‘Gods in our own World’: Representations of Troubled and Troubling Masculinities in Some Australian Films, 1991-2001

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Abstract

The dominance of male characters in Australian films makes our national cinema a rich resource for the examination of the construction of masculinities. This thesis argues that the codes of the hegemonic masculinities in capitalist patriarchal societies like Australia insist on an absolute masculine position. However, according to Oedipal logic, this position always belongs to another man. Masculine yet 'feminised,' identity is fraught with anxiety but sustained by the 'dominant fiction' that equates the penis with the phallus and locates the feminine as its polar opposite. This binary relationship is inaugurated in childhood when a boy must distinguish his identity from his mother, who, significantly, is a different gender. Being masculine means not being feminine.

However, as much as men strive towards inhabiting the masculine position completely, this masquerade will always be exposed by the elements associated with femininity that are an inevitable part of the human experience. Yet, the more men are drawn to the feminine, the more they risk losing their masculine integrity altogether under the patriarchal gaze. Men, in this dualistic regime, are condemned to negotiate their identity haunted by the promises of the phallus and the fear of its loss.

I begin with a model of masculine integrity represented in the image of an ideal father, Darryl Kerrigan, from *The Castle* and then proceed to problematise it through an examination of its excesses observed in the father of David Helfgott in *Shine*. In the second chapter I investigate two films that represent mothers as the principal threat to masculine integrity: *Death in Brunswick* and *Proof*. Both films reveal a misogynistic impetus, which is expressed as violence against women in *The Boys*, the sole focus of my middle chapter. With misogyny and violence still resonating, I follow the contours of my argument through an examination of *Chopper* and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* in the fourth chapter, where I emphasise the performative nature of identity, before arriving at a discussion of men and their relationships in the final chapter (*Mullet*, *Praise*, and *Thank God He Met Lizzie*).

Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the Barr Smith Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Signed .....

Shane Crilly

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A Note on Style

Referencing and formatting throughout this thesis have been done according to *The Chicago Manual of Style*. 15th edition.

Introduction

> When we gaze with strained attention at imaginary scenes on the stage or screen, including the screen of the mind's eye when we read or dream, we are engaged in the making of culture, our making by culture, which includes the mechanism both of sexual violence and, someday perhaps, of its undoing. (Lawrence Kramer, *After the Lovedeath*, 4)

'That's what we are; we're all gods in our own world'

Brett Sprague utters these puzzling words just before he and his brothers attack the unfortunate girl at the end of *The Boys*, leaving the audience wondering what they might tell us about his behaviour. To be a god is a formidable task. It implies omnipotence, absolute presence and an unchanging wholeness. It assumes a preordained, sanctified and unquestioned right to wield power, like God the father in the kingdom of heaven.

But a god, or the image he created of himself on earth—man, a king in his castle—must have subjects that submit to, or at least acknowledge, his power. These include lesser men, men who might concede but secretly yearn for, or dream of, power for themselves. Sometimes these men might assume this power and exercise it over other men. Sometimes they might also exercise it over women, for, just as God invokes the father, he also invokes the mother who gives birth to man. A woman can be an especially satisfying subject for a would-be god to rule over, as she can serve to remind him that he is no longer the vulnerable little boy who depended on her so completely.

However, as much as he tries, he will not be able to forget those early feelings of powerlessness, as he stumbles across a fundamental obstacle. He can be a god in his own, self-contained and enclosed world, his castle, but he will become isolated and 'lonely

looking down on everyone'[1] and forever exposed to a threat—other gods or kings might consider him their subject. Hence, just as easily as he can assume sovereignty, it can be taken away from him, and he will once again be reminded of the vulnerable, little boy he once was.

Absolute presence and the right to command; the assumption of power, or being pressured to assume power; the fear of losing power, of never gaining it, of being subject to it, of being powerless: these are the nodal points upon which the masculinities examined in this thesis are strung. These are the tensions, uncertainties and anxieties that constitute the troubled (at the personal level) and troubling (at the public, civic level) masculinities in these films as they engage in dialogue with what many commentators have perceived as a crisis in masculinity.

David Buchbinder notes that in recent times 'a number of writers and scholars, as well as the media, have announced that masculinity is in crisis and that men are now less certain of themselves than ever before.'[2] R. W. Connell adds that 'questions about men and gender have aroused media interest, academic debate, and political controversy in most parts of the developed world.'[3] Many of the publications emerging from these debates and controversies are linked to the mythopoetic men's movement, which Connell observes has been 'a response to the new feminism.'[4] The most notable figure of this movement is Robert Bly, whose publication of *Iron John*, which calls for men to return to their mythic roots, reached the coveted *New York Times Book Review* Bestseller List and remained there for many weeks. Other titles, such as *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* by John Gray, stress a fundamental difference between men and women that must be negotiated to ensure gender harmony. Furthermore, that there is a crisis is suggested by the titles of the more academic books (*Male Trouble: Looking at Australian Masculinities*, *Male Trouble* by Constance Penley and Sharon Willis, *Masculinity in Crisis* by Roger Horrocks, and *The Hazards of Being Male* by Herb Goldberg, to name just a few). In fact, the first such book to 'formulate' the argument that the 'old masculine ideal is fatal to men themselves' was

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[1] Sandra, in *The Boys*, speaking to Brett when she visits him in prison.
[2] *Masculinities and Identities*, 1.
[3] 'Introduction: Australian Masculinities,' 10.
[4] 'Men at Bay,' 75.

by Sidney Jourard in 1971. His 'point of departure' was the decreasing life expectancy of men, in contrast to women, in the twentieth century.[5] Connell points out that Australia 'is by no means alone in these developments' but adds that there has been an emphasis on 'explicit debates on men's violence and on boys' education.'[6]

Indeed, Australian cinema since the 1970s revival is a fruitful resource for investigating this so-called crisis, as most of its exemplary films are centred on male characters. Furthermore, these characters adhere to a normative masculine model, as Neil Rattigan points out: 'The consistent and dominant image of Australian cultural identity promulgated by cinema … since the 1970s ... is of a white male, nearly always Anglo-Celtic (but not rigidly so), down-to-earth, unsophisticated, democratic, and unimpressed by authority.'[7] Tom O'Regan adds that 'Australian cinema is closely associated with an homogeneous, monocultural, masculinist, xenophobic and exclusionary national identity.'[8] The narrow, exclusionary representations of masculinities in the national cinema seem to protest too much and lend support to the perceived anxiety about identity in the contemporary world.

However, it would appear that there has been a paradigm shift in recent years. Graeme Turner notes that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, after the heady days of government subsidisation, the Australian film industry 'had come to terms with the changed funding environment. The clear commercialization of the local industry ... removed some of the pressure on Australian filmmakers to produce "national" films and thus opened the way for more personal and individual projects.'[9] This resulted in a changing of the guard from versions of Australian identity that were 'nostalgically masculine, rural and colonial,' exemplified in the performances of Jack Thompson and Bryan Brown, to a national iconography that is now more heterogeneous, as in the performances of a new generation of actors such as Ben Mendelsohn, Russell Crowe and Noah Taylor. Citing *Death in Brunswick* as exemplary, Turner notes that 'the semiotics of Australian ethnicities and

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[5] *The Transparent Self*, quoted in Badinter, *XY: On Masculine Identity*, 141.
[6] 'Introduction: Australian Masculinities,' 10.
[7] *Images of Australia,* 16. Note also that the revival was dominated by male ensemble films.
[8] *Australian National Cinema*, 132.
[9] *Film as Social Practice*, 170.

masculinities would seem to have changed.'[10] Philip Butterss suggests: 'Much more than a change of personnel marked the new decade however; not only was there a shift in the image of Australian masculinity embodied in particular performers, film narratives themselves seemed newly preoccupied with questions of gender identity, and the construction of the masculine subject. A crop of films, including many of the most successful Australian productions, were now consciously exploring the process of becoming a heterosexual man in contemporary Australian society.'[11]

Becoming a Man

> The development of personality is connected firmly to the division of social labour. Childcare is work; the workforce is gendered; This fact matters for emotional development. However we modify the details, this simple and powerful argument must be acknowledged in any future account of the formation of masculinities. (Connell, *Masculinities*, 20)

Any discussion of masculinities must begin with the understanding that the object of study is not fixed and stable. Moreover, when we speak of representations, it is not a simple matter of considering how they reflect what is presumably out there in society.[12] Instead, masculinity is a 'relational concept,' understood only when linked to femininity. Concepts of masculinity and femininity are socially determined in patriarchal society as mutually exclusive. They are enunciated as diametrically-opposed positions attracting associations that are perceived as unequivocally feminine or masculine. Hence, when I speak of femininity, I am not referring to some irreducible, biological fact but rather to the common associations that society has attached to the concept, associations that are not masculine. Connell explains that masculinity and femininity only 'have meaning in relation to each other, as a social demarcation and a cultural opposition.'[13]

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[10] *Making It National*, 127.
[11] 'Becoming a Man in Australian Film in the Early 1990s,' 79.
[12] When I speak of society, I am referring to late industrial, western, capitalist society, such as Australia.
[13] *Masculinities*, 44.

One way to understand how this 'cultural opposition' is constructed is to view it through the division of labour, where women are almost universally assigned the task of raising infants, because they are anatomically capable of giving birth and lactating. In tribal societies this often leaves the task of hunting and defending community boundaries to the men. [14] Connell notes that while 'biological reproduction does not cause, or even provide a template for, gender as practice,'[15] as a 'body-reflexive practice' it 'constitutes' yet, at the same time, is 'governed by … social structures.'[16] Hence, while the division of labour might be biologically initiated, it is socially regulated, and identity is determined through the adoption of the masculine and feminine subject positions. Men in tribal societies, for example, have to be aggressive, physically strong and competitive as they inhabit the public world in order to carry out their duties. As David Gilmore notes: 'Manhood is the social barrier that societies must erect against entropy, human enemies, the forces of nature, time, and all the human weaknesses that endanger group life.'[17] On the other hand, women under these circumstances are conditioned to be weaker physically, dependent and passive as a result of their reliance on men to protect the community. Furthermore, they develop more competency in the affective and relational domains as they carry out the duties of childrearing and managing the home sphere.

Now, if we transpose this situation to the modern state, where this fundamental division of labour still exists,[18] we can observe that the dynamics are much the same, even though the social structure is different. As I discuss in later chapters, the logic of capitalism has given rise to the nuclear family and the ideology of individualism, causing the erosion of communities as the social unit of society. Instead, individual family units compete with one another for the privileges society has to offer. Men who leave the responsibility of childrearing to their wives must inhabit a generally impersonal, and often hostile, public sphere in order to work to support their family. They develop much the same masculine traits as their tribal counterparts: aggressiveness, competitiveness and toughness. Similarly, women develop those qualities that society associates with femininity: passivity,

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[14] Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, 225.
[15] *Men and the Boys*, 27.
[16] Ibid., 59.
[17] *Manhood in the Making,* 226.
[18] McMahon, 'Blokus Domesticus,' 154.

dependence and inclusivity. But we can go a step further in this dualistic regime to help us understand the cultural opposition between masculinity and femininity.

Establishing independence from the maternal figure is a key manoeuvre of subject formation and is something all children must do to develop a mature adult identity. However, for boys, their identity is formed in relation to someone of the opposite sex, while for girls it is formed in relation to a person of the same sex. For a boy, being a separate individual means being a different gender, because given the relational, binary nature of gender identity, to establish his masculine identity, he is expected to distance himself from his mother. As Coppelia Kahn notes, a girl's femininity 'is reinforced by her original symbiotic union with her mother and by the identification with her that must precede identity, while [a boy's] masculinity is threatened by the same union and the same identification. While the boy's sense of *self* begins in union with the feminine, his sense of *masculinity* arises against it.'[19] Consequently, the maternal object for the growing boy often becomes an abject figure, resulting in a greater accent on gender polarity in males than in females. As Elisabeth Badinter notes: 'Male identification remains more largely differentiated than female identification. Traditionally, masculinity is defined more often by the avoidance of something than by a desire for something. To be a man signifies *not* to be feminine; *not* to be homosexual; *not* to be effeminate in one's physical appearance or manners; *not* to have sexual or overtly intimate relations with other men; *not* to be impotent with women.'[20]

What often results for the child when he grows to be a man is an incomplete subjectivity amputated from the affective, relational world of the maternal figure as he strives to define himself in opposition to his mother and femininity in general. In his attempts to live out this inadequate version of subjectivity, he becomes anxious and insecure because of the danger that his identity might at any moment regress or 'collapse' back into that symbiotic fusion with the maternal figure, for the elements that are associated with femininity are a significant part of what makes us all human (for example,

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[19] *Man's Estate,* 10. All emphases within quotations throughout this thesis are in the original.
[20] *XY: On Masculine Identity*, 115.

feelings of powerlessness, vulnerability, dependence and fear). [21] Hence, this form of masculinity will always be brittle and unstable and constantly in need of propping up. As Nigel Edley and Margaret Wetherall point out, masculinity becomes a 'fantasy of conduct and behaviour which can never be realised in practice because constantly men will be defeated by their actual humanity and mix of feminine and masculine capacities.'[22]

Steven Nock provides us with a neat summary of the masculine predicament: 'In the search for the meaning of manhood we must keep these two possibilities in mind: first, masculinity is earned by accomplishing things that are not female; second, there is no critical juncture at which point males may proclaim their masculinity as secure and "earned." The pursuit of masculinity will continue in men's lives.'[23] We can observe this pursuit in the emphasis in our society that is placed on proving manhood, or being a *real*, absolute man. In contrast, Gilmore explains that 'although women, too, in any society are judged by sometimes stringent sexual standards, it is rare that their very status as women forms part of the evaluation.'[24] As Badinter phrases it, 'being a man implies a labour, an effort that does not seem to be demanded of a woman. It is rare to hear the words "Be a woman" as a call to order, whereas the exhortation to the little boy, the male adolescent, or even the male adult is common in most societies.'[25] This is because being a woman is generally viewed in society as a biological given (woman have babies and are inevitably associated with nature). Moreover, very few words are available to describe a woman who fails at being a woman, in contrast to the abundance of words available to describe a man who fails the numerous tests of manhood that he encounters daily.[26] A woman might be a

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[21] To be sure, this delimiting version of subjectivity is experienced by women too as, in their desire to experience the full gamut of human experience, they can also be aggressive and competitive. It is common to think that these characteristics have surfaced only as a result of the recent feminist movement, but they have always existed in women. Consider the reflections of the narrator of *Jane Eyre*, which reinforce my point about a common humanity: 'Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts just as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer' (109).

[22] *Men in Perspective,* 53.

[23] *Marriage in Men's Lives,* 48. Note how menstruation 'lays the basic foundation for the possibility of adult womanhood. No such thing happens for boys.' Hence there is no critical moment that males can declare that they have attained masculinity (46).

[24] *Manhood in the Making*, 11.

[25] *XY: On Masculine Identity,* 1–2.

[26] *Manhood in the Making*, 11. Looker points out that 'men sometimes learn that quite absurd things signify manliness, such as ... acceptable and unacceptable ways of crossing their legs' ('Doing it with your Mates,' 213).

'whore' or a 'slut' but she still retains her womanhood nonetheless, whereas a man who is called a 'girl' or a 'sissy' loses his masculine integrity entirely. This leads to the question of how this situation is sustained. To find an answer, we have to understand the concept of hegemonic masculinity where these prevailing, dominant notions of masculinity are generated.

Staying a Man in the Hegemony of the Masculine

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as that which is 'most honoured or desired' or 'the most visible.' Connell explains that it is 'connected with prominent institutions and cultural forms, such as business and sport, and is extensively presented and promoted in mass media.'[27] He observes elsewhere that 'hegemony is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power, collective if not individual,' adding that 'it is the successful claim to authority ... that is the mark of hegemony.'[28] The media proves to be most efficacious with regard to this claim. Whilst specifically addressing the cultural hegemony of the North American-dominated mass media in Australia, Turner's observation of the power of the media equally applies to the hegemony of the masculine: 'To gain control of the representational agenda for the nation is to gain considerable power over individuals' view of themselves and each other.'[29] Given that there is a 'small, elite group' of media producers within society that are 'predominantly White, middle-class, and male' and have the largest share of media power which enables them to 'make sense of society on behalf of others,' it is not difficult to conceive that it is their interests that are promoted, their representations that dominate.[30] These interests and representations inform the hegemony of the masculine, whose chief characteristics can be identified and spoken of in the singular. Indeed, a masculine ideal (powerful, absolutely present to itself and void of femininity) insinuates itself repeatedly in these representations, an ideal which Badinter observes 'has changed very little over

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[27] 'Introduction: Australian Masculinities,' 14–15.
[28] *Masculinities,* 77.
[29] *Film as Social Practice*, 158.
[30] O'Shaugnessey and Stadler, *Media and Society*, 23. Connell observes that it is no 'statistical accident, but a part of the social construction of masculinity, that men and not women control the major corporations and the great private fortunes' (*Men and the Boys*, 25).

hundreds of years.' She adds that 'most cultures have adhered to this masculine ideal and created their own models, but it is America, without cultural rival, which has imposed its images of virility on the whole world.'[31]

Nevertheless, dominant versions of masculinity cannot be imposed on the population that easily. As significant minority and interest groups (notably feminist and gay groups) within society jostle for input into the representational agenda, hegemonic masculinity will always be exposed to challenge and contestation. Connell points out that hegemonic masculinity 'need not be the most common form of masculinity, let alone the most comfortable. Indeed many men and boys live in a state of some tension with, or distance from, hegemonic masculinity.'[32] Elsewhere he observes that hegemony 'does not mean total control. It is not automatic, and may be disrupted—or even disrupt itself.'[33] Indeed, there is a danger in viewing hegemonic masculinity as unitary or monolithic, because social and historical contingencies ensure that it remains contradictory and divided. However, despite these tensions, the ideal man still reigns in the hegemonic order of society, and this is because of a fundamental inducement.

Society compensates males for the pain and anxiety they feel when they are pressured to distance themselves from their mothers and all things feminine (what Maggie Carey terms 'the mother wound'[34]) through the simple equation of the penis with the phallus. This is the 'dominant fiction' that Kaja Silverman refers to in her book *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*.[35] The powerlessness and vulnerability that men feel but don't admit to, due to the masculine façade, is massaged by the reward of absolute masculine self-possession, if they stick to the rules of masculine conduct. Boys are helped in this process by identifying with powerful, authoritative masculine figures (particularly strong fathers) that promise power and privilege when they grow up. A young man can dream of omnipotence, mastery

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[31] *XY: On Masculine Identity*, 129–31. In Australia, the reducibility of the vast array of media images to the common elements I have suggested is aided by the fact that the media are controlled by two men, Rupert Murdoch and Kerry Packer. Their media empires which extend to the rest of the world (including the USA) give rise to the question of a global hegemonic masculinity or a 'world gender order' (Connell, *Men and the Boys*, 40).
[32] 'Introduction: Australian Masculinities,' 15.
[33] *Masculinities*, 37.
[34] 'Healing the Mother Wound.'
[35] *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, 15–16.

and the right to wield power when it is time for him to step into the shoes of the father, because he possesses the privileged mark of sexual difference, the penis. Consequently, most men are content to believe that it is possible to recover, one day, the power they lost in the separation from the mother. In the meantime, however, many are happy to sustain themselves on the privileges that being a male in patriarchal society provides, what Connell identifies as the 'patriarchal dividend.'[36]

But it remains to be said that no man can embody all the qualities of the ideal man, as lived experience jars with the promise of power. Someone else always seems to be more powerful (a movie star, public figure or sporting hero), another male who, as Kramer points out, 'maddeningly ... almost never appears in his own person. He hides behind a symbol, a persona, or an emissary' and remains 'an impalpable nameless phantom.'[37] Hence, there is a significant and fundamental contradiction within masculine subjectivity. Kramer explains:

> For both men and women, to become a subject, to acquire an identity, is to assume a position of femininity in relation to a masculinity that always belongs to someone else. This other is the wielder and bearer of authority in all its forms, social, moral, and cultural; both pleasure and truth are in his charge; yet no man, and certainly no woman, can securely identify with this masculine subject-position. Instead, biological men are directed to occupy a position that is simultaneously masculine in relation to a visible, public, feminine position, and feminine in relation to an unstated, often unconscious position held by the figure (trope, image, or person) of another man. The same men are directed to repress their knowledge that this doubling of polarity by the dim, ever-looming figure of the other man renders their own position masculine in content but feminine in structure.[38]

This ambiguity creates enormous tensions. In addition to repressing knowledge of their feminine position in relation to a masculine position 'that always belongs to someone else,' men must also repress their desire for this masculine ideal when it is notionally embodied

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[36] *Masculinities*, 82.
[37] *After the Lovedeath*, 29.
[38] Ibid., 5–6.

in an actual person, as this desire places them in the very same feminine position they are seeking to escape. Homoeroticism will always be repressed in a homosocial economy that is subject to the tyranny of the absolute masculine position.[39] These repressions are mainly facilitated through ideological processes that ensure that contradictions are smoothed over and absolute masculine possession is naturalised as a biological given. Turner explains that:

> implicit in every culture is a 'theory of reality' which motivates its ordering of that reality into good and bad, right and wrong, them and us, and so on. For this 'theory of reality' actually to work as a structuring principle it needs to be unspoken, invisible, a property of the natural world rather than human interests. Ideology is the term used to describe the system of beliefs and practices that is produced by this theory of reality; and although ideology itself has no material form, we can see its material effects in all social and political formations, from class structure to gender relations to our idea of what constitutes an individual.[40]

In relation to masculinity, these ideological processes achieve materiality mainly through rituals of gender surveillance. Typically, men are punished within the homosocial economy for transgressing conventional masculine norms. And, in turn, not only is punishment inflicted by others, it is also internalised by the subject through intense self-surveillance when men aim to be masculine through-and-through. As Judith Butler sums up: 'Gender is ... a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions—and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction "compels" our belief in its necessity and naturalness.'[41] Viewed from a different angle, Peter Looker observes that 'if we are driven by the biological imperatives of natural difference, then it has to be asked why we expend

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[39] When I refer to the masculine position, its links to the absolute ideal and hegemonic masculinity are inevitably brought to bear. Hegemonic masculinity is informed by the myth of the absolute masculine position or the ideal man and, therefore, all aspects of hegemonic masculinity (its codes of conduct, its figures and models) can potentially be equated with this position if these aspects are taken to be absolute. Hence, the terms ideal man, absolute masculine presence or position, or simply the masculine position are interchangeable according to context.

[40] *Film as Social Practice*, 155.

[41] 'From Interiority to Gender Performatives,' 366.

so much energy in asserting, maintaining and policing those differences and in repressing ... contradiction[s].'[42]

Fear of not attaining, or of losing one's notional masculinity is often assuaged by projecting this fear onto others, which inevitably raises the question of violence. Violent acts that render others inferior in some way can be a means of reaffirming masculine integrity. As femininity is the primary target of this violence, women prove to be most efficacious as the object of this projection. Kramer notes that 'biological women are made to bear the main burden of occupying the official, visible feminine position and in doing so of maintaining the fiction that the position held by men is genuinely polarised.'[43] Making women see this is one of 'the defining privileges of the absolutely masculine position.'[44] To be sure, violence is integral to expressions of masculinity, as it is inscribed at the inauguration of masculine subjectivity and sustained within the economy of gender relations.

Theoretical Manoeuvring

> We are free to recognize a psychoanalytic theme in art, but we are not compelled to; and if we do recognise a psychoanalytic theme, we need not be disturbed, because we are free to drown it in a rich orchestration of multiple meanings. (Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death*, 56)

From my discussion above, it is apparent that a psychoanalytical framework would prove most efficacious in focusing my argument. Indeed, psychoanalysis and film have been an inevitable partnership ever since film study was established as a discipline in the 1970s due to the impetus of Lacanian film theorists, such as Christian Metz whose seminal work *The Imaginary Signifier* was the first significant study of the intimate connections between the techniques and conventions of the cinema and the human psyche. As Laura Mulvey explains, 'the formal preoccupations [of mainstream film] reflect the psychical obsessions

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[42] 'Doing it with your Mates,' 206–7.
[43] *After the Lovedeath*, 7.
[44] Ibid., 102.

of the society which produced it.'[45] Furthermore, 'the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire onto the performer.'[46]

Barbara Creed points out that the 'oedipal narrative form is central to the writings of film theorists who draw on psychoanalysis in their reading of film texts.' She claims that these theorists 'proceed from the premise that a film is influenced structurally and thematically by the unconscious of society' and that they believe 'the oedipal scenario … is central to all forms of mainstream film narrative.'[47] In line with this thinking, Creed argues that 'Australian cinema has developed a rich tradition in oedipal narrative forms.'[48] Teresa de Lauretis notes that the Oedipus myth has been 'honed by a centuries-long patriarchal culture and [is] still at work with a vengeance in contemporary epistemologies and social technologies.' She concludes: 'All narrative, in its movement forward toward resolution and backward to an initial moment, a paradise lost, is overlaid with what has been called an oedipal logic—the inner necessity or drive of the drama—its "sense of ending" inseparable from the memory of loss and the recapturing of time.'[49] More importantly, as Mulvey points out, the oedipal scenario as it is understood from the point of view of psychoanalysis is 'a political weapon demonstrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form.'[50]

Freud saw the Oedipus complex as 'the central experience of the years of childhood, the greatest problem of early life and the most important source of later inadequacy,' adding that 'if psycho-analysis could boast of no other achievement than the discovery of the repressed Oedipus complex, that alone would give it a claim to be counted among the precious new acquisitions of mankind.'[51] Such a polemic inevitably attracts criticism and has generated a seemingly endless amount of commentary. To add to this is a daunting task but, for the purpose of developing my argument, it is necessary to highlight some

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[45] 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' 15.
[46] Ibid., 17.
[47] Creed, 'Mothers and Lovers,' 22.
[48] Ibid., 14.
[49] *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, 125.
[50] 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' 14.
[51] *Outline of Psycho-analysis*, 60–61.

significant points and terminology of the oedipal drama as understood by psychoanalytic theory.

