which I discuss later) with its assumption that the male was "destined to enlarge the nation and its history, whereas women would frustrate [it]" (Walker, qtd. Schaffer, 30). This congruence with the popular hegemonic discourses of her time is confirmed by our knowledge of the author.

Surprisingly, for a woman who supported full political rights for Australian women, who marched with suffragettes in London, and who became an active speaker and campaigner for a political movement, Prichard upheld to the end of her life the principles of male dominance and female submission, especially in the home. She was not what would now be called a feminist, though her son, Ric Throssell, saw fit to label her maiden speech to the St Ives' Primrose League as "ardently Australian and feminist" in his biography (24). Arguing that "When women vote a great power for the purification and betterment of public life is brought into play" (qtd. Throssell, 24), she aligns herself with Anne Summers' God's police, women who felt compelled to regulate the morals of society as well as those of the family. Writing of his mother's marriage, Throssell comments, "She was afraid of [Jim's] careless extravagance; but believed it was necessary to show that she had confidence in him. A man had to be master in his own home, she said" (62). The business arrangements for her writing which Prichard entrusted to her husband came frighteningly 'unstuck' on several occasions and contributed no doubt to his breakdown.

Kay Iseman reflects on the dichotomy between women's public and private lives which is reinforced in Prichard's fiction. To a modern reader *The Pioneers* reveals real sexual and power politics within marriage, yet the novel shows "no awareness of the

author's consciousness of this dimension. Mary Cameron, with her strong nurturing spirit, and the adventurous Deirdre, tamed by Davey's love, stand in stark contrast to Prichard's professed beliefs in free womanhood" (Iseman, 77). In this novel, as in others that follow, strong women *expect* to be mastered by men. It is as if Prichard is trying to make this myth of masculinity work.

Prichard's ideal of men living in harmony with nature invariably involves conquest – sometimes of the land as in *The Pioneers*, but always of animals and women. Ideological constraints within male hegemony determined her life and go some way towards explaining her unfailing allegiance to male supremacy which she seems to be both consciously and unconsciously affected by. These attitudes come out in different ways in *Working Bullocks*. One of these is the need shown by the women characters for men to be strong.

In *Working Bullocks* Red Burke returns from the war to find that his brothers have sold up his bullock-team and he must now make a new life for himself. His bushman's resilience is evident in the opening scene which echoes with the battle cry of bullock-drivers in a colourful bush scene in which Red is seen to his best advantage – with a display of masculinity that prompts women to stand aside admiringly. Already in charge of a new 'contract' team, we see him cracking a long whip, in full control of the task, the team, and his 'swamper', Chris Colburn, to whom he issues instructions as they urge the gigantic animals forward. Chris's mother and his sister, Deb, pull off the track in their light pony-drawn spring cart in deference to the power of men and beasts approaching. But as if to remind us of man's fallibility as opposed to mastery, the big whim wheels drop into soft earth, bringing the whole unit to a halt. Chris begins to chop saplings for skids, while Red, "measure[ing] the log with his eyes, the position of the whip, the power of his team" (2) demonstrates both skill and experience. This is Red in *his* public world – "the Karri'll do me" (3) he calls to Mary Ann – contented, and in tune with the natural world. When Mary Ann looks at Red Burke she sees two men. The first is the impressive outer man of Red's world of work and the second, the more fragile inner man which Mary Ann's long experience of motherhood enables her to recognise:

She wondered how she could disapprove of Red Burke as he stood before her. Moleskins, worn as old leather, were tight on his thighs, leggings strapped the broad, hard shape of his calves. A grey flannel shirt, heavy with grease and dust, showed his breast the dark red of oiled

jarrah. The arm grasping his long-handled whip, sleeve torn from it, bare to the arm-pits, red and brown with sunburn, glint of fire in the hair on it, muscles and sinews strung out, flung its challenge.

“A powerful brute,” Mary Ann Colburn conceded. (5)

But as he approaches the more vulnerable side is revealed in eyes that are “shy, mistrustful, yet hopeful as a child’s...” a smile “that comes slowly, a face, sombre, immature and unhardened. A motherless foal,” Mary Ann concluded (5). Red joined his father ‘on the road’ almost as soon as he could walk; both parents, it seems, abandoned him early, leaving his bachelor uncle, Wally Burke, to bring him up. Early maternal separation is referred to several times in the novel, inviting the psychoanalytic interpretation that I offer.

Mary Ann Colburn is the mother of eighteen children. She, herself, is described here in terms of idealized male qualities of strength and stoicism. She is “a terror for work” (4) and she is “hard and straight as nails” (3). She is more than equal to the men she stands among but she succumbs to the ‘womanly’ impulse to flatter and defer. As Red approaches in this opening scene, she is anxious to show admiration and praise. She first refers jokingly to the “foreign languages” he must have learned overseas, judging by the language he uses around the bullocks; then she admires Peter Moody’s bullock team and this draws a warm response from Red; but when she comments sympathetically on the loss of Red’s own team, she offends. “Chris was mad when your brothers sold ’em so soon after the news you was dead got around” (6). By now “the smile had gone from Red’s face. Mary Ann Colburn was in the habit of saying what she thought with simplicity. But she saw she had blundered” (6). Each of the three aspects of this exchange takes on further significance as the narrative unfolds. The first involves a false connection between Red Burke and language which I explore in Lacanian terms. Red is not a swearing man as she would have it: still less is he the ‘speaking man’ of Lacanian theory:

Bill William’s voice broke across... harsh and threatening, with strings of oaths. He did not make the song of talk to the bullocks that Red did, give it the trolling melody. Men... liked to hear Red Burke getting his beasts over a stiff pull on the track. That was one of the odd things about Red, they reckoned. He rarely swore at this bullocks. (82, 83)

The second aspect involves possession, the pride in ‘owning your own’ which is worked out in the novel, first in terms of bullocks and later in terms of women. The third, in its

criticism of the Burke brothers, connects Mary Ann with the Burke family in a way that is to echo throughout the story. “There never was a good Burke” is a comment Deb will hear many times as her friendship with Red develops.

From veiled hints dropped throughout the story we gather that Mary Ann is Wally Burke’s lost love of many years ago. This might account for Wally’s reclusive nature and his bitter attitude towards women, and since he was Red’s primary caregiver, it might go some way towards explaining Red’s inability to communicate – with men as well as women. For it is this flaw in Red’s character that triggers the major crises of the narrative.

When Chris is killed Red must deliver the body to his family after the accident but he cannot face Mary Ann. Instead he ‘goes bush’ for nearly a year. In similar vein he avoids speaking directly to Leslie de Gaze who, he believes, deliberately wrecked his stockyards, preferring to solve the problem with a very public fist fight. Unfortunately everyone, including de Gaze, believes the fight is over Tessa Connolly. In a later incident when Tessa *is* to blame – when she blackmails him into cheating in a horse race – Red is again silent, this time in the face of community accusation and outrage. (On this occasion Red interferes with weights carried by the riders, causing his horse to lose the race and his friends to lose their money.)

Mary Ann is to suffer the death of two sons during the course of the story – Chris to a logging accident for which Red holds himself responsible, and Billy in an accident at the saw-mill where her husband, Tom, also loses an eye. In the face of so much pain Mary Ann holds the family together. Her only daughter, Deb, stands resolutely beside her, obedient, dutiful and hard working. Yet in the scene at Billy’s death-bed Deb cries that she wishes it were her, not Billy, and her mother concurs. Here Prichard is replaying the exact circumstances of her own brother Alan’s appendicitis operation with her journalist father, Tom Prichard, whose love she had, but whose approbation for her work she was never able to secure. At this point Deb is to learn that she is “not the most important member of the family” exactly as her creator did on that unforgettable day (*Child of the Hurricane*, 104). But Mary Ann is to ‘lose’ a daughter too. When Deb finally marries Red Burke at the end of the novel Mary Ann is the only character to see the tragedy of the situation: all it promises is a new breed of ‘working bullocks’ a new generation of workers to be exploited by the captains of industry. For by this time Mary Ann, unlike Red, has had the wit to profit from the new

understandings brought to the timber town by the revolutionary hero Mark Smith, whose name announces his Marxist politics.

Notions of conquest and possession also run through the depiction of sexuality. As people of the land both Red and Deb are identified with the rhythms of nature in the world of the bush, in the same way that Coonardoo, in the novel of the same name was “the well in the shadows” and “the spirit of the earth” (225). The celebration of sexuality in *Working Bullocks* as Drusilla Modjeska sees it, “is drawn in Lawrentian terms of male aggression and female submission and is portrayed from the male point of view” (234). When Red runs his hand over the stallion, “with gentle caressing movement” he is “as subtle as a lover in his desire for mastery” (47). Red’s lovemaking is paralleled with the taming of his brumbies, as is Warieda’s in *Coonardoo*. In Deb the relationship between sexuality and the environment is symbolised by a constant association with trees: “She might have been a tree growing, or a spring welling, deeply, quietly underground” (95), with all the ambiguity this implies in a novel whose men are both lovers and butchers of trees.

Early in their relationship Deb watches Red “with a dark brooding as if awaiting her fate, mistrustful, dispassionate, yet stirred by the instincts of her mating season” (97) and when Red watches Deb one afternoon as she rests with her father in the shade of the forest, he envisages not just a sexual relationship, but a fantasy of rape and murder, it would seem:

Deb! It was as if he had shouted to himself away at the back of his brain. Such leaping surprise and joyousness there was in the discovery... Red communed with himself, vaguely, sleepily, comparing her with women he had known... Tessa with her tricks... What was the game women were at?... He did not want to think of marriage right now. He was a brumby, Red told himself. He would take his mares when he wanted them, when and how. He remembered the Boss... He would take his mate like that... he would bite her flanks and she would spring to his passion, cry with delight as he held her. And she would be a woman like this girl, strong with animal instincts, undaunted.... Why not Deb?.. Presently he would move over and fold with her, he told himself. “And if the old man wakes I’ll kill him and throw him behind the dead tree there.”

Immediately after, as if waking from a dream, “a sense of guilt and rage, sombre, implacable, inundated him.” (89, 90)

Psychoanalysis can shed some light on this rather disquieting scene. Freud saw the child’s relationship with its parents as critical for the achievement of its ‘proper’ sexual identity. As Elizabeth Wright puts it:

The difficulties begin with the child’s dependence on the nurturing mother. Not only are there problems specific to the very formation of a self-concept in the initial separation from the mother’s body, but the love of the mother remains dominant in the early formative years. Inevitably, according to Freud, a perception of the father as rival in this love becomes insistent for the boy-child to the point where he is drawn into fantasies of the killing of this rival and of possessing the mother. This is the Oedipus complex... (14, 15)

I have already noted the atypical nurturing phase in Red’s life which in psychoanalytic terms may lead to inadequate ego-formation. The later Lacanian model, which is a re-reading of Freud’s theory, would explain it in terms of lack. At the crucial Mirror stage which marks the transition from mother-dependence to independence, from non-self to selfhood, he lacked the necessary mediation by the mother. Within the structure of this novel another woman (Deb) intervenes at a much later stage in the role of substitute mother. She will ‘compensate’ for Red as her mother has done for Tom, for the novel records a sense of disappointment in a masculine myth that does not measure up. It is reflected in Mary Ann’s misplaced idealization of Red Burke, seen first at the meeting in the forest. References to maternal milk and oral motifs associated with a child’s need for nourishment connect Deb with Red:

Red got a jet of milk in his face. It splashed over his cheeks, into his eyes and mouth. The warm, sweet fragrance suffused him. He sprang towards Deb, arms out to catch and hold her, his reaction instinctive and violent. But she, laughing and alert, had sprung from the box... (119)

Throughout the novel Red is torn between the city girl, Tessa, and the country girl, Deb. Tessa, however, is associated with ‘unnatural’ things: lipstick, corsets, teased hair and even soured milk. When Red is in town he is seen to be ‘contaminated’ by urban values, becoming an excessive drinker and thereby confirming the family reputation: “There never was a good Burke” (107).

In the healing forest where Red retreats after Chris's death, the Lacanian narrative is played out. The Mirror stage marks the entry to the Symbolic or language phase as the child moves from the Eden-like Imaginary towards self-knowledge. The moment of entry is a moment of 'jouissance' or jubilation but also a moment of misrecognition for the ideal image of coherence he thinks he sees is in fact neither 'ideal' nor 'coherent'.

For Red the forest is his Imaginary and the moment of recognition is his discovery of the young stallion which he knows he has the skill to capture and tame. "You're mine! You're mine my boy!" (21). Involving both lust and possession, it triggers his desire first for Tessa – the wrong woman (hence his moment of misrecognition) and later for Deb. Having eaten little for days he suddenly "found he was hungry – hungry for bread and tea, whisky, or beer and cheese, jam, onions, cabbage – food *of all sorts*" (21). And "with exultation" (21) he calculated how he would go about catching the stallion and breaking him in. When thoughts of Deb and her family leave him, the "Memory of the scent Tessa put on her dress [drifts] across Red with a queer quivering drive" (29). The Mirror stage is figured in scenes of the brumbies at the creek pool:

The pool mirrored rusty rough-haired backs and flanks, flowing tails and ragged manes when the mares and foals stood tranquilly drinking the clear cold water... The stallion nosed a young mare caressingly as she drank. He bit her flank; she squealed joyously. (22)

In the solitude of the bush where Red comes to terms with Chris's death, his 'rebirth' begins with the discovery of the brumbies and the subsequent breaking in of the stallion which will parallel his own emotional growth. His customary sullenness situates him as someone yet to be constituted as subject with the Symbolic. But as he develops a relationship with Deb "His voice [can] be heard rollicking gaily as he [calls] to the bullocks up and down hill on the track..." (92). The significance of the Mirror phase as a key moment in ego-formation is reinforced much later when "Deb's eyes lay in his. They made him think of the pool where he had first seen the Boss come to water" (84) for it marks the change that is to occur in Red. By contrast his own mirror image *displeases* him when he prepares to date Tessa, prompting him to put on the ('further contaminating') hair oil which he "sniffed with some disgust..." (54).

Mary Ann's dismay at the end of the novel was referred to earlier. After Billy's death she is converted to the marxist philosophy brought to the town by Red's new

labourer, Mark Smith. She becomes a successful campaigner for worker's rights and seeks an end to the exploitation of men as beasts of burden. But when the strike fails Mark leaves, and workers like Red Burke, though intellectually convinced of the rightness of the cause, return to their accustomed places in the work chain. So now as she watches Deb walk away with Red, Mary Ann calls out: "You're no better than the beasts you're driving – the pair of you. You'll be driven ... worked by them" (251). The two disappear with the bullocks into the forest whose "silences, whisper of leaves, and murmur of small birds" is "flung through by the *laughter of a butcher-bird, melodious and cruel*" (251). [My emphasis.]

This reminder of the political implications of the story, the ongoing industrial exploitation of timber workers in a capitalist society, allows us to be less surprised than we might otherwise have been when Red, glowing in his love for Deb, acknowledges his continuing attraction to Tessa:

And there was Tessa too! He smiled as his thought swayed to her... For the time being he had all he asked of life; believed he could have all he would ever ask. He was all a joyous, sensuous satisfaction. He had been hungry and was filled. Hunger and vigour were still his; but he carried his food with him. Deb was the promise of meat and drink as she walked beside him. He was intoxicated with rejoicing because of her. His lust made a song about her, trilling and warbling through all his fibres as a blue-bonnet was warbling in the prickly thicket and scrub of young redgum and karri saplings beside the path. Superb warbler, they called him. He was that, and so was Red, this morning. And there was Tessa – luscious as ripe fruit, a peach, one of those late golden peaches. She smelt like that! And ripe fruit is always good eating. (250)

The ripe fruit "always good for eating" signals an extension of the eating/devouring motif. At the purely narrative level, the novel in its celebration of lust or natural sexuality simply permits Red to legitimately (just 'naturally') think of both women at the same time. However there is also an allegorical meaning: capitalism, represented by Tessa and de Gaze (petite bourgeoisie and transplanted English gentry respectively) is, even at the end of the novel (which closes with the ongoing exploitation of the timber workers) still under threat. In some revolutionary future Tessa, the late golden peach, will be available to Red, the timber-worker, when the middle class is conquered. Within this mix of narrative and allegory the celebration of the man's

promiscuity allows the admiration for a forceful working class masculinity to be retained. In this uncomfortably paradoxical ending we can see the woman writer striving to retain her ideal of male mastery along with her socialist analysis.

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In popular imagination, images of the bushman-as-hero with his egalitarian values and his ethos of mateship exist within a tradition of Australianness which originated with Henry Lawson. As a unique Australian creation the bushman marked the country's difference from England, the parent culture. Over time the "voice of the bush" became the voice of Australia, and it was decidedly a masculine voice. As ideas of nationalism grew the myth of an Australian 'self' or national identity took shape. In a review of 1950's war novels, David Walker studied "the getting of manhood" and observed that all the novels managed to relate the performance of the Australian soldier to "an Australian tradition of physical prowess and manly bravado extending back several generations" (qtd. Schaffer, 29). The novels linked the returned soldiers of both world wars with their pioneering predecessors, the bushmen and the gold-rush digger. "The bush and the battlefields as opposed to the trivial and fragmenting life of the city, become the testing ground for Australian manhood. On both fronts, women are conspicuously absent" (Schaffer, 30). Walker makes the comment, cited earlier, that "the idea was deeply embedded in the culture that the male was destined to enlarge the nation and its history, whereas women would frustrate that end" (qtd. Schaffer, 30). Thus a specifically masculinist cultural identity became established. Schaffer notes the absence of women in the *Bulletin* of the 1890's, in the stories of Henry Lawson, in commentaries on the *Bulletin* and the Lawson stories, and in the writings of literary critics, historians and sociologists whether male or female throughout the twentieth century. Neglect of women, which may be an attribute of Western scholarship in general, as Schaffer concedes, is "particularly pronounced in Australian cultural studies" (30).

But women were not the only ones relegated to marginal positions in Australian culture: Chinese migrants and Aborigines were just as invisible. And not all men were privileged to be the arbiters of identity. Schaffer identifies at least three character types "vying for the title of true native son." There is the squatter, who has pretensions to the

gentry and is associated with English ruling-class values, (de Gaze in *Working Bullocks*) the selector who is often represented as an ignorant peasant and associated with Irish migrants or convicts, and the native bushman (a Red Burke character) who is defined partly through his opposition to the other two and partly through his relation to the land. Thus processes of inclusion and exclusion operate to determine the 'ideal' (and the question of who gets to make such a selection becomes significant). Finally when the Henry Lawson type is referred to as the 'true' Australian we are in the territory of liberal humanism which assumes the existence of an essence or truth that is to be found behind the representations/misrepresentations of historians, critics or other writers and producers of meaning. Schaffer writes:

Lawson's imagined presence as the founding father of the Australian tradition creates a centre through which a tradition evolves. The logocentric assumption of Western metaphysics that structure has a centre, that a play of elements can only take place within a total form, effectively limits and closes off the play of differences. This assumption, according to Derrida, rests on a concept which he claims is 'contradictorily coherent... the centre is not a centre.' The concept represents the force of a desire, a desire for certitude and immobility. It allows anxiety to be mastered. We desire a centre as a guarantor of being as presence. For post-structuralist writers, the desire to establish a centre, origins and truth coexists with the knowledge of the impossibility of the project. It coexists with the desire to affirm the endless play of difference which tries to pass beyond man and humanism. (36)

My point is that the concept of mastery whether of land, woman, beast, or of indigenous peoples is a concept of reductiveness. It limits the possibilities of diversity or plurality. Further, man's mastery of the land which in a nationalist tradition attempts to secure the illusion of coherent identity is known to be impossible in a post-modern world, as Schaffer has shown.

## Chapter Three

### Women Threaten But Mates Protect

*Man Alone* (1939) could be seen as an Englishman's view of New Zealand masculinity at a specific time in our history. From the first page of the narrative we are thrown into an all-male environment, a world social historians confirm as typical of New Zealand in the time between the wars. With Mulgan's particular narrative technique placing us always at one remove from the protagonist, we are presented with a kind of grand appraisal of the country - its landscape, its customs and its people (which in this case means its men). A certain objectivity is achieved by having a narrator retell Johnson's story - and from a distance in time as well as space, though there is a hint of romance in their having met "at one of those fishing villages in Brittany where everybody paints" (Intro).

Along with Johnson, the "new chum" (a term bestowing instant outsider status), who arrives in Auckland on an assisted emigrant's ticket, we enter the new country with the same spirit of optimism felt by the early colonists: "The way people talked about it in France made it seem like the only country in the world" (7). But here any resemblance to the idyllic New Zealand of *Spur of the Morning* or *A Pilgrim's Way in New Zealand* by Alan Mulgan emphatically ends. The novel has even been seen as an attempt to bury a father. John Mulgan was embarrassed by his father's literary efforts which he saw as cosy, superficial and pictorial. But he was obliged to seek publication for both his novel about life in Auckland at the turn of the century and his travel book since he, John, was living in England at the critical time. Patrick Evans claims that "*Man Alone*" doesn't simply bounce off the father's writing; it tries to repel it, to extinguish it, to burn it out and destroy it completely, and all it represents" (130). He believes the challenge the Phoenix generation made to its literary "parents" is seen at its sharpest in this father/son relationship. The group of young New Zealand men who established the literary magazine, *Phoenix*, in the nineteen thirties, identified most strongly with young British writers who were challenging the established order. And so, because of his determination to counter "a false way of seeing, Johnson's story seems calculated to destroy forever anything positive about New Zealand" (Evans, 131).