The transition from the symbiotic fusion with the mother, where need, dependence and polymorphous desire are the modality of existence, to a fixed subject position that, through the blocking and rechannelling of desire, becomes the basis of a gendered identity, is fraught with difficulties. A child's desire to possess the mother is not easily relinquished, especially for a boy who, as I have noted, feels the disjunction of individual identity-formation more strongly. This desire becomes complicated when, from about the ages of two or three, he becomes aware of his penis as a sign of sexual difference (what Freud describes as the phallic stage of development). As a consequence of his 'observations and intuitive surmises of sexual life,' the boy's penis becomes the focus of his desire to possess his mother, which he enacts on a physical level. Freud claims that the moment a boy 'feels pleasurable sensations in his sexual organ and learns to procure these at will by manual manipulation, he becomes his mother's lover.'[52] This is reciprocated when, through the physical care she provides for the boy's body, she becomes his 'first seducer' and his 'first and strongest love-object and ... the prototype of all later love-relations—for both sexes.'[53] As William N. Stephens notes in his cross-cultural study of the Oedipus complex, 'generalised maternal nurture or mother-love, in and of itself is, to some extent, sexually stimulating to the infant.'[54] Furthermore, he provides evidence that 'women are capable of being sexually aroused by nursing,' especially in cultures where a lengthy post-partum taboo exists.[55]

This 'early awakened masculinity' establishes a trajectory that inevitably leads to rivalry with the father, where the logical consequence of the incestuous fantasy of possessing the mother is the desire to dislodge the rival progenitor.[56] However, this desire

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[52] Ibid., 57.
[53] Ibid., 56.
[54] *Oedipus Complex: Cross Cultural Evidence*, 37.
[55] Ibid., 34. Additionally, evidence suggests that infants with attending mothers tend to masturbate more frequently as opposed to those who do not have mothers, as in the case of orphans (36).
[56] *Outline of Psycho-analysis,* 57.

is cut short when the father prohibits the boy's masturbatory activities.[57] The boy realises that he alone is not the sole object of his mother's desire and that there is a phallic power greater than his which, within the dynamics of the oedipal triangle, initially resides with the father but is ultimately to be found in the wider society to which the latter is linked and which he represents. This establishes an anxiety over losing his most precious organ (what Freud terms the 'castration complex'), an anxiety necessary to ensure that the boy's desire for the mother is repressed 'more or less completely.' [58] For a boy to become a heterosexual male in a patriarchal world, he must repress his desire for his mother (or substitute) and redirect it towards a suitable female love object when he grows up. However, while the sense of threat needs to appear real to the little boy to propel him through the Oedipus complex, it exists mainly at the level of fantasy, and its effects are mostly symbolic.[59]

Significantly, for Jacques Lacan, the onset of the Oedipus complex coincides with the acquisition of language, when the child is inserted into a pre-existing order. This is the moment of humanisation, when the child becomes constituted as a subject and 'his nature is woven by effects in which is to be found the structure of language, of which he becomes the material, and that therefore there resounds in him ... the relation of speech.'[60] This structure is governed by the signifier, to which the subject is reduced, and on which must depend, and which bars access to the pre-oedipal world of plenitude, as the child's identity now exists in the field of the Other and is no longer absorbed into the imaginary identification with the mother. Subjectivity is hence predicated on lack and leaves the individual hopelessly divided. As Lacan explains, 'man cannot aim at being whole ... while ever the play of displacement and condensation to which he is doomed in the exercise of

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[57] While it is true that it is often the mother who literally prohibits the boy, especially when the father is absent from the home, 'for the little boy, the castrating agent is the father—the authority to whom, in the last resort, [the boy] attributes all threats made by other people' (Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psycho-Analysis*, 57).
[58] *Outline of Psycho-analysis*, 59.
[59] The argument goes that when a boy observes that girls do not have penises he assumes that they have been castrated, especially if he observes female genitals during menstruation, as is often the case with the mother. Furthermore, it is common practice for adults (especially males) to tease boys when they reveal their penises with the threat that they will lose it ('a bird will come and peck it off') if they don't put it away or put some clothes on.
[60] *Ecrits: A Selection*, 284.

his functions marks his relation as a subject to the signifier.'[61] Hence, it is the law of language, or what Lacan calls the 'symbolic order', that acts as the castrating agent in the way it serves to prohibit the child's desire to remain in possession of the mother. Therefore, while the figure of the father often embodies this law to the child, when Lacan speaks of the father (the symbolic father or *nom-du-père*, name-of-the-father), 'he has an agency in mind which cannot be reduced to whatever forms may be taken by the "real" or the "imaginary" father—an agency which promulgates the law.'[62] As Lacan notes, 'it is not only man who speaks, but that in man and through man *it* speaks.'[63]

Subjectivity, then, can be said to turn on this question of agency, conventionally symbolised by the phallus and chosen 'because it is the most tangible element in the real of sexual copulation.' It is a 'privileged signifier of that mark in which the role of the logos is joined with the advent of desire,' providing coherence to the order via the necessary illusion of a fixed relationship between the signifier and the signified.[64] As a transcendental signifier it serves as a provisional grounding agent to the endless play of signification. Lacan explains: 'For it is the signifier intended to designate as a whole the effects of the signified in that the signifier conditions them by its presence as a signifier.'[65]

Identification with the phallus is driven by the desire for presence and completeness and is therefore imaginary. It refers to any sense of potency or control or subjective unity, real or imagined, that is experienced through the authorisation of the symbolic order. It refers to the claim a subject makes on a coherence of meaning, truth or knowledge, and the power, prestige or advantages that these, in their institutional manifestations, bestow on the subject, who in patriarchal society is mostly male. However, as Lynne Segal points out, the phallus is not something that men automatically possess by virtue of being male or having a penis 'but a seemingly timeless symbolic order, representing sexual difference and the law of the father, which holds women and men alike in its thrall.'[66] In practice, then, what occurs is a 'slippage' between the phallus and the penis, 'between the fluctuable and

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[61] Ibid., 287.
[62] *Language of Psycho-Analysis*, 440.
[63] *Ecrits*, 284.
[64] Ibid., 287.
[65] Ibid., 285.
[66] *Slow Motion,* 87.

material male organ itself and the magnificent idea of it—for the phallus, unlike the penis, never tumesces and detumesces; it is always already erect.'[67]

Nevertheless, just as the phallus is the mark of power, it is also the mark of castration, as no one individual can embody it fully and at all times.[68] As Bowie explains, 'the phallus is the promise of meaning organised by an organ and, equally, it is the loss or cancellation of meaning perpetually being foretold.'[69] True phallic power necessarily always belongs to the Other and resides in the 'real,' which leaves the subject exposed to the imminent threat of losing potency, control or a sense of subjective unity. As such, castration can take many forms, as the primary fear of losing one's testicles is displaced onto other instances of significant loss. Kramer notes that 'in the world of gender polarity, any absence can become a castration.'[70] In addition to the transposition onto other parts of the body, like the eyes or the limbs (the blinding of Oedipus being the most notable example), castration can be perceived when one loses such things as employment, a significant acquisition, like a home, or any other similar loss that leads to the disruption of subjective unity. Furthermore, 'the agency of the father lends itself to a great variety of substitutions' —the state, institutions, public figures, mothers, 'phobic subjects' or any agency that can derive power from the symbolic order.[71]

As important as the Oedipus complex is in understanding human subjectivity, it is wise to heed a few warnings. The sociologist Connell concedes that the oedipal narrative is an important tool, because from psychoanalysis we get 'two important points: the extent to which adult masculinity is built on over-reactions to femininity; and the connection of the making of masculinity with the subordination of women.'[72] However, he points out that it is one among many and warns that it is 'radically incomplete.'[73] He claims that it cannot provide a complete map of masculinity, providing instead 'a map of *one* historically

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[67] Hurley, *Gothic Body*, 146.
[68] Refer to note 37 above.
[69] *Lacan*, 128.
[70] *After the Lovedeath*, 95.
[71] Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psycho-Analysis,* 56.
[72] *Masculinities,* 11.
[73] Ibid., 20.

possible pattern.'[74] Furthermore, he evaluates the significance of psychoanalysis with regard to masculinity as dependent 'on our ability to grasp the structuring of personality and the complexities of desire at the same time as the structuring of social relations, with their contradictions and dynamisms.'[75] Stephen Frosh would seem to agree, noting that 'the theory of the Oedipus complex provides a description of some possible mechanisms by which social structures are incorporated into individual consciousness and have a formative role on the ordering of the psyche.'[76] Later, paraphrasing William Reich, Frosh states that 'repression is not natural, but is a product of a particular form of society, the "patriarchal-authoritarian" form. This has its central power base in the family, through which the oppressive injustices of capitalism are translated, in early experience, into the child's character. The Oedipus complex, for example, through which so much of the child's personality is organised, is produced by the structure of the family under capitalism and transmits to the child the (ideological) values of the parents, derived from their own position in the productive process.'[77]

While the Oedipus complex has endured relentless challenges, and its limitations as an analytic tool have been exposed over the years,[78] it still remains embedded in some form or another in the various understandings of human behaviour as a compelling model for the analysis of identity formation and cultural reproduction. As Nancy Chodorow argues: 'Until we have another theory which can tell us about unconscious mental processes, conflict, and relations of gender, sexuality, and self, we had best take psychoanalysis for

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[74] Ibid., 18.
[75] Ibid., 21.
[76] *Politics of Psychoanalysis,* 48.
[77] Ibid., 146.
[78] Namely by feminists such as Judith Butler, Kate Millet and Luce Irigaray who, in stressing that Freud was influenced by the patriarchal values of his time, object to the way in which female sexuality and femininity in general, through a perceived deviation from a masculine norm, is constructed as lacking. Furthermore, as Connell indicated above, traditional psychoanalysis is not very sensitive to historical contingencies and tends to lapse into essentialism, a point taken up by one of psychoanalysis' most vigorous opponents in recent times, Jeffrey Masson. He insists that the interpretive methods of psychotherapy (which inform the model for psychoanalytic theories in the academy) are fundamentally flawed because they are based on the assumption that the patient's problems are 'self-created.' This results in the subordination of social factors to the psychic domain of the individual. Moreover, the analyst's impartiality cannot be guaranteed, often resulting in his or her 'views' being imposed on the patient (*Against Therapy,* 43–44). Finally, we cannot overlook the savage critique in *Anti-Oedipus*, by Deleuze and Guattari, of the oedipal regime as it operates in contemporary western society.

what it does include and can tell us rather than dismissing it out of hand.'[79] She concludes: 'I am more convinced even than I was during an earlier period that psychoanalysis describes a significant level of reality that is not reducible to, or in the last instance caused by, social or cultural organisation.'[80] At the very least there can be no doubt that, as Segal claims, 'we can never escape the influence of our mothers and fathers.'[81]

In response to these theoretical problems, I attempt to locate my discussion on that dynamic fault line between the personal and social construction of masculine subjectivities. While analysing the particular, personal constructions of the characters on the screen through their relationships with their parents, I also situate the discussion in its social context. Moreover, I am mindful that the characters on the screen are not real, in the sense that their life does not continue beyond the margins of the frame, but they are nevertheless constructed out of the same signifying economy and are informed by the same textual consciousness, or '*mise en scène* of desire,'[82] from which real flesh-and-blood people (like myself and the audience) piece together, through cathected images and signs, their own understandings and expressions of selfhood.[83] Hence while psychoanalysis remains at the foundation of this thesis, it is liberally supplemented by Sociology, Anthropology, Cultural Studies and Poststructuralism in order to steer it away from any essentialist or universal tendencies. In this way, I hope to loosen the exclusive connections of the oedipal narrative with psychoanalysis. When analysing a narrative such as Sophocles' *Oedipus* we must be attentive to the text within which it is embodied. This approach compares to the analyst who treats the patient as an individual by following up specific 'individual symbolic connections.' We must pursue the 'associations that culture and the ethnographic context build around every story or myth.'[84]

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[79] Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, 4.
[80] Ibid., 7.
[81] *Slow Motion*, 28.
[82] Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, 5.
[83] As a man, I am not quarantined from the processes I am describing, despite the adoption of an objective voice throughout this thesis. My retention of the first-person plural in the quotation of the title, therefore, is deliberate, as it applies to me as much as it does to the world I am gesturing towards.
[84] Sissa, 'Interpreting the Implicit,' 36.

Thesis Outline

> In traditional narrative, women seek men, but men seek manhood. Traditional narrative is so preoccupied with this search that manhood itself seems to be won as much—or more—in narrative as in reality. Unless a man has a story to tell about his attainment of manhood, he has not in fact attained it. And even if he has a story, it has to be told more than once. The story itself is another one of those little extra pieces by which masculine identity contrives the illusion of wholeness. (*After the Lovedeath*, 146)

I have chosen films that show men negotiating their manhood in the contemporary world. Many have enjoyed mainstream commercial success and wide social currency and, because of their popularity, need to be included for their consensualising tendencies. Examination of the status quo is a necessary starting point to understand how ideas about manhood are reproduced through ideological processes. I begin in chapter one with *The Castle* (Rob Sitch, 1997), which serves this purpose well, as Darryl Kerrigan is constructed in the film as a model of masculinity and fatherhood. Against this I set another enormously popular film, *Shine* (Scott Hicks, 1996), which, though consensualising in different ways, serves to unsettle and destabilise, and hence critique (through the excesses of patriarchal authority displayed in Peter's fathering of David Helfgott), the comforting images of fatherhood presented in *The Castle*. Nevertheless, despite both films' consensualising tendencies, like all films, they contain the seeds of their own subversion. As Rose Lucas points out, 'images of masculinity in the cinema may indeed reflect and thus perpetuate dominant social ideas about masculinity; they may equally—and perhaps, at the same time—work to challenge and problematise those dominant representations.'[85]

In the second chapter, the focus shifts to the mother figure and its significance in the manhood of the two central characters in *Proof* (Jocelyn Moorhouse, 1991) and *Death in Brunswick* (John Ruane, 1991). In contrast to the depiction of the father in the first chapter, the father is absent in the lives of both Carl and Martin, leaving the mother as the centre around which their identities orbit and the principal threat to their subjective integrity.

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[85] 'Dragging it Out,' 139.

With David Helfgott's disturbed subjectivity still resonating, I explore undercurrents of misogyny that rupture the surface of these narratives which end safely in heterosexual marriage (*Death in Brunswick*) and homosocial solidarity (*Proof*). In these films the mother and women in general are linked to abjection or the abject, which, after examining Elisabeth Badinter's and Nancy Chodorow's analyses of the myths of motherhood, I explore through the writings of Julia Kristeva and Barbara Creed. I conclude the chapter with an examination of closure in a reintegrated masculine subject through the narrative theories of Laura Mulvey and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's analysis of homosocial desire.

My first choice has always been to include films that consciously problematise and challenge received images of manhood. Unfortunately, they are less popular with audiences but warrant inclusion because of their complexity, nuance and engagement with the tensions of contemporary masculinities. *The Boys* (Rowan Woods, 1997), which is the sole focus of my middle chapter, fits this description. In this film the feminine, maternal figure is abjected to its logical conclusion. The misogyny that lingered just below the surface of the films in the previous chapters now erupts into actual violence against women. With this chapter we can complete the descent into the core of masculine subjectivity where violence is sovereign. Notably this descent is accompanied by gothic elements which can be observed in the films of the first three chapters. Kelly Hurley notes that the Gothic 'has been theorised as an instrumental genre, re-emerging cyclically, at periods of cultural stress, to negotiate the anxieties that accompany social and epistemological transformations and crises.'[86] Hence it is no accident that I have placed *The Boys* literally at the centre of my thesis, where I examine some of the possible reasons why men like the Sprague brothers use violence as an essential part of the expression of their identity. After discussing violence's uncanny relationship with the ordinary and everyday according to Sigmund Freud's theorising, I utilise the writings of Lawrence Kramer, Michael Kaufman and R.W. Connell to explain how violence is structured into patriarchal society. In particular, I examine Alfred Adler and R.W. Connell's reworking of the notion of the masculine protest. Furthermore, through the theories of Lawrence Kramer, Jurgen Reeder, Laura Mulvey and Marie Balmary, I explain how violence is

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[86] *Gothic Body*, 5.

intrinsic to the symbolic order as an effect of the figure of the 'uncastrated man' and hence, ineluctably, a part of masculine subjectivity and gender relations.

In the last three chapters, while still attending to the personal, I turn my attention more closely to the social. *The Boys* becomes the pivotal film of the thesis, as its violence is foreshadowed in the opening chapters and haunts the remaining chapters. Moreover, the social implications of the uncastrated man, stemming from the oedipal triangle discussed in this chapter, are traced from convictism through to the figure of the larrikin in the fourth chapter where I focus on castration anxiety in the characters of *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Stephan Elliot, 1994) and *Chopper* (Andrew Dominik, 2000). The spectacle of the larrikin figure leads on to a discussion of camp, which can be read against the essentialising tendencies of psychoanalysis. Here the writings of Judith Butler, Carole-Anne Tyler and Richard Dyer make a significant contribution to my argument.

In the last chapter I use Nancy Chodorow's discussion of oedipal asymmetries to explore heterosexual relationships in the films *Mullet* (David Caesar, 2001), *Praise* (John Curran, 1998) and *Thank God He Met Lizzie* (Cherie Nowlan, 1997) and how the relationship with a woman, as the suitable love object, impacts on masculine subjectivity. I also examine the legacy that the patriarchy has passed on to its sons as they face significant intimate relationships, marriage and fatherhood. This legacy is shaped by the impetus of modernity and its concommitant ideology of romantic love in late capitalist, western societies, as explicated by Anthony Giddens, Steven Nock and Jacqueline Sarsby. The films reveal wounded spirits and a tendency toward melancholia, which I explore through the theorising of Sigmund Freud and Julia Kristeva. I use the character of C. J. Dennis' Sentimental Bloke as a benchmark to evaluate the constructions of masculinities in this chapter within a local and increasingly globalised world. As Connell notes: 'The pattern of "Australian Masculinities" does not make much sense until it is seen as part of the history of settler colonialism, dependent industrialisation, and contemporary globalisation.' [87]

In the choice of my films I make no claims of comprehensively covering the field of Australian masculinities. Nor do I make claims to know the object of my study. O'Regan

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[87] 'Introduction: Australian Masculinities,' 19.

cautions that because Australian cinema is an '*unprincipled assemblage,*' by necessity 'it has an open-ended and highly contingent character and …cannot provide anything more than a contingent grasp of its object.' He explains: 'There can be no privileged point in the cinema where all the diverse elements could be summarized into a generalized principle. It is the network—made of a collection of hybrid entities—that governs the cinema's form and character. The various ways in which agents know Australian cinema depends on their place in this web.'[88] Therefore my aims are relatively modest. In my selection of films I am 'assembling possibilities rather than ... demonstrating necessities.'[89] My thesis could be demonstrated with an altogether different choice of films.

[88] *Australian National Cinema*, 40.
[89] Kramer, *After the Lovedeath*, 19.

I

A Man's World: Boys, their Fathers and the Reproduction of the Patriarchy

The life of the father has a mysterious prestige … it is through him that the family communicates with the rest of the world: he incarnates that immense, difficult and marvellous world of adventure; he personifies transcendence, he is God. (Simone de Beauvoir, quoted in Segal, *Slow Motion*, 27)

MY FATHER BEGAN AS A GOD

My father began as a god,
full of heroic tales
of days when he was young.
His laws were as immutable
as if brought down from Sinai,
which indeed he thought they were.

He fearlessly lifted me to heaven
by a mere swing to his shoulder,
and made of me a godling
by seating me astride
our milch-cow's back, and, too,
upon the great white gobbler
of which others went in constant fear.

Strange then how he shrank and shrank
until by my time of adolescence
he had become a foolish small old man
with silly and outmoded views
of life and of morality.

Stranger still
that as I became older
his faults and his intolerances
scaled away into the past, revealing virtues
such as honesty, generosity, integrity.

Strangest of all
how the deeper he recedes into the grave
the more I see myself
as just one more of all the little men
who creep through life
not knee-high to this long-dead god. (Ian Mudie)

These Gods that fail us bequeath diverse legacies to their sons and daughters. (Segal, *Slow Motion*, 27)

Introduction

The two films in this chapter feature fatherhood as the theme that regulates their narratives. Both focus on a father who significantly influences the life of his son or sons. *The Castle* (Sitch, 1997) centres on the amiable patriarch, Darryl Kerrigan, who, as 'the backbone' of the family, dominates the film and functions as the fixed point (transcendental signifier) around which the events and characters rotate. His fifteen-year-old son, Dale, in particular, is in awe of his every word and deed. This reverence is warranted as Darryl never lets his him down. He protects his castle and maintains the integrity of the family thus reinstating patriarchal authority and paving the way for his son's transition to manhood. As such, Darryl evinces within the audience a nostalgic longing for a reassuring authority figure at a time in the contemporary world when its absence, both physically and symbolically, is a cause of much public concern.[1]

In contrast to the benign, nurturing image of Darryl Kerrigan, *Shine* (Hicks, 1996) presents an image of fatherhood that reveals the excesses of patriarchal authority. David is in fear of his father, Peter, not in awe of him. Despite Peter's best intentions to guide David in what he perceives as a harsh world, his love for his son is overbearing, and he crushes David's fragile ego with his heavy-handed and oppressive approach to fatherhood. David does physically manage to escape his father by studying music in London against his father's wishes, but the cost of this act of rebellion is psychological disintegration and many years in a mental institution. His identity is recovered only when he meets Gillian, the woman he eventually marries, but he is totally reliant on the emotional support she provides. While David's subjective reintegration is inspirational, he does not achieve manhood in the traditional sense. Psychological disorder, according to the film, is the legacy of a severe, overbearing father.

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[1] Lupton and Barclay, *Constructing Fatherhood*, 78–80.

The Castle: 'Serenity'

When *The Castle* was first released back in 1997, Darryl Kerrigan's distinctive expressions quickly established social currency. Phrases such as 'Ah the serenity' and 'Tell him he's dreaming' slipped easily into the vernacular. Those who were not one of the first to see the film (including me) found that that their identification with the Kerrigans was established well in advance. This ease of identification is noteworthy, given that the Kerrigans are an anachronism in the contemporary world. They may be facing current issues such as corporatism and economic rationalism, but their core values hark back to an imagined time when life was believed to be much simpler. The tenor of the film is inescapably nostalgic and is very reminiscent of the fifties and early sixties, when the filmmakers were growing up. Santo Cilauro claims that 'the film is a smorgasbord of our best moments with our own families when we were kids.'[2] Even one of the nation's notable critics, Phillip Adams, claims: 'I grew up with families like the Kerrigans. I've eaten Kerrigan food in Kerrigan kitchens surrounded by Kerrigan décor while everyone conversed in a Kerrigan accent.'[3]

More interesting, however, is not the ease with which the audience can identify with the Kerrigan's outmoded values, but how this identification is undermined through humour, as the audience can never be certain whether it is laughing with the Kerrigans or at them. This disjunction is set up by the filmmakers through the predominant use of ironic humour. For example, when Darryl remarks on the 'serenity' while the family is staying at Bonny Doon, the momentary silence which follows is interrupted, in one instance, by a bug zapper frying an insect and, in another, by Steve revving his motorbike. The audience can see the joke but the characters remain oblivious. Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik observe that 'the process of comedy more acutely involves a *play* between identification and distanciation,' a difference they claim is accentuated in the cinematic experience where through laughter the spectator is 'pulled away from the world represented on the screen.'[4] If this is the case, then the humour deployed throughout the film simultaneously enables the audience to connect with the sentiments of the Kerrigan clan and disavow this

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[2] Quoted in Devine, 'A Man's Castle is his Home,' 10.
[3] 'Charm of an Aussie Optimist,' 42.
[4] *Popular Film and Television Comedy*, 149.

connection in order to ward off any embarrassment felt by the association with their naive, artless and anachronistic lifestyle.

Yet, although the audience might feel superior, or more sophisticated, any attachment to the sentiments expressed by Cilauro and Adams above makes it difficult for the audience to distance itself completely from the comforting, wholesome family values that the Kerrigans present. The film may mock the Kerrigans, but it is also apparent that they are celebrated. After the laughter has subsided, there lingers a residue of value, something that is worth keeping or protecting—a possibility perhaps—something that has not been completely eroded away in a rapidly expanding, global world (distinct national values, perhaps). This possibility, that life could be as simple as the film portrays, is very seductive for audiences in this complex modern age. Adams exclaims that 'what happens in *The Castle* is what bloody well should happen.'[5] Don't we all wish for serenity, plenitude, or those moments where everything seems to fit into place and we feel that we are the masters of our own happiness? It is here that the film is most successful in manufacturing consent and reinforcing the status quo about the family, particularly the role of the father.

'Darl'

The Castle is almost exclusively about a father and a husband, as Darryl Kerrigan dominates the film appearing in almost every scene. Through the humour discussed above and the narrative point of view (the voice-overs of his son Dale) we are encouraged to see Darryl as an object of admiration. He is like a god to his son, 'full of heroic tales' (in this instance, stories about his job as a tow-truck driver). As a husband, he is beyond reproach. He compliments his wife Sally's cooking at every meal and praises her handicrafts despite their obvious inexpert construction. Her Darryl, whom she calls 'Darl,' is a man of 'principles' and a perfect gentleman, demonstrated when she tells the story of their first meeting. She was with someone else at the time, and because he was not willing to 'cut anyone's lunch,' from that moment on she 'had eyes' only for Darryl.

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[5] 'Charm of an Aussie Optimist,' 42.

The choice of Michael Caton, best known to Australian audiences as the lovable, jocular and dependable Uncle Harry from *The Sullivans*, for the part was inspired. Jane Kennedy claims that he 'sprang immediately to mind' when the film was first conceived.[6] Caton mobilises associations of the iconic Australian male: Anglo, white, working-class, heterosexual, a man of action and integrity, honest and cheerfully optimistic, a larrikin, a digger and a battler against the odds—in short, Caton's portrayal of Darryl Kerrigan represents a safe reassuring image of manhood. Stephen Crofts claims that the association of Michael Caton with his role of Uncle Harry, along with the 'nostalgic setting, licenses ethnic, gender and familial representations which can be read as comforting because they elide the anxieties and complexities of the present (not to mention the past also!)'[7] Sally's 'big hunk of a man' can be relied upon to support and protect the household. As the traditional head or 'backbone of the family,' he dispenses with the threat to his 'castle' through his 'fighting spirit' and determination never to give in and wins against the odds. He demonstrates to the audience, in his own clumsy words, the 'example of the individual, of how the individual if he has the guts to stand up and shove it right up those people who think they can stand on top of you.' In the end, his castle prevails and equilibrium is restored. Closure endorses the nuclear family, heterosexuality and the subordination of women. A brief coda reveals that both Con and Steve (after reuniting with his girlfriend) follow in their father's footsteps by having children and families of their own. Sally, the 'other bones of the family,' maintains her secondary position within the household through the sexual division of labour and her confinement to the home space. She poses no threat to Darryl's manhood. His masculinity is reaffirmed and secure at the end of the film as he resides over his castle.

In her book on homosocial desire in English literature, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick discusses how the phrase, 'A man's home is his castle,' functions ideologically in capitalist society. Citing Marx's notion of the 'diachronic narrative of origins,' she points out that one of the possible manoeuvres of ideology is to idealise images of the past as a means of smoothing over the inconsistencies of current social structures. She explains that the image of the castle 'reaches *back* to an emptied-out image of mastery and integration under

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[6] Quoted in *Melbourne Age EG*, June 27, 1997, 13.
[7] '*The Castle*: 1997's "Battlers" and the Ir/Relevance of the Aesthetic,' 167.

feudalism in order to propel the male wage-worker *forward* to further feats of alienated labour, in the service of a now atomized and embattled, but all the more intensively idealised home.' However, while property ownership may be discontinuous in the transposition of this image into a contemporary context—a mortgaged home on a quarter-acre block does not compare to an inherited castle on a substantial estate—the 'contradiction is assuaged and filled in by transferring the lord's political and economic control over the *environs* of his castle to an image of the father's personal control over the *inmates* of his house.'[8]

This backward-looking, ideological stance is consistent with the nostalgic mood of the film in the way it harks back to the 1950s. Nock, in his book on men and marriage, explains that 'until the 1960s, men's adult lives were defined by marriage.' Men were expected to be the breadwinners and those that 'could not, or did not, adequately provide for their wives and families were not only failures, they were not men (they were "pseudo-homosexuals," men who did not meet the prevailing standards of masculinity that were almost entirely related to marriage and the family).'[9] Recall how Darryl slips into a melancholic mood after losing in the Supreme Court. He feels not just the failure of losing the case (over which he has no control—he and everyone else knew he had done his best), but also failure as a man, in the way that Nock has noted. Dale tells the audience, 'I'd never seen him so down.' Later, when Dale tells Wayne that their father has 'gone all quiet,' Wayne is astounded.

Drawing on anthropological research (namely the work of David Gilmore), Nock adds that 'throughout the world, males are expected to assume at least three roles to be complete members of adult society.' He explains that they are expected to be fathers, providers and protectors to their children and wife. Importantly, he notes that 'in the performance of these roles ... men may become aggressive, assertive, competitive, hierarchical.'[10] We can observe these traits in Darryl's character, despite his benign appearance. He is assertive when dealing with the woman from the municipal office ('Will you stop pretending to be

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[8] *Between Men*, 14.
[9] *Marriage in Men's Lives*, 17.
[10] Ibid., 49–50.

on my side'), and he is aggressive when he deals with the standover man and pulls down the iron gates of the consortium owners with his tow-truck. Caton himself has declared that 'there's nothing quite so primitive as when your home is threatened.'[11] Darryl is also aggressive in his verbal insults. He tells the pompous Airlink lawyers to 'suffer' in their 'jocks' when Laurie Hamill delivers a blow to their case, and when Darryl wins he calls out, 'bad luck ... ya dickhead!' However, it is here, in his swearing (which shocked one reviewer enough to censure the film for its unnecessary use of 'rough language'[12]), that we can gain more insight into Darryl's aggression.

Anthony Easthope notes that swearing is a 'masculine prerogative' and constitutes a 'masculine style' of speaking. He claims that swearing is 'transgressive, a deliberate effort to break the rules of politeness and good verbal behaviour' and as such is aggressive.[13] We can observe this most clearly above when Darryl swears in the courtroom. Additionally, it is important to note that Darryl swears only in front of men, where it functions as a bond between them and himself.[14] Note also that the word 'fuck' (which Darryl uses quite frequently) means to assume an active masculine position, to penetrate a passive, feminised other. While the women in his life pose no visible threat to his masculinity, perhaps we can observe in his swearing the symptoms of the violence and aggression that inscribes all masculine subjectivity within the symbolic order. The act of swearing unconsciously fortifies the boundaries of masculinity in relation to a feminine other. Darryl may not be overtly violent toward women, but we can note here how the symbolic authorises any recourse to violence that the masculine subject might take to shore up these boundaries, either consciously or unconsciously.

These boundaries are reinforced also in the clear separation between the public and private spaces in the film. Dale points out that his father never brings his problems home. He presents a cheerful and optimistic face to his family and makes them 'feel special' through his compliments ('Why would you want to eat out when this gets served up to you

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[11] Quoted in *Melbourne Age EG*, June 27, 1997, 13.
[12] Partridge, 'Fair Dinkum Aussie Delight,' 12.
[13] *What a Man's Gotta Do,* 94–95.
[14] Excepting the time when he swears in front of his next-door neighbour, Yvonne, who in effect stands in as an honorary man. When he apologises to her, she tells him, 'Get your hand off it.'

every night?'), while fortifying himself for the outside world. He ventures unaccompanied by his wife out into the streets, offices and courtrooms of the public world.[15] Sally, apart from the short walk home from the airport, is only ever seen in the home space. Darryl, on the other hand, inhabits both spaces and switches from the aggressive, assertive role to the loving, caring role frequently throughout the film. Indeed, like most men, Darryl is a divided man.