From the first page John Mulgan builds in hints of unease. Disillusionment, however slight, begins even with talk of the weather as Johnson's companion at the ship's rail recalls spending his last two nights in Auckland three years ago, "cold as death" (8) waiting in the wharf-sheds for sailing time. Johnson is surprised: he didn't think it was ever cold here. And the returning kiwi soldier with his "shrunken and pock-marked" face and his shrapnel-damaged arm becomes, himself, a reflection of the physical, cultural and emotional landscape Johnson is soon to become a part of. Self-absorbed, the man coughs, lights a cigarette and looks ahead to his own future:

'It's home again now for me, mate,' he said, 'and there'll be the wife and kids and all there waiting for us.' He spoke without enthusiasm (8).

It is a masterful opening, foreshadowing in the thumbnail sketch of a single character, the bleak and desolate New Zealand Johnson will encounter, a country peopled by men ill at ease in female company, ill-equipped to deal with family responsibilities, and socialised into the exclusive culture of men.

When Johnson enquires about accommodation in Auckland the soldier jumps at the chance to delay his family reunion:

'I tell you what, son, we'll go along there first and get you fixed up.'

'You'll have people meeting you,' Johnson said.

'That's right, but they won't mind waiting... We'll do that and have a drink. I won't probably be seeing fellows like you again for a time.' (9)

The prospect of the loss of male companionship built up over the years overrides the joy or even the sense of responsibility a soldier might be expected to feel on return to civilian life. Jock Phillips comments on the ambivalence of man/wife, man/family feelings of the time. For him *Man Alone* shows just how far these men's reactions grew out of their long involvement in male culture and the values and loyalties bred by that culture:

From the time when they left their mother's care and entered school, males were encouraged to repress their more sensitive feelings lest they be thought of as effeminate; they were instilled with admiration for men of physical toughness and indifference to pain such as soldiers and rugby players; they enjoyed good times drinking and skylarking with their mates and regarded friendship as an undemanding carefree matter. (*A Man's Country*, 258)

Women make only fleeting appearances in *Man Alone* and Johnson, significantly, remains single. To marry meant to 'settle down' and though Johnson is constantly exhorted to buy land or cattle in New Zealand he never actually relents. A model of male self-sufficiency, he is still moving on when the narrator last hears of him. In his research into the newspapers and magazines of the period, and specifically in the humour pages, Jock Phillips identifies the houseproud wife, the spendthrift, the nag – all stereotypical images of thirties' womanhood. Males were depicted in situations where marriage was feared, escape desired, and nostalgia for lost youth keenly felt (253). The women of Mulgan's novel are disgruntled, suffering ill-health or crazy; seen through the eyes of male characters they appear fickle or unworthy of trust.

At the 'National' on that first day in New Zealand we watch Johnson and the reluctant returnee join others in the bar where the talk is "mostly about the war" ... and where "no-one got merry with the drinking" ... and there was "a quietness and sickness over everything and over the other men in the bar" (9). His introduction to New Zealand women is even less encouraging. At dinner he is served by "a fat, white-faced, dark-haired waitress" who will not smile at him as she serves him, "resenting him and the work he caused her" (10). In the street he meets a prostitute who will not go with him to the National. Missing the significance of this he takes her to another bar where he learns from strangers that 'our Rose' is diseased. He agrees not to touch her but she goes off with another man even before he has the chance. Next morning, rising late, he orders breakfast only to be greeted "disfavourably" by a girl who refuses him breakfast or even a cup of tea. As she closes the door he is suddenly prompted to check his pockets against possible robbery during the night.

Two factors contribute to the relative ease with which Johnson secures work. The first is his conviviality in the bar, his willingness to 'shout a round' or to allow his accent to be good humouredly mocked. The second is his status as ex-serviceman. Tom Blakeway, the red-faced farmer who passes him in the vestibule, reluctantly offers a job after a hard look and searching cross-examination: "I reckon we ought to help fellows that were in the war,' the big man said heavily" (17).

Food, sex and work – a man's basic needs – and all offered so grudgingly, the novel seems to say. But Johnson is resilient. At Blakeways he meets Scotty with whom he shares a workers' hut. His induction to the Blakeway household includes a 'run – down' on the women: 'The missus is all right. Her scones is good... The old girl (Blakeway's mother-in-law who spends the day, restlessly, in her rocking chair)... is

crazy as a coot' (20). A daughter, Eileen, has left the farm and gone to town for work. (A tinge of betrayal is conveyed as this information is related.) Blakeway's wife works in a "dark kitchen" taking phone calls for her husband, cooking for the men and caring for the old lady in her black dress and white lace cap, the garb of a more elegant past. A "Queen Victoria grown thin," she symbolizes the fate of farming women in this harsh, rural environment and prefigures an unhappy future for Mrs Blakeway herself. The repetitive daily life of the women is no less monotonous for the men: "Milking at Blakeways was as much like working in a factory as anything else. It passed the first day as it did in all the three years he was there..." (19). As the nullity of daily existence settles on Johnson he learns what it is to be a New Zealand male and how to join in:

He got to know the dates of the race meetings and where to get beer in town at most times, and the story of the 1905 match when Wales beat the All Blacks by one try to nil, and why it was necessary to have a farmers' government to protect the real interests of the country. (20)

Paul Day, in his autobiography of Mulgan (1968) juxtaposes the much quoted paragraph (above) with the words of M. K. Joseph in 'Secular Litany' fifteen years later:

Saint All Black

Saint Monday raceday

Saint Stabilization

Pray for us.

The monotony of life for young men on the land, echoed in Mulgan's phrase – "and all the time the warm rain came down and the grass grew thick and green and the cows came into the milking shed heavy with cream" (21) is broken only by Saturday night socializing. Johnson takes a passing interest in Mabel, the daughter of a neighbouring farmer – "Mabel, at twenty-three, strong, solid and wanting a husband". He kisses her in the back of the car and even thinks of marriage but in a long look at Mabel's parents he sees himself and Mabel in a generation's time:

His face was grizzled over a drooping grey moustache, but the lines of his face were well formed and well fed. His wife... was a short plump woman with arms as powerful as a horse's leg but her feet were troubling her. (22)

Mabel's father's advice on choosing a wife is to find a woman who can work like a man on the land, (though his own wife's health is clearly failing already). But Johnson moves on with Scotty. When the two return much later they call on Mabel, now a

storekeeper's wife with two children. Scotty, ever suspicious of women, hastens to reassure Johnson of the wisdom of his earlier decision:

‘You’re well out of that, Johnnie,’ Scotty said afterwards as they waited by the road to pick up a lift. ‘She’s a mean woman, you can tell it by the way she watches her husband while he eats.’ (43)

As Phillips puts it, “Prostitutes were not the only women to be perceived as objects by the world of mates. The scorn of women cemented the bonds of mateship and reinforced its exclusive nature” (*A Man's Country?* 36).

As jobs get harder and harder to get the two men are reduced to frequenting relief depots and joining food queues. Johnson confides that the government is ruining his ‘system.’ His system, as he explains to Scotty is the “keep on working and moving, it’s the hard work for the good time and never stay long anywhere” (45), a young man’s ideal which Scotty cautions against. His dream of the two of them “living and farming by themselves” (43) is thwarted by the Depression. Back in the North they get caught up in the Auckland riots where Johnson gets involved in a scuffle with police, following an attempt to rescue Scotty from police brutality. As Phillips observes, “looking after an injured or sick friend” is one of the archetypal experiences to be found in colonial memoirs and novels’ (*A Man's Country?* 27). Forced to flee, he heads south stealing a ride on a railway truck and finally taking up life as a single man again on a King Country farm.

Stenning, his new employer, also has marital advice for Johnson: ‘You ought to get married... you’ll need someone to keep your house if you get settled...’ (104). He has his wife’s sister in mind but Johnson gets involved with Stenning’s wife, Rua, who is given the role of initiator in the liaison. In truth, Johnson “did not want to be disturbed by Rua” (110). She is a threat to mateship, even the kind that can be enjoyed with a taciturn man like Stenning, a threat to the kind of camaraderie he understands and is comfortable with:

Johnson and he had never talked more than was necessary; but they had talked about the farm and the stock and the work that was to do, and had discussed and argued with equality. (14)

When a woman disrupts this relationship Johnson must leave. But Rua, confirming the reputation claimed for her by the cream lorry driver who brought him to the farm (‘She’s a bitch, that’s all’) (76), visits Johnson’s whare late at night only to be caught by Stenning. In the ensuing fight Stenning is killed.

Johnson takes to the bush, to the cleansing forces of nature where he remains for many weeks, surviving appalling weather conditions until, on the point of starvation, he stumbles into the hut of an old recluse: 'Howdy, mate,' is the old man's greeting, 'Come on in. Shut the door' (150). In the opinion of Jock Phillips, the message of the novel... "if it is not already clear, is hammered home – women and especially wives threaten [a man's] safety, and mates protect him" (255). While the old man feeds and clothes him, the pattern of feminine betrayal and male support continues as Johnson's subsequent reappearance is reported by Rua and his next disappearance is aided by an old mate, Petersen. Back in England Johnson's brother's wife, whom he recalls as a woman 'pale and mean with dislike' of Johnson, resenting, we can only assume, the brother-to-brother financial loan that had enabled Johnson to be smuggled in on an oil-tanker, exhorts him to move on – for the sake of her children (197). He departs, not unhappily, in the company of a personable Irishman, heading off to the Spanish war. Johnson's New Zealand experience, we are told, was worse than a war. He couldn't talk about war but he agreed to tell the narrator "worse things about the peace"... the "bit in between" (Intro).

We do not see Johnson in love; indeed emotion plays little or no part in the novel. But in the tradition of male romanticism a softer side of his nature comes out in his responses to the physical environment which are often not shared by other characters. Working on the coastal scow with Peterson, "he was alive with the sun and the sleepiness of salt air and the long days at sea" (36). In statements like "Those were good times for him" Mulgan registers with classic understatement both Johnson's contentment for the moment and his taciturn personality in general:

Tom Blake, the Maori cook, would have disappeared ashore and Johnson and Petersen would be sitting there, the deck just lifting to the swell from outside the bay. They would sit there and smoke and talk, though not much, and watch the moon coming up in the sky and the lights ashore, and the riding lights of the yachts and their own light on the mast-head shaking slowly across the sky. (35)

Congenial male company and just enough work for moderate wages were the two essential ingredients for his happiness.