It is also evident that his sons are following in his footsteps, as he represents to them a model of masculinity that they are eager to emulate. Like Darryl, they are self-contained and unaccustomed to revealing their vulnerability. When Darryl loses the appeal to the Supreme Court, both Steve and Wayne struggle to articulate their feelings about their father. Steve says rather clumsily to his father in the poolroom: 'You haven't let anyone down. I don't know what the opposite of letting someone down is, but you done the opposite.' This is reminiscent of Darryl's awkward 'example of the individual' speech mentioned above. The effect is comic, providing the audience with another opportunity simultaneously to laugh at the Kerrigans and retain affection for them. More importantly, however, this moment points to the commonly-held perception that men are unable to express their emotions. This inability is derived from the association with femininity of tender emotions that are often repressed when a boy grows to manhood because of the imperative to define his masculinity against femininity. It is significant to note here that Darryl reserves his affections for his wife and daughter but displays no physical contact with his sons. However, what his boys lack in emotional expression they make up for in physical exuberance, which Darryl struggles to keep in check. He already has one son in gaol who, according to him, 'got in with a bad crowd' and committed armed robbery. He reminds Steve of this fact after he shoves a gun in the face of the standover man. While he reprimands Steve for his impulsive behaviour, he tacitly applauds his spirit in his approval of the bargain price he paid for the gun. For his sons, Darryl embodies the promise of power and privilege noted in the introduction, but they misrecognise the real source of phallic power.

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[15] His *children* also do not accompany him because of their feminised position in relation to the home space.

To be sure, phallic power belongs to the figures of hegemonic masculinity in the film, in particular Laurie Hamill, QC. As one of the 'big boys' that Denis Denuto refers to, he is masterful throughout his courtroom performances and commands respect amongst his peers. Recall Dale's voice-over commentary about Wayne's parole; Hamill just had to walk into the room in order for the papers to be signed. And we must not forget that had it not been for the serendipitous meeting between a battler and a 'rich man's lawyer' outside the Supreme Court the Kerrigans would no longer be able to enjoy any more of those moments of serenity. Instead, they would be living in a two-bedroom unit with the greyhounds and the next-door neighbour. However, the film smooths over this uncomfortable reality through its choice of Bud Tingwell for the part of Laurie Hamill. Tingwell's iconic status as a gentle and compassionate man serves to endorse the egalitarian ethos that informs the film. He might be a rich man's lawyer, but we can trust him and, by extension, the hegemonic masculinity that he represents, because he is just like us. This no doubt explains Sitch's explanation for giving Tingwell the part: 'Bud adds an element of credibility to *The Castle* which we could never have found anywhere else.'[16] Indeed the film's 'credibility' rests on how successfully it has managed to gloss over its contradictions.

'Dreaming'

When Tracy and Con return from their honeymoon in Thailand, they give each member of the family a gift. Wayne receives a small, carved elephant which Dale explains 'brings good luck, especially if the trunk is up.' It is a seemingly trivial gift along with all the other souvenir items that the young honeymooners purchased, but the filmmakers take some trouble to exploit its comic value by foregrounding it in a number of scenes. Of course, not only is the erect trunk a symbol of good luck, it is also a potent symbol of phallicism (particularly in the Asian world, through its associations with the Hindu god Ganesha). This point is lost on the Kerrigans, providing another instance of the ironic humour mentioned above. Nevertheless, I would like to explore the resonance of the souvenir

[16] Quoted in Copas, 'Laughing at Our National Identity,' 27.

elephant as a means of picking away at the seams of the narrative in order to lay bare some of the unconscious elements of masculinity in the film.

At the film's end we see Wayne packing his case and leaving prison. He pauses for a moment and muses over his elephant with its erect trunk before putting it away. We are left to wonder exactly what is going through his mind. Dale tells us in voice-over that the parole board released him 'in shock' at the presence of Laurie Hamill. Is Wayne thinking that the elephant did bring good luck? Are we invited to share the view, symbolised in the elephant, that good will always win out? Significantly, Wayne's luck at achieving early release has less to do with the souvenir than what that souvenir points to. Phallic potency within the relations of power in society resides with those who have the ability to wield control due to their wealth, position and prestige.[17] Wayne, his father and those like him who constitute the mass population may dream of personal mastery, but in order to do so they must, as Kramer has pointed out, repress the fact that they will always be feminised in relation to an omniscient phallic other which has the power to castrate or 'compulsorily acquire' your home (and serenity). Hence, the souvenir serves as the mark of this repression within the film when considered from the populist point of view.

The sense of personal mastery is further reinforced by the way the Kerrigans' subjectivities are constructed around consumerism, which the souvenir elephant also serves to symbolise. This is signalled at the beginning of the film when Tracy appears on the television game show, *Wheel of Fortune*, and becomes more conspicuous as the film develops. The Kerrigans are avid consumers constantly seeking out bargains. Steve is in awe when Tracy and Con tell of the bargains they found in Thailand and, with the encouragement of his father, is always combing through the *Trading Post* in search of the ultimate purchase. Some of these 'bargains' are quite absurd (jousting sticks and a pulpit) and provide humour for the audience, but others reveal that Darryl has a canny business sense, which accounts for his successful tow-truck operation and his ability to provide for his family. This sense is best illustrated when they are driving to Bonny Doon. The radar detector beeps and Darryl, looking very pleased with himself, says to the rest of the family,

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[17] This power is reinforced by the phallic imagery that is prevalent in the film (in particular, the planes and the low-angle shot of the High Court building).

'Just paid for itself.' This moment of beating the system and other moments of self-control facilitated by a canny purchase (the transportable home at Bonny Doon being a prime example) provide Darryl with a brief sense of empowerment, leading to an exaggerated understanding of his position in the patriarchal hierarchy (i.e. believing himself to be an example of an individual with the 'guts'). These moments position us into thinking that the power of the individual will alone is enough to overcome marginalisation within the power relations of society. All that is required is masculine fortitude or 'guts,' which is seemingly available to anyone with the courage to be a man.

We can observe here the myth of individualism operating, that 'bedrock virtue of modern societies,'[18] which obscures the real relations of power. The 'Kerrigan Decision' at the end of the film demonstrates the potential of the individual to succeed against the odds, in the manner of Hollywood films at the time, such as *Philadelphia* (1993) and *Guilty by Suspicion* (1991).[19] This might be inspiring for those members of the audience who feel disempowered, culturally as well as financially, by the effects of economic rationalist government policies and the encroaching global economy. The 'ordinary man' battling to maintain control over his family might be comforted by the way Darryl's control over his 'castle' is re-established and by the way the absolute masculine subject position is reinstated. But this amounts to nothing more than a wish fulfilment which obscures the real power of the state within the economy. Edward Nell points out that 'the social function of individualism [as a philosophy and an ideology] has been to explain and justify the central role of the market, and to mediate its relation to the state' over which it 'should take priority.'[20] While Darryl's triumph, and the associated restoration of his masculine fortitude, might seem to affirm the rights of the individual (ironically, by courtesy of the state) it nonetheless works to obfuscate the influence of the state in the market. As Crofts observes, the image of self-sufficiency embodied in Darryl Kerrigan 'meshed perfectly with the anti-welfare discourses being vigorously promoted by the Howard Government in the later 1990s.'[21] So who is really dreaming here?

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[18] Fukuyama, *Great Disruption*, 48.
[19] It is a tradition that stretches back to the great courtroom battles such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Inherit the Wind*.
[20] *Making Sense of a Changing Economy*, 194.
[21] '*The Castle*: 1997's "Battlers,"' 169.

A populist reading of any text will tend to overlook the workings of ideology and pass over the many inconsistencies that inevitably appear throughout the process of textual production. As Turner notes, a 'text is a kind of battleground for competing and often contradictory positions.' He adds that in most cases 'culture's dominant positions' win out, 'but not without leaving cracks or divisions through which we can see the consensualizing work of ideology exposed.' The unconvincing intervention of Laurie Hamill QC is one such gap. More importantly, examination of these fault lines, in addition to exposing the influence of cultural dominants, also reveals 'the intransigence of the ideological opposition.'[22] The Working Dog team's inept handling of the wooden elephant explained above is one such instance. Another can be found in those moments when Dale, in the middle of family merriment, suddenly and inexplicably feels sad about Wayne not being present. The first occurs when the family is watching the television show, *The Best of Hey, Hey, It's Saturday,* and the second occurs when Dale overlooks Darryl being playfully affectionate with Tracy.

In the first instance, Dale, sitting at his father's knees watching television with the rest of the household, is vitalised by Darryl's infectious laughter. For a fleeting moment Dale feels joy (or serenity, as his father would name it) as everything seems to fit into place; but this feeling quickly disperses when he thinks of his brother in prison. Indeed, Wayne is a source of anxiety in the narrative that will not go away, despite his early release from prison at the end of the film. Consciously or unconsciously, he serves as a continual reminder of the precariousness of masculine subjectivity and those elements I have discussed above that constitute the masculine subject position. He signifies the underside to the non-threatening, sanctioned masculinities of Darryl and Laurie and functions to destabilise these masculinities. We cannot overlook the fact that Wayne is serving time for a violent crime (armed robbery). He could not afford a rich man's lawyer, so he had to depend on the hapless Denis Denuto and ended up getting an eight-year sentence. This fact alone reveals the Kerrigans' true position within the patriarchal hierarchy. Wayne is castrated, or feminised, in relation to the State, which will always have the authority to wield power over the masses. And, significantly, he is the recipient of the wooden elephant

[22] *Film as Social Practice*, 171–72.

designed to bring good luck when its trunk is up. Indeed, as I have noted, this is the only way that people like the Kerrigans can dream of achieving any phallic potency.

Finally, at the risk of stretching the significance of the elephant too far, I would like to note the way that it points to a transgression that is not imaginable in a populist reading of the text. I am referring to the second instance cited above, that curious scene when Darryl teases his daughter. He threatens to send a nude baby photo of her to the television station they are watching, and they start to wrestle playfully with each other. The scene is imaged as an innocent moment of affection between father and daughter, without any suggestions otherwise. However, Dale appears at the doorway with a cue stick in his hand to see what all the fuss is about. He pauses momentarily, watching in admiration and approval as father and daughter lark about, before the thought of Wayne once again intrudes on his happiness: 'That night I thought of Wayne again. I wondered what he was doing and whether the elephant's trunk was up because that means good luck.' A mere coincidental juxtaposition of elements perhaps (father, daughter, nude photo, phallic trunk/cue stick, young man's anxiety), but the persistence of the souvenir elephant rupturing the surface of the text makes one wonder at all the tensions and anxieties that lurk below.

The Castle of the Self

Easthope claims that the masculine ego bears a close resemblance to the structure and function of a castle. Using da Vinci's design for a fortress as an illustration, which he describes as a 'masculine narcissistic fantasy,' he points out that the construction of the castle is predicated on defence, where every aspect of the design is contingent upon anticipating the threats of an opposing other, both externally to 'repel external attack' and internally to 'suppress treason within.' Hence, the castle is defined by what it is not, which, when serving as a trope for masculine subjectivity, invariably turns out to be the feminine. Anxiety, vigilance, paranoia and aggression are the key accompaniments to masculine subjectivity. As Easthope explains, the masculine subject is 'both stake and

agent in a ceaseless struggle to keep itself together, to close all gaps, watch every move, meet aggression with aggression ... to *master* every threat.'[23]

However, Easthope does point out that this defensive posturing is a feature of all ego formations, as humans are not born with egos; they have to be 'developed' within the individual. Images from society converge with memory and the repetition of experience to create the illusion of an enduring entity. As Terry Eagleton notes, 'the ego is a function or effect of a subject which is always dispersed, never identical with itself, strung out along the chains of the discourses which constitute it.'[24] Nevertheless, continuity in identity is demanded in order to function in society, but absolute unity is impossible to maintain against the contingencies of time. Those who attempt to maintain this sense of unity must be constantly vigilant against the threat of disintegration. Anything that contradicts this imagined unity must be repressed, denied or vigorously attacked. Hence, the more an individual cherishes the ego, the greater the defence will be, and this is what distinguishes the dominant version of masculinity from other ego formations. As Easthope explains, as long as the masculine ego attempts to be self-contained, 'masculine all the way through' and 'total master, the more aggression it releases.'[25]

That the image of the castle should present itself at this time is no coincidence. Darryl Kerrigan's innocent, uncorrupted and distinctive Australian character provides a point of identification for the audience in a climate of anxiety about an ever-expanding, homogenising global economy. This anxiety about Australia's cultural boundaries, identified by Liz Ferrier,[26] may be assuaged to a degree by the comforting, nostalgic values I have identified above, but these values fail to hide the reality of the contemporary world outside the cinema doors, what Frosh describes as the 'post-Oedipal image of the pre-Oedipal world.' Citing Joel Kovel, he explains that 'with the demise of the powerful patriarchal family … the consumer narcissist [is] faced with the feeding, invading, obliterating other which has no specific personality, but … creates desires in the same instant as it fulfils them, leaving the genuine needs of the individual untouched

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[23] *What a Man's Gotta Do*, 39–40.
[24] *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 169.
[25] *What a Man's Gotta Do*, 42–43.
[26] 'Vulnerable Bodies,' 63.

underneath.' He argues that the patriarchy now is only 'perpetuated through the internalised lost structures of Oedipus' and to the extent that there remains a 'yearning for authority.' In place of the patriarchy there exists the 'administrative society' which 'operates more forcefully through its ability to protect people against their real (pre-Oedipal) desires by manipulating what seems to be their needs.'[27] The film can be described as an attempt to reinstate this authority and re-establish those 'lost structures' against the threat of the other. Significantly, while the women characters pose no real threat to the masculine subjectivities in the film, the threat of the feminine is displaced onto this all-powerful, feminising, obliterating other. The menacing force of this mysterious other is akin to the forces we observe in the Gothic genre that threaten to rupture the surface of reason, order and everyday familiarity.

In her study of the Gothic novel Kate Ferguson Ellis observes a congruence between the images of 'crumbling castles as sites of terror' that feature in these novels and the idealisation of the home which emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century.[28] She points out that the rise in the popularity of the Gothic novel ran parallel with the sexual separation of the private and public spheres and articulated a 'struggle for control over and within the domestic sphere.' Moreover, she argues that this struggle and 'the problem of evil inside the home' is still of concern today, as 'the home can never be purified once and for all, that it is inextricably connected to "the world," whose violence and danger must be faced, and wrestled to the ground, again and again,'[29] a world, I must add, that is dominated by the hegemony of the masculine. Indeed, the next film under discussion, *Shine* directed by Scott Hicks (which, incidentally, is Sitch's favourite film),[30] features a very different type of castle to the one inhabited by the Kerrigans, one which harks back to the haunted castles of the heyday of gothic fiction.

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[27] *Politics of Psychoanalysis,* 172.
[28] *Contested Castle*, ix.
[29] Ibid., 219–20.
[30] Quoted in 'Laughing at Our National Identity,' 27.

The Shadow of the Prohibitive Father

The trajectory of David Helfgott's tragic life is established in the opening scenes, where we are introduced to all the 'pieces' that go into making up his life, his sense of selfhood or manhood. *Shine* begins with a close-up shot of David's face in profile at the threshold of his recovery. He is talking too fast, staccato phrases, almost tripping over his words. We hear only fragments: 'a bit of a struggle,' 'gotta put all the pieces together to make a word out of it,' 'it's a mystery, a mystery.' Then it is night and it is raining and he is knocking on the door of Moby's Café, which has just closed. We meet Sylvia, the restaurant owner, and a waiter, who are both amused by his babbling. He hugs them between drags of his drenched cigarette, then moves toward a portly, camp-looking man called Sam seated at the bar, who immediately rebuffs David: 'Get out of here. Go on!' David suddenly shrinks and cowers into the arms of Sylvia. He is then driven home by the waiter and Sylvia to his squalid boarding home. More fragments: 'It's a lifelong struggle … to survive,' 'Helfgott … help of god,' 'Didn't help him, he got exterminated,' 'Daddy, bit of a meany,' 'It's a ridiculous tragedy.'

It is immediately apparent that David has some sort of problem with his father ('bit of a meany'). This may account for how easily he is intimidated by Sam. His response, to fall into the arms of a woman, suggests perhaps that he is somewhat feminised. Additionally, the Jewish name and the mention of extermination allude to the horrendous forces that impact on David's life: his damaged father and the atrocities of Nazism, of which he was a victim. For indeed, David's life has been ruined; it has been smashed to pieces, pieces that he must put together 'to make a word out of it.' All these pieces are slowly put together as subsequent scenes show, in flashback, the story of David Helfgott's life.

David appears as a healthy, likeable and ordinary boy, but suspicions about his domineering father are confirmed when it is soon established that he is in total control of the domestic space, which resembles a prison camp. We see Peter peering through the barbed wire strung along the back fence and spying on his daughter talking to a boy in the laneway. Later, when Peter is chopping wood, the *mise en scène* reveals his wife, silent and pensive, peering through louvred windows, reminiscent of prison bars. Peter is like a gothic tyrant, a Bluebeard figure, who keeps the inmates of his castle under control and

securely imprisoned. Notably, he prevents David from going to the USA and closes up the gap in the back fence with a sheet of galvanised iron after he interrupts his daughter's conversation with the boy. Moreover, Peter's wife, who has only a few lines in the film, is completely subordinated to the household chores and the tasks of caring for the children. She never looks happy and represents a contrast to the cheerful Sally Kerrigan. Indeed, there is a strong contrast here with the mood of the Kerrigan household. Instead of boisterous merriment, we have a brooding silence that exerts its pressure on the young David and his sisters.

We first witness the pressure that Peter puts on his son when David does not win a local piano competition. With his anxious sisters looking on, David lags behind the stern walk of his father on his way home. Nevertheless, David evinces spirit when he plays a brief hopscotch before following his father through the front gate. This foreshadows his decision later to defy his father and go to London to study music. However, at this point, the weight of Peter's oppression is beginning to bear down on his son. It stems from a burden that Peter himself has been carrying, a burden that he seems intent on passing to his son. While playing chess, he tells David how his own father smashed his violin and prevented him from playing music, a story David has obviously heard many times. He castigates David for losing: 'You're losing … David, always win, always win.' As David's first model of masculinity, Peter presents a very hard and grim figure.

Peter is a Jew, fortified by the struggle to survive in the aftermath of the Holocaust. He lost all of his family before emigrating to Australia. Hence, as Thane Rosenbaum points out, his own family has become very precious to him and, consequently, he guards against its breaking up, even to the extreme of physical violence, as we see in a later scene when he tries to prevent David from leaving to study in England. Rosenbaum points out that this explains the way he rules the home with an iron fist and maintains it like a fortress.[31] Peter's version of masculinity harks back to a traditional model, often associated with the nineteenth century, where the father assumes the position of absolute head of the household. As Badinter points out: 'As far back as we go in the history of the Western

[31] Review of *Shine.*

family we are confronted with the power of the father, which always goes hand in hand with the authority of the husband.'[32] Unlike Darryl Kerrigan, Peter does not represent a model of manhood to emulate willingly. Instead, he is a figure who commands and coerces his son. When he prevents David from going to the USA, he tells him: 'I won't let anyone destroy this family. I know, David, what is best because I'm your father.' Peter expresses his contempt for Ben Rosen when he feels that his influence over his son is being weakened. He tells his wife: 'What kind of man is he? He is not married. He has no children. Don't ever compare me to him. What has he suffered? Not a thing in his life … What does he know about families?' Compared to Ben Rosen, Peter's suffering has hardened him both emotionally and physically. While chopping wood in the back yard, he pauses and tells the teenage David to punch him in the stomach. David obliges with a puny punch: 'You see, a man of steel, no-one can hurt me.' Here we can observe the extreme of masculine fortitude and self-containment. The castle of the ego is fully barricaded. He then tells David ominously that 'only the fit survive; the weak get crushed like insects.'

But Peter's lessons are far too severe for the young, sensitive David, as he behaves like a threatening, castrating, primitive father. When David performs at a fundraising concert, he is approached by an attractive girl who says he has 'wonderful hands.' His attractiveness to the opposite sex and the phallic power that he possesses in those hands is immediately snuffed out when Peter swiftly calls him away. The girl receives a glare, and from this point on in the film the only women that David is seen with are matronly figures. Indeed, Peter is excessive in his forbidding nature and effectively castrates David, despite his moments of defiance. When his father forbids him to go to the USA, David's response is to shit in the bath before his father gets in. For this he is severely beaten with a wet towel. The *mise en scène* contains slow motion shots of dripping water that foreshadow David's impending mental illness. Peter also beats his son when David tells him he is going to London: 'I am your father who has done everything for you! If you go, you will never come back into this house again. You will never be anybody's son. You will be punished for the rest of your life.' It is here that the film, possibly, comes closest to explaining the origins of David's mental illness. Indeed, he is punished for the rest of his

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[32] *Mother Love*, 6.

life in this interdiction against naming his father. Badinter observes that the father has continued to be the 'nominal, bloodline link in our patrilinear society,' adding that, traditionally:

> His last name enabled the child to find a place in the social group and attempt to resolve the agonising question of his roots. In addition, Lacan has long stressed the importance of the 'father's name' in the child's unconscious as the bulwark of the law. Indeed, no human being can be deprived of this element, the foundation of the symbolic order, without severe damage. When the 'father's name' is precluded, psychosis breaks out in the child, who cannot succeed in establishing himself as subject, subject of speech, and social subject.[33]

The question of David's mental condition will be dealt with later, but for now it has to be noted that Peter's cruelty is always matched with deep affection, because in his own dysfunctional way, he loves his son desperately. After the bathroom incident, Peter embraces and caresses the distraught David telling him that life is 'cruel' and that 'music will always be [his] friend.' He continues: 'Everything else will let you down … No one will love you like me.' This desperate tenderness toward his son suggests a transference, because Peter appears to desire full possession of his son in a way that we might imagine him wanting to possess his own father (or mother) when he was a boy. The homoeroticism of this scene is quite disturbing, as David is almost suffocated by his father's embrace.[34] A connection can possibly be made here with a later, puzzling scene when David goes out on the town in London with his music school colleagues. He wakes up the next morning draped in a red feather boa, the same boa worn by a transvestite who was making eyes at David the night before. Questions emerge. What is the exact nature of David's sexual disposition? What has his father to do with this? Does David desire other men in an effort to seek the unconditional love he never had from his father?

These questions aside, the scenes discussed above are important, not only for what they reveal about Peter's psychology, but also for the way they point to the spectre of castration,

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[33] *Mother Love*, 281.
[34] This scene is similar to the tenderness and affection shown by Peter earlier when he discovers David in the middle of the night tinkering with the 'Rach III.'

which gathers momentum as the narrative progresses. Peter may be a castrating figure, but he too has been castrated: first, by his own father who smashed his violin and, second, by the Nazis who destroyed his family. Moreover, in telling David that music will not let him down, Peter alludes to a phallic power far greater than his. Phallic power resides not just with Peter but with the tradition of European music, which, significantly, is very patriarchal. We must remember, as Segal noted in the introduction, that the power of the phallus does not reside in mere individuals but exists within the power relations of the institutional and social networks of patriarchal society. Buchbinder reminds us that 'no man can ever actually finally appropriate the phallus … it remains a free floating sign in the culture.'[35] Nevertheless, through the promises that the institution of music provides, David can achieve an authoritative position in the patriarchal order. However, he must compete with other men and earn his place in the hierarchy, which inevitably raises the question of its loss. Indeed, the threat of castration is all around David when he defies his father and heads for London.

The Castrating Other: 'You have to tame the piano, David, or it will get away from you. It's a monster. Tame it or it will swallow you whole'

David's piano teacher at the music school in London is Cecil Parkes, who once impressed the great man Sergei Rachmaninoff himself with his playing of the Third Piano Concerto. But now he has a paralysed arm from a stroke and cannot perform any more. This functions as a symbolic threat of castration and casts a shadow over David's new life away from his father. Hence, when David Helfgott himself decides to perform the formidable concerto, he must reckon with the power of the phallus and its associated threat of castration. Success will guarantee recognition and a performing career, and with it a place in the patriarchal order, but failure will result in marginalised status with respect to this order. When David, still under the influence of his severe father, asks to perform the 'Rach III' in the concerto competition, he sets the bar dangerously high in this rite of passage. Cecil tells David that no-one has been 'mad enough' to attempt performing the

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[35] *Performance Anxieties*, 50.

Rachmaninoff concerto at this stage of their career, but David's response is very telling: 'Am I mad enough?'

From this moment David is seen practising the 'Rach III' with manic intensity. He seems oblivious to the portent of his doom, the looming threat of castration implied in the formidable figure of Rachmaninoff and his concerto with those 'big fat chords,' and the occasion of the performance, when David has to reckon with the weight of the tradition of European music. This threat is reinforced by the plaster cast of the great man's enormous hands which Cecil decides to show David one day to help inspire him. Holding them up in admiration, he tells David, 'magnificent fingers, so virile.' David shuffles nervously, and the audience is left to wonder how David's hands will compare when he sits before the piano at the competition. The virility of David's hands has already been alluded to by the girl at the fundraising concert. Will he be virile enough to pass the ultimate test of manhood in the musical world by playing (according to the film) the most difficult concerto ever written?

The Rachmaninoff concerto here establishes a link between Cecil Parkes and Peter Helfgott. Both encourage David to play it but in very different ways. Like Ben Rosen, Cecil Parkes acts as an alternative father figure for David. Unlike Peter, he is nurturing with an authority that is not excessive. Parkes teaches the importance of mastery and rationality as essential ingredients of performing life but stresses the importance of playing from the heart. However, he tells David that he 'mustn't sacrifice everything to the emotions,' which must be 'tamed' (here we can equate emotions with femininity). Hence, Cecil presents David with a model of masculinity that is balanced, a model to emulate in contrast to that of his own father. Additionally, he tolerates David's growing eccentricity, and takes a keen interest in the young man, revealing genuine love and care, something sadly lacking in David's relationship with his own father. Parkes tells a doubting colleague that he has seen 'moments of genius.' His delight in David is evident when he applauds him after David breaks a string while practising the difficult cadenza. Noticing David's dismay, he tells him that 'Liszt broke many strings.' In the music world it would seem that this is an important rite of passage into (masculine) maturity.

This image of a nurturing father figure can be matched by that of Katherine Susannah Prichard's father. When David asks the famous writer what her father was like, she tells him the story of how she jealously upset an inkpot over his writing while he was out, as an act of defiance against his prohibition not to disturb him while he was working. As her incursions into his study would always be greeted with 'Go away, I'm writing!' she replied in the same way when he discovered her misdemeanour. She tells David that there was a 'terrible silence' as she just stared defiantly at her father. His response was to rush at her, pick her up and give her a great big hug. Prichard describes it as her first literary effort. Her reckoning with her father (significantly through language, affirming his status as a symbolic father), as a child, in addition to foreshadowing David's feminine-induced recovery, provides a stark contrast to David who, at the time, is trying to muster up the courage to tell his father about the scholarship in London. The contrast suggests the importance of a supportive father figure to the healthy development of individual subjectivity. Ben Rosen and Cecil Parkes, along with Prichard's father, represent models of fatherhood (and masculinity) that are restrained, compassionate and nurturing.

Unfortunately the influence of these surrogate fathers cannot alter the tragic course of David's life. He collapses after the performance of the 'Rach III' and never recovers, and he is left to languish in a mental institution. His world now is dominated by women, causing David to become very feminised. This is highlighted in one particular scene when a nurse, walking him down the corridor, puts her arms around David. He performs a brief hopscotch movement, immediately recalling the scene with his father in the early part of the film. His feminisation is also demonstrated when, one day, he stumbles in on Beryl's 'music therapy class.' She takes on the responsibility of looking after David, functioning briefly as a mother figure for him and revealing the extent to which he has regressed to the maternal world. However, his yearning for the maternal breast, evident in his obsession with touching her breasts, forces her to put him in a boarding house. Significantly, water imagery begins to feature from this point on in the film. David's delight in water is made obvious in a number of scenes that show him splashing in a pool or a bath, or swimming in the sea, evoking the symbiotic, pre-symbolic world that now informs David's life.

Subjective Reintegration: Shining in the Shadow of the Other

However, it is here that we can observe a shift in the momentum of David's life. At this point the narrative turns back on itself, returning to the restaurant scene at the beginning of the film. The meeting with Sylvia eventually releases him from the tyranny of his boarding house landlord, and David begins the task of rebuilding his life by performing again, albeit in Moby's Cafe. Phallic power is slowly restored, and we see him in the *mise en scène*, seated at the piano, surrounded by women when his competence as a pianist has been recognised. Ironically, David's reintegration into the symbolic order is through the agency of mother-type figures, as opposed to the nurturing father figures mentioned above (though it must be pointed out that the authority of these mother figures can be attributed to the patriarchy). From this point there are no significant male figures in his life. David is fortunate to find an unusually tolerant friend in Sylvia who, unlike Beryl, is prepared to take on the risks associated with caring for David. Nevertheless, though he may lean on Sylvia, a genuine friendship develops between the two. It is Sylvia who eventually introduces David to Gillian, his future wife, whose true role in his life is somewhat ambiguous. In a scene before they are married, Gillian is seen walking up the stairs to David's bedroom, picking up his clothes, as a mother might for her small boy. Shortly after, they are seen making love in the same bedroom. The ambivalence of their relationship is never fully resolved in the film.