When times are not good Johnson is frequently uplifted by glimpses of Mt Ruapehu. On the first occasion, riding out from the Blakeways' into the pumice country with Scotty, it appears in the distance "dwarfed and toylike" (25):

It was a clear day with a heat haze on the hills... the hot sun shimmered on the snow peaks of Ruapehu. Johnson had never seen a snow mountain before... It's bloody marvellous country," he said. "By God, Scotty, I wouldn't mind climbing that mountain there". (25)

But Scotty is unimpressed: 'That's a daft idea,' he said (26). Released from dairy farm routines Johnson is enjoying the sense of freedom involved in leaving one place of work for another, but Scotty, older and more concerned about economic security, is already worrying about their prospects for farming in such dry, windswept country. On the second occasion in his flight from police in Auckland, Johnson has just spent a miserable night in a railway waiting room when the sky clears and "the white snow that was Ruapehu" rises above him while all around him, below the snowline is "dark bush" (72). Later, at Stenning's it takes on a more obvious metaphoric significance, foreshadowing the coming murder as its glaciers rise "red and bloody to the peaks" and it seems closer. "He had seen the mountain before, but never at such close quarters" (79). The dark bush encroaches further, this time... almost to the yard at the back of the house (80) as the "hushed roar of the snow river" that will be Johnson's path to salvation goes by. But in the early days work at Stenning's had been hard and satisfying:

Johnson could not like Stenning, he was too sullen and unattractive a man, but he liked working with him. He admired his great forearms and his skill with an axe and the way he drove at the work in a fury of accomplishment. (89)

On good days when the sun shone it seemed the "best life in the world" and Ruapehu would "shine in the sun" so that the black rocks... in the ice were plain to see and the green on the glaciers... and the bush not ominous but "blue with haze." On such an occasion Johnson asks Stenning as he had asked Scotty, 'Did you ever climb that mountain?' and the reply is identical: 'God no, now what would I be doing that for?' (89). Stenning is running his eyes down the line of a *half*-built fence and thinking about the winter's work. Scotty and Stenning see only economic potential in a landscape (the colonists' gaze). Ruapehu is dazzling white and the hills are hotter than ever at Christmas time when Rua makes her play for Johnson – and when rumours of their affair reach the township there are black swirling clouds around the peak and a thunderstorm that rages for hours.

Paul Day, acknowledging that the mountain clearly stands for something more than itself, suggests that it stands for the value system of an older culture, one that transcends the dull, work-weary materialism espoused by the hardworking New Zealanders whose lives the book documents. But I suggest a double image: that Ruapehu is both inspiration and threat, that as a large body of land surrounded by menacing bush which moves ever closer to Johnson, it also becomes land-as-lust symbolising the force to *possess* that Johnson, in finally espousing New Zealandness as he does, only just manages to resist. At every step of Johnson's journey from the men at the 'National' on his first night, to Blakeway's, Thompson's, Stenning's and even on Petersen's scow, Johnson is advised to buy land, to settle down. But Johnson finally opts for freedom to move on and as he finally heads north seeking escape he looks back at Ruapehu "pleased to be leaving it behind" (168).

Crossing the eerie Rangipo desert into Onetapu, the place of shivering sands, is Johnson's manhood test. Here the forces of wind and rain momentarily hold him captive but he makes his way into the grim Kaimanawa Ranges in driving rain and finally feels "surrounded and drowned in the hills and bush, safe and alone and submerged" (139). For a time he shelters in a cave "more comforting to him than most homes had been" (142) but Nature is a deceptive mother for here, lulled into a false sense of security, he begins to dream and to lose interest even in hunting birds for food. He has to fight this weakness and leave the cave, traditional (Freudian) symbol of the womb, and go on. Everywhere the feminine principle threatens.

Paul Day notes the affection Johnson carried for the country – "the peace of Northland, the brooding presence of the great mountain... the radiant Hauraki Gulf..." (115) but the comfortless, bleak elements in the landscape are the ones that predominate: and we may recall the original title – *Talking of War*. Mulgan's English publisher rejected the title making three other suggestions including *A Man Alone* which Mulgan modified. Omitting the article lent a rather more universal character to his hero and suited his intention of presenting a rugged, objective view. Accordingly it began a tradition in New Zealand literature, man alone figures becoming a distinguishing mark of the thirties and forties.

Even though it documents a time of peace, *Man Alone* is strongly influenced by war, particularly as a defining experience for masculinity – or indeed for literary credibility. Kai Jensen claims that serving in war conferred masculine authority on writers like Davin, Glover and Mulgan – "our most distinguished soldier writers" (62).

Their war experience, he observes, tended to translate less into stories of personal experience than into harsh new literary styles admired as a mark of mature writing. Laurence Jones named Mulgan and Sargeson “crucial models for a generation of fiction” (34) but feminist critics were later to decry “that harsh, laconic, bitten-off masculine dialect... installed as the dominant discourse...” (Bunkle et al., xxiii). In Jensen’s view war offered male writers a new closeness with ordinary men “all wearing the same uniforms and facing the same dangers” (58). When Mulgan wrote of front-line experience in his book *Report on Experience* he noted:

In war when you are working well together, you find the sober pleasure of working in concert with friends and companions and at the same time feeling pride in yourself for the part which you can play as an individual. This takes place against a background of issues which are large enough to be impressed in your mind as life and death, and victory and defeat. I believe this fact to be one reason why men are happy in war-time. Honest men know that war is to be fought and destroyed for the suffering and pain and crime that go with it. But honest men will also admit that they themselves as individuals have been happy in war-time and some of them have afterwards tried to find the same things in peace and always failed. (76-77, qtd. Jensen, 58)

These soldier writers, Jensen writes, “seemed close to that ideal combination of literature and manliness, the whole man” (59).

Not surprisingly Mulgan’s New Zealand is figured as a site of battle. It has a violent death as its climax and its imagery is drawn from war. From the dull staleness and sense of sickness which seems to clothe the city of Auckland when Johnson arrives, we are taken into a countryside of pocked and cratered farmland, meeting shell-shocked ex-servicemen and farmers with the names of guns (Stenning, Thompson). The fight is against the stock firms, the banks or the land itself. The enemy is just less visible, less immediate, than in warfare. For the males of this generation war is everywhere, as Patrick Evans observes. At the front “life [was] grim, but at least you [got] to shoot people in the head” (131).

Scotty is always something of an outsider in male company because he hasn’t been to war: “I wasn’t in the war,” he told Johnson. “No, boy, no war for me. M’chest’s bad so they said. It’s a good thing it’s over now” (20). But it isn’t over for any of those who went there, particularly Thompson whose farming venture in the “bone-dry blasted

hills" (26) is more than a match for him. At night he talks to Johnson persistently about the war:

Thompson had an obsession about the war. He was going over it in his mind again, remembering every piece of it, the battles and the men and the names of places and talking about it till Scotty shouted: 'Christ, turn it in. I wasn't at the war' and Thompson said nothing, looking at him, pale, gaunt, contemptuous. (28)

Thompson is still in the war, locked in combat with the unresisting land. Images of blood, tales of lonely death and attempts at heroism affirm the general respect for war. Finally it becomes clear that Thompson's battle with the land will be lost and Johnson moves on alone, sorry to leave Scotty, but otherwise without regret.

Evans claims that writers of the period saw themselves as soldiers and their task as some kind of military mission:

In this they affirmed their masculinity for they were at heart a group of Kiwi blokes, and the small number of women who were initially associated with them found no place in the literature... Far more important than women to the young men of *Phoenix* was the problem of reconciling the role of the artist with the machismo of warrior society. (77)

## Chapter Four

### Living With Lack

*The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) belongs to a group of mid 1940's Hollywood films which exposed the vulnerability of conventional masculinity. It would seem that World War II and the immediate postwar situation precipitated a crisis of faith, a loss of belief in the whole ideological system underpinning American society – including free enterprise, big business, the family, the American Dream itself. For some filmmakers the old vraisemblance would not do. Male characters who were not heroic, who in fact epitomised lack rather than sufficiency began to populate the screen. In 1946 and 1947 three films in particular portrayed masculinity in ruins – but of these *The Best Years of Our Lives* was the most extreme. While *The Guilt of Janet Ames* (1947) presented blatant and sustained images of male inadequacy, it ultimately called upon its female subject to deny them – so that the discomfort of the viewer was removed by the disavowal. In *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) male sufficiency was largely restored by the end of the film but *The Best Years of Our Lives* makes no attempt to resolve the crisis of male castration, exposing it repeatedly and sustaining it to the very end.

The film's ironic title refers to the fact that many servicemen had the best years of their lives in wartime. In their readjustment to civilian life they became the victims of dislocating peacetime forces. In all three films referred to above a 'hero' returns from World War II with a physical or psychic wound which marks him as deficient and renders him incapable of functioning smoothly in civilian life. In *The Best Years of Our Lives* the horror is trebled as we watch the social disintegration of returnees from each of the three armed forces.

In the opening sequence we meet three U.S. servicemen at an airport terminal trying to arrange flights home. At the counter stands Fred Derry, a glamorous airforce officer returning home with no obvious scars of war. Beside him, naval rating Homer Parrish provides the first scopic trauma of the film as he signs the passenger list with two prosthetic hooks replacing the hands he has lost in combat. Fred's reaction foreshadows the shock that is shortly to be registered by family and community at the 'otherness' of demobilized men. Al Stevenson, an older army sergeant, is visibly

'whole' but betrays his neuroses during the flight home as he voices concern about rehabilitation.

Tensions are eased as magnificent countryside in broad panorama displays the land the veterans have ostensibly fought to preserve. Director William Wyler's innovative camera techniques involved deep focus and long takes, devices he claimed gave the viewer 'choices' and time to reflect, devices that become crucial to our interpretation of events. As the group relaxes a little they talk of family and home, and Fred reveals his modest aspirations:

Fred: All I want is a good job, a mild future and a little house big enough for me and my wife. Give me that and I'm rehabilitated.

But once they land, Fred's easy confidence and self-esteem are to be challenged to breaking point.

While the first night at home proves deeply troubling for Al and Homer, Fred has difficulty in even locating his home. First, his wife is not at his father's where she used to live, then he cannot find her workplace, and finally he cannot get into her apartment. Closed doors become a motif for Fred. At last he agrees to spend the night at Al Stevenson's but is to suffer further ignominy when a nightmare reveals his worst combat memory, and he finds himself being comforted by Al's daughter, Peggy. This is to be one of Wyler's many displays of male lack. Further, in covering Fred's eyes with her hands as though to block out the scene of terror, Peggy locates him on the side of spectacle – as object not subject, inverting the conventional scopic paradigm. Peggy strokes his face and whispers repeatedly: 'Go to sleep, go to sleep,' as she induces him to lie down again. And this moment of personal revelation marks the onset of *her* desire for *him*. Thus there is a gradual ascendancy of female over male potency. The same soothing gestures of mother or nurse are to be repeated in scenes in which Al is comforted by his wife, Millie, and Homer, by his girlfriend, Wilma.

The importance of the female role in the 'official' (state) recovery process cannot be overstated. In anticipation of severe veteran adjustment problems, a body of 'advice' literature was circulated in communities across America. A major role was prescribed for the traditional caregivers, who were to expect drinking binges, excessive male bonding, and unwillingness to return to work, as problems to be systematically worked through with tolerance and love until the male subject was restored to his former dominance in home and workplace. And movies, of course, did an even better job in this education process. When Peggy reassures her father who is suffering

awkward discomfort on his first night home, she says: 'Nice to have you around, Dad. You'll get us back to normal.' But Peggy has already moved further on than Al can comprehend. We have to strain to catch his short reply: 'Or maybe go nuts myself.'

Fighting prejudice and ignorance, Fred actively pursues employment, but, without the institutional hand-ups available to Al who returns to his former banking job, or the support of extended family offered to Homer, he finds his current skills and recent experience everywhere inappropriate. Finally he returns, humiliatingly, to his old job at the soda fountain in a local drugstore. His whole career as fearless bombardier is trivialised and mocked in a scene in which a child releases a toy plane, spinning it across the shop in order to shoot it down. As the hand of a shopper stretches out to ground it, we recognise Peggy Stevenson – once again Fred's rescuer, in the 'privileged' role of witness to male insufficiency. Here again the scene is emotionally charged with female desire – soft focus, loving look, long take. Peggy's growing love for Fred and her acceptance of all that he stands for – including the disintegration he is beginning to represent – is reinforced that night when she announces her intention to break up his marriage.

At home things go badly for Fred. His young wife, Marie, once in love with his uniformed good looks and ribbons, now cannot cope with his low salary and shabby clothes. Her attitude to Fred's 'difference' contrasts sharply with Peggy's:

Marie: Are you really alright... in your mind? Can't you get these things out of your system?... the war's over. Come on – snap out of it!

But Fred's war is not over as his nightmares show. Kaja Silverman in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* writes:

Ironically the film here entrusts Marie with its clearest articulation of the dysfunction which results when the ego is flooded with excessive excitation. The war has infiltrated Fred's "system," and that trauma has not yet been "bound." (Silverman, 79)

She explains elsewhere that masculinity is particularly vulnerable to the unbinding effects of the death drive because of its ideological alignment with mastery (61). Fred is locked into a compulsive repetition with no possibility of mastery.

The trashed bomber scene, metonymic for junked war veterans, marks the nadir of the negativity surrounding Fred. We catch him at a military airport trying to get a plane out – east or west, it doesn't matter. "Because the war has invaded his psyche," Silverman writes, "his homelessness will be equally acute wherever he goes"

(Silverman, 80). There is a very emotional shot in medium close-up of Fred's father reading out with pride his son's citation for distinguished service which cuts dramatically to a long shot of Fred walking among rows of scrapped aircraft. The deep focus and the long take serve to diminish both Fred and the planes, while the white light suffusing the whole field prepares us for the surreal scene to follow. Though stripped of engines and propellers, the planes, standing in their neat lines, still seem to convey an operational efficiency that Fred was so recently a part. There is even a momentary illusion of a triumphal arch achieved by the alignment of the sloping wings of adjacent planes within a single frame.

As Fred climbs into one of the planes and dusts off the seat, he becomes a dark silhouette in the cavernous cock-pit. The camera cuts to an exterior reverse shot and we see him through the plexiglass window. Following his glance to the furthest nacelle at Right, we go with the camera as it pans Right to Left, pausing at each nacelle in a kind of preparation-for-departure ritual while the sound track provides a rising engine noise. Then, a rapid dolly from extreme long shot to wide angle close-up of the nose, tilting upward at the very last moment, allows us to look *up* at Fred... Perhaps we are being invited to revere him one last time?

But as bomber and bombardier become one, fused in the plexiglass screen, we distance ourselves again – and the sound track drowns out everything. The final head-on approach conveys the awesome power of the killer machine even as its total powerlessness, its manifest lack – no engine, no propellers – stares us in the face. Silverman writes:

When Fred imagines himself aloft once again on a bombing mission he detonates the dominant fiction. At that moment he escapes social rationality, opting for the non-ego over the ego, the threatening outside over the coherent inside, and death over life. (Silverman, 81, 82)

Silverman's "dominant fiction" involves the ideological systems of society referred to earlier and includes "the images and stories which cinema, fiction, popular culture... draw upon and help to shape" (Silverman, 30). Yet Fred's scars remain invisible to the everyday world. He steps out of the bomber into the sunshine to discuss job prospects with the salvage man and as he does so he must endure yet another insult:

Salvage man: I see. One of the fallen angels of the Air Force. Well, pardon me if I show no sympathy. While you glamour boys were up in the blue yonder, I was down in a tank.

The scrapped planes are due to be reconstituted into housing, a final metonymic touch in which Wyler leaves us to link aircraft reconstitution with human salvation and the rebuilding of a nation.

Just how we see Fred's future depends on the choices we make in the final scene where Fred is best man at Homer's wedding. If we go with the sub-text, focusing on the *tensions* of the *mis en scene* (the grim facial expressions of the family members, Al's grip on Millie's arm) and the *disconnections* (the best man is positioned apart from the groom, the bridal couple stands apart from the rest), we see a picture of the old 'reality' in ruins. And when Peggy's glance meets Fred's outside the diegesis their scopical reunion becomes a joint rejection of it. *The Best Years of Our Lives* speaks to a crisis of faith in the collective ideology of a nation whose very linchpin was the privileging of masculinity. Fred Derry's heroic version of masculinity, first damaged by the war, is then battered by the postwar recovery period. His prospects of total 'recovery' are unresolved by the film.

Homer's story differs markedly from Fred's. Returning home with metal hooks for hands, he is a spectacle of lack. Yet the dexterity he displays in the use of his hooks, first to write with a pen, then to light a cigarette, and later to eat and drink, proves that the injury was sustained some time ago and that the navy's efforts to rehabilitate him within its own confines have been successful. Amongst this world of men he can be cheerful and uncomplaining and perform everyday tasks with ease. But as Al observes: 'They couldn't train him to put his arms around his girl, to stroke her hair.'

The question of Homer's masculinity arises on the journey home as the three exchange confidences, for each is returning to a long-term heterosexual relationship. Homer's concern is that Wilma will be too young to cope: 'Wilma's only a kid. She's never seen anything like these hooks.' Silverman comments on this remark:

Homer here articulates the thematics of his amputation – the thematics of an intolerable difference, accessible to vision, which defines its carrier as both other and inferior, and which confers upon its viewer an unwanted knowledge. The comparison between Homer's disfigured arms and the female body within the classic psychoanalytic account of sexual difference becomes even more striking when he associates Wilma's scopical ignorance with her youthfulness, and imagines that her affection will be unable to survive the unveiling. Over and over again the film insists upon this equation, making the spectacle of Homer's hooks (and,

even more, his stumps) something primal and traumatic, and stressing that to the civilian eye he is a “mutilated creature.” (Silverman, 70)

Silverman notes that the first and only time we get to see the amputated limbs is nevertheless the moment at which Wilma most ardently demonstrates her love for Homer. Wyler presents this to his forties audience in a powerful scene of unveiling and catharsis – a scene in which a severely disabled veteran must reveal his loss of manhood and his sense of helplessness to his childhood sweetheart.

The scene’s three-part setting – bedroom, stairs, kitchen – reflects the patterns of three with which the film is meticulously crafted. Homer’s room is particularly important. We have visited it earlier, noting with Homer, the *momentos* of a life which has now gone forever. On the walls sports photos recall his once active participation in team games. But on this earlier visit the camera lingered on one specific photo in which Homer was reaching high to hurl a ball – so that we, the viewers, were in direct line of fire. A subtle touch but enough to rouse our repressed fears of mutilated men. A rifle and bayonet on another wall might serve to remind us of the violence that ended a target-practice scene in the garage when Wilma last tried to get Homer to talk about their future.

Homer is in the kitchen when Wilma knocks. That he desires her but is reluctant to act on his feelings has been suggested in an earlier kitchen scene – this time at Wilma’s house. Here Homer appeared in the half light of evening, moving across his neighbours’ lawn, his back to the camera, his hooks hanging loosely at his sides in the role of onlooker... or was it voyeur?... concealed behind the net curtains. Now Wilma appears in silhouette at the screen door as a rather insubstantial image, recalling for us that opening sequence when Homer so grossly (though affectionately) underestimated her. His greeting is pleasant, but now he becomes evasive both in speech and body language, avoiding eye contact and busying himself with the milk bottle. He is a big man. His bulk dominates the small kitchen. Light coming in Left puts him in shadow as it falls strongly on Wilma, supporting her firm resolve to clarify the terms of their relationship. Musical motifs, earlier associated with Homer are now repeated but with additional deep tones cutting across light, ethereal phrases. As they ascend the stairs deep focus camera work enhances what is now sexual tension, highlighting space and shadows, with the staircase itself, in true melodramatic code, signalling the imminence of some dramatic discontinuity. Metal hooks stir sexual anxieties. Violence or castration? Whatever our fears – and whether they are for Wilma or for Homer, they are

cut short as we register the shift in power that has somehow occurred. If Wilma initiated this meeting, it is now firmly in Homer's control.

They stand quietly facing each other in the bedroom, and as they do so, the camera also holds the rifle and bayonet within the frame in a long take. We have time to re-experience the unease we felt on the earlier bedroom visit – or we can choose to recall one other bedroom scene which would complete the triangle with this one. On the night of the 'freak-show' incident – when Homer, exasperated by the prying eyes of his little sister and her playmates peeping through the garage window, smashed through the glass with his hooks in a bold, unflinching gesture that couldn't be contemplated with hands of flesh and blood – we followed him to little Luella's room... watched him bring his hooks to her head, only to note the gentleness with which he pulled up the covers in an act of contrition. The children had been merely curious; it was he who had shouted, 'Do you want to see the freak?'

The 'explosion' we have been waiting for (when Homer finally finds his voice) comes in the form of a revelation of total emasculation that has been unfolding minute by minute in the characters of the two able-bodied veterans, and now reaches a climax in Homer's confession. In asking Wilma to perform the nightly tasks normally carried out by his father, Homer shakes his harness and hooks on to the bed so that he stands before her with what is left of his arms. He says quietly:

Homer: This is when I know I'm helpless. My hands are down there on the bed. I can't put them on again without calling to somebody for help... If that door should blow shut, I can't open it and get out of this room. I'm as dependent as a baby...