Nevertheless, the *mise en scène* showing David playing the piano and surrounded by women is important in the way that it exemplifies the means of David's salvation. His subjective re-integration may be assisted by women, but it is clinched through music, a coincidence which comes as no surprise if we take into consideration that music can have regressive tendencies and be linked to the maternal voice.[36] More significantly, Anthony Storr notes that music has the 'power to structure our auditory experience and thus to make sense out of it.'[37] It offers a haven for those who are overwhelmed by confusing external stimuli and 'can ... make life liveable for people who are emotionally disturbed or mentally

[36] Noy, 'Development of Musical Ability,' 334–37; Kohut, 'Some Psychological Effects of Music,' 20.
[37] *Music and the Mind*, 105.

ill.'[38] As such, music can be likened to the masculine ego, which always struggles with the allure of the pre-oedipal, maternal world. For the performer or listener, music relies upon the principles of mastery and order, on the one hand (the masculine), and emotion, on the other (the feminine), for its coherence and vitality. The excesses of one at the expense of the other will always threaten music's integrity, which brings us back to Parkes' warning that David 'mustn't sacrifice everything to the emotions.'

When David goes to London, earlier in the film, he is pressured by the extreme version of masculinity presented to him by his father. This extreme version conflated with the pressure to perform results in David's breakdown. David does not have the same fortitude as his father required to sustain an absolute masculine subject position. However, the alternative of an extreme feminine subject position is not an option either, as David could not remain passive, dependent and protected for the rest of his life. A middle ground must be sought, and music provides this middle ground and affects his salvation (ironically foreshadowed in his father's prophetic declaration that music will never let him down). In the world of music, through performing, David can achieve a certain amount of masculine integrity, as the enthusiastic audience response to his comeback performance and the women around the piano at Moby's Cafe attest. This supplements the fragile, uncertain masculine reintegration he achieves in the day-to-day world by being a man and having a relationship with Gillian. Hence, music can be seen here as a trope for that blend of masculine and feminine elements that is indispensable for all subjectivities. The film seems to support the view that masculinity and femininity are positions that one adopts but can never inhabit fully, irrespective of biological gender. Katherine Susannah Prichard as a child in her defiance asserted a 'masculine' position in relation to her father. Perhaps, then, another way of looking at the red feather boa incident is to consider the way it points to the fluidity of gender positions, something to which I will be returning to later.

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[38] Ibid., 107.

David's Disorder

David's recovery is indeed remarkable and makes for an inspiring story, but there is one conspicuous omission from the film: the name of David's disorder. Certainly, the film does not spell this out for artistic reasons, as it is not a documentary on a person's journey through mental illness. Hicks insists that what he was trying to convey was an 'emotional truth,' as opposed to being 'bogged down in day-to-day biographical detail.'[39] The closest the film comes is when Beryl asks the nurse what is wrong with him. We don't hear what precedes the word 'disorder' because, significantly, this is muffled by Beryl's 'big fat chords' in the non-diegetic soundtrack. To be sure, the film points to the father as the cause of his mental problems, as I have noted above. Furthermore, there is the strong suggestion that his obsession with music, or his genius, may have contributed to his illness. Fiona Magowan notes that his triumphal performance of the 'Rach III,' when he reaches the 'apex of his genius,' is 'imaged as a moment of madness.'[40] Both possibilities, his father and his music, have led critics to their own conclusions. Various commentators unproblematically refer to his illness as a nervous breakdown.[41] Claude J. Smith, Jr. claims that David is 'severely schizophrenic,'[42] and Simon Wessely states that while it 'looks like psychosis … notwithstanding the parody of manic speech, no manic person could play a restrained version of "Flight of the Bumble Bee."'[43] Noel Purdon also believes that David has schizophrenia and that this reflects 'the fragmentation caused by the loss of his father's love.'[44] Despite the filmmakers' reticence and these varying opinions, one small but vital scene provides us with a clue as to the possible cause of David's disorder.

It occurs earlier in the film during a sequence of scenes showing David preparing to go overseas to the Julliard School of Music. Peter is sitting in his armchair reading through a scrapbook he has compiled on his son's achievements. Pride is beaming out of Peter's eyes as he turns the pages. He then pauses and lays the scrapbook down and notices a hole in the armrest of the chair. He covers it conspicuously with a makeshift piece of material

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[39] Quoted in Kalina, 'Life at the End of the Tunnel,' 9.
[40] 'Shine: Musical Narratives and Narrative Scores,' 110.
[41] Francke, review of *Shine,* 45; and Kalina, 'Life at the End of the Tunnel,' 8.
[42] 'Finding a Warm Place for Someone We Know.'
[43] Review of *Shine.*
[44] '*Shine*: A Part to Tear a Cat in,' 29.

(some sort of patch) and arranges it until the hole is absolutely hidden and the material perfectly neat. According to Hicks, Armin Mueller-Stahl was here acting spontaneously without direction during filming of this scene. It delighted him. He called it a 'little masterstroke' and a 'gem.'[45]

Up until this point in the film, Peter has been in total control of David's life, but this control is now threatened by David's planned departure to the USA. Shortly after this scene, Peter finally erupts and prohibits David from leaving. Hence, we could read this scene, the covering of a rent in the material, as an image foreshadowing Peter regaining control. But I think we can go further. It is possible to read this scene (unconsciously played out by the actor) as a reference to a serious oedipal disturbance, suggested by Badinter earlier.[46] An overbearing father who has so completely traumatised his son can induce a state of psychosis in his offspring. Ordinarily, any traumatic experience that a subject might have repressed remains in the realm of the symbolic order, returning as a symptom, the sign of the repressed. This is called neurosis and can be placated or brought to the light of day through analysis, leading to a healing of sorts. However, when the trauma is too great, it is rejected or foreclosed (*Verwerfung* or forclusion), as if it doesn't exist, and ends up in the 'real,' which is outside the symbolic order and inaccessible to the subject. A permanent 'hole' or gap (*béance*) remains in the symbolic order with regard to that which cannot be spoken. In this case, the trauma returns to the subject as an hallucination which acts as a sort of patch over the rent or gap. As Benvenuto and Kennedy explain: 'The altered structure of the psychotic subject coincides with his using language in various ways: the symbolic moorings of speech may be dislocated and he may speak in a roundabout, fragmented, or confused way, or else in an excessively or stylized way in which he is "spoken" rather than speaking.'[47] Here we are reminded of David's own speech: 'Gotta put the pieces together to make a word out of it.' However, most importantly, Benvenuto and Kennedy note that 'for psychosis to be triggered off, the

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[45] Quoted in Kalina, 'Life at the End of the Tunnel,' 60.
[46] The following discussion is based on Benvenuto and Kennedy's explication of Lacan's theory of psychosis in *The Works of Jacques Lacan.*
[47] *Works of Jacques Lacan,* 146. Note how he babbles in the presence of his father the last time he sees him. His father says, 'David get to the point.' He also has great difficulty writing to Cecil Parkes and requires Gillian to calm him down in order to put his words into a coherent order.

name-of-the-father has to be foreclosed, that is, it never reaches the place of the Other.'[48] As I indicated above, Peter Helfgott's haunting words, 'You will never be anybody's son,' resonate meaningfully here.

Psychosis or not, the film reveals that David has come a long way from his days in the asylum. When his father appears in ghostly fashion to David in his room near the end of the film, he is a shrunken man with cracked glasses, matching those David wore when he was at the nadir of his mental illness. Significantly, we can observe that David's glasses are now not cracked. His father is just like all of the ordinary men who inhabit the earth and no longer the powerful monster David remembers, with the ability to castrate or crush David like an insect. When Peter tells David the story of the violin for the last time, he falters, realising the emptiness of his words. And so, with the ghost of his father put to rest, David regains his selfhood and marries Gillian. The film closes at his father's gravesite where David can feel nothing for the man, the 'long-dead god' who nearly ruined his life.

Conclusion

Both *The Castle* and *Shine* play out the drama of striving for the absolute masculine position, but in different ways. In *The Castle*, it is Darryl Kerrigan who is at the centre of this drama providing a model for his sons to emulate. He resists the threat to his masculine integrity from the Airlink consortium and, despite some anxious moments, re-establishes control over himself and his family, thus endorsing the absolute masculine position and the patriarchy which supports it. On the other hand, in *Shine,* the drama is played out in the conflict between father and son. Peter Helfgott maintains his sense of masculine fortitude throughout the film but alienates his son in the process and ends up as a hollow, brittle and insignificant man, thus inflicting violence on both himself and his son. In pressuring his son to be like him, 'a man of steel' who must 'always win,' he causes the sensitive David to suffer much anguish. David is not able to follow his father's example and ends up having a mental breakdown when his identity disintegrates and collapses into a feminine-dominated realm. Nevertheless, while David's subjective reintegration cannot match that

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[48] Ibid., 158.

of Darryl Kerrigan, in terms of normative masculine virility, through the triumph of the (individual) human spirit and the love of a good woman (who gives up her lifestyle to be with her husband), David assumes a masculine position that earns the respect of its audience. In this sense, closure, as in *The Castle*, proves to be conservative in the way that it affirms the myths of an inherent, masculine strength and a woman's role as a support to her husband.

However, when read side-by-side, one benign, the other disturbing, the films provide both a model and a critique of the traditional, ideal man as father and husband. Though Darryl maintains his masculine integrity at the end of *The Castle,* it is largely through good fortune, without which he would have faced a loss of self-esteem (gone 'all quiet') and credibility in the eyes of his family and the audiences alike. Hence, both films reveal the precariousness of masculine subjectivity when it is predicated on absolute mastery and control. The films also reveal the pressures that men must endure when they take on the sole responsibility of providing for and protecting the atomised, domestic domain of the nuclear family. The image of the castle serves here as an effective metaphor for the version of masculinity to which this situation gives rise, as well as a focal point through which ideological processes sustain this version of masculinity. The myth of individualism knits well with the image of a father defending his castle and lording over the inmates.

We can also observe in these films how gender roles are clearly demarcated. Both wives exist within the home space and perform the traditional duties of cooking, cleaning and caring for the offspring. They pose no direct threat to masculine subjectivity. However, the threat of the feminine is still evident in Darryl's swearing and Peter's fear of weakness. The threat is also evident in its displacement onto a faceless, invading, global other, symbolised by the Airlink Consortium, that creates anxiety about Australia's distinctiveness as a nation, as Ferrier observed earlier. Both films enter into dialogue with the fear of global homogenisation through their focus on embattled characters that embody distinctive Australian traits and who triumph in the end against the odds. Darryl is the archetypal Australian male battler (or digger), while David harks back to a likewise

nostalgic perception of Australia as a place of antipodean oddities.[49] While both characters might appear to be very different from each other, each reveals the filmmakers' desire to articulate nationalistic authenticity in the face of a rapidly-expanding, globalising homogeneity. The question of masculine subjectivity and national identity is discussed further in chapter four. In the next chapter attention is directed towards the significance of the maternal figure in the construction of masculinities.

[49] Ferrier, 'Vulnerable Bodies,' 63.

II

Mummy's Boys: Men, their Mothers and Absent Fathers

> The man said, 'The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate it.'
>
> Then the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent beguiled me, and I ate.' ...
>
> To the woman he said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.' (Genesis 3: 12–16, Revised Standard Version)

Introduction

The films discussed in the last chapter focused on strong fathers who typified aspects of the absolute masculine position and were central to the lives of their sons. In this chapter the attention turns to strong mothers, who are represented as all-powerful, controlling, even monstrous, in the lives of their sons. Mrs. Fitzgerald in *Death in Brunswick* (Ruane, 1991) imposes herself in the life of her alcoholic son, Carl, constantly nagging him and insisting that she be informed of his whereabouts. She meddles in his personal affairs and interferes in his relationships with disastrous consequences. Similarly, in *Proof* (Moorhouse, 1991), though his mother may be dead, Martin is still troubled by memories of her which intrude on his life and make him unhappy. They also appear to influence his relationship with his housekeeper, Celia, who assumes an importance in his life far greater than her job description. Like Carl, Martin is in his thirties and yet to step over the threshold into manhood.

Significantly, fathers are absent in these films, leaving the responsibility of raising the sons to the maternal figure. There is no mention of a father in *Death in Brunswick* and we can surmise an absent father in *Proof* when Martin's mother says he has to live at his grandmother's when she dies. Without a father to guide them and unable to sever their ties

to their mothers, Carl and Martin struggle to establish an independent identity, particularly in the male-dominated, public world where they face the pressures of the absolute masculine position. This tension between their regressive tendencies and the imperative to act as a man is projected onto their mothers, who become the targets of the resentment, frustration, rage and anxiety that these men feel and are blamed for the dysfunction of their sons' lives. They become oppositional figures in relation to their sons' subjectivities, hence reinforcing the binary logic of masculine subjectivity.

'Real tough guys'

While in the domestic space under the influence of his mother, Carl may behave as a boy, but when he ventures into the male-dominated public world, he is expected to act as a man by asserting himself against other men and accepting the responsibilities associated with manhood, such as work and a heterosexual relationship (namely marriage). In Martin's case, even though he is blind, he must at least strive towards a measure of independence to achieve manhood. He too cannot escape the pressures of compulsory heterosexuality essential to his social definition as a man. If Carl and Martin do not assume the masculine position, they risk being marginalised as feminine and losing their status as men altogether.

In *Death in Brunswick*, all the dynamics of Carl's masculinity are evident in the opening scenes. We see Carl in his dark, untidy room being wakened by cans blowing about in the street. The outside world intrudes on him, and he is forced to go out into the street to put an end to the din. His mock attempt to assert control in the public space, when he stomps aggressively on the cans, is undermined the moment he returns inside and notices his mother with her head in the oven. For an instant he thinks she has gassed herself, but she immediately sets about chastising him for living a 'Bohemian' existence and announces that she will be staying a week or so to look after him and do the work he 'should be doing.' His only response is to say 'Yes Mum,' which establishes the maternal influence over his life. This is neatly symbolised when he attempts to pump up his bicycle tyre outside on his way to start a new job. A close-up shot reveals a hole in the tyre through which the protruding tube is seen deflating. The soft feminine underside to his public, visible masculinity will always threaten to expose itself and deflate any phallic posturing

Carl might attempt. Furthermore, a sequence of shots reveals Carl dressed in a leather jacket, with its associations of toughness and virility derived from the bikie culture, unsteadily riding his dilapidated pushbike, a form of transport more commonly associated with children. The contrast here foreshadows his venture into the Bombay Club where he is to begin his first day as a cook and where the drama of his masculinity is largely played out.

Carl's low status in the patriarchal hierarchy is established when he is shown straight to a filthy kitchen by his fast-talking boss, Yanni, who does not even acknowledge his name, despite Carl's insistence. He just refers to him as 'Cookie,' alluding to the impersonal nature of the working relationship characteristic of the workplace. Yanni represents a figure of hegemonic masculinity: his authority is supported by his ability to hire and fire and by his gang of minders, who physically enforce his dictates and act as the policing agents of the hegemonic order. Carl is no match for their combined strength, but he feels compelled to assert himself nevertheless, to act as a man in their presence. He challenges Yanni over his working conditions, even though Yanni doesn't listen, and ignores his warning about drinking on the job. Later, when he is ordered like a slave to cook a pizza for Yanni and the boys, in a larrikin act of defiance, he puts cockroaches and mouse droppings on the topping. Indeed, Carl's attempts at asserting himself in the workplace are rather lame. He doesn't have authority even over his kitchen-hand, Mustafa, who tells him, 'Your kitchen, you clean.' Furthermore, he remains accountable to his mother, who calls him at work to check up on him. In one instance, with Mustafa looking on in the background, he tells his mother what time he will be home and then whispers, 'I love you too.'

His ineffective manly posturing is further highlighted when he comes up against the formidable bully, Laurie. While Yanni's power is derived mainly from his wealth and capitalist status, Laurie's is purely physical. He is tall, muscular and capable of inflicting violence on just about any man. The hardness of the surface of his body is a visible sign of his self-contained masculinity. As Easthope observes, 'the skin surface can take part in the masculine fascination with armour ... A hard body will insure that there are no leakages

across the edges between inner and outer worlds.'[1] Physically, no one else in the film compares to Laurie. He seems to be at the top of the pecking order, a notional 'real' man, and a figure of the uncastrated Other. Carl witnesses his phallic power first-hand when Laurie deals out some rough justice on Mustafa. After beating him up, he squeezes his testicles, alluding to his ability to castrate others literally and symbolically through his sheer physical power.

Carl might wear a leather jacket, but he is no match for this toughness. Nevertheless, he bravely stands up to Laurie on a number of occasions, showing that he has the potential to be a man. Fortunately, through good luck alone, he does not suffer the same fate as Mustafa. Carl and Laurie's anticipated confrontation towards the end of the film is undermined by the intervention of Sophie, and Yanni's inexplicable generosity. Nevertheless, it is a key moment in the film with regard to the construction of Laurie's masculinity. When Carl grabs a bottle and fails to smash it in an attempt to defend himself, Laurie just laughs and says sarcastically, 'Real tough guy, hey.' He then proceeds to demonstrate how a real tough guy should do it, but cuts his hand and is momentarily put off guard. Carl jumps on him and, in the ensuing scuffle, bites Laurie's ear. This immediately aligns Carl with femininity through the association with women's or girls' fighting, which is often represented in films through biting and scratching. Knowing he has overstepped the mark, Carl cowers pathetically before the enraged Laurie who, in routine fashion, sets about beating Carl, fully aware that the 'contest' is a foregone conclusion. The feminised Carl is necessary for Laurie to affirm his masculinity, given that his physicality is all he has in the patriarchal world. The image of Carl's subjection to Laurie's physical strength is vital to secure the latter's superior masculinity, thus reinforcing the image of his manhood. Laurie's violence toward Carl follows the logic of the violence men direct toward women outlined by Kramer in the introduction. The 'defining privileges' of Laurie's absolute masculine position extend to making Carl see his own lack.[2]

But Carl endures, this being only one of the many tests he has to face as he negotiates his position in the patriarchal hierarchy. Indeed, the momentum of Carl's trajectory

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[1] *What a Man's Gotta Do*, 52.
[2] *After the Lovedeath*, 102.

towards ‘true’ manhood is what propels the narrative to its closure. Furthermore, Carl is assisted in this passage by his mate Dave, who serves as an equally tough, though more benign, model of masculine behaviour, compared to Laurie. He demonstrates how to act as a man by elbowing Laurie in the testicles and handling the Mustafa affair in a rational, unemotional way. During these moments he is an example of decisive, self-determined manhood. Carl, fired up by these examples and the dressing-down he receives from Dave, finally confronts both his mother (tries to ‘neck her,’ as Dave instructed) and Sophie’s father, his facing up to the latter being the decisive act of his manhood. He tells the worried Sophie: ‘Everything’s going to be different now; I’m making a new start all round, a clean slate as my mother used to say.’ But reference to the mother here proves what a sham his posturing is. In another mock assumption of the absolute masculine position, we see Carl in the penultimate scene heading toward the Papafogos family home with Sophie obediently at his side and his now paralysed mother in a wheelchair, which he is operating by remote control. He has not, as yet, met Mr Papafogos, but a picture of Mr Papafogos in hunting attire holding a gun which he first saw when he first had sex with Sophie should have served as a warning. In the final scene Carl is seated at the wedding table wearing a neck brace, courtesy of Mr Papafogos, and looking decidedly uncomfortable.

So who did get ‘necked’ here? Clearly, the uncertainties about Carl’s masculinity remain, and the question of how self-assured he would be if his mother had not become an invalid will never be known. Notably, he is able to be honest with her only when he thinks she is unconscious in the hospital. And, as far as Sophie is concerned, though he appears to have found a suitable love object in her, it is she who is the assertive one in the relationship. This is demonstrated the very first time they have sex. She propositions Carl by opening up the sofa bed, and when they have sex, she sits on top him in a sexual position more commonly identified with a man. Additionally, we are reminded that it is Sophie who saves Carl from a severe beating at the hands of Laurie. Hence, we may deduce that Carl has been unable to overcome the feminising influence of the maternal figure.

But uncertainties about masculinity not haunt only Carl. The models of masculinity in Carl’s life also fail to inhabit the masculine position absolutely. Notably, Dave, though he can hold his own in the public world, is ‘under the thumb’ in the domestic domain. He

might be able to hit a bull's eye when his wife June is not around, but he is sent scurrying to get rid of his cigarette the moment he hears her at the door. His position and authority within the household are most tellingly indicated the morning after the graveyard scene. After spending the night banished to the boys' room, he stands before his wife covered in mud like a naughty little boy and passively receives her chastisement. Significantly, in the *mise en scène* he is positioned next to his boys. Given the way June treats him, he could well be one of her children. June is clearly the head of the household, which greatly undermines any phallic potency he might display elsewhere.

Laurie too seems invincible, until he is caught off guard and elbowed in the testicles, ironically, by Dave. His fallibility is accentuated later in the scene I have described above, when he cuts his hand in an attempt to demonstrate his notional, real-man status. But his fate as 'just one more of all the little men/ who creep through life' is sealed when the gang of marauding Turks jump the fence and behead him. Even Yanni, the powerful figure of hegemonic masculinity, loses his fiancée, Sophie, a woman he has acquired like a possession in an arranged marriage, to Carl. Humiliated in front of his henchmen, he has to concede that, despite his wealth, the insipid, feminised Carl is the object of her desire. Only Sophie's father's and the Turks' power remain intact at the end of film, a fact which alludes to the fear that phallic power always seems to reside elsewhere in the figure of an 'impalpable other man,' as Kramer noted earlier.[3]

Anxieties about the absolute masculine position, with its associated fears of castration and an ultimate figure of phallic power, can also be observed in *Proof*, albeit expressed in different ways. Though Martin's mother may be dead, his housekeeper, Celia, has become a substitute mother figure for him, as he depends on her for his daily needs due to his blindness. All his anxieties about his mother, established in a series of flashbacks, are projected onto Celia. Martin both feared and mistrusted his mother, who was all-powerful in his life. He tells his friend Andy: 'I saw the seasons come and go through her eyes—she was my world.' We see Martin as a young child with his mother by the window, describing

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[3] *After the Lovedeath*, 29. Significantly, the character of Sophie's father is mostly an image to Carl throughout the film (a photograph, a figure in a car and a figure standing on a balcony). The Turks too have anonymity which enhances their phantom-like status.

the garden scene before them. She tells him that there is a man there, a gardener, raking the leaves, but Martin does not believe her because he cannot hear him. He accuses her of lying, and when she asks him why she would lie, he tells her, 'Because you can.'

Martin's response to this situation of perceived powerlessness has been to develop a tough, hardened ego. As a reaction to the powerlessness he felt as a child, he is motivated by the desire to be in full control of his life at the expense of his emotions. Martin's character, hence, represents the violence that men inflict on themselves when they deny an essential part of their humanity, their passive emotions, through intense self-surveillance. The by-product of this denial is aggression, as emotions that are not properly processed are vented in dangerous ways. At the start of the film, we see Martin striding aggressively down the street, crashing into astonished passers-by without apology. In the restaurant he deliberately spills wine to get attention. He is also exceedingly rude to Celia and presents a sullen and abrupt manner to others, including Andy when he first meets him. These examples serve to illustrate Easthope's point on aggression and the ego cited in the last chapter. He points out that while 'aggression is an effect of the ego and the ego's struggle to maintain itself,'[4] in the masculine version, 'the more the "I" strives to be total master, the more aggression it releases.'[5]

However, though Martin's aggression might be dangerous, it fuels his determination to discover the truth of his existence, which is contained in the photograph he took of the garden when he was a young child, the most important photograph of his life, and the one he so desperately keeps away from the prying eyes of Celia. He tells Andy that he must describe the contents to him because they will reveal the 'proof' of whether his mother lied to him as a boy or not. The resemblances here between Martin and Oedipus, a blind man obsessed with solving the riddle of his life (signified, in Martin's case, by the photograph), cannot be overlooked and encourage a psychoanalytic reading of the film.

While a blind person wanting to be a photographer might seem like an exercise in futility, Martin believes that photography empowers him and enables him to 'see,' thus

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[4] *What a Man's Gotta Do*, 41.
[5] Ibid., 43.

overcoming the castrating effects of his blindness. Significantly, the camera has phallic connotations and, in this instance, it affords Martin a certain amount of control or mastery. He explains to Andy that when he takes photographs, he has proof 'that what's in the photograph is what was there.' However, his sense of phallic potency must be underwritten by someone he can trust to describe what is in the picture. And this is where Andy fits in. Martin likes his style because it is 'honest and direct.' Holding a photograph in his hand, he points out to Andy: 'This is proof that what I sensed is what you saw through your eyes. The truth.' But his plan to have complete control inevitably falters, as he must still rely on another human being who, like his mother, proves to be fallible.

Nevertheless, it is significant that Martin trusts Andy. He has deep mistrust for his mother and Celia and, by extension, all women, so he turns to a man to affirm the truth of his identity. We can observe here how Martin's subjectivity is premised on the rejection of the feminine and the feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability that are associated with it. He tells Andy: 'If I continue to deny what she wants, she can never feel pity for me. Instead I can pity her.' But what is it really that he is denying? Is he not simply censuring his own desires that are concealed under the transference of his feelings about his mother onto Celia?

Furthermore, his blindness aside, this rejection, fear and mistrust of the feminine and its associated anger, aggression and striving for self-containment (in short, his adoption of the masculine position) do not, ironically, prevent him from being feminised. He remains mostly confined to the domestic space because he has no job to give him reason to inhabit the public sphere, and when he does venture out on his own, it is mostly to the park where mainly old people, women and children go during the day. He also goes to the restaurant where Andy works, but his most significant public outing is to the drive-in with Andy where, like Carl, he must contend with the underbelly of the hegemony of the masculine.

When Andy goes to get some snacks, Martin explores his car and unwittingly 'stares' at some young men and a young woman (who signals their heterosexuality) parked in the car next to him. They respond violently when Martin inadvertently holds up a pack of condoms, damaging Andy's car and accusing them both of being 'poofters' when Andy returns. Andy and Martin make a hasty retreat from the physical scuffle that ensues and,

with Martin in the driver's seat, are lucky to escape unharmed. This violent response by these 'hoons,' like Laurie's in *Death in Brunswick*, enacts the suppression of the feminine, which is necessary for them to affirm their masculinity. It also highlights Martin's vulnerability within the public sphere, where he inevitably occupies a subordinated, feminised position in relation to an absolute masculine other. Though his blindness may be a contributing factor to this vulnerability, it also functions as a signifier of all men's feminised position in relation to this castrating Other. As Creed reminds us, 'blindness is a conventional symbol of castration.'[6]

Father Figures and the Oedipal Matrix

The films seem to suggest that domineering mothers and absent fathers lead to dysfunctional subjectivities. Carl may assume manhood when he gets married, but he has still not resolved the doubts and uncertainties about his mother which threaten his masculine integrity. Martin remains housebound and feminised, as the final *mise en scène* reveals, and yet to establish a healthy relationship with another woman, for much the same reasons. But lack of fathers does not prevent these characters from looking elsewhere for someone to help guide them to manhood (that is, provide a model of masculinity, mediate separation from their mothers and channel them towards a suitable love object). In each case a mate becomes implicated as a father figure, which creates some interesting personal and interpersonal dynamics.

In *Death in Brunswick*, when Carl visits Dave to tell him the news of his date with Sophie, he behaves like an awkward teenager. He is excited about his new love but also apprehensive about Dave's (and June's) disapproval. His fears are warranted as Dave admonishes him to 'take it easy,' reminding him that the last time he was in love he got married. Dave then reprimands Carl in a manner reminiscent of a frustrated father: 'You really are like a chook in a thunderstorm.' When June comes home she joins in and tells him he is 'hopeless' and asks him when he is going to 'grow up.' She then turns on her husband, telling him he is just as bad. On his way out Carl is offered a final piece of

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[6] 'Mothers and Lovers,' 22.

fatherly advice: ‘I’d be a bit careful of this Gina Lollabrigida of yours; look at the trouble I’m in.’ Indeed the imbalance in the two men’s relationship (adult to child) is contrary to the expectations about mateship which are usually based on egalitarian notions.

This imbalance is most evident when Carl calls Dave in the middle of the night after he accidentally stabs Mustafa. Despite the threats from his wife, Dave cannot forsake Carl, who is whimpering on the other end of the line. Here June acts like the hard parent while Dave plays the part of the soft parent. When Dave arrives at the Bombay Club, Carl is a quivering mess, so Dave has to take control. He remains level-headed throughout the ordeal while Carl, vomiting and still whimpering, submits to his orders. Yet, despite his fear of getting caught and going to gaol, a greater terror strikes Carl: ‘Dave, you won’t tell Junie, will you?’ It would seem that Carl is in as much fear of June as he is of his mother, which places her, alongside Dave, as a parental figure to Carl.

The positioning of June and Dave as mother and father figures to Carl is highlighted when Carl brings Sophie around after Laurie is set upon by the Turks. Standing at the door, Carl, again, behaves like a teenager, bringing his girl home to meet the parents. But when June alerts Sophie to the fact that Carl is still married, Sophie runs outside in distress, leaving Carl with a lot of explaining to do. The *mise en scène* reveals June and Dave washing the dishes and looking out on the ‘young’ couple as they earnestly discuss their problem. She tells Dave: ‘If he runs out on her, I’ll hold you personally responsible,’ reinforcing his parent-like obligations to his mate. But the burden of this responsibility is beginning to wear thin for Dave. Frustrated at his dithering, he tells Carl as he is leaving: ‘Look you stupid bastard, make a decision! You’re screwing Sophie’s life up. You’ve killed a guy, for Christ-sake, and its all been for what? I’ve had it with you. I’m jack of you and your mother. Reactionary old bitch. Why don’t you bloody well neck her? And fuckin’ do yourself at the same time.’ In no uncertain terms Dave lets Carl know that it is about time he grew up and worked things out for himself. At some point a parent must relinquish responsibility for his or her child’s actions and direct that child to act independently.

Unfortunately, unlike Carl, Martin does not have the opportunity of this important step on the road to maturity, as he is fatherless and his mother died when he was very young. Martin’s blindness and need to find someone to trust is comparable to the vulnerability of

children who have no option but to rely on their parents or caregivers. Without a mother or a mother figure (because he cannot trust Celia), Martin, like Carl, turns to his only other alternative, a mate, to help fill the void of the absent father. His faith in the 'honest and direct' Andy is not unlike the immutable faith we might imagine a boy puts in his father, who is often, initially, perceived 'as a god.' But, as Martin finds out, his trust in Andy is misplaced because Andy can never assume the position of his father and, like any father (as Mudie's poem suggests), can never live up to the infantile expectations that Martin places on him. Nevertheless, his significance as an embodiment of Martin's desire for a father can be observed in Martin's oedipal dynamics.

Andy becomes implicated in the oedipal matrix when Martin invites him into his home for a port after the drive-in incident. He notices a photograph of Martin and his mother on the mantelpiece, and Martin asks him to describe it for him. In a manner reminiscent of a doting father, he tells Martin that his face is covered in freckles and that his hair is short. While describing Martin's mother, Andy runs his fingers over her image, which recalls the scene when Martin, as a boy, ran his fingers over his mother's face and neck while she was sleeping. The eroticising of this shot connects Andy sexually to the mother, but it is only when he has sex with Celia that he becomes fully installed within the oedipal triangle. Celia lies on Martin's bed in a seductive manner and says to Andy, 'Let's pretend we're blind.' Given that I have already argued that Celia and Martin's mother are conflated in his psychodynamics, we can posit the following interpretation.

If we accept that blindness is a signifier of incestuous desire,[7] in pretending to be blind (that is, in pretending to be Martin), Andy and Celia are transgressing the incest taboo. For Andy, to pretend that he is Martin means that Celia is symbolically committing incest with her 'son.' For Celia, to pretend that she is Martin means that Andy, as the father figure, is symbolically committing incest with his 'son.' Furthermore, the displacement of Celia and Andy onto Martin's oedipal dynamics is confirmed when they deceive him about their relationship, a deception that Martin accused his mother of as a child. Finally, it is worth pointing out that both Andy and the man in the garden, who serves as a symbol of the

[7] Creed points out that 'in the cinema blindness—both literal and metaphoric—continues to constitute a popular referent for oedipal desire' ('Mothers and Lovers,' 22).

missing paternal figure that Martin yearns for, are working class, thus securing the connection between the two.

Clearly, mates taking on the role of father is not enough to turn these characters around. Andy may have the qualities that Martin searches for in a parental figure (someone you can trust) but his presence merely exacerbates the grief and anguish that Martin feels about his mother. Similarly, while Carl views Dave as a role model and is prepared to listen to his advice, he seriously misreads Dave's outburst by taking him literally. His problems will not be solved by killing his mother. As the maternal figure, she (like Martin's mother in his life) will continue to impact on Carl's life, and men like him, until such time as he reckons with his fear of her.

The Threat of the Feminine: Castrating Mothers

Both films, then, imply that the presence of substitute father figures is not enough to sway the influence of the monstrous maternal. Despite the threats to the characters' masculine integrity posed in the public world, the mothers are the ones that provide the greatest threat to their manhood. Carl's mother, regardless of her physical frailty, has more influence over him than any other figure, and Martin cannot escape the influence that his mother still has over his life. Moreover, the presence of other powerful women in the lives of these characters augments the power of their mothers. June has control over Dave despite the manly status he has amongst his peers, provoking in Carl further fear of the maternal figure. Similarly, Celia provokes in Martin the same fears he had of his own mother. Indeed, as these films suggest, it is not only the father who embodies the threat of castration, as Freud proposed, but also the mother who has the power to castrate, a point explored by Creed in *The Monstrous-Feminine*. Through a reinterpretation of Freud's 'Little Hans' case study, she argues that women pose as much a threat of castration as men. She states: 'Whereas Freud argued that woman terrifies because she appears to be

castrated, man's fear of castration has, in my view, led him to construct another monstrous phantasy—that of woman as castrator.'[8]

Death in Brunswick positions us to think that the reason Carl cannot stand up for himself in the public male world is because he cannot stand up to his mother at home. She has effectively castrated him in the eyes of the world by keeping him infantile. When June asks him whether he has told his mother about Sophie, he responds like a child, telling her that his mother 'has funny ideas about migrants,' that his mother needs 'a little time' and that 'she wouldn't like it' if he told her the truth because 'she's been sick.' His child-like status is reinforced throughout the film by the *mise en scènes,* variously showing him lining up with children at the matinee movie and walking through the children at the swimming pool. Furthermore, when he returns home from the graveyard scene, he is summoned by his mother to her door and questioned about his whereabouts in a manner similar to Dave's interrogation. He is splattered with mud and looks decidedly sheepish. When asked about his state, Carl merely answers, 'I fell over,' like a guilty little boy. Elsewhere, he is completely submissive towards her, evidenced in the number of times he says 'Yes mother.'[9] Indeed, the film would have us believe that his mother is something of a monster in the way that she controls Carl's life. Her power to castrate Carl is signalled at the beginning of the film when she expresses her disapproval of his magazines. She rolls her eyes in disgust at his defence that he reads them only for the articles. However, her power over Carl is most clearly indicated in her decision to withhold his inheritance, which upsets him more than anything else. He rants like a little boy shouting, 'I want my money!'

Similarly, in *Proof* Martin fears his dependence on his mother and accuses her of lying, which signifies his fear of castration. Lying equates to castration, because if his mother lies, she takes away the control she bestows on him by seeing for him. However, Martin does compensate for his blindness through the sense of touch, which affords him some independence from his mother. But this limited power is subject to her prohibition when she chastises him for touching her while she was sleeping. In this scene, his fingers trace

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[8] *Monstrous-Feminine*, 7.
[9] Carl also feminises himself when he puts on his mother's shower-cap and makeup before going to the pictures with Sophie. Recall also how he fights like a girl when he bites Laurie's ear.

the contours of her face and neck before venturing to her breasts. She seems to enjoy his touch, as if she were having a dream, but she wakes with a start and reprimands him: 'You can't touch people whenever you want. Fingers aren't the same as eyes. It's rude.' She appears shocked by the disjunction between the dream and her son standing before her, which might account for this outburst. Nevertheless, it appears to have a profound effect on him, as he remembers it some twenty-five years later.

His mother becomes a monstrous figure to Martin mainly as a result of the transference to Celia. The conflation of the two produces an abject castrating figure, who haunts Martin's life. In Celia, we see the justification for Martin's fears about his mother. We first meet her waiting silently in Martin's home when he returns from his first meeting with Andy. The *mise en scène* constructs her as somewhat sinister; she silently watches as Martin unwittingly undresses before her. The camera shot gives prominence to her eyes, which effects the reversal of the male gaze. Ordinarily, the socially-authorised male gaze is an intimidating gesture based on subordinating the passive feminine object to the desire of the active masculine position. As Mulvey observes in her renowned essay: 'In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female.'[10] In this case, however, because of Martin's blindness, Celia has the power, normally afforded the male subject, to look erotically at Martin's body. He becomes aware of Celia's presence only when she taps the ash of her cigarette into the ashtray. He then trips over the coffee table she has placed in his way. Throughout the film she continually taunts him by mischievously putting obstacles in his way, which further links her to the spectre of the castrating mother. The effect of these obstacles is the same as a lie: they take away his control and prevent him from acting independently. It is not surprising, then, that it is Celia's eyes that worry Martin the most when he goes to pay her from his safe. He places his hands over them so she will not see the serial number (and no doubt the most important photograph of his life).

Martin's mistrust of Celia seems to be justified when, later, she blackmails him into spending an evening with her and tries to seduce him against his will. After this episode he

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[10] 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' 19.

returns home, collapses on his bed and cries, seemingly gripped by a primal grief, or what Julia Kristeva describes as the 'impossible mourning for the maternal *object*.'[11] Furthermore, when all her attempts at seducing Martin fail, she ends up seducing his friend, Andy, in Martin's own home. She clearly has an unhealthy obsession with Martin, as all the pictures of him on her wall attest. As Creed points out, she 'commit[s] the crime of which the young Martin accused his mother; Celia exploits his blindness and deceives him about the existence of a man in the garden.'[12] As with Carl's mother, there seems to be little that is redeemable in the character of Celia, and this enlists the audience's sympathy for Martin.

For both characters, the maternal world remains something they both fear and desire. They are attracted to it, as their infantile tendencies reveal (Martin cannot help recalling it and Carl cannot stop behaving as a child), yet they are frightened of its influence over them. The yearning for the lost pre-oedipal, pre-symbolic world of imagined plenitude is a common experience for most humans, and though it may be possible to capture a sense of it in moments of 'serenity,' most learn to deal with the effects of its loss. However, the characters in these films do not seem to have overcome the trauma associated with its loss. They are, arguably, seduced by the enticements of their infantile past to a pathological degree. This world of plenitude is signified in each film through the trope of music.

The connection between music and the pre-symbolic is most obviously played out in *Proof*. When Celia takes Martin to the symphony concert, he places his hand over his heart and appears visibly moved by the sounds he hears. After the concert, Martin tells Celia: 'I would like to thank you. That is an experience I'd never forget.' Clearly, it is an experience that has affected him at a primordial level. Celia is surprised and moved by this unusual display of emotion by the normally impassive Martin. Hoping that the experience may have softened his resolve toward her, she attempts seduction one more time. Back at her place she places his hand on her heart and tells him that in the same place that the music 'got you, that's where you get me.' This clinches the link between music and the maternal object, which no doubt prompts him to be enticed momentarily by her breasts. However,

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[11] *Black Sun*, 9.
[12] 'Mothers and Lovers,' 15.

gagging on her kiss, he quickly draws away in horror and, after she insists that he 'wants' her, takes flight shouting, 'I don't want anyone.' The presence of the maternal object, evoked by the pre-symbolic desires stirred up during the concert, is clearly too close in proximity to the presence of the flesh-and-blood Celia to be comfortable. Is it the maternal breast or Celia's breast that he desires? This is, perhaps, the clearest example of how the maternal object haunts Martin's life.

In Ruane's film, the connection between music and the maternal is not so obvious, but it is still evident. Carl's mother tells him that she has only two vices left in life: smoking and Mahler. When Carl organises a date with Sophie, despite his mother's attempts to intervene, he joyfully frolics down the hallway as the slow movement of Mahler's Fifth Symphony swells in the background. The elation and bliss he feels as his desires are met by a woman can be linked directly to the symbiotic union with the mother. Michael Kaufman notes that 'a relationship with a woman … unconsciously resonates with that first great passive relationship of the boy with his mother.'[13] It is significant, then, that Carl, in the confusion of his desires, should choose to put on Mahler's Fifth Symphony when he attempts to poison his mother. Moreover, given the regressive tendencies of music noted by Storr in the last chapter and that the desire to destroy the feminine is, as Horrocks points out, one of the 'archaic visions of a reactive primitive masculinity,' [14] we can further surmise the connection between music and the pre-symbolic world of the mother.

As Laurence Kramer so eloquently states:

> In the receptive ear, willing or unwilling ... music brings to life Jacques Lacan's cryptic formula that the Unconscious is the discourse of the Other. The music identifies the 'innermost,' most 'authentic' feelings of the listener with the feelings of someone else, and reveals that these feelings can be authentic and innermost only and precisely because they are those of someone else. For the listener, the resulting position of derivativeness, of secondariness, corresponds to the repressed feminine position embedded within gender-polarized masculinity. But it also corresponds to a position of absolute pleasure, a site of fullness, identity, and bodily vitality rather than

[13] 'Construction of Masculinity and the Triad of Men's Violence,' 22.
[14] *Masculinity in Crisis*, 80.

> of loss, dissociation, and castration. The music charges (entrusts and electrifies) the listener with the desire of synergy; it carries out, pied-piper-like, a violation or coercion or seduction or suffusion or liberation or *jouissance*. [15]

Myths of Motherhood

The conclusion that the films seem to be drawing is that the primary responsibility for any dysfunctioning of masculine subjectivity lies with the maternal figure, irrespective of any other factors that may be involved (for example, an absent father). If a mother does not relinquish her hold on her son and allow him to take his proper place in the public patriarchal world, she runs the risk of damaging him for life. To be sure, mothers are often blamed for the failings of their children, with little thought given to how their role as mothers is constructed by society. Motherhood has become a sacred institution vigilantly guarded as the cornerstone to society, which is all the more reason to subject it to close scrutiny in an effort to understand its impact on the construction of masculine subjectivities.

Badinter notes in *Mother Love: Myth and Reality* that the role of the mother in western culture has fluctuated radically across time and space in the last three or four hundred years. She begins her book by explaining that the common practice in Paris in the late eighteenth century was to send new-borns to wet nurses outside the city. She states: 'Many children died having never received direct care from their mothers. Those who did live to return to the family home several years later found themselves strangers to the women who had brought them into the world.' She concludes that the mothers seemed 'very little concerned with what is seen today as the child's natural need for affection.'[16] She cites the example of one such new-born, Charles Maurice de Talleyrand, who was injured for life, sustaining a club foot, while under the care of a wet nurse. His mother became aware of the incident only some years later, as contact with her son was very infrequent; yet, she still packed him off to his grandmother's when his time with the wet nurse was over.[17]

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[15] *After the Lovedeath*, 110–11.
[16] *Mother Love*, xix.
[17] Ibid., 66.

According to the logic of psychoanalytic theory, the abuses that de Talleyrand and others like him suffered would have given rise to a generation of neurotics and psychotics. However, as Francine du Plessix Gray notes in her foreword, his mother was considered 'absolutely normal,' and there were apparently 'no tragic scars on the psyche of the boy, who seems to have had a typical French eighteenth-century childhood and grew up to be one of the ablest and most balanced statesmen of his century.'[18]

Armed with these and other facts, Badinter, in her review of history, concludes that motherhood as it is understood today is only a recent invention and that 'no universal and absolute conduct on the part of the mother has emerged.'[19] She notes that due to such contingencies as economic status and environment, 'survival instinct may sometimes get the better of the maternal instinct.'[20] While Badinter does recognise that maternal love is a 'human feeling,' she reminds us that 'like any feeling, it is uncertain, fragile, and imperfect.' Most importantly, she points out that, 'contrary to many assumptions, it is not a deeply rooted given in women's natures.'[21] She concludes that maternal love is a myth, which calls into question the burden of responsibility attributed to the mother for raising children. If mothering is not simply a matter of biological inevitability then fathers, siblings and extended family and friends enter the picture as potentially responsible for the physical and psychological welfare of the child.

Indeed, the current pervasive notion that the mother is responsible for the psychological welfare of the child, which these films play out, can be traced to the emergence of psychoanalysis in the late nineteenth century. Badinter observes that in the eighteenth century the mother was considered to be the 'doctor's helper.' For most of the nineteenth century she was charged with the responsibility of being the 'priest and teacher's assistant,' adding that 'thanks to psychoanalysis the mother's role [has been] elevated to include principal responsibility for her offspring's happiness—a terrifying assignment completing the definition of her role, her mission in life.'[22] Badinter states that the emphasis on

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[18] Ibid., xi.
[19] Ibid., 327.
[20] Ibid., xxi.
[21] Ibid., xxiii.
[22] Ibid., 205–6.

psychoanalytic theory has resulted in the mother assuming the central role within the family, 'the immediate, if not prime, influence on the child's psychic stability,' with the associated implication that 'an emotionally unhappy child is the son or daughter of a bad mother.'[23]

The pervasiveness and tenacity of certain myths about motherhood is explored by Nancy Chodorow and Susan Contratto in 'The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother,' where, in their review of feminist writers, they observe 'a continuity with dominant cultural understandings of mothering.' One of these continuities is the tendency to blame, noted above, which they claim results when the power of the mother is overemphasised by the writer. The helpless child is seen to be at the mercy of a mother who is in charge of every aspect of its life. In this situation, any frustration a child might feel is directed solely towards the mother. Similarly, a mother may visit the frustration of her domestic isolation onto the child or find that her own unresolved problems with her mother are influencing her relationship with the child. Mother and child are seen to be living on a 'psychological desert island.' As Chodorow and Contratto note, 'having only each other, each is continually impinging and intruding on the other, and there is no possibility of escape.'[24] Consequently, in this formulation, the mother-child dyad is viewed solely from an adversarial perspective. Chodorow and Contratto claim that some writers see 'an almost primal aggression in the mother-child relationship,' which is 'cemented by maternal and infantile rage,'[25] and suggest that such feminist writers are revealing their own 'unprocessed, infantile fantasies about mothers.'[26] To qualify this claim, they point out that everyone is 'prone to mother-hating, for we all live in a society that says that mothers can and should do all for their children. Moreover, we are all mothered, and our psyches retain the imprint of these origins.'[27]

The flipside to blame of the mother is the reactive, corrective tendency to idealise the mother, which has become equally important in our cultural ideology. Focusing on the

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[23] Ibid., 260.
[24] 'Fantasy of the Perfect Mother,' 88.
[25] Ibid., 85.
[26] Ibid., 88.
[27] Ibid., 92.

conditions that result in bad mothering, some feminist writers argue that with the 'patriarchal constraints' removed and increased support and education, a mother will be able to devote herself completely to the needs of her child and ultimately work towards perfecting her mothering skills. But, as Chodorow and Contratto remind us, as appealing as these utopian visions might seem, they also reveal infantile fantasies about mothers, particularly in those writers who feel that they were poorly mothered.

Against these tendencies in feminist writing, Chodorow and Contratto propose that we acknowledge the complexity of mothers' lives—they are individuals as well as mothers—and 'their place in a two-way relationship with their children.' Consequently, they assert that we must 'question our involvement in child-centered assumptions about mothers' by examining more closely our theories of childhood.[28] They point out that infants and children have 'agency and intentionality' and are not merely 'passive reactor[s] to drives and environmental pressures.' Hence, they insist that we must establish theories that are based on 'collaboration and compromise' and that 'stress relational capacities and experiences instead of insatiable, insistent drives,' in order to dilute the negative emphasis on conflict.[29]

What we can learn from Badinter, and Chodorow and Contratto is that we must look beyond individual mothers—our own mothers, and mothers as they are represented in the media—to the social context that frames our understanding of them. We must realise that, with the responsibility of parenting limited almost exclusively to the mother since the late nineteenth century, a culture of blame (and its opposite, idealisation, which has the same effect to pin responsibility on the mother) has taken root. Because of her conspicuousness, the mother has become an easy target for a patriarchal society, already predicated on the opposition to and subordination of the feminine. It is quite conceivable, then, to conclude that, while the mother can be attributed with the responsibility of psychological damage in her offspring, because of her all-powerful position, the real causes of this damage stem from the social structure in which the mother is embedded. In light of this, one then has to question the films' logic of reducing the cause of Carl's and Martin's dysfunctional

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[28] Ibid., 92–93.
[29] Ibid., 95–96.

subjectivities to the maternal figure only. However, this perspective is difficult to attain, as these films are seemingly concerned with pathological cases. If we deflect the fear of the maternal, which preoccupies these films, onto the pathological, we run the risk of not understanding how this fear links up with cultural fears and suppression of the feminine. To trace this continuity we must be mindful of the ideology that the institution of motherhood has generated and how these filmmakers have been informed by this ideology.

As was pointed out in the last chapter, Turner noted that 'the consensualising work of ideology [is] exposed' in the 'gaps' and 'cracks' of the film, or where 'the audience is aware of a weakness in the narrative.'[30] Such weaknesses can be observed, for instance, when we question our attitude towards Martin's mother. The film tells us that Martin thought she lied as a punishment for his being blind. This infantile notion is put to rest in the last scene by Andy's description of the photograph; yet, despite being exonerated, her menacing influence still lingers at the close of the film. Martin has been able to forgive Andy, but there is no formal recognition of his forgiveness of his mother. The displacement of his feelings about his mother onto Celia leaves little room for Martin and the audience to reflect on the mother as she is absorbed into Celia's role as the devouring, castrating figure in Martin's life. Similarly, we can question our attitude toward Celia. The film positions the viewer to think that Celia is somewhat evil and monstrous, as I have explained, but one has to ask, just how bad is Celia? Is she obsessive or just a bit desperate? Is she malicious or just mischievous? As Creed points out, 'she looks after [Martin's] every need, craves his affection and trust but experiences only distrust and rejection.'[31]

The demonisation of both the mother and Celia is not sufficiently argued by the film, giving rise to the question of misogyny, which is revealed in instances of abjection that abound in *Proof*. It is in these instances that we can observe the workings of ideology because the film does not make its position on misogyny evident. As Karl Quinn points out: 'It is unclear whether Moorhouse intended the film to be an exposé of the misogyny underlying Australian rituals of mateship, or if the film is unconsciously suffused by such

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[30] *Film as Social Practice*, 171.
[31] 'Mothers and Lovers,' 15.

values.'[32] Similarly, we can discern a similar misogynistic strain in *Death in Brunswick*, which is also characterised by the abject in relation to the maternal figure.

Abjection, Misogyny and the Maternal Figure

> *Oedipus the King* handed over to Freud and his posterity the strength of (incestuous) desire and the desire for (the father's) death. However abject these desires may be, which threaten the integrity of individual and society, they are nonetheless sovereign. Such is the blinding light cast by Freud, following Oedipus, on abjection, as he invites us to recognise ourselves in it without gouging out our eyes. (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 88)

In her essay on abjection, *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva argues that subjectivity is constituted according to a fundamental threat, the abject, which she claims is not, strictly speaking, an object: 'What is abject is not my correlative.' However, the abject does have 'only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to *I*.' What opposes subjectivity is repelled or held at a distance. This creates a space in between or a border that circumscribes the subject. Nevertheless, despite its threat, the abject is also alluring: 'It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced.' The abject may be what is 'radically excluded,' but it 'draws me toward the place where meaning collapses.' Hence the abject, though abhorrent, is integral to the formation of subjectivity and, by extension, the culture in which we live. 'On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture.'[33]

Within this model of subject formation, the maternal figure becomes implicated in the first strivings of the individual to form a separate identity. Kristeva states that while the abject remains '*the "object" of primal repression*,'[34] it nevertheless 'confronts us … within our personal archaeology, with our earliest attempts to release the hold of *maternal*

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[32] Review of *Proof* , 322.
[33] *Powers of Horror*, 1–2.
[34] Ibid.,12.

entity even before ex-isting outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language. It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling.'[35] At this juncture, the abject becomes the precondition for the symbolic, as the symbolic order is not enough on its own to facilitate separation. As John Lechte explains, the symbolic order 'depends on the mother becoming abjected,' adding that, as a result of her gradual rejection, she becomes, 'at the pre-symbolic level, the prototype of what the drives expel.'[36]

Given, as I have argued, that separation from the mother figure is far more disjunctive for males than it is for females, it follows that males feel greater abjection towards the maternal figure than females. The abject mother appears more of a threat to masculine subjectivity than feminine subjectivity because of the pressure for males to define their identity in opposition to femininity. Hence we witness an increased anxiety within the masculine subject about patrolling the borders of identity. Feminine subjectivity is more continuous with the maternal object, whereas masculine subjectivity is predicated on a clear distinction. However, this clear distinction can never be achieved, as the borders will always remain uncertain, due to the pull of the primal bond with the mother. As Kristeva explains, it is ambiguity that gives rise to the abject. What 'causes abjection' is that which 'disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.'[37]

In *Proof*, the abject is signalled during the drive-in scene when Martin and Andy are watching a horror film.[38] A woman, screaming, is pursued and finally slain by a killer. Andy is enjoying it, and so are the other viewers (presumably men) because they toot their horns. Martin turns to Andy and says: 'You know, if you analyse your feelings, you do really want the killer to get the girl.' Here Martin articulates his own fear and resentment of the maternal object, which he projects onto Celia throughout the film. This projection is

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[35] Ibid.,13.
[36] *Julia Kristeva*, 159.
[37] *Powers of Horror*, 4.
[38] This compares with Carl's first 'date' with Sophie. They also see a horror film, *The Howling III: The Marsupials*. In a similar manner, this can be seen to signal the abject.

underscored by Celia's association with food, food waste and faeces, which have particular significance in relation to the abject.

When we first see Martin, he trips over a garbage bin full of food scraps as he is wandering down an alleyway behind the restaurant where Andy works. In the next scene we meet Celia, who delights in putting obstacles in Martin's way. The juxtaposition of these two scenes can be seen to establish a link between the garbage bin obstacle and the obstacles Celia puts in his way which, by association, links Celia to the image of food waste from the restaurant. [39] Kristeva states that 'food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection.' Furthermore, when Celia entices Martin into her home to seduce him, she offers him his favourite meats. This immediately precedes his repulsion of her advances. The scene is reminiscent of the primal scene Kristeva paints in her essay:

> When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk—harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring—I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire. Along with sight-clouding dizziness, *nausea* makes me baulk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. "I" want none of that element, sign of their desire; I do not want to listen, "I" do not assimilate it, "I" expel it.[40]

Kristeva could very well be describing Martin here, as he gags, not on the food Celia offers him, but on her lips as she kisses him. Martin, shaking, panting and in great distress, pushes Celia away in disgust and runs panic-stricken into the street. Significantly, the very thing that put Martin in this predicament is the photograph that Celia snapped of him on the toilet in order to blackmail him. Through the relay from the act of defecating to the shame and embarrassment of Celia's presence in the toilet to her threat to display the photograph publicly, we can observe another instance of Celia being associated with the

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[39] This association is reinforced in the scene when Celia picks up Martin's photographs. She returns via the alleyway which contains a number of garbage bins.
[40] *Powers of Horror*, 2–3.

abject. Kristeva claims that 'dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be.'[41] On the other side of the border exists Celia and, behind her, the maternal object in a place where Martin abhors to be. However, though he desires to expel, eliminate or shit out the maternal object, she will forever remain a threat to his subjectivity, unless he can learn to reckon with it. As Lechte explains, 'the control exerted by horror—the abject—can only be the greater if it remains hidden, unknown—unanalysed.[42] … Through a refusal to confront the abject … a fundamental aspect of individual and social life remains in oblivion, and our understanding and capacity to cope are thereby greatly diminished.'[43]

Food loathing also features in *Death in Brunswick*, but its association with the maternal is extended to women in general throughout the film. The connection is inaugurated at the start of the film when, after leaving his nagging mother at home, Carl arrives for his first day at work as a cook.[44] He is shown the coolroom by his boss and is immediately repulsed by the smell of rotting food. More importantly though, it is here that he takes Sophie to have sex. Their moment of passion is interrupted, however, when his mother calls, thus establishing the connection between the female object (mother conflated with Sophie) and the abject. Furthermore, when Sophie asks Carl why his mother stays with him, he delivers a classic Freudian slip. 'She gets horny,' he says before correcting himself, 'Er, lonely.' Here we see a reference to his castration anxiety which, along with the abject, informs his relationships with the opposite sex.

The coolroom is also the place where Carl hides Mustafa's body while he waits for Dave. Corpses feature in this film, so it is necessary to examine how they function in relation to the abject. Kristeva calls the corpse 'the most sickening of wastes,' because it 'is a border that has encroached upon everything.' She asks, 'How can I be without a border?' explaining that 'the corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject.'[45] Arguably, then, the graveyard scene,

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[41] Ibid., 3.
[42] Which, in Martin's case, casts doubt on whether he really does analyse his feelings.
[43] *Julia Kristeva*, 158.
[44] It is interesting to note that both he and Andy are cooks, which emphasises the food motif.
[45] *Powers of Horror*, 3–4.

where Carl and Dave go to hide Mustafa's corpse, should provide us with further insight into their subjectivities and how they are informed by the prevailing cultural conventions of gender construction.