Wilma's firm and compassionate response takes him by surprise. Their embrace, in a scene saturated with female desire, is initiated by Wilma and, involves Homer lying on his back with Wilma leaning over him. Here Homer literally holds the position normally reserved for a female subject, the position in which his lack now permanently situates him. "Not only is he the object of a probing social gaze, obliged to account for his appearance to strangers at drugstore counters [Fred loses his job for punching a too-curious customer on Homer's behalf in just such an encounter], but his undressing becomes the occasion for an intense erotic investment" (Silverman, 71). (Brackets mine) For Silverman the scene not only displays but *privileges* male lack: She quotes an essay published in 1947 in which the author, Robert Warshaw claims:

one feels a current of excitement, in which the sailor's misfortune becomes a kind of wish fulfilment, as one might actually dream it: he *must* be passive, therefore he can be passive without guilt. (71)

Not surprisingly Wyler's cinematic methods have provoked in his critics not just varied but contradictory interpretation. Silverman draws attention to two kinds of response since they closely approximate the reactions attributed by Freud to the male subject at the sight of the female genitals. The first involves disavowal. Roger Manvell argued in 1976 that the film "staunchly upholds the sacred stability of home and family... of free enterprise and the virtues of big business" (qtd. Silverman, 89). The second, while it acknowledged the conspicuous display of male castration, defended itself against such spectacle by marshalling moral disapprobation – through a horror of the mutilated creatures who populate *The Best Years of Our Lives* (Krakauer, qtd. Silverman, 89).

Al Stevenson's story of loss is the most tragic. Of the three veterans he is the least able or willing to break away from the military world: 'The thing that scares me most is that everybody is gonna try to rehabilitate me,' he tells Fred on the way home. Later he describes his homecoming in terms of a military manoeuvre: 'It feels as if I were going in to hit a beach.' When the plane lands the men share the back seat in a taxi-cab ride to their separate hometown addresses. The three faces are grouped together in a shot of the rear-view mirror, united in their feelings of alienation and detachment as they drive along the once familiar streets, discovering the changes – a hot dog stand, a Woolworth's department store, and a new neon sign over Homer's uncle's saloon. Homer suggests that they all go to Butch's for a drink but Al is firm and fatherly at this point, insisting that Homer face his family.

Al is second to be dropped off, and the military language continues as the taxi pulls up:

Fred: Some barracks you got there. Hey, what are you, a retired bootlegger?

Al: Nothing as dignified as that. I'm a banker. (To the cab driver) How Much do I owe ya?

Fred: Take your hand out of your pocket, Sergeant. You're outranked.

Al: (saluting) Yessir, Captain, sir.

Inside the expensive apartment Al is surprised to be asked for I.D. by the clerk at the reception desk. His uniform alone does not put him above suspicion. Though his family is overjoyed to have him home he is quickly aware of being an intruder in their lives. Millie must reschedule her social life; the maid/cook's job has been taken over by

daughter Peggy; son Rob does not appreciate the Samurai sword he offers him as a souvenir and has his own views on world politics. Realising that he is out of touch with all the growth and changes that have occurred during the war years, Al remarks: 'I've seen nothing. I should have stayed home and found out what was really going on.'

If the war constituted an historical trauma threatening American masculinity, male superfluity both in the commercial and domestic world proved to be a second, as Silverman suggests (Silverman, 64). Al's adjustments in this regard are minor. He does not return to an independent working wife or have to compete with women to get a job. But he is no longer king in his own household; he may not even be needed there. Millie, who has been the mistress of her own life for some years now, is visibly taken aback when spoken to by her husband as if she were an army subordinate. 'Gosh, you got tough,' she responds in an effort to laugh it off. But Peggy, more than Millie, will ultimately expose the failure of the paternal function in her father as, little by little, she is seen to take control. On the night of his unexpected return it is Al who proposes the 'night on the town' for his wife and daughter but Peggy who becomes chauffeur/chaperone as they progress from bar to bar as Al's drinking becomes excessive. As she watches her parents on the dance floor she quips: 'Nice to see the young folks enjoying themselves.'

Dancing drunkenly with Millie, Al forgets who she is and tells her about his wife and children 'back home.' Only when they meet up with Fred and Homer does he return to his old exuberance and seem to be himself again:

Even under the most auspicious circumstances... the fiction of a phallic masculinity generally remains intact only for the duration of the war. As long as the soldier remains on the battlefield, he is fortified to some degree by his comrades; the "binding" which can no longer take place at the level of the ego occurs instead at the level of the group. (Silverman, 63)

However, his disorientation resumes the next morning when he jumps into the shower with his pyjamas on, throws his slippers out the window and fails to recognize himself in a prewar photo on the vanity. The same estrangement soon becomes apparent at the bank where a paternalistic manager, anxious to reinstate him, makes him president of the small loans department which will be dealing with G.I.'s seeking financial help to start up their own businesses. Al is in trouble immediately after his first attempt at loan arrangement for he cannot reconcile the stern policies of the Cornbelt Loan and Trust

Company with his personal sympathy for the G.I. applicants. When a bank dinner is held in his honour he resorts to nervous drinking before leaving home and continuous drinking all evening before his obligatory speech. He barely gets away with a speech which in its call for a more humane kind of capitalism, effectively exposes his loss of belief in the Company.

Al is the most privileged of the three veterans but he has the deepest problems. In terms of current understandings of trauma victim difficulties he would seem to be destined to further disintegration, perhaps even total breakdown, fulfilling his own prediction that he might 'go nuts [him]self.' In her book *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) Judith Herman posits three fundamental stages in trauma recovery. The first involves the establishment of trust and safety; the second requires a reconstruction of the trauma story – often a patient/analyst situation in which the story is verbalised, shared and finally integrated into the patient's present life; the third involves reconnection to the world the victim has lost faith in. Al Stevenson's *disconnection* is figured in the ballroom dancing scene and again at Homer's wedding; but although he is everywhere surrounded by trust and safety nets he shows no sign of sharing his trauma stories. Resisting all help, he stumbles on, until we see him in the final wedding scene clutching tightly to Millie's arm, "a gesture which speaks not only to the tension in the room, but to the difficulties in his own marriage, and his barely contained desire to break the phallic contract" (Silverman, 87). Fred Derry's prospects of recovery from trauma are almost as fragile. Measured in the same terms, he would seem to have barely passed Judith Herman's first stage by the end of the film, and in his proposal of marriage to Peggy Stevenson his words are marked by negativity: 'You know what it'll be, don't you Peggy? It may take us years to get anywhere. We'll have no money, no decent place to live...' But if Homer's psychic wounds are sooner healed than Al's or Fred's, the ongoing difficulties of life at home and at work with such physical disability speak for themselves: reconnection may never be achieved for him either. In Silverman's words "male lack is so fully displayed in [the] film that even four decades after its original release it remains profoundly disturbing, and at times almost unwatchable" (Silverman, 67).

Silverman's book, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, challenges the phallic identification upon which masculinity depends by insisting that all subjectivity is founded on lack and by isolating historical trauma as a force capable of unbinding the coherence of the male ego and "exposing the abyss that it conceals" (Silverman, 121).

She identifies World War II and the recovery period as the particular historical upheaval which precipitated loss of belief in the commensurability of penis and phallus.

## Chapter Five

### What's a Man Gotta Do?

*Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) is ostensibly a film about troubled youth recording a typical fifties' social problem. It focuses on a group of identity-seeking, American teenagers from middle class families in conflict with the law, with each other and with their parents. Less obviously, perhaps, it probes a new social phenomenon of the times, manhood in crisis. Though the contrast between good-looking college freshman, Jim Stark, with his manly, upright physique and his blustering, inept father in a frilly apron is constantly before us, there is much more to the study than a son's need for a strong role model. Jim is desperately in need of parental guidance but the model he demands of his father is a preconceived model that is in Jim's/our heads, a model which, in my view, the film both supports and rejects.

The film positions us to sympathise with the three rebellious young people it highlights and to view the world from Jim's perspective in particular. This perspective is dramatically figured in a scene in which Jim lies on his back on the living-room couch with his head hanging off the edge when his mother enters the room. The camera revolves an entire 180 degrees counterclockwise so that we see his mother upside down, as he does. Much of the blame for a topsy-turvy world is laid at her feet. Apart from being openly hostile or airily dismissive, Jim enjoys no relationship with his mother within the film. On the night of the 'chickie run' when Jim survives the high speed car race to the cliff edge and Buzz is killed, Jim comes home to beg for help in coming to terms with what he has done. While he may have protected his 'honour' in playing the game, he is clearly involved in Buzz's death. His first impulse (for oral gratification) is to go to the fridge where he drinks milk from the bottle and then puts its cold glass against his hot cheek, a memorable image in which his estrangement from maternal comfort is metaphorically represented. Going downstairs he finds only the ghost of a father available to him: Frank Stark is slumped in a chair, asleep. This image is tellingly juxtaposed with the empty grey screen of the television set playing static in the early hours of the morning.

Kaja Silverman claims that the blame in *Rebel Without a Cause* is located "at a predicable site... The mother is shown to have precipitated the entire crisis by refusing

to stay in her culturally sanctioned place. The conclusion is clear: men can only be aggressive and potent if women are passive and impotent" (*The Subject of Semiotics*, 140). Jim expects (and gets) a packed lunch from his mother when he leaves for 'school' on his first day but there is tension as he receives the package for it includes peanut butter which he dislikes and, clearly, since Jim rolls his eyes to the ceiling, she should have known this. It is also a moment of small-minded triumph for his grandmother who points out that the cake he loves was baked by her. Jim's mother is portrayed as acid-tongued, domineering and self-centred. The two women 'make mush' of his father, Jim tells Ray, the juvenile-offenders officer:

Jim: If he had guts to knock Mum cold once then maybe she'd be happy and then she'd stop pickin' on him... she eats him alive and he takes it.

This state of things is distinctly unsettling to Jim who 'knows' how family hierarchies should be structured. His greatest dread is to end up like his father. He, himself, at this point in the film, wears ties, white shirts, suits... he likes the conformist 'expected' role.

Althusser, quoted in Silverman, insists that the subject is from the very outset *within culture* – that is to say it has always defined itself by means of historically specific ideal images. The imaginary and the ideological are closely connected.

...what ... is ... ideology if not simply the "familiar," "well-known," transparent myths in which a society or an age can recognize itself (but not know itself), the mirror it looks into for self-recognition, precisely the mirror it must break if it is to know itself? (Silverman, 217)

What Althusser describes here is the process whereby the subject constantly rediscovers itself in the same ideological representation by means of which it first knew itself. Thus the male viewer in *Rebel Without a Cause*, as Silverman explains, aligns himself once again with the paternal position when he identifies with the adolescent Jim Stark.