Though speaking specifically of horror films (to which this film alludes), Creed's comment about audience response to the abject applies here: 'Viewing the horror film [images of abjection] signifies a desire not only for perverse pleasure (confronting sickening, horrific images/being filled with terror/desire for the undifferentiated) but also a desire, once having been filled with perversity, taken pleasure in perversity, to throw up, throw out, eject the abject (from the safety of the spectator's seat).' More importantly, however, Creed argues that women have a 'special relationship to the abject' in horror films.[46] Indeed, the hiding of Mustafa's body in the coffin of Mrs de Marco has powerful symbolic resonance with respect to the representations of masculinities within the film. Initially, the forcing down of Mustafa's body onto that of Mrs de Marco alludes to the repression of the abject feminine. Furthermore, as Creed suggests, we could also interpret Dave stomping on the corpse as an enactment of Carl's repressed rage towards his mother (an act which foreshadows his attempt later in the film to 'neck' her). Creed also notes that Dave, likewise, might be giving vent to his own repressed aggression toward his wife June, who, as I have already indicated, is represented as a monstrous maternal figure in his life.[47] Finally, the Gothic resonances here cannot be ignored: it is night time, it is misty, and they are in a graveyard, which reinforces the power of the unconscious forces operating within the film. The scene is also reminiscent of the graveyard scene in *Hamlet*, where the young prince and Laertes leap farcically in and out of the grave, as do Carl and Dave. Would the resonances of the revenge tragedy genre with its notorious misogyny be too remote to discern here?[48]

In this scene, we can observe a clear example of the presence of the Gothic genre acting as a symptom of 'the anxieties that accompany social and epistemological transformations

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[46] *Monstrous-Feminine*, 10.
[47] 'Mothers and Lovers,' 17.
[48] While the corpse of Martin's mother in *Proof* can be seen to signal the abject, his reaction to the coffin points to a Lacanian interpretation ('It's hollow'). This alludes to the absence of the signifier born out of the jouissance of the other (mother) which gives rise to the desire of the other, propelling the subject into the symbolic in search of fullness or plenitude.

and crises,' noted by Hurley in the introduction.[49] Along with the abject, the presence of Gothic elements in the film points to the anxieties and uncertainties of masculine subjectivity in the contemporary world. However, in accordance with the transformative potential of the abject argued by Lechte, the destabilising influence of the Gothic, likewise, can be transformative. Hurley explains that irrational discourses like the Gothic can provide 'liberatory possibilities exceeding those allowed within the dominant cultural order' and can subvert 'conventional meaning systems' to make way 'for new ones to emerge.' As such, '"out-of-control discourses" [are] oppositional and highly productive, rather than merely symptomatic.'[50] Nevertheless, these transformative possibilities hinge to a large extent on the way texts are read.

When narrative closure points to Carl attaining manhood, it is important to bear in mind that it has been achieved at the expense of the maternal figure. His moment of defiance (an attempt at matricide) leads to his mother's heart attack, paralysis and consequent confinement to a wheelchair. Hence the spectre of misogyny plays a key role in the formation of Carl's masculine identity. As Creed points out, 'the text's gradual abjection of the maternal figure (harridan/crushed corpse/paralysed mummy) provides the film with some of its most savage moments.'[51] And it is these 'savage moments' that the film endorses as essential to the awakening of Carl's masculine subjectivity. However, what is perhaps most alarming here is that there seems to be ample justification for this misogyny. Isn't Mrs Fitzgerald after all the 'reactionary old bitch' Dave claims her to be? And isn't Dave too a victim of matriarchal authority? The film clearly positions the audience to sympathise with the male characters, which leaves the abject in the construction of masculinity unexplained and unexplored. Carl makes his peace with Mustafa (as Martin does with Andy) during his puzzling epiphany in church and, like Martin, is unable to reconcile himself to his mother. Male solidarity remains intact, yet the anxieties about the maternal figure remain repressed.

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[49] *Gothic Body*, 5.
[50] Ibid., 7.
[51] 'Mothers and Lovers,' 18.

The Homosocial Economy and the Maintenance of the Patriarchy

It would seem that, in the world of these films, the bonds established between men are more important than those established with women. This emphasis on homosociality is particularly evident in *Proof*. After all, Martin does not get the girl in the end, he gets the guy. As Creed notes: 'Martin eludes his "proper" Oedipal destiny. He does not transfer his love for his mother to another woman. Instead he reaffirms the bonds between men.'[52] While the presence of Celia locates Martin's subjectivity within a normative hetereosexual context, the film is primarily about the relationship between Martin and Andy; Celia merely mediates the relationship between the two. Despite Martin's brief apology, which is undermined by her sacking and his curt reference, she remains abjected at the end of the film, expelled from (his) narrative closure. He acknowledges her breasts as a symbol of his heterosexual desire but remains barred from them because they are too familiar as a symbol of the desire for the maternal object.[53] The obstacle of the woman—literally and figuratively—is overcome, and Martin regains control of his life. As de Lauretis observes, in opposition to the male, who is 'the active principle of culture,' the 'female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter.'[54]

Patricia Ticento Clough, in her analysis of the significance of the realist tradition in constructing 'empirical reality,' claims that narrative closure invariably adheres to an 'oedipal ... logic of sexual difference,' where the text's final authority is affirmed in the 'unified masculine subject.'[55] Moreover, as Mulvey points out, the 'grammar' of realist narrative 'places the reader, listener or spectator *with* the hero.'[56] Clough adds that closure in the unified masculine subject is achieved only through a disavowal of 'narrative desire or narrativity itself' in the representation of reality and the 'feminine thematization of castration,' which 'defensively covers over the struggle among men over phallic power.'[57]

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[52] Ibid., 15–16.
[53] His struggle to sever the maternal ties is evident right to the end when he tells her not to worry about him before she leaves.
[54] *Alice Doesn't*, 119.
[55] 'Oedipal Logic of Realist Narrativity,' 24.
[56] 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,"' 32.
[57] 'Oedipal Logic of Realist Narrativity,' 25.

We can observe this in *Proof*, where the masculine subject position is normalised through the male solidarity Andy and Martin achieve as a protection against Celia's chaotic desire. The question of men's anxiety over their castrated status, in relation to the power of the phallus and their need always to compete with one another to allay this anxiety, is neatly disguised at the end of the film. The same point can be observed in *Death in Brunswick*, though the disguise is not so effective as Carl Fitzgerald's masculine subjectivity is affirmed somewhat shakily at the end of the film. The confirmation of his manhood is more anticipated than enacted in the film. Like Celia, his mother is silenced and excluded from narrative closure. Her place is taken by Sophie, who follows Carl on his way to reckon with her father. He punches Carl in the face and represents the final authority in the film. In the last scene, Carl has assumed his position in the patriarchal order but bears the mark of castration (the neck brace) and must remain under the watchful eye of his father-in-law.

In 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' Mulvey remarks that the 'presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story-line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation.' Celia's breasts in the seduction scene provide an example of this. Mulvey then cites Budd Boetticher: 'What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance.' Hence *Proof* resembles the tendency of some films (namely 'buddy films') to dispense with the problem altogether, where 'the active homosexual eroticism of the central male figures can carry the story without distraction.' [58] However, as Creed explains: 'Although *Proof* is not about a homosexual relationship its exploration of male bonding, based as it is on the exclusion of woman, suggests that all relationships between men involve a degree of homoeroticism. Woman is represented as an abject figure who must be located outside the territory of the male couple.'[59]

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[58] 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' 19.
[59] 'Mothers and Lovers,' 16.

Indeed, homoerotic elements abound in the film and articulate what Peter Looker has called 'a longing that is always there in excess of the facts.'[60] These elements are clearly discernible during and after the drive-in scene. In the previously cited scene at the drive-in, when Andy goes to get some snacks, Martin feels his way around Andy's car in order to know more about him. The camera eroticises his tactile exploration of the various objects that he finds, and we are reminded of the scene when Martin 'explores' his mother while she is sleeping. This establishes a link between his desire for Andy and his desire for his mother, a desire which Celia recognises when she says to Andy, 'I think he loves you.' Homoerotic desire is further established when they escape from the hoons. With Martin 'driving,' they are chased and caught by the police but manage to talk their way out with improbable explanations. In the end it is all a lark, which serves to cement the bond between them, and they end up outside of Martin's house laughing uncontrollably.[61] Once they settle themselves, Martin takes off his sunglasses to wipe his eyes. Andy notices Martin's eyes and remarks to him that they are blue. This is reminiscent of a convention in Hollywood movies where women remove their glasses before their lovers to reveal their hidden beauty. Martin's response to Andy's observation is to invite him in for some port. Here we see a not so subtle allusion to heterosexual courtship, which Moorhouse playfully exploits. But this is as far as it goes, as their relationship is always enacted only on a symbolic level. When Celia tells Andy 'perhaps the camera loves us,' Celia and Andy become conflated within Martin's gaze. This conflation is reinforced when Celia constructs Andy as an object of desire out of the imperfect photographs of him taken by Martin. Here Celia symbolically mediates Martin's repressed homoerotic desire for Andy.

Sedgwick discusses this symbolic dimension of male-to-male relationships in her book *Between Men*. Citing anthropological sources, she notes that women are often used 'as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men.' In this situation women become a 'conduit … in which the true *partner* is a man.'[62] Hence we could say that Andy and Martin experience sex together vicariously

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[60] 'Doing it with your Mates,' 215.
[61] Creed interprets this laughter as an 'orgasmic release' ('Mothers and Lovers,' 16). Furthermore we are reminded here of Kristeva's observation that 'laughing is a way of placing or displacing abjection' (*Powers of Horror*, 8).
[62] *Between Men*, 26.

through Celia. In short, what we have is the familiar device of an erotic triangle. David Buchbinder puts Sedgwick's argument succinctly: 'Women and their bodies often function, in representation, as the sites upon which male homosocial relations may be established and maintained, the presence of the feminine deflecting any suspicion of the homoerotic or, worse, the homosexual.'[63]

Homosocial desire is essential in the formation of bonds between men, but according to the unspoken 'rules' that govern the homosocial economy, this must not spill over into homosexuality. Homosocial desire must be disavowed, and a man must take his proper place in the hegemonic order, or suffer the consequences as both Martin and Carl find out. The boundaries of a man's subjectivity are carefully policed, as the hoons at the drive-in and the physical violence directed against Carl by Laurie and his father-in-law demonstrate. Significantly, it is not only men who police the boundaries, but women as well. When Sophie first meets Carl she tells him, 'We all thought you were a poof.' This impression was informed by the contrast between Carl's timid, nervous character and that of the direct, physically intimidating Laurie. Sophie's friend Carmel echoes this statement when Carl tries to contact Sophie through Carmel. Looking up at him standing on the ladder at the window of the women's toilet, she declares, 'You're weird Carl, weird.'

In both *Death in Brunswick* and *Proof*, the homosocial economy remains intact. There may have been some doubts about Carl's and Martin's masculinities, but by the end of each film, an attempt has been made to pull them into line. Carl is ready to take his place within the patriarchal order and so is Martin, now that he is free of the influence of his mother (Celia). Hence, as in *The Castle* and *Shine*, both films confirm the patriarchal order whereby authority is vested in the masculine subject and women settle into their subordinate roles. This is vividly illustrated in *Proof* through the figure of the gardener, who, as I have argued, signifies for Martin the absent father or paternal figure. It is important for Martin that he be there, as opposed to any other aspect of the landscape that his mother describes for him. It is the one thing he insists upon, the one thing that he wants to catch her out on. Furthermore, it is when he suspects that the gardener is not there that

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[63] *Performance Anxieties*, 66.

he wishes to take, what turns out to be, the most important photograph of his life. This photograph, he believes, will give him proof of the infidelity of women. So when Andy, a male (and working-class, consolidating the link to gardener, as I have already indicated) and the one person he feels he can trust, despite the fact that he has already been lied to, finally describes the photo to Martin, the absent father figure is reinstalled into Martin's psyche. His friendship with Andy is reaffirmed literally and symbolically through the connection with the reinstated gardener/father figure. Here the patriarchy too is reaffirmed as something fixed, dependable and reliable, as it was always already there, like the 'kind' old man in the photograph. Phallic power too is restored through the continuity of the camera, the photograph itself and the existence of the gardener, who signifies the name, or law-of-the-father.

Conclusion

The binary logic of masculine subjectivity is more pronounced in the films discussed in this chapter than those in chapter one. The feminine other represented by the monstrous maternal figure becomes the focus for delineating the boundaries of Carl's and Martin's subjectivities. With the maternal figure under control (Carl literally has charge over his mother by remote control, and Martin utilises his authority to fire Celia) and put to rest at the end of each film (Carl's mother is silenced and immobilised, and Martin's mother is forgotten), we are led to believe that both characters are now free to take that crucial step over the threshold into manhood. As they assume their position in the patriarchal hierarchy, Carl as a husband and Martin as a liberated, self-contained man, the promise of absolute masculine subjectivity awaits them, symbolised by the figures of Sophie's father and the man in the garden. Yet, the task of maintaining and protecting their newly-acquired masculine integrity still clearly lies ahead of them. Both remain vulnerable to the maternal figure, which can sometimes lead to devastating consequences as men seek to overcome its debilitating effects.

We can note that, in the films discussed so far, violence is an inevitable and inescapable part of masculine subjectivity. Carl and Martin might not perpetrate violence on others, particularly women, as a means of repressing or subduing the feminine, but violence

nevertheless still underwrites their subjectivities, since it is displaced onto images of abjection that reveal links to the maternal object. What results is a barely repressed misogynistic strand which weaves its way through both films. In the next chapter these misogynistic elements are no longer repressed; instead, they erupt into direct acts of violence. Like the characters in this chapter, fathers are not present, but as we shall discover, the mother has no power to prevent her sons from unleashing their frightening rage.

III

Bad Boys: Representations of Men's Violence in *The Boys*

> Sexual violence is the pathology of modern subjectivity. (Kramer, *After the Lovedeath*, 12)

> One of the chief ironies of the whole Yorkshire Ripper case is that the police spent millions of pounds fruitlessly searching for an outsider when the culprit was just an ordinary bloke, a local man who shared their background and attitudes to a remarkable degree. (Joan Smith, *Misogynies*, 123–24)

> Women have very little idea of how much men hate them. (Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, 249)

Introduction

I have argued that the maternal object arouses fear and rage in the characters of Martin, Carl and Dave, emotions that become inscribed in their masculine subjectivities. Mostly, however, these feelings remain unacknowledged, revealing themselves only in those moments of thinly disguised misogyny outlined towards the end of the last chapter. In *The Boys* (Woods, 1997), misogyny becomes manifest in physical violence against women. When their partners resist their behaviour and escape the household, the Sprague brothers take out their frustrations on an anonymous woman. The audience is spared the physical brutality perpetrated against the unfortunate woman as the film ends just before the crime is committed. Consequently, the focus remains on the pre-crime story, inviting the audience to consider why these men are so violent. While the film resists providing answers, it offers many leads for the discussion of violence in the construction of masculine subjectivities.

Domestic Spaces: 'There's nothing you can do, 'cause a man's home is his castle'

It is noteworthy that the masculinities discussed so far are represented mainly within the domestic space. In the films explained in the previous chapter, Martin is largely housebound while Carl continually retreats to the maternally-dominated domestic space when he gets into trouble in the public world. In the first chapter, Darryl Kerrigan and his sons rarely step out of their 'castle' by the airport, and David Helfgott's formative years are spent under the rule of a tyrannical father in a very different sort of castle, one reminiscent of a Gothic tale. Similarly, in *The Boys*, Brett Sprague rules over 'his' castle, which stands like a gothic fortress against the wider world for its inhabitants and becomes the space where the full horror of claustrophobic confinement are played out. He tells the police who come knocking at his door: 'There's nothing you can do, 'cause a man's home is his castle.'

One thing, however, links all these spaces: they are all haunted by the spectre of castration. If the government compulsorily acquires 3 Highview Crescent, Coolaroo, Darryl stands to lose his masculine integrity. David Helfgott spends most of his life repairing his subjecthood, damaged by his father when he lived at home. In contrast, the domestic space for Carl and Martin is where the castrating maternal figure holds sway. Finally, in *The Boys*, the associations of the domestic space with emasculation are brought into focus, as the film foregrounds this space and its role in the construction of masculinities to a far greater degree than any other film examined in this thesis. While Brett, like Peter Helfgott, may be a tyrant in his own world, the control he exerts in the public domain is negligible.

Indeed, the immediate impression of *The Boys* is one of suffocation. This is not surprising given that the majority of the filming was undertaken in a suburban Sydney house where the characters were required on the set at all times regardless of their participation level.[1] As a result, the house itself seems to have a Gothic-like presence, almost as an extra character in the way that it imposes on the other characters, which in turn implicates it as one of the major causes of the family's problems. Felicity Holland and

[1] Anderson, 'Boys Behaving Badly,' 20.

Jane O'Sullivan note: 'The claustrophobic aspect of this film, which is often shot through doorways and composed of long, low-focused shots, stresses the domestic causes of the rage these immature men feel.'[2] Almost every *mise en scène* within the household includes the hall or a doorway intervening between the viewer and the action, cluttering the shots and producing this sense of suffocation. This is established at the start of the film.

The Boys begins with a brief scene of movement through an indistinct, unfocused roadscape, foreshadowing the crime at the end. Dissonant music and a vague industrial pulse feature on the soundtrack. The effect is nightmarish and lingers when the credits begin against a background of still shots of domestic objects: a television aerial, a ceiling light, a circular clothes hanger, the padlock from Brett's locker, water dripping from a tap into a sink drain, a toothbrush holder, a light switch and an air conditioner—all ordinary household objects. However, through off-centre closeups, focusing/unfocusing and irregular camera angles, these objects become defamiliarised. An uncanny element, in the Freudian sense (*unheimlich*, unhomely), is introduced into the film, what we might term, according to Mulvey, 'a *mise en scène* of the uncanny,'[3] which remains to haunt the rest of the film. In the background, a menacing, repetitive, four-note motif reinforces this uncanny feeling and announces the tensions that exist in this ordinary domestic space.

After the credits, when the action begins, the mode of camera work returns to realism. We see Brett, just released from Goulburn gaol, sitting on the coffee table he has made while he was inside, impatiently waiting for his brother to pick him up. The *mise en scène* presents Brett as a lone figure set against the backdrop of the penal institution behind him. The coffee table, an ordinary and common household object, establishes his connection to the domestic spaces of the opening shots. The small, suffocating, domestic domain, of which Brett is inevitably a part, contrasts sharply with the expanse of the public patriarchal world outside. This contrast is repeated throughout the film. When Brett is captured by the police in the front garden, we see this through the window from inside. A high angle shot, with the ceiling light intervening (the one featured at the beginning of the film), gives the viewer an eerie feeling that the house itself is looking down on Brett. Indeed, these long

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[2] '"Lethal Larrikins,"' 83.
[3] *Fetishism and Curiosity*, 150.

shots of the policing institutions and agents of the state, while pointing to the social causes of Brett's behaviour, ensure that these causes remain at the margins of the domestic.

In his essay on the phenomenon of the uncanny, Freud explains that the special feeling of the uncanny is 'related to what is frightening—to what arouses dread and horror,'[4] or, more specifically, 'that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.' However, Freud adds that 'what is "uncanny" is frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar.'[5] Mulvey notes that the 'strangeness of its effect' is located 'within the home itself, ultimately [located] … in the womb, the first home, and the tomb, the last.' Furthermore: 'The power of cinematic language juxtaposes spaces and images which disturb the familiar with strangeness and the uneasy intimations of fear and desire.'[6] The inference of this for *The Boys* is that what appears to be ordinary, safe and familiar—in short, what is homely, like the objects of the opening scene—becomes implicated in the extraordinary and frightening acts of cruelty within the film. Hence, the thin veneer of day-to-day life becomes a source of uneasiness: that which 'arouses dread and horror.'

This point has been noticed by the critics. Michael Fitzgerald claims: 'It's classic horror, without the blood. In fact, the film's most violent image comes with a cigarette extinguished on a car window—a scene Alfred Hitchcock might have dreamed up had he been born in Sydney's Blacktown.'[7] Lauren Martin adds: 'The sound of Brett Sprague smoking is somehow very, very scary. He ignites a match, a cigarette, a sickeningly simple kickstart to his first and last day of freedom.'[8] Both critics are referring to the moment before the brothers attack the anonymous girl. Here, a familiar, everyday object—a cigarette—discloses the threat of violence that looms in the background of day-to-day life. As director Woods himself claims, the film is 'real-life horror.'[9] Susie Eisenhuth also notes the 'real-life horror' of the film. She claims that *The Boys* 'is not into the specifics of the evil men can do. It is, instead, a powerful meditation on the banality of evil, the

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[4] 'The Uncanny,' 219.
[5] Ibid., 220.
[6] *Fetishism and Curiosity*, 150.
[7] 'Darkness of the Soul,' 64.
[8] 'Then Came The Sprague Brothers …,' 9.
[9] Quoted in 'Darkness of the Soul,' 64.

happenstance, the randomness, the mundane events such nightmares are made of.'[10] But what does this 'meditation' reveal about 'the mundane events' that precede the crime?

According to Woods, there are a number of issues that the audience could contemplate: 'Although there were a whole lot of contributing factors, obvious contributing factors—poverty, mother/son communication problems, out of control drugs, an appalling inability to relate to women, sexual inadequacy—it wasn't fair for us to push for any one cause ... It wasn't that we didn't want to answer any questions, it was that we didn't have the answers ourselves.'[11] However, despite Woods' fence-sitting approach, the Gothic overtones, the emphasis on the uncanny and the thriller structure of the flash-forwards channel understanding along some fairly predictable pathways. The social questions of poverty and drugs become obscured because the above features frame a pathological perspective that follows the logic of the horror genre, which, as the commentators above have observed, this film closely resembles. Typically, in horror films, villains like Brett Sprague are just simply evil, requiring no understanding beyond this to maintain interest in the plot. After all, one could argue that the chief appeal in the narrative of *The Boys* is not so much the question of why these men did what they did, but rather who is going to be the victim in the end? Nevertheless, the constraints that the influence of the horror genre bring to bear can be problematised if we attend to some conspicuous details observed throughout *The Boys*. Closer inspection reveals that the question of men's violence is far more complex than the film would have us believe. Social factors can be teased out of *The Boys* when we observe the continuities between the film and the social context out of which it arose.

'Why are you like this, Brett?'

The personal and the social intersect neatly in the image of Brett's one and only cigarette. The prominence of this cigarette has already been commented on from a cinematic point of view, but its significance increases when we consider its symbolic value. When Brett announces in the loungeroom that he has given up smoking, his brother Stevie queries him

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[10] 'Any Mother's Son,' 75.
[11] Woods, '*The Boys*: Examination of a Family in Crisis,' 15.

about the cigarette in his pocket. Brett stands it erect on the television set and states, 'That's me pride, mate.' The phallic connotations cannot be overlooked here, especially when we consider that the film draws the viewers' attention to it. At the beginning of the film when Brett is sitting on the coffee table waiting for his brother, there is a closeup shot of his hand taking the cigarette out of its packet and then immediately returning it. We see it again, during one of the flash-forwards, when Brett is burning his clothes after the crime has been committed. Naked, except for his underwear, he places the now half-burnt cigarette in his jocks. It is here that the association with the phallus is made obvious, which adds significance when he stubs it against the window before he attacks the woman. Moreover, just prior to this, he lights up a cigarette, draws in the smoke, and exclaims ecstatically, almost orgasmically, 'Fuck, that's good.'

Literally, all the pride Brett has left as a man is the feeling of satisfaction associated with giving up smoking. It is the only sense of positive control or power that seems available to him in his life. He has no job and no money (he has to borrow money from Glen to buy drinks for the family). He cannot get an erection when his girlfriend Michelle entices him into the laundry for sex. He cannot assert himself against Newman and the police. There does not seem to be any other legitimate avenue for him to assume a respected masculine position in society. All he has is his puny, phallic cigarette, which is symbolically repeated in the screwdriver he used to assault Graham Newman. It is no match for the large knife Newman drove into Brett's stomach. For, indeed, Brett is a castrated figure.

But it is not only Newman and the police, and the hegemonic masculinity that lies behind them, who have castrated Brett. As in the films discussed in the previous chapter, women also serve as castrating figures in Brett's life. This is signalled shortly after Brett returns home from prison when his mother, Sandra, and Michelle hold up a knife conspicuously before him while they prepare lunch. Notably, Brett tells Michelle to be careful with the knife while she is chopping up the vegetables. Though Sandra is not the castrating mother in the sense Creed outlines, this role is displaced onto Michelle. She is not prepared to be the passive partner in the relationship, revealing, at times, that she can be quite active and dominant (recall, for example, how she sets the terms for their sexual transaction). Moreover, she emasculates Brett with her derisive, acerbic comments. Before

they go out to the laundry to have sex, Michelle gives Brett a tongue lashing: 'Listen, dickhead, you might think you're king of the fucking universe slumming it down here with the morons, but from what I have just seen, you're just a bunch of fucking losers.' When Brett responds by telling her that he wants sex, she replies bluntly, 'I don't think you got it in you.' Later in the laundry, when he cannot get an erection, she taunts him: 'Where's this big cock you got saved up for me?' Provoking Brett further, she states, 'You took it up the arse, didn't you.' It is more than he can endure. The sting of his emasculation erupts and he assaults her. At this point, given the displacement of his mother onto Michelle (and quite apart from her provocative comments), it is worth considering the degree that the maternal object figures in his frustrations. As Kaufman noted previously, a man's relationship with a woman inevitably resonates with the earlier, passive mother-son relationship.

Academic-turned-therapist Roger Horrocks observes that most impotent men do not allow themselves to experience feelings such as 'helplessness and powerlessness,' and they fail to understand how these manifest themselves in 'rage and hatred toward women.' As a result of this denial, these emotions can take 'a bodily form' and become 'somatised into sexual impotence.'[12] More significantly, these feelings are commonly associated with regressive, infantile behaviour (as we have seen with Martin and Carl). Kaufman explains that 'the prolonged period of human childhood results in powerful attachments to parental figures' (particularly mothers) which gives rise to 'a prolonged period of powerlessness.'[13] Men, in particular, are more sensitive to this feeling because of the pressure to inhabit the absolute masculine position. Hence, we could posit that Brett's character is shaped by an unsteady and uncertain relationship with the maternal object, resulting in feelings of rage and hatred. This view is reinforced when we observe the contempt Brett displays towards his mother near the end of the film, when he verbally abuses her and assaults Kevin. Indeed, the confines of the domestic space and the pain of Brett's emasculation are a potent mix. As Kaufman notes: 'The family provides an arena for the expression of needs and emotions not considered legitimate elsewhere. It is one of the only places where men feel

[12] *Masculinity in Crisis,* 99.
[13] 'Construction of Masculinity,' 9.

safe enough to express emotions. As the dam breaks the flood pours out on women and children.'[14]

So does Brett's poor relationship with his mother account for his behaviour, exacerbated as it is by his social circumstances? Do his brothers' relationships with Sandra account for their behaviour? In short, is poor mothering to blame? The film does seem to invite these questions, but it is difficult to answer them as the narrative does not delve into the history of the boys' relationships with their mother. We can only surmise what I have just noted. All we know is that Sandra does not have her boys' respect and that, as Michelle reminds her, she is unable to control them. It is tempting, then, to point the finger at Sandra, but we should not fall into the trap of taking the simplistic and predictable option of blaming the mother. What, then, do we discover when we turn our attention instead to the father figure?

The three boys have two different fathers who, for whatever reasons, loved Sandra but left her. The only potential father figure in their lives is Kevin, whom they refer to as 'Abo.' Like Sandra, he too does not have their respect. When Glen confronts his mother over their different fathers, he is appalled at the suggestion that 'Abo' might be his father: 'What are you saying, I'm a boong?' This comment reveals that 'Abo' is even more marginalised than the boys. Notably, he spends most of his time on the fringes and outside with the dog. He is ineffectual and powerless against the boys' combined physical threat. Their violent attack against him near the end of the film confirms his marginalised status in their eyes. He is merely an object used, in a similar manner to Laurie and the hoons, to affirm what is left of their own masculinity.

Failing to acknowledge their own feelings of vulnerability and succumbing to the belief in an absolute masculine position, the brothers let their need for a scapegoat blind them to the positive version of masculinity Kevin presents to them. Kevin is devoted to Sandra and sticks with her, despite the appalling behaviour of her sons. He is gentle and caring and provides her with physical and emotional support, demonstrated in the scene when she receives an abusive phonecall after the crime. More importantly, the contrast between

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[14] Ibid.,16.

Kevin's and the boys' masculinities positions the audience in a very particular way. If Kevin, like the boys, is socially marginalised yet can still maintain a safe and reassuring subjectivity, what then does this say about the Sprague bothers?

'Your mum reckons ... you're all such mental spastics the world needs to be protected from you'

It would be easy to attribute the brothers' behaviour to a limited intellectual capability as a way of accounting for their behaviour. Certainly Glen and Stevie are a bit witless. Recall how Glen plays with Jackie's mobile while she tries to discuss the future of their relationship. Note also Stevie's response to his mother's rebuke: 'So it's all our fucking fault now …we can't help it if the cops pick on us.' However, the same cannot be said of Brett. Though Brett may be castrated, he is certainly not stupid like his brothers. His behaviour cannot be explained away that easily. There is enough evidence in the film to suggest that Brett is, in fact, quite intelligent. He is fully cognisant of his place in the patriarchal hierarchy, and he reveals this in a number of instances in the film.

The most notable of these occurs when Brett challenges Glen about his new job. He tries to convince Glen that he is working for well under the basic wage, but Glen is convinced that he is earning good money. Brett tells Glen, 'The ones screwing you the most are the ones saying they wanna help.' Picking up on the pointed reference to Jackie, Glen replies defensively: 'So what should we do, go to gaol with you? Is that how we're going to sort out our future?' But he is no match for Brett, who retorts:

> Oh what fucking future? This is it, mate; this is the fucking future!' … Fucking Jackie's been the one screwing you just like everyone else. You know why, mate? Because you haven't got a fucking choice. No one in this fucking world has got a choice. They're all out there trying to do it to everyone else ... There's only one way out. You fucking do what they're trying to do. You fucking do it to them.