Mirrors feature several times in the movie and always involve misrecognition. When Jim returns Judy's compact that he has kept since she dropped it at the police station, he jokes, 'Wanna see the monkey?' as he flicks up the mirror. This monkey reference also links Judy – in vulnerability – to the wind-up monkey Jim is 'putting to bed' under newspapers in the gutter when the police bring him in for drunkenness, as it establishes her need for him. Animals are mentioned many times in the film. Jim lets out an authentic sounding 'moo' at the planetarium observatory when the lecturer points out the constellation of taurus, and the gang's knife-blade fight which takes place immediately after is a choreographed, ritualistic scene that evokes bullfighting. Jim is a

'pigeon' the gang should 'bring down'; Judy's father calls her Glamour Puss, both families are 'zoos,' and Jim, despite the masculine sufficiency he displays in the role of father figure at the deserted mansion, is to end up as inadequate to the task of protecting a 'son' as his chicken-hearted father. While the animal references at first help to establish his innocence and immaturity, they also contribute to a sense of biological essentialism as we watch the three create a 'normative' family at the mansion – as if a patriarchal family were somehow 'God-ordained.' The film, however, will ultimately deny this. Jim, himself, – nervous, inarticulate and childishly wilful in the company of all but his new-found friends - is frequently a picture of male lack.

Plato's part in the film is quietly understated. His odd socks – one red, one blue – cause laughter to Jim and Judy but signal to the audience the confusions within this more complex character. On the one hand he is still the small boy babied by his nanny in the luxury apartment his mother seldom visits, who seeks to be the child in the Jim-Judy-Plato family. On the other, he is the delinquent who shot a litter of puppies with his mother's gun. But there is a further reason for his personal alienation. Plato's emerging homosexuality, never made explicit by the film, is obliquely referred to as 'my modern personality' on one occasion but it is too modern for a fifties' movie and remains largely covert.

His relationship with Jim is always ambivalent – he is attracted to him as a male companion and as a father figure at the same time. 'Nobody can help me,' he tells the juvenile-offenders officer in the opening scene and the words gain in significance as the film rolls. Inside his school locker door he has a male pin-up (Alan Ladd) and a mirror.

It seems likely that Plato is influenced by *The Blue Dahlia* (1946), a post-war 'tough' thriller starring Alan Ladd as a laconic, emotionally cold war veteran whose screen name, Johnny, he shares (Plato's real name was John Crawford), who has a friend called Buzz, and whose situation involves both guns and social alienation. Ladd's coldness is echoed in several images involving Plato and body warmth. Shivering at the police-station, he refuses Jim's offer of his sportscoat; much later he accepts Jim's red zippered jacket as he accepts Jim's trust; later again his dead body is zipped into Jim's jacket as they wheel him away. In this movie also, three men adopt mother/father/child roles in a parallel gesture of displaced familial bonding as a temporary resolution to problems of personal insecurity.

Combing his hair at his locker the morning after the police station meeting, Plato catches a glimpse of Jim behind him in the mirror reflection, viewing him, it seems, as a

potential hero-substitute but as Jim approaches he is framed with the BOYS room sign above his head, suggesting something more intimate/sinister.

That afternoon at the planetarium Plato retreats under his seat when the lecturer demonstrates a future big bang in the cosmos. The incident recalls the puppy shooting incident and looks ahead to two further explosions – Buzz’s car and Plato’s own death by police gunfire. The lecturer wants the students to consider man’s insignificance in the face of an enormous and transient universe, suggesting that such an awareness can render man’s own affairs ‘trivial and naïve:’

Lecturer: And while the flash of our beginning has not yet traveled the light-years into the distance, has not yet been seen by planets deep within the other galaxies, you will disappear into the blackness of the space from which we came – destroyed, as we began, in a burst of gas and fire. The heavens are still and cold once more. In all the immensity of our universe and the galaxies beyond, the earth will not be missed. Through the infinite reaches of space, the problems of man seem trivial and naïve indeed, and man existing alone seems himself an episode of little consequence.

But when Plato comes out of hiding he rejects the lesson, saying, ‘What does he know about man alone?’ This film constantly stresses his isolation. Jim’s friendship and later Judy’s warmth fill a gap in Plato’s life but they are unable to protect him. His death is unnecessary in the sense that he is shot for carrying an unloaded gun but inevitable in the sense that his fifties’ world was not ready for him.

Plato’s tragic end is precipitated by his belief that Jim and Judy, like his real parents, have betrayed him. Having gone to sleep to the tune of Judy’s lullaby, he wakes to find himself surrounded by Buzz’s gang. He runs – but the combination of lethal weapon and sobbing small boy foreshadows disaster while it reinforces Plato’s impossible situation as child *or* adult. ‘This poor baby got no-one,’ his nanny is to say as his dead body is wheeled away. In racing to make amends and in twice asking Plato, ‘What’s wrong with you?’ Jim echoes his own father. That Jim will be powerless to shelter the boy is symbolised by his floundering in the dark inside the planetarium: ‘Boy, I’m as blind as a bat.’ When Frank Stark appears at the scene of Plato’s death he attempts to console Jim with the words, ‘You did everything a man could,’ raising questions about manhood for the audience as well as Jim. He puts his suit coat around his son’s shoulders, handing over the mantle of manhood he (so plainly) misrepresents.

Silverman writes:

All the melodramatic energies of the film are generated by the failure of the father to achieve a perfect match between himself and the values which define the paternal function – a failure which he inevitably transmits to the son. (*Subject*, 140)

The ‘happy’ ending provided by the melodrama is undermined in several ways. Jim’s parents smile happily to see Jim and Judy walk away as a couple, signifying that Jim has ‘grown up’ at last – and that the pair have adopted their traditional gender-specific identities - but there have been subtle hints to indicate that Judy will merely become another Mrs Stark (in both senses). In her role play in the garden she is the too-perfect mimic when she says, ‘I’ll scrimp and I’ll save and I’ll work my fingers to the bone...’ and, more tellingly, she is linked with Jim’s mother in wearing an almost identical white robe throughout most of the deserted mansion scene. Judy is the exemplary Freudian subject in that she has rejected her own mother (shown by her indignation when the police say they have phoned her mother instead of her father) and channelled her libidinal drives in the direction of her father. In the demonstrative affection she displays towards her little brother we see that she is in the process of moving to Freud’s next stage, that of desire for a child. Her father, however, sends her mixed messages in that his nickname for her (Glamour Puss) encourages the make-up, tight sweaters etc. while his repulsion of her kisses (‘You’re getting too old for that kind of stuff, kiddo!’) ends in his calling her a tramp. Feeling confused and unloved, she walks the streets until police bring her in as a ‘tramp-suspect’ at 1 a.m. This rebellious spirit is willingly relinquished, however, as she seeks to impress male friends of her own age group, subsuming her newly found self in the interests of promoting the ‘necessary’ male potency in a traditional heterosexual relationship within a patriarchal culture. Judy’s own mother is weak and passive but Judy’s fire will not stay repressed as the film’s subtext suggests.

As if to point up his own irony, Director Nicholas Ray, himself, plays the cameo role of solitary enigmatic figure ascending the planetarium steps as the cars drive away in the final scene. The film ends as it began with the sound of police car sirens, befitting a story of troubled urban society.

## Chapter Six

### When the Gaze is Reversed

The fantasy of self-contained, omnipotent masculinity is problematised in *The Full Monty* (1997) which can be seen as a light-hearted take on the issue of manhood in crisis. It is a film about loss – loss of jobs, loss of family cohesion and loss of self-esteem. With minimal welfare support, steelworkers in the once prosperous city of Sheffield face daily life without work to go to. Gary, the film's protagonist ('Gaz' to his mates) has lost his wife to a better breadwinner and is in danger of losing access to his son through lack of £700, the funds he needs for joint custody. Furthermore he risks losing the respect and love of his son, Nathan, a boy of about eight years old who trails disconsolately along with his father on 'access' days, disapproving of everything Gaz has to offer: his house is too cold, his activities boring or suspect. ('Why can't we do normal things?') The film is constructed around a series of comic / tragic reversals, the first involving Nathan who gradually comes to represent the voice of conscience or Law-of-the-Father.

In the opening scene Gaz is organising his mate, Dave, to remove a steel girder from the gutted Steelworks building. 'It's worth £10, is that.' Nathan protests that this is stealing. 'No,' says Gaz, 'it's liberating...' in the expansive manner that has fed his optimism in the past but clearly will no longer do. The precariousness of Gaz's situation is figured in the canal scene that follows. In an attempt to get themselves and the girder to the other side, the two friends perform a balancing act on the roof of an old car, which is floating in the canal. Nathan is safely despatched but the weight of the girder is such that the car sinks and Gaz is left quarrelling with Dave on the slippery car roof while Nathan walks off. Dave chides him with: 'What's your initiative got to say about this, then, bog eyes?' With his reputation for resourcefulness and imagination on the line, Gaz is about to lose the last thing he has left, a good mate. Yet Dave whose marriage is in tatters has no one else to depend on. And Dave is not a self-reliant person.

Women in the film are largely bystanders in the broader scheme of things but they are the source of enormous male angst in the small events that occur from day to day. They are invaders of male space when they arrive in hundreds at the working men's club to watch a male strip show. The WOMEN ONLY posters on the club walls

give the men an unfamiliar dose of the exclusion tactics normally applied to women. The male stripper scenario is to introduce the male body as object of the look rather than the subject. As they walk home from the canal incident, dripping wet, Dave and Gaz reveal their old accustomed attitudes to women when they react to a young woman who has to pass close to them as they descend some steps. Attempting to reassert himself after recent humiliation, Gaz offers Dave a score out of ten for her body – a shared joke serving to institute an opposition between the ‘we’ who share it and the woman as ‘other.’ The woman herself, however, gives them a friendly greeting as she passes by. The joking context re-establishes a bonding between the two friends and reinforces a closed circuit of male-to-male communication.

Dave is not ready to concur with Gaz’s favourable assessment: ‘You can’t tell until you see their tits...’ for the woman is warmly dressed for the cold day. Reduced in this way to a single physical attribute, the woman is rigidly objectified and distanced by both the language and the attitudes of the two men (even though she is well out of earshot), a device which serves to avert the threat to male bonding that women represent. As an oppositional term femininity threatens by its very existence the exclusiveness and completeness of the phallus.

*The Full Monty* is on one level an attempt to reorder the disruptions and schisms in masculine identity which we have observed developing throughout this project. But there is little open conflict with women who are clearly not the enemy. When Dave’s depression leads to impotence his wife remains loyal and supportive though she is presented as a fully desiring woman. Gaz can be forgiven for refusing his wife’s offer of a packing job at £2.50 an hour at the supermarket where she works, though immediately after he feels forced to accept money from an eight year old’s bank account – nominally face-saving, perhaps, for at least it’s ‘between men.’ But Gaz is brought to his knees in this scene where self-knowledge is at war with immediate need: Gaz cannot trust himself to repay the money, but letting the boy down again would be too much:

Nathan: You said you’d get it back.