Exactly how Brett intends to 'do it to them' is not clear at this stage, though we suspect he is referring to the likes of Newman. He clearly has a grudge against those who wield economic power, like Nick, the man his mother works for. When Nick visits to collect the

party materials she makes for him, in a sort of sweatshop arrangement, he says to Brett, 'I hope you appreciate how hard your mother works for you?' to which Brett responds, 'Works for you, you mean.' Unlike his brothers, Brett knows his position in the world and has no illusions about his life. This is clearly demonstrated just before he and Michelle go into the laundry. During their argument, Michelle needles Brett: 'Hey, you know what your mum reckons? She reckons you're all such mental spastics the world needs to be protected from you.' Brett's response, once again, is revealing: 'What makes you think she's wrong?'

Brett's intelligence may be demonstrated in his social awareness, but more telling is his ability to manipulate. This is evident from the start of the film when he is intent on re-establishing his dominance and control of the household the moment he steps out of prison. He directs Stevie to tie his coffee table to the roof of the car and leaves it for him to take off and carry inside when they get home. Glen likewise submits to Brett's orders, though a little more grudgingly. Brett demands that they take his car when the boys go to get some 'grog.' He also insists that he drives, and when Glen objects, he shouts, 'Give me the fucking keys!' With Glen in the back, he speeds all the way and runs through red lights. However, it is later, when Brett tells Jackie that she has been giving everyone 'the big V,' that we realise his intentions. Brett resents Jackie's influence over Glen and is intent on breaking up the relationship. Here we see the use of the age-old 'divide and conquer' method identified by Machiavelli in *The Prince*.

Brett compensates for his lack of control and authority in the public world by lording it over his family, particularly his brothers. Knowing that one of them has stolen his drug stash, he sets about accusing and intimidating them. He watches in amusement while they squirm at his probing questions. Like a cat with a mouse, he tells Glen, after he protests his innocence, 'You're bloody good.' Furthermore, there are a number of occasions when Brett lectures his brothers on some of the harsh realities of life, as if he were the patriarchal authority, or the king of the castle. He tells both of them that they wouldn't last 'three minutes' in prison and reminds Stevie that he needs to learn to keep his mouth shut, because it was his loose mouth that resulted in the police being alerted about his planned assault on Newman.

Through the disintegration of the relationships consolidated while he was in prison, Brett does eventually succeed in re-establishing his control of the household, but it comes at a cost. Jackie, Michelle and Nola leave, never to return, and 'Abo' is given a good hiding so that Brett can spend a 'moment of peace and serenity' with his brothers. But it is a chilling moment haunted by the fear of a man with the frightening potential to manipulate and destroy and far removed from the benign image of masculinity represented by Darryl Kerrigan, who also utters the same word ('serenity') when experiencing a moment of togetherness with his family. The visions could not be more diametrically opposed, yet they still exist on the same axis. Both characters, for a moment, experience plenitude and feel in control. Notably, these are also features of the absolute masculine position, which are echoed in the image of the castle that both men refer to. But Brett, unlike Darryl, has more sinister intent in his efforts to be in control.[15]

Just before the boys leave to commit the horrendous crime, Glen and Stevie speak of the possibility of going up north, but it is useless. Brett passes one of them a screwdriver in readiness for another assault on Newman. He, finally, also gets Glen to admit that he stole the drugs. He calls Glen a 'dumb prick,' to which Glen responds, 'Yeah, I know.' At this stage Glen has resigned himself to Brett's control, as he slumps in the chair passively, almost in a stupor. But he fully understands Brett's power over him. This is revealed later in the car when Brett tries to put their situation into some sort of philosophical perspective, a confused mix of science fiction and fatalistic realism. Brett says, 'Now we're together just the way God planned it.' To this, Glen responds, 'The way God planned it? Or the way you planned it Brett?' So it would seem that had Brett not returned, Glen and Stevie might not have been led to commit the crime. As Jackie says shortly before she storms out, 'We all felt a whole lot safer when you were locked up in gaol!' The film seems to invite this interpretation.

Is Brett the 'bad apple' that has returned to spoil the rest of the barrel? Looking at the other characters, it does seem that they have been trying to achieve some measure of

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[15] It is interesting to note that these films were both released in the same year. They represent two diverse responses of the embattled family to the recession 'we had to have' and the belt-tightening measures of the newly elected conservative government. One is an attempt to explore the underbelly of masculinity in adversity, while the other attempts to gloss over the harsh realities.

satisfaction in their life while he has been in prison. Sandra seems happy enough with Kevin who remains with her at the end of the film. She would like some more work from Nick but, financially, she is managing her $300-dollar-a-week house. Glen has been living with Jackie and, by his own admission, his life has 'really taken off' since he met her. Michelle has waited faithfully for Brett to return, and there is nothing in the film to indicate that she will not continue to stick by him as long as he treats her properly. Stevie is the only one who feels completely trapped with no way out, but he does tell Brett that Jackie might be able to get him a job cleaning cars.

The 'bad apple' interpretation is given weight if we consider Brett's erratic behaviour, particularly those moments when he reveals a tenderness that contrasts with his otherwise violent and aggressive manner. The most puzzling occur when he displays inexplicable gentleness towards Nola. In spite of Stevie's cruel indifference to her fears, Brett caresses her and reassures her that he will protect her because, as he puts it, she is now 'part of the family.' This moment recalls the instance at the start of the film when he presents the coffee table to his mother Sandra. While it is an awkward moment, during which neither is able to acknowledge their feelings, Brett's intentions do seem sincere. Moreover, a parallel can be drawn here with those moments when Peter Helfgott shows extraordinary tenderness towards his son, in contrast to his otherwise cruel behaviour. However, like other monstrous figures we see on the screen (Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs*, for example), these gentle moments are overshadowed by terror and cruelty. When Brett comforts Nola in her room after she calls the police, his physical assault on Michelle just previously lingers on, adding a sense of threat to his words. While this behaviour can be viewed as consistent with Brett's strategy of psychologically manipulating the household, when we consider it in the light of his explosive anger and his obsessional interest in the science fiction book *Moons of Infinity*, it would seem that he is indeed psychologically disturbed.

Nevertheless, even if Brett is represented as psychologically disturbed or deluded, his delusions are pieced together out of the familiar discourses of gender relations authorised by the patriarchally-dominated institutions of society. It is necessary to be reminded here that people like Brett are shaped by these institutions (which include the education, police and prison systems, as well as business) which traditionally define and value women (or

femininity) as other, passive, submissive, yet, at the same time, a threat to self-control. Segal makes this point in her discussion of Peter Sutcliffe, the man responsible for the murder and mutilation of thirteen women in the north of England in the 1970s and 1980s. She explains that, as an altar boy, he '*believed* in the links between sex and sin. He *believed* it was Eve who brought sin into this world and that female sexuality was both fascinating and "loathsome."' Segal points out that while he was clearly suffering from symptoms of psychosis (he heard voices) 'his delusions were constructed out of the most familiar fantasies around him: some women are good (pure and asexual), some women are bad (sinful and sexual).' The voices from God that he heard 'were but echoes of the voices of the most prominent mortal men around Sutcliffe—of the press, the police and later the prosecution.'[16]

We need to be careful, then, to avoid singular, reductive causes of behaviour such as Brett's that steer attention away from other contributing factors. Holland and O'Sullivan elaborate on this point when they express concern about the director's decision not to depict the crime. They claim that these sorts of crimes are a social responsibility and that the absence of the depiction focuses attention on the pathological, consequently deflecting attention away from this responsibility. If the crime is viewed only from a pathological point of view, it becomes extraordinary within the day-to-day life of the Sprague family. In this case, Brett, as I have pointed out, is just the 'bad apple' who has returned home to disturb the normalcy of domestic life.[17] Hence, it is necessary to examine the social now and steer away from the pathological or single-root causes. In this instance, Alfred Adler's theory of the 'masculine protest' proves quite useful.

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[16] *Slow Motion,* 251–52.
[17] '"Lethal Larrikins,"' 80.

The Masculine Protest: 'All I want is a bit of fucking respect.'

Although Adler bases his theory of the masculine protest on the clinical evidence of neurotics, it does have wider social significance as an explanation for men's behaviour. Focusing on individual pathology, Adler explains that the masculine protest is a defence mechanism, an 'overcompensation' for any doubts that a person might have about his own masculinity. These doubts inevitably arise in childhood when the child feels 'inferior' or weak 'in the face of adults,' leading to the possibility of its renunciation and resulting in an overdetermined subjectivity, or 'hypertrophied masculine wishes and efforts' which camouflage the child's weaknesses and vulnerability. The latter are associated in the child's mind with femininity and rejected. As Adler points out: 'The renunciation of masculinity … appears to the child as synonymous with femininity, an opinion which holds not only for the child, but also for the greater part of our culture.'[18] He concludes that 'the excessive pre-eminence of manliness' is the 'arch evil of our culture'[19] and provides us with a profile of masculinity that is immediately recognisable in a contemporary context:

> Every form of inner compulsion in normal and neurotic individuals may be derived from this attempt at the masculine protest. Where it succeeds, it naturally strengthens the masculine tendencies enormously, posits for itself the highest and often unattainable goals, develops a craving for satisfaction and triumph, intensifies all abilities and egotistical drives, increases envy, avarice and ambition, and brings about an inner restlessness which makes any external compulsion, lack of satisfaction, disparagement, and injury unbearable. Defiance, vengeance, and resentment are its steady accompaniments.[20]

In the last sentence, he could very well be speaking of the Sprague brothers, who fit neatly into this category of the masculine protest.

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[18] 'Masculine Protest and Critique of Freud,' 47–48.
[19] Ibid., 55.
[20] Ibid., 48.

We must be careful, however, not to equate automatically traits usually defined as masculine with the 'evils' of our society. It is only when they are taken to be absolute that they present a danger, as in the case of Brett, who desires to be a god in his 'own world' by controlling the inmates of his castle and demonstrating his physical strength (bashing up Kevin) and sexual potency ('the big cock' he has saved up for Michelle). Kaufman notes: 'While many of the characteristics associated with masculinity are valuable human traits—strength, daring, courage, rationality, intellect, sexual desire—the distortion of these traits in the masculine norm and the exclusion of other traits (associated with femininity) are oppressive and destructive.'[21] But how is this valorisation of the masculine and denigration of the feminine socially produced?

Kaufman provides us with an explanation. He states that, while a boy might feel powerless when he is growing up, society provides him (as opposed to girls) 'with a great escape.' This comes in the form of identification with authoritative masculine figures (particularly strong fathers) that promise him power and privilege when he grows up. It becomes his 'compensation for distancing himself from his first love, his mother.' It is in this identification that the boy moves away from what Kaufman calls the 'passivity of his infantile relationship to the mother' to a 'project of controlling himself and controlling the world.' In this process he represses his desires along with what society 'defines as negatively passive or as resonant of passive experiences.'[22] Gregory Smith explains that when control is the dominant factor in the project of masculinity, the emotional life of the male subject is ignored. However, when any feelings surface that might threaten this control, men 'are more likely to attribute feelings that arise to other people [namely women] as they become unused to … taking responsibility for [them] personally.' Instead, they feel 'impacted upon' and, 'because of the notion of control, they must respond to this impact.'[23] What results is the formation of what Kaufman terms a '"surplus-aggressive" character type' which, he explains, is the norm in patriarchal society for every male.[24] However, when this aggressive subjectivity is faced with particular, personal feelings of inferiority or localised social disempowerment, as is the case for the Sprague brothers, we

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[21] 'Construction of Masculinity,' 3.
[22] Ibid., 10–11.
[23] 'Dichotomies in the Making of Men,' 42.
[24] 'Construction of Masculinity,' 11.

witness a reinforcement of this 'surplus aggression.' Hence the masculine protest can be seen as a particular response to the insecurities felt by men when they feel inferior as a result of their social marginalisation.

This is where Connell picks up Adler's theme of the masculine protest, which he identifies as a specific form of masculinity set against the prevailing hegemonic masculinity: 'protest masculinity.' Connell, as a sociologist, focuses his discussion on the social construction of masculinities. He points out that, in contrast to the times Adler describes, there are now no longer any stable models of masculinity (especially working-class models) for young men to identify with because of the economic downturn and technological restructuring of the labour market in the 1970s. Traditional employment trajectories like trades are no longer a possibility for males when they leave school. Instead, they must rely on what Marx calls 'abstract labour,' the least skilled labour which 'anyone can perform' (like cleaning cars).[25] Hence, as Connell points out, masculinity is not shaped in relation to a 'specific *workplace*, but in relation to the *labour market as a whole*, which shapes … experience as an alternation of work and unemployment.'[26] Furthermore: 'In such a situation one does not develop trusting, optimistic views of the economy.' The alternative for most is what Connell defines as a 'radical pragmatism,' where there is little concern with where the money is coming from.[27] Often this results, as Connell's case studies show, in female partners working (like Sandra and Jackie) and males staying at home. Here there is a breakdown in the traditional division of labour achieved not through any sense of social justice, but rather through economic necessity. However, this radical pragmatism more commonly, as Connell points out, extends to crime, such as stealing and drug dealing.[28] These responses lead us to the chief characteristic of this version of masculinity.

Both Adler and Connell's theories can be summed up by the word, 'defiance.' Any person who assumes an authoritarian stance or, at the very least, adopts a position of superiority becomes a target for this defiance. In *The Boys*, the prime target is the police,

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[25] *Masculinities*, 96.
[26] Ibid., 95.
[27] Ibid., 97.
[28] Note that it was small-time drug dealing and a bungled robbery that put Brett Sprague in gaol.

'the coercive arm of the state [which] weighs heavily on them.'[29] Other authority figures include Nick ('Four-eyes') and Newman, who represent aspects of hegemonic masculinity. Connell states: 'Protest masculinity is a marginalized masculinity, which picks up themes of hegemonic masculinity in the society at large but reworks them in the context of poverty.'[30] What results is mere posturing as such a 'claim to power' is made 'where there are no real resources for power.'[31] Hence, any protest or defiance, in reality, is ineffectual, what John Frow calls 'a politics without effects.'[32] We can observe this when Brett mouths off to Newman ('Here's some of your friends: Ching, ching Chinaman. You owe me, Newman!') and when the boys taunt the police through the window of their home like naughty schoolboys.

Connell notes that 'there is something frenzied and showy' about protest masculinity, 'a lot of concern with face, a lot of work put into keeping up a front.'[33] These men embrace 'the marginality and stigma … turning them to account' resulting in a 'skilled, finely pitched production mounted on a shoestring.'[34] Traditionally, in Australian culture, those who can turn defiance into a performative display are applauded. It has become a tradition often known as larrikinism. However, it is hard to see Brett and his brothers in the popular sense of the word. To describe them more accurately, we have to turn the clock back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the inner city poverty of Sydney and Melbourne. It is necessary to be reminded that the original larrikins were members of gangs (pushes) and were notorious for their unruly behaviour on the streets. Additionally, they often engaged in brawls and robberies where, as a result of their poverty, they used such things as bricks and broken bottles, because they were the only weapons available to them.[35] With *The Boys* we see a return to this type of larrikin, a reintroduction of 'the "anti-social meaning" of the term,' which is a far cry from the image of the likeable larrikin (Darryl Kerrigan, for example).[36] Brett uses a screwdriver to assault Newman and

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[29] Connell, *Masculinities*, 100.
[30] Ibid., 114.
[31] Ibid., 111.
[32] Quoted in Butterss, 'When Being a Man is all you've Got,' 41.
[33] *Masculinities*, 110–11.
[34] Ibid., 116.
[35] Murray, *Larrikins: 19th Century Outrage,* 143.
[36] Holland and O'Sullivan quoting Rattigan, '"Lethal Larrikins,"' 84.

the boys stick the boot into 'Abo.' At the end of the film they go armed with a file 'to give that Newman prick a taste of his own medicine.'

Indeed, Connell believes that protest masculinity is essentially a collective practice. He claims that similar patterns exist in the practices of street gangs in the USA and that there is 'no standard developmental path into it, apart from the level of tension created by poverty and an ambience of violence.' More importantly, the group becomes 'the bearer of masculinity.'[37] Connell here moves quite some distance from Adler, emphasising the social conditions that impact the most on the construction of this version of masculine subjectivity. And, within these social conditions, the central experience of their power relations is violence,[38] which is where I now turn my attention.

Men's Violence: 'Let's get her.'

In my discussion I have outlined a psychological profile and a sociological explanation to address the question of what makes men like Brett Sprague violent. Both have provided us with some insight but fall short of supplying us with complete answers. However, there is another perspective that needs to be addressed in order to provide a comprehensive picture of men's violence—the biological. Here we return to the nature versus nurture debate, which never seems to go away. We must ask if there is something physiological, perhaps genetic or hormonal, that accounts for violent behaviour. As I detail below, some would argue that the potential of people like Brett and his brothers to be violent is no greater than it is for any other men in society. Yes, they agree that social conditions can produce frustration resulting in aggression, but they counter this by arguing that men give expression to their aggression mainly because they are inherently more aggressive than women due to their biological makeup. They observe that women are equally frustrated by their social conditions (indeed, have more reason to be frustrated than men, given the traditional imbalance of power in gender relations) but they do not commonly resort to

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[37] *Masculinities*, 107.
[38] Ibid., 98.

violence.[39] This biological perspective is a common and convenient framework of understanding, as it reduces complex issues to one simple equation: human behaviour is determined by physiological makeup. This simplicity accounts for the popularity and persistence of biological determinism in the public consciousness. For this reason it is necessary to examine some of its arguments more closely.

Michael Ghiglieri's recent book *The Dark Side of Man* provides us with a useful reference point. Written by a scientist, it is a good example of how scientific research is mediated in popular book form within the public domain. Relying on Darwin's theory of sexual selection, Ghiglieri claims that 'the origin of men's violence is not a question of nature versus nurture. Instead, nurture is genetically programmed by nature.' He goes on to say that men use violence to compete with other males as part of a 'reproductive strategy' to ensure that their genes will be passed on to the next generation.[40] It is this passing on of genes that Ghiglieri argues lies behind rape. He refutes feminist assertions that rape is an exercise of power, claiming that men rape for sexual gratification and no other reason. He states that 'the facts on rape tell us that rape is one more natural product of macho sexual selection, an extra "tool" or adaptation in many men to help them "win" natural selection's reproductive contest.'[41] Hence, men rape because of a biological urge, because it is pleasurable. What Ghiglieri overlooks is that the pleasure derived from the act of rape invariably coincides with the pleasure derived from the exercise of power and control. The two are often indistinguishable.

Putting aside the binary model (nature/nurture) upon which his argument rests, a model that has been deconstructed elsewhere,[42] it is interesting to observe how Ghiglieri has neatly eliminated social context from his argument by asserting that nurture derives from nature. This clears space for him to concentrate on his biological premise, which he elaborates by claiming that a man's brain is different from a woman's. Ghiglieri explains

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[39] Though Segal (*Slow Motion*) argues that women tend to internalise aggression which often results in depression or projection 'onto others, or onto the world in general, as in paranoia and agoraphobia' (266). She also draws our attention to the high incidence of lesbian violence (262) and the aggression displayed by women in traditional masculine occupations, such as prison wardens (268).
[40] *Dark Side of Man*, 29.
[41] Ibid., 106.
[42] Derrida 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences.'

that there are differences in the morphology of the hypothalamus, a part of the brain that 'dictates our emotional and physical responses to outside challenges.'[43] Consequently, he claims that this part of the brain 'makes men and women behave differently' and that these differences are '*tangible and measurable*.'[44] Furthermore, Ghighlieri asserts that rage is 'produced by a cascade of endocrine hormones' and an imbalance in serotonin levels which are observable in 'excessively violent men and suicidal men.'[45] Rage becomes something that is 'automatic' and seemingly beyond the control of the individual. But does this provide a satisfactory account for the behaviour of people like Brett Sprague? Does it fully explain his violent response to Michelle and 'Abo' and the anonymous woman?

Sometimes it can be difficult disputing scientific 'facts,' especially when one does not have a specialist knowledge. However, this should not prevent one from questioning the use to which these 'facts' are put. We already know how scientific theories of race have been used to justify colonial expansion in the nineteenth century and 'ethnic cleansing' in the twentieth century. But what about those theories, like the ones above, that appear to be driven by no other motive than objective scientific enquiry? Carmen Schifellite explains that from the moment observable 'facts' are theorised, they become objectified. He states that 'fact and theory become part of an interpretive framework that constructs … a scientific paradigm.' Hence, 'once a paradigm or set of interpretations is established, there is a tendency for further research to select facts that fit the theory.'[46] In other words, scientists tend to find only what they are looking for. Consequently, it becomes impossible to tease out their interests from scientific research because scientific facts inevitably become mixed up with the interests of individuals and organisations. One cannot separate the observer from the observed.

Kaufman notes that we can never know the extent to which biology determines behaviour 'for the simple reason that the men we examine do not exist outside societies.'[47]

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[43] According to research the 'sexually dimorphic nucleus of the hypothalamus is two and a half times larger in men than in women.' He also points out that the 'INAH-3 nucleus in most homosexual men is the same size and shape as that of women' (*Dark Side of Man,* 34).
[44] *Dark Side of Man,* 34.
[45] Ibid., 35.
[46] 'Beyond Tarzan and Jane Genes,' 53.
[47] 'Construction of Masculinity,' 4.

Moreover, just talking about biology places it within a social context and subjects it to the prejudices of prevailing social attitudes. But this does not mean that we can conveniently ignore biology. As Schifellite reminds us, the point is not that biology doesn't matter; rather, as social commentators, we 'must continue to make the process of social construction visible and a part of the object of [scientific] study in the hope of rendering the "observable" more visible. We must continually analyse the interpretive framework in which we operate as producers of knowledge.'[48] Therefore, as I have already pointed out in relation to Brett (and Peter Sutcliffe), every act of violence has a social context.[49] Kaufman reminds us, however, that this does not mean 'there are no pathological acts of violence, but even in that case the "language" of the violent act, the way the violence manifests itself, can only be understood within a certain social experience.'[50]

Let us return to Connell. These men might be marginalised by hegemonic masculinity, but they can still exert power over women because this power is structured into patriarchal society. Connell calls this the 'patriarchal dividend.' He explains that 'a gender order where men dominate women cannot avoid constituting men as an interest group concerned with defence,' which he points out 'is a structural fact.' He adds: 'To speak of a patriarchal dividend is to raise exactly this question of interest. Men gain a dividend from patriarchy in terms of honour, prestige and the right to command.'[51] This relates to the compensation boys receive when growing up, referred to by Kaufman earlier. Connell explains that a 'structure of inequality on this scale, involving a massive dispossession of social resources, is hard to imagine without violence. It is, overwhelmingly, the dominant gender who hold and use the means of violence … Patriarchal definitions of femininity (dependence, fearfulness) amount to a cultural disarmament that may be quite as effective as the physical

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[48] 'Beyond Tarzan and Jane Genes,' 61.
[49] Nock, in *Marriage in Men's Life*, states that 'the "inherent" source of any trait does not adequately explain its expression. Suppose that musical talent inheres in genes. The child who is lucky enough to inherit such genes will not automatically become a musician, any more than the child who inherits whatever it takes to be aggressive will necessarily behave that way. Something else must happen for potentials to be displayed. And that something, surely, is elaborated by the relationships one has with other people. In fact, aggression may be "produced" in men by particular configurations of social relationships. Various patterns of hierarchical relationships may evoke more or less aggressive responses by men' (49).
[50] 'Construction of Masculinity,' 5.
[51] *Masculinities*, 82.

kind.'[52] Kaufman expresses the same point: 'Our cities, our social structure, our work life, our relation with nature, our history, are more than a backdrop to the prevalence of violence. They are violence; violence in an institutionalized form encoded into physical structures and socioeconomic relations.'[53]

Connell identifies two patterns of violence. The first is the violence used to 'sustain … dominance' over women. This includes such things as intimidation, verbal abuse, domestic assault and rape. Men who behave this way often feel justified because they are 'authorized by an ideology of supremacy.' The second pattern is that which exists 'in gender politics among men.' Connell reminds us that most violent 'transactions' occur between men where violence functions 'as a means of drawing boundaries and making exclusions,' as in heterosexual violence against the gay community. As this is usually a collective experience, Connell suggests that 'violence can become a way of claiming or asserting masculinity in group struggles' (like the marginalised masculinities of Brett and his brothers). More importantly though, Connell notes that this violence is 'continuous with the assertion of masculinity in sexual violence against women.'[54]

Kaufman identifies a third pattern of violence, forming part of what he terms the 'triad of violence.' Along with violence against women and violence against men, Kaufman includes violence against self as a significant dimension of violence in society. He claims that these three patterns intersect and reinforce one another. Men's feelings of powerlessness are alleviated by violence against women in an effort 'to affirm their personal power in the language of our sex-gender system.' However, this violence can also be directed against other males who appear to be letting the team down because they seem to pose a threat to the suppression of feminine traits (gay people, for example, as illustrated by the hoons' response to Martin and Andy in the drive-in scene from *Proof*). Finally, violence becomes directed against the self when these feminine traits (for example, passivity and dependence) are repressed, resulting in damage to individual subjectivity.[55]

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[52] Ibid., 83.
[53] 'Construction of Masculinity,' 6.
[54] *Masculinities*, 83. We need to be reminded here that men rape other men to assert their authority in a group situation (for example, prisons). Women are not the inevitable targets of this exercise of power.
[55] 'Construction of Masculinity,' 17.

Kaufman concludes that violence becomes a substitute for desires that are thwarted or repressed and transformed 'into a form of emotionally gratifying activity.'[56] We can see now that men's violence against women is an inevitable consequence of the power relations that exist in patriarchal society. Whether this is biologically determined or not seems irrelevant because relations of power are so integral to the complex weave of day-to-day life. Hence, the focus must remain on these relations of power.

The Boys provides us with a notable example of these relations of power and how violence is inescapably linked to them. When Sandra tells Nola to get Stevie 'off the grog' she attributes to her a responsibility that aligns Nola with the disciplining institutions of society. Effectively, she enlists her in what Anne Summers refers to as 'God's police.'[57] It is an echo of the responsibility traditionally accorded to women to civilise their men. However, as the film illustrates, this conflation of women with the more powerful authoritarian institutions of society (hegemonic masculinity) and the conservative values that they represent exposes women, like Nola, to reprisal. They become easy targets, due to their physical vulnerability, for the frustrations of disenchanted, angry men who are attempting to assert their masculine rights and privileges in the face of the castrating other.

Each brother in the film has a personal gripe against his partner, which is reinforced by their association with the policing institutions (and the hegemonic masculinity that informs them). It is this gripe that they carry with them right to the end of the film when they meet the anonymous woman. Apart from Nola, who is lucky to escape the enraged Stevie (who calls her a 'fucking bitch'), we can observe that Jackie is policing Glen's behaviour when she warns him of the consequences of being late for work. In her efforts to keep Glen respectable, she gives him an ultimatum: he must choose her or his brothers. When she drives off, all he can say is, 'The fucking slut.' Finally, we have already noted that Michelle is a castrating figure in Brett's life. The conflation of this figure with the emasculation Brett feels as a result of his social and economic marginalisation fuels his rage towards women. It is Brett who issues the sickening command to his brothers at the end of the film: 'Let's get her.' We realise at this point the significance of Brett's earlier

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[56] Ibid., 2.
[57] *Damned Whores and God's Police*.

comment to Glen, cited above: 'There's only one way out. You fucking do what they're trying to do. You fucking do it to them.' It is here that we can observe the full horror of the social menace of masculinity referred to by Adler.

Each character feels, as Smith describes, 'impacted upon.' As I explained earlier, when a woman arouses emotions in a man that make him feel vulnerable, he feels threatened by her and is compelled to act in response. This is because he is not used to dealing with these emotions because the socialisation process, with its imperative to be absolutely masculine, normally causes them to be repressed (feelings of powerlessness, passivity and fear which resonate with the attraction to, and rejection by, the maternal object). Smith believes that this situation informs justifications for rape. An 'abhorrent logic' emerges that attributes responsibility to the woman.[58] When Michelle challenges Brett to demonstrate his sexual prowess in the laundry and he cannot get an erection (giving rise to feelings of powerlessness, impotence and rejection), he bashes her head against the wall. In his mind, she is to blame for feelings he cannot understand. She has impacted on him and he must respond. Fortunately, Michelle manages to escape relatively unharmed and vanishes from Brett's life. His ultimate act of aggression is saved for the anonymous woman at the end of the film. Interestingly, Brett and his brothers note her attractiveness, a detail which might lend some credence to Ghiglieri's theory, but as my discussion clearly indicates, the boys' act of violence is more 'a hideous exercise of power' speaking as it does out of 'a desperate sense of powerlessness.'[59]

But do we now have a complete picture? Are men violent, directly or indirectly (through the benefits they receive from the violence of others), because they wish to maintain their dominance, biologically-motivated or otherwise, in patriarchal society? Are they violent because the subordination of women and femininity cannot be legitimated by any other means? To answer these questions it is necessary to return to the psychological framework and take a closer look at the oedipal matrix, to look past 'commonplace knowledge of Oedipal struggle' and 'lay bare deeper levels' of the complex.[60] So far in this

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[58] 'Dichotomies in the Making of Men,' 43.
[59] Holland and O'Sullivan, '"Lethal Larrikins,"' 84.
[60] Reeder, 'Uncastrated Man,' 136.

thesis I have focused much attention on the feminine, particularly the maternal object, in the construction of masculinities. Specifically, I have examined how negotiation of the maternal figure, and by extension all things feminine, has a significant role in determining masculine subjectivity. However, now, it is necessary to take a closer look at the father-son dyad.

'So that's what we all are; we're all gods': The spectre of the phallic male or 'Uncastrated Man'

> Patriarchy is founded on rites and rights of inheritance and exchange of women that neutralise a neurotic, violent, father/son rivalry and establish the basis for a symbolic order. But perhaps this symbolic depends shakily on the repression of the primal, pre-Oedipal father so that culture continues to be tinged with violence and institutions that claim to be guardians of the law and defence against chaos are maintained by the violence that lies behind patriarchal authority. The image of the primal *father* confuses the neat polarisation between pre- and post-Oedipal that reproduces a polarisation between mother and father. Julia Kristeva has discussed the phenomenon of horror and disgust as a culture returning under the aegis of a pre-Oedipal mother, a body without boundary, an 'unspeakable.' Perhaps even more 'unspeakable,' hardly even achieving symbolisation in the collective fantasy of popular culture, is the threat embodied by the primal father. Perhaps even his lack of cultural recognition is significant, returning rather in symptomatic social and sexual anxieties that afflict our society. Perhaps desire for and fear of a powerful mother and the misogyny it generates conceals something even more disturbing, desire for and fear of a violent father. Perhaps it is the 'unspeakable' ghost of Laius that haunts relations between men, generating homophobic anxieties and an attraction bonded by physical violence … (Mulvey, 'The Oedipus Myth,' 199)

In her chapter on the Oedipus myth, Mulvey notes that 'it is remarkable to what extent it is about father/son relations.' She claims that the feminine is largely marginalised in the narrative. Instead, it figures only to the extent that 'desire for the mother is more

significant as a symptom of father/son rivalry.'[61] Therefore, behind the mother/son relationship lurks the relationship between the father and the son. While the relationship with the mother can be seen to generate fear and anxiety in the representations of masculinities in the films discussed in chapter two, it can be equally argued that the relationship with the father can generate the same feelings. This point has already been touched on in my discussion of *Shine* in the first chapter. However, these feelings of fear and anxiety are of a different kind.

Jurgen Reeder in his essay, 'The Uncastrated Man,' argues that masculine subjectivity is haunted by the fear that 'someone or something must exist who is not castrated.' The belief that such a figure exists, an uncastrated man, 'must be taken to be structurally bound to the play between different positions inaugurated by the Oedipus as a consequence of the displacement of the phallus taking place there.' He adds that the uncastrated man 'is a "necessary element" in the unconscious—the unknown, but logically inevitable, term of the Oedipus.' Hence, the uncastrated man is only 'pure position in a structure' and does not correspond to a living person. Instead, it becomes the source of fantasies about, and desires for, absolute masculine presence, typically denoted by the figure of the primitive father. [62]

It was Freud who posited the theory of this pre-cultural (pre-oedipal) primordial father who possessed all the women in the primal horde and had unlimited power over all the other males.[63] Fear and jealousy of his power caused the other men to kill the primitive father. However, the chaos that reigned thereafter and the guilt about the murder led to the formation of the prototype of patriarchal society based on the taboos of incest ('to neutralise a neurotic, violent, father/son rivalry,' in Mulvey's terms) and killing within the horde (to allay the guilt of killing the primitive father). However, the actual existence of a primordial father seems very dubious, and Freud's theory has largely been discredited over time. What we are dealing with, rather, is a manifestation of fears about the existence of an uncastrated, phallic male more than the existence of an actual person. As Reeder points

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[61] 'Oedipus Myth: Beyond the Riddle of the Sphynx,' 199.
[62] 'Uncastrated Man,' 142.
[63] *Totem and Taboo*.

out, 'the way in which [Freud] portrays his figure makes one wonder if we in fact aren't dealing with Freud's own narrativization of the uncastrated man.'[64]

This is a point which is taken up by Marie Balmary in her psychoanalytical study of Freud, *Psychoanalyzing Psychoanalysis*. She argues that, despite Freud's close attention to the pre-oedipal primitive father throughout his works, he is curiously silent on the pre-oedipal aspects of Sophocles' play. The reason for this, Balmary points out, is that certain features of Laius' life bear a close resemblance to Freud's own father Jakob. In her account, she demonstrates that Freud repressed unpleasant facts about his father (namely his tendency towards promiscuity), resulting in the abandonment of his seduction theory (the fault of the father) in favour of his fantasy theory, articulated in the Oedipus complex (the fault stemming from the child's desires).[65] Using Freud's own theory of the compulsion to repeat, she describes how this repression returns time and time again throughout Freud's life in the form of symptoms. Focusing on the discontinuities of both Oedipus' and Freud's life, she demonstrates that 'what makes no sense in someone's life may be meaningful when that life is related to those that preceded it.'[66] Here Balmary is arguing in favour of the maxim that the sins of the father are visited on the son.[67] Moreover, she points out that 'all the faults committed by the very people who present the law to the child' and the inability of the subject to recognise this are at the origin of neurosis, not sexual desire alone.[68] Balmary explains: 'The impossibility of uttering the fault … is not without effect. The father, falsely innocent, is misapprehended [*méconnu*]. The child, falsely guilty—at least concerning the father's fault—is no less misapprehended. Finally, the will to conceal has nothing to do with love; it does not lead to

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[64] 'Uncastrated Man,' 142.
[65] *Psychoanalyzing Psychoanalysis*, 37–38.
[66] Ibid., 34.
[67] Her reference to Lacan's case study of the man with the severed hand provides compelling evidence in support of this argument. His patient, an Islamic man estranged from his religion, became disturbed as a child when he overheard that his father was a thief, the punishment being, in Islamic law, the severing of the offending hand. As an adult, the patient lost the use of his hand for no apparent physiological reasons. Lacan explains: 'A long time had indeed passed, and the sentence [against his father] was still not executed … But it nonetheless remained inscribed in the symbolic order of intersubjective relations which one calls the law' (quoted on page 21). He adds that 'every personal experience is determined by the individual's relationship to the law which binds him' (quoted on page 22).
[68] Ibid.,164.

either love or tranquillity. The displaced, unacknowledged fault will perform its work of separation across generations, separation from others and from oneself.'[69]

Such an idea is not so far-fetched if we consider the resonance of the powerful notion of original sin in western society. According to the Bible, everyone is born with the stain of sin derived from the fault of the original father, Adam. However, when Jesus was put to death on the cross over two thousand years ago, his punishment, putatively, absolved the sins of all humankind across the generations. Balmary explains that there is a clear correspondence between this religious perspective ('an original fault, the punishment of the guilty party and the transmission of this punishment through the generations') and her central argument that 'psychoanalysis … is linked, at its origin [through the life of Freud] to the idea of the fault.'[70] Here, two of the most powerful explanations of human existence are conflated to produce a compelling vision of the individual and society.

To be sure, this wider view of the human condition does not negate the significance of the Oedipus myth as a framework for understanding patriarchal culture (a point which Balmary makes throughout her book). Instead, we must expose the 'deeper levels' that are typically overlooked when the Oedipus myth is used as an analytic tool. This involves observing how 'desire for and fear of' the primitive father functions in the constitution of individual and collective masculine subjectivity or, as Reeder notes, tending to 'masculinity's unfinished relationship to … *the uncastrated man.*'[71] Mulvey states: 'The Oedipus myth, in its transmission from the primal father [Laius] to the father of the Symbolic Order [Theseus], also shifts the question of fault or guilt out of the mythic terrain of phylogenesis and places it within the psyche, within fantasy and thus also within culture and the possibility of resolution within culture.'[72] This resolution can be achieved only when we realise that an originary fault is inscribed at the inauguration of human subjectivity. As Lacan reminds us, this fault is an effect of the acquisition of language (the symbolic, or law of the father) which causes the alienation of the subject from the

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[69] Ibid.,170.
[70] Ibid., 20.
[71] Reeder, 'Uncastrated Man,' 140.
[72] 'Oedipus Myth,' 198.

undifferentiated, pre-symbolic world of the mother. It is the mark of symbolic castration, the symbolic fall from grace from the Garden of Eden.

Hence, with respect to the symbolic order and its institutions, we must keep in mind that all humans are castrated. As I have pointed out, no-one can claim to possess the phallus, as true phallic power always resides elsewhere. Kramer explains that the phallus as a 'signifier of subjective unity … only enters discourse in relation to castration, which is to say in relation to the possibility of its loss.'[73] An individual might imagine that he or she has absolute power, omnipotence or absolute presence, but this will always be accompanied by the niggling fear that this is not truly the case. It is here that we can observe the origins of much of the fear, frustration and anxiety (in contrast to the threat of the feminine) when a male assumes the absolute masculine position, feelings that are exacerbated by the introjection of the masculine ideal in the form of the policing superego. Kramer states that 'the Oedipus complex centres on a single subject-position' within the male psyche leading to the development of a 'highly aggressive' superego.[74] Hence, there exists within the masculine psyche a very potent mix. On the one hand, we have the figures emanating from the position of the uncastrated male within the oedipal matrix (the primitive father, Laius) and, on the other, we have the superego, both uniting to form the possibility of a terrifying paternal figure. This provides us with a fuller account of Kaufman's 'surplus aggression.'

The character of the paternal figure within the psyche of the individual subject has a significant bearing on the shape of that subjectivity. We have already observed how the oppressive figure of Peter Helfgott emasculated his son David. Conversely, as the character of Martin suggests, the absence of a father can have just as much impact when he is not present to guide and restrain his son's excessive masculine tendencies, tendencies that are likely to be triggered when the resulting brittle and fragile masculine ego is threatened by more powerful figures, both masculine and feminine. As Kramer notes, any reminder of the 'castratory moment' (that is, the lack that lies at the beginning of all subjectivity, male and female) is likely to give rise to a violent response: 'What counts as normal masculine

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[73] *After the Lovedeath,* 27.
[74] Ibid., 24.

subjectivity involves a continual effort to defer the arrival, which is to say the return, of the castratory moment. Sexual violence is the deferral technique of the last resort. It does not represent a break with the norm, but the norm's logical outcome.'[75] He concludes: 'Violence against women does not so much deliver men from feminine abjection as deliver it to them; in the woman's violated body, in her tears, pleas, screams, useless resistance, the violator finds the image of an abjection to which his masculinity is superior.'[76] Brett's assault on Michelle and the boys' attack on the anonymous woman now take on a different perspective. While fear and repression of the feminine feature significantly in the formation of masculine subjectivity, these features are ultimately subordinated to the anxiety and fear of the all-powerful paternal figure, which installs within the individual through the agency of the superego 'a right to command.'

Reeder points out that 'the uncastrated man lurks in men's and women's unconscious' giving rise to 'serious misapprehensions concerning the real state of affairs as to the place and function of the man and the father (he *is* castrated).'[77] This situation is compounded by the 'fact that the father, during the greater part of bourgeois history, has been an absent figure,' leading to an ever-present uncertainty about his role and function.[78] This may well be the source of the 'mysterious prestige' of the father, referred to by de Beauvoir, that I mentioned in the first chapter. The consequence of this misapprehension about the actual existence of an uncastrated man and the lack of adequate father figures exposes young men to a serious danger. Young men need help to contend with this misapprehension and the oppressive superego. Reeder explains that the danger exists when, 'for lack of a "good enough" paternal presence [and appropriate rites of passage] a young man might be tempted to replace the long and difficult work of submitting to the father's prohibitions and simultaneously taking him as a model with an attempt at fortifying his masculinity with powers he believes he can pick up from the primitive father.'[79] Though not conscious of this process, a young man reveals this through his fantasies of omnipotence. This is most clearly demonstrated in the version of masculinity Brett presents. His is a masculinity

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[75] Ibid., 28. We can note here how radically opposed this point of view is to the pathological ('bad apple' theory) and biological positions.
[76] Ibid., 121.
[77] 'Uncastrated Man,' 143.
[78] Ibid., 145.
[79] Ibid., 146.

without bounds—a masculinity run riot. For Brett, his subjectivity is informed by his science fiction fantasy book, *Moons of Infinity*, from which he derives momentary delusions of omnipotence. He tells his brothers at the end of the film: 'So that's what we all are; we're all Gods in our own world.' But these gods have been created by the gods that 'fail us'—the fathers that 'bequeath diverse legacies to their sons and daughters.'

Conclusion

I noted at the beginning of this chapter that *The Boys* does not provide its viewers with any answers to the question of what produces men's violence. However, I did argue that its point of view tended toward the pathological at the expense of the social through its *mise en scène* of the uncanny and its allusions to the horror genre. But, given the traditional and inevitable emphasis on individualism in mainstream cinema, can a film be expected to address adequately the social conditions that form the backdrop to its characters and narratives? Director Woods articulates this tension: 'As soon as you're seen to be answering questions, especially questions as profound and as difficult as those [in the film], that imaginative struggle is curtailed and the drama and the tension is out the window. So, aside from the philosophical concerns—that we didn't have the answers—it was more importantly the dramatic concerns that were driving us. The compelling nature of the story was gone the instant we attempted to explain things.'[80]

One has to question, then, the political efficacy of mainstream film which, due to industry imperatives, will mostly favour dramatic appeal over political vigour. It will always be difficult for the audience to see the bigger picture when the social is figured at the personal level. How can the audience be expected to incorporate into its reading the social aspects of the problem of violence that the film hints at but never fully explores? Indeed, from the comfort of its seat, the audience can safely distance itself from the excesses of the brothers' behaviour, especially those male members of the audience who might find some of the behaviour alarmingly familiar and discomforting.

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[80] '*The Boys*: Examination of a Family in Crisis,' 15–16.

If we look at closure, we can see how the film neutralises the threat of this violent, menacing version of masculinity through the intervention of the police and the legal system. It is reassuring to know that the state can protect us from people like the Sprague brothers. More importantly, the disjunction between people like the Sprague brothers and the audience diverts attention away from the collective gender practices in which we are all implicated. The violence inscribed within patriarchal society (through maintaining and defending the absolute masculine position) is overlooked in the emphasis on the pathological nature of Brett's masculinity, thus obscuring the inextricable link between masculinity and culture indicated by my discussion of the fault of the father.[81] Instead, the extreme aspects of hegemonic masculinity are displaced onto this marginalised group of men, resulting in the perpetuation of the status quo and the affirmation of the patriarchy. As Butterss notes, the film 'absolv[es] the culture as a whole of blame, either through presenting the dangerous men as inherently evil, or ascribing the causes of this form of masculinity to problems within the nuclear family.' [82] This is similar to the observations that Horrocks makes on the trials of the serial murderers and rapists Nilsen and Sutcliffe: 'One reason that … [they] were given massive elaborate trials—when their guilt was incontrovertible and admitted—is *to absolve society*, and label these men bad, not mad. Although they are extremely pathological men, one of the reasons they shock us and fascinate us so much is that they reveal in horrific detail the psychotic tendency in patriarchy and in ourselves.'[83]

Looker reminds us that 'rapists conform to no stereotypes.'[84] They cannot be identified by social class nor are they, necessarily, mentally ill (both suggested by the film). Instead, it is often their very ordinariness that identifies them, something that *The Boys* goes part way in suggesting through the mundaneness of its *mise en scène*. It is here that the film's 'meditation on the banality of evil' reveals the full horrors of male violence. Joan Smith points out that what was most remarkable about Sutcliffe was his similarities to the community and those in pursuit of him, not his differences.[85] As Looker argues, there is

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[81] A link which is vividly illustrated in Lacan's case study of the man with the severed hand.
[82] 'When Being a Man is all you've Got,' 46.
[83] *Masculinity in Crisis,* 115.
[84] 'Doing it with your Mates,' 209.
[85] *Misogynies*, 123–24.

'continuity between the structure of "normal" gender relations and Sutcliffe's violence.'[86] Indeed, Darryl Kerrigan and Brett Sprague are both located on the same axis as I have indicated, and if we follow this logic, it would appear that rapists could be family members, our next-door neighbours, our friends, and, most terrifyingly of all, they could be ourselves. Indeed all men are on the same continuum as Brett Sprague. Looker observes: 'Men maintain power through a kind of collusion in which they deny what they can know about themselves and other men in regard to their experiences of being socialised, or gendered, as men. One of the most effective forms of disguise that men can therefore use is to separate their lives into discrete categories, the private and public, the individual and the collective, and not to see the way these categories intertwine and support one another in the formation of a powerful masculine gestalt.'[87]

To understand violence in society, we must begin to reckon with this 'powerful masculine gestalt,' informed as it is by fantasies generated by the position of the uncastrated man. But this reckoning, or 'unfinished business with the uncastrated man,' will always be difficult while the conditions for masculine excess remain in place. Without any stable, nurturing models of masculinity, resulting from the economic downturn and the cultural revolution, men will always be exposed to the dangers of negotiating their masculinity in an often indifferent, hostile world. But we are not dealing with a problem that is peculiar to contemporary society, despite escalating levels of violence in today's world. In the next two chapters I take an excursion into history and examine Australian masculinities from their origin in convictism to the early decades of the twentieth century in order to present a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary constructions of masculinity. In doing so, I hope to complete the picture of masculinity as a predominantly social construction which becomes implicated in all personal subjectivities.

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[86] 'Doing it with your Mates,' 211.
[87] Ibid., 209.

IV

The Performance of Masculinity: Larrikinism and Australian Masculinities

> What about those poor bloody academics, those college graduates battling their guts out to write some airy-fairy piece of exaggerated heart-work? And there's a bloke, sitting in a cell, who can't spell, and he's written a best seller! It's sold 250,000 copies, and it's still selling! And he's writing another one! And I can't spell. I'm semi-bloody-illiterate! They must hate my guts, hey? (Chopper Read, *Chopper*)

> Cinematic representations of a nation too often begin (and end) with images of the prevailing, consensual social structure, reinforcing existing power bases associated with gender and ethnicity. In the case of Australia, the definition of the nation and its distinctiveness have been prejudiced from their inception by the country's colonial origins. (Jonathan Rayner, *Contemporary Australian Cinema*, 8)

Introduction

With the exception of *The Castle* and the references to local context in the other films, the masculinities examined so far would not be out of place in any urban settings throughout the English-speaking world. As my discussion has pointed out, over-determined masculinity and the hysterical fear of femininity account for many of the anxieties experienced by the masculine subject in the modern state. Looker reminds us that 'Australia, Britain and North America encompass a shared economy of gender relations ... The socialisation of Australian men cannot be quarantined from the wider culture we now imbibe daily—from the influence of Hollywood, for example, which still works to uphold the values of male power in its representational system.' However, despite there being 'more commonalities than differences,' Looker does point out that there are 'local

inflections' and 'intensifications of some elements in this economy—Australian men, for example, are sometimes deemed to be more misogynistic than their other English-speaking brothers.'[1]

I have already discussed misogyny, which continues to be a notable feature in the construction of Australian masculinities. Other 'intensifications' or 'inflections' include a preoccupation with lawlessness, which harks back to Australia's convict origins, where it began as an expression of defiance against the penal authorities. Indeed, defiance has become a chief feature of the nation's masculine identity. It has evolved into a distinctive performative display known as larrikinism which, though it might be applauded, belies its origins as a spirited gesture against the castrating effects of the colony's penal culture. Indeed, Australian men seem to protest their masculinity just a little too much. In the realist films of the screen revival of the 1970s (for example, male ensemble films such as *Sunday Too Far Away*, *The Club*, and *Don's Party*), most males are assertively heterosexual, vigorously disavowing homosexuality and any elements of homoeroticism. This overstimulated masculinity is countered by a tradition of representations that border on camp. The exaggerated posturing of masculinity to the point of grotesqueness can be observed in characters such as Barry McKenzie through to contemporary representations such as Barry Fife in *Strictly Ballroom*. That masculine representations should be created for comic effect is no idle strategy, as the two films in this chapter demonstrate. Both *Chopper* (Dominik, 2000), and *The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert* (Elliott, 1994) rely heavily on humour to shape their versions of masculinity. The films also illustrate the points I have noted above that contribute to what can be defined as a distinctive Australian masculinity.

[1] 'Doing it with your Mates,' 206.

Chopper

A restless and uneasy relationship between men and figures of authority has informed constructions of national identity for the greater part of Australia's history. Many of the country's milestone films play out this theme (consider *The Sentimental Bloke*, *Gallipoli* and *Breaker Morant*). Indeed, Australia's first feature film, *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (Charles Tait, 1906), was about the nation's most infamous criminal. This contentious relationship with authority can still be observed in contemporary constructions of masculinities, where filmmakers display a preoccupation with criminality, particularly when it is conceived as a response to marginalisation and subjection. A brief, and by no means complete, list of recent films serves to illustrate this point: *Everynight Everynight*, *Idiot Box*, *Holidays on the River Yarra*, *The Interview*, *Kiss or Kill*, *Doing Time For Patsy Cline*, *Bad Boy Bubby*, *The Big Steal*, *Two Hands, Mr Reliable* and, more recently, *Chopper*.[2] These representations of manhood in association with criminality and recalcitrance dominate Australian films and reveal how the national cinema, according to Rayner, 'is linked indelibly to enduring, colonial, cultural associations,' informed as they are by the nation's penal origins.[3] As O'Regan remarks, 'the drama of national insubordination ... is one played out often in Australian film.'[4]

Raymond Evans and Bill Thorpe note that 'Australian masculinism originally grew within a military, penal, colonial and colonizing matrix and thus fostered discipline, inequality, deference, and brutality.'[5] The dominant form of masculinity at the time was cruel, harsh and excessive, relying heavily on the utilisation of the lash, which imposed 'a sense of submission, surrender and vulnerability—traits associated conventionally with feminized behaviour.' Evans and Thorpe explain that 'in reducing the subject to a condition of helplessness and impotence … a sense of humiliation and emasculation was violently imposed, while the authority figure, directing the punishment, grew

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[2] Gregor Jordan's recent film of the Kelly story, which was still in production at the time of writing, further illustrates my point about this preoccupation with criminality.
[3] *Contemporary Australian Cinema,* 8.
[4] *Australian National Cinema*, 109.
[5] 'Commanding Men,' 19.

concomitantly in power, like a Leviathan.'[6] These authority figures of the hegemonic order resembled the primitive father: all-powerful and prohibitive. Confined to quarters that cruelly echoed the domestic space and under the guardianship of hostile gaolers, the convict was a castrated figure who lived in constant fear of the phallic power of the other. Hence, the first images of masculinity were founded upon the question of survival in conditions of extreme human degradation. One can only wonder to what degree the sins of these original 'fathers' have been visited upon today's generation of men and how images of their terrifying power, which still persist in the public consciousness, augment the influence of the absolute masculine position. In short: what unfinished business do Australian men have with the uncastrated man?

But there existed those 'rare' few who were 'stoical' in their suffering and who refused 'to cry out or scream in anguish.' These men 'subverted' the emasculation process and 'retained,' in part, 'a sense of masculine integrity.' As Evans and Thorpe explain: 'The lacerated backs of such multiple offenders thus became not so much marks of their degradation but rather badges of their courage and status.' For the greater majority, however, such resistance was not possible. The only resistance they could make was in the 'answering texts' of their tattoos, those 'small expressions of selfhood' that served 'as a painfully scored cultural window for mental escape from an exiled and intolerable existence back to a pre-convicted place and time.'[7]

His body heavily adorned with tattoos and scars, Chopper Read is reminiscent of one of the stoical resisters referred to by Evans and Thorpe above. He feels no pain and seemingly cannot be tamed by the penal institutions of society. His insensitivity to pain is highlighted when he is stabbed repeatedly by his mate Jimmy Loughnan. With gaping stab wounds, he speaks in a calm, everyday voice to Jimmy, expressing surprise at the treacherous act. Later, fearing that he may be the target of retaliation after killing Keith George, the defiant Chopper asks to be taken out of 'H Division,' but his request is denied. Unfazed, Chopper has his ears cut off by one of the inmates in order to force a transfer. He is seemingly indifferent to the pain as the inmate hacks away at his ears with a razor blade. Chopper

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[6] Ibid., 24–25.
[7] Ibid., 26–27.

tells him not to 'saw into it' but 'rip into it.' He gets his transfer, mocking the prison wardens as they escort his bloodied body away.

These moments seem to construct Chopper as an uncastrated man, a man who can resist the penal system and 'retain his masculine integrity.' His defiance, self-containment and mastery over his own body are gestures toward the absolute masculine position and provide focal points for audience identification. If we accept Mulvey's argument that the cinematic experience is generally structured around the male gaze—that is, 'around a main controlling figure with whom the spectator can identify'[8]—then it is possible that Chopper could enlist identification from the male members of the audience who might feel that their masculinity is being threatened by social or economic conditions.[9] Identification with Chopper feeds, what Steve Neale describes as, 'phantasies of power, omnipotence, mastery, and control.'[10] Jimmy was unable to kill him and the flesh and blood Chopper Read is still alive today, despite all the contracts out on his life. Mulvey notes that a character's appealing qualities are 'those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror.'[11] However, as Neale points out, 'while the ego ideal may be a "model" with which the subject identifies and to which it aspires, it may also be a source of further images and feelings of castration, inasmuch as that ideal is something to which the subject is never adequate.'[12] Chopper's mutilated ears serves here as a mark of this castration. As I noted in the previous chapter, having the phallus or absolute masculine presence is a fiction and never a fully-lived experience for any man, a point that the film appears to be making. In spite of Chopper's defiance and seeming invincibility, the 'coercive arm of the state' has ultimate power over him. This is demonstrated when, at the end of the film, the prison officers shut the door on him. Though he may have endeared himself to his gaolers, who apologise as they shut the door, he casts a lonely figure in his small cell at the close of the

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[8] 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' 20.
[9] To be sure, Chopper is also an object of identification for female members of the audience who might be seeking 'a sort of guarantee that the phallic quality [they] seek in a man really exists' (Reeder, 'Uncastrated Man,' 142).
[10] 'Masculinity as Spectacle,' 11.
[11] 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' 20.
[12] 'Masculinity as Spectacle,'13.

film. His own sense of omnipotence and control is diminished by the recognition that he is only one of a number of media 'freak shows' that come and go and are soon forgotten.

The film draws our attention to Chopper's vulnerability in a number of other instances that undermine those spectacular moments of self-possession. When Chopper walks into his father's house like a big, awkward kid with his 'Tiger' bag after being released from prison, we are immediately struck by the contrast between this image and the one presented to us while he was in Pentridge. Moreover, his father, Keith, immediately asserts his authority over Chopper when he teases him. After insisting that his son has a beer with him, he holds his glass up and, barely controlling his amusement, says, 'Cheers big ears.' Moments later, he asks his son, 'Nice shirt—do they make 'em for men?' Chopper is made visibly uncomfortable by this bantering, and Keith is quick to pick up on his son's sensitivity. He tells him not to be 'such a sook.' Here Keith polices the boundaries of Chopper's masculinity, establishing a link between his authority and the authority of the wider patriarchal society of which he, inevitably, is a part. In what would otherwise be a familiar, homely, father-and-son talk, Keith attempts to advise his son on how to conduct his life. Significantly, when the subject of Jimmy Loughnan is raised, he tells his son not to be too soft, pointing out that he should have dealt with him more harshly: 'I always told you, Mark, your kindness will be the death of you.' Indeed, Chopper's soft spot for Jimmy Loughnan is very revealing.

'Jimmy, if you keep stabbing me you're gonna kill me, right!'

Easthope observes that 'banter depends on a close, intimate and personal understanding of the person who is the butt of the attack. It thus works as a way of affirming the bond of love between men while appearing to deny it.'[13] Keith Read's joking, above, and Chopper's playful taunting of Jimmy throughout the film illustrate this. Through banter the affection that these men have for each other is simultaneously acknowledged and disavowed in the same instant. Passivity, softness and the display of tender emotions must be avoided at all costs, according to the codes of masculine conduct, in order to keep the

[13] *What a Man's Gotta Do,* 88.

threat of femininity at a safe distance. Yet, as Easthope points out, 'the supremely masculine relation of father and sons has a strongly homosexual component.'[14] Desire for the phallus embodied in another male will always invoke homoeroticism. The more intensely it is sought, the more intensely these elements are denied or repressed by the masculine subject. With this in mind we can begin charting the elements of homoeroticism that contradict Chopper's larger-than-life heterosexual persona and reveal his vulnerability. The most notable can be observed in the scene cited above, when Jimmy stabs Chopper in an attempt to rid himself of his obligation to support Chopper's wild plans for retribution against the 'Painters and Dockers.'

It is a strange and unsettling scene, at once gruesome, humorous, erotic and playful. Initially, Chopper is bewildered that his friend should want to stab him. Standing passively before his mate with gaping wounds oozing blood, he asks Jimmy in a casual, matter-of-fact voice what he is doing. He then gives Jimmy