Gaz: You don’t want to believe anything I say.

Nathan: You said so. Believe you.

Gaz: You do?

Nathan: Yeah.

Gaz: Blimey, Nath.

Gaz hugs the boy in a gesture of warmth and gratitude barely possible at the beginning of the film when a cuff from arm's length was as close as he could get to a father / son expression of affection.

Gaz's ability to bounce back keeps the plot alive. It is a sign of his masculine competence that he is able to pick up on what was in fact Dave's idea to do a strip show themselves, and to convince four other dislocated 'heroes' to join in. Doing so requires each one to come face to face with personal hangups and prejudices concerning bodies. When Horse appears for his audition his name instantly confirms the general belief that black men have larger penises than white men, and reinforces Dave's growing fear of being passed over by his wife for an Afro-American. In this we are to see a myth exploded, for Horse, while secure in his position in the group as a dancer, is the first to voice concern at the idea of 'going all the way' as he has deep anxiety about the smallness of his 'willy'. Lomper shares this concern too and begins to worry about his chest once Dave has referred to him as 'saggy tits.' Lamenting the failure of the cosmetic world to produce 'anti-fat bastard' cream when it offers anti-wrinkle cream to women, Dave is reduced to wrapping himself in cling film in the garden shed in an attempt to lose weight before the big night. It is now clear to them all that they are to be judged by women according to their bodies alone – as if they had no personalities. Gerald, once a steelworks foreman, is able to shore up some lost self respect when he is sought after for his skill as a ball-room dancer. But in a quiet moment he confesses to Dave that he suffers from unexpected erections, a condition which might well afflict him on the night of the strip show with so many women watching.

The likelihood of such performance problems is borne out by our glimpse into Gerald's marriage. Apparently childless, the couple live in an attractive suburban home with a family of gnomes in the front garden. Linda's hair is actually combed up so that her head shape resembles that of a gnome. As a husband Gerald has been a good provider until recently but a poor communicator – and he has a great deal too much pride. When his credit finally runs out with local retailers the furniture van arrives for repossession and Linda must finally know the truth – Gerald has been out of work for six months. As the two stand helplessly by in their garden, there is a brief moment when Linda cradles one of the gnomes in her arms like a baby. But seconds later she opts for rejection of this deceptive act and of the lie that has been their marriage. 'No, Gerald,' she says firmly. 'I never liked them.' And as the gnome explodes into a thousand pieces on the cobblestones we realise that this is a moment of truth for Gerald too. Earlier

incidents involving the jeering and mockery of work-mates with respect to Gerald and the gnomes have revealed to us that it was Gerald who was the gnome-lover. It was Gerald who stroked the newly repaired gnome after the Punch 'n Judy Show saying, 'That's marvellous, that. Ta, lads, ta.' Now Gerald must acknowledge the self-indulgence involved in his gifts of gnomes (instead of children?) to Linda as he experiences further feelings of inadequacy. But Gerald remains likeable – he is not condemned by the film. Behind him lie the global issues of post-industrialism; in front of him lie the new facts of women's place in the world which Gerald in the all-male space of the Sheffield Steelworks has not been prepared for.

But to return to our discussion of bodies. Having wittingly or unwittingly swapped roles from spectator to spectacle the men all engage in rigorous attention to personal physique. The sun bed which earlier had occasioned sly looks of contempt and amusement behind Gerald's back is now rostered out. Many camera shots of running, exercising and shaping up are taken on a green hillside against a hazy cityscape as the process of self improvement goes on and self-esteem returns. Falling, touching, laughing and togetherness are emphasised. Being admired – especially by women – is welcomed. The film singles out Donald specifically in this regard as he pauses in an early morning run to receive appreciative remarks from a group of women. This is the same youth who is to be captured by the camera, if only momentarily, in a homo-erotic moment with Lomper when, in escaping the police raid, the two find themselves leaping through back gardens in red leather G strings and finally scrambling together through an open window to stand looking, motionless, and acutely aware of each other in an empty room. This relationship is later portrayed in several shots as a warm male-to-male friendship. The hint of bisexuality as acceptable future phenomenon or construct is neither developed nor returned to.

Donald's relationship with Lomper seems to be made possible by Lomper's release from a mother/son connection but the film is not explicit on this. We first meet the red-haired Lomper when Dave rescues him from a carbon monoxide suicide attempt in his car, an act which signals deeper troubles than the job-loss all of the men are experiencing. At this point in the narrative he could be seen to be less disadvantaged than most. He at least retains membership to a functional men's group, the Works Band, and he has managed to secure some part-time work as security guard at the old building, notwithstanding the irony that such a position implies. Lomper can be read as the victim of a poorly negotiated Oedipal separation which has compromised his chances of

reaching the expected status of 'complete' heterosexual manhood. We get only a glimpse of the mother/son relationship in a rather chilling scene when Lomper, returning from his suicide attempt, finds his mother's empty wheelchair at the foot of the stairs and the woman herself clinging to the banister rail half-way up the stairs. 'I thought you'd gone,' she says, ironically, as he lifts her up and helps her to bed. It would seem that he is expected to be home each night to attend to her. It is clear that he has had difficulty in forging relationships with other people, male or female. Just that morning he has told Dave he has no mates but Gaz jokes and teases him out of his self-absorption. Much later, after his mother's funeral, we see a broad-smiling band conductor teasing him too, as the band strikes up the strip-show music, a routine they have obviously put together in his absence to signal that they are 'in' on the story of the police raid on the local stripper group. The musical joke relaxes him and he puts down his instrument with a big smile to sit and be the recipient of their good humour and proffer of friendship.

There is a good deal of looking and spying in *The Full Monty* as one would expect in a film about a strip show. We are introduced to it in the opening scene where Gaz, Dave and Nathan, caught out in their pilfering by the sound of the security guard, peer out at the passing Works band as they emerge from their flattened positions against the wall. While the 'look' here is one of curiosity and is directed from men towards men, the sense of transgression which is already present in the scene lingers on, affecting our response to successive 'looking's' and 'spying's.' Gaz is in the classic role of voyeur when he spies on the women watching the Chippendales, but what is normally an aggressive male position is here weakened in two ways. First, the object of the look is not one woman but many, and second, the receivers of the look are actively (and aggressively) involved in looking in the opposite direction – at other men. But in an unexpected cinematic move the look is suddenly turned upon us when three women from the crowd, seen first in a long shot of the cabaret scene, abruptly appear in medium close-up looking straight at us. At this point the identification of spectator with Gaz or even camera with Gaz has suddenly been lost as the women are in fact looking into a mirror, not at us, and Gaz is behind them, having retreated ignominiously behind the door of the toilet cubicle. The look has indeed been returned but not in the traditional manner. The gaze as force-field has been shattered. With the triangle of film-maker, spectator and protagonist dislocated in this way, a new way of seeing is signalled. Here there is no open challenge, no question of symbolic revenge. The 'femmes fatales' are

not a threat to masculinity through being 'conspiring, conniving or deceitful' as a fifties' Hollywood movie might have depicted them (Orr, 67). Here active female sexuality is validated, the need for male power going unnoticed. Jean tells her girlfriends she cannot understand Dave: 'It's as if he's given up...'

Later Gaz and his mates spy on the ballroom dancing club. The look again begins with curiosity but turns to mockery when Gerald and his wife are identified among the dancers. The subsequent Punch 'n Judy Show which develops when the men hold Gerald's garden gnomes up to the window brings in the note of potential violence always heralded by this entertainment piece. Gerald on this occasion is merely humiliated but on the next occasion he is at a job interview and they cause him to fail to get a job for which he is well qualified. This time Punch is in full cry and one of the gnomes is smashed. Gerald, mortified, resorts to violence himself when they get back to the job club, punching Gaz, pushing him against the wall and finally dissolving into tears of self pity. The child-like level to which all the men have regressed is expressed in a single camera shot of Dave sitting foolishly in the children's play area with his arm stuck in a plastic toy.

In his book *Cinema and Modernity* John Orr claims that the power of the gaze is construed by modern film-makers as a power of surveillance – 'by which all institutional powers acquire knowledge of their subjects in different habitats – in rooms, houses, factories, barracks, schools, hospitals, asylums' (59). In such cases the power of the object being watched is drained by the superior power of the subject doing the looking. If marriage can be seen as an institution in this sense, Gerald's marriage parallels this power-draining syndrome. Lacking the ability to communicate and show affection, Gerald has remained distant from Linda, playing or faking the role of provider and remaining always 'unknowing' where Linda's needs are concerned. 'Kept' in her suburban home with their family of garden gnomes, Linda (obediently) becomes one. Ignorant of their true financial situation she is made to look ridiculous when she appears with a ski resort brochure suggesting that as 'things are looking up' they might consider a holiday in the mountains.

The dishonesty in their relationship is played out in a single telling shot when Gerald, dressed immaculately in a suit prepares to leave the house for 'work.' The frame is divided vertically into two clear halves with Gerald checking his appearance narcissistically in the hall mirror on one side and Linda behind the wall, emerging from the kitchen with his cut lunch and urging him to ease up and leave the lion's share (of

the work) to someone else for a change. Where Linda's look is towards Gerald, his is into the mirror and back to himself.

The end when it comes is a celebration of manhood stripped to its bare essentials but it finally convinces no-one. For what is really being validated is the men's love for themselves and each other at the expense of their more difficult heterosexual relationships. The final shot of six pairs of buttocks advancing on the audience (and a mixed audience at that) recalls an early shot of a woman at the men's urinal, reminding us that no space is a male-only space any more – certainly not the world. As a demonstration of the inviolability of the masculine the film's very articulation in comic genre reduces it to the realm of entertainment or jokedom, its finale presented with glitzy show-time music and exploding points of light. Masculinisation is here presented simultaneously as assertive and dislocated, an oblique challenge in itself, perhaps, to any idea of the unity and stability of the self.

## Conclusion

This thesis has traced the changes in the construction of masculinities which have occurred throughout the twentieth century, viewing them against challenges to the liberal humanist notion of a coherent and unified self that was traditionally a male self. It records a progressive movement towards diversity and plurality within narrative techniques, imagery, characterisation and themes. The possibilities that a new view of the self might offer for the transformation of individuals which emerged in the early modernist period, were lost in mid century but reappeared later and continue to influence change.

With Kaja Silverman I have isolated World War II as the historic moment marking a sudden and irreversible decline in masculine superiority. From this point on the texts record the failure of men and boys to match the values that previously defined the paternal function. They depict vulnerability and insufficiency in the male subject first covertly then tentatively and finally, openly.

With RW Connell I look back on the century and see the 'change' of which there is so much awareness, not in terms of the crumbling of the material and institutional structures of patriarchy, but rather in terms of the crumbling of its legitimation. In all public forums at least, patriarchy now has to be excused and defended against an expectation or presumption of gender equality.

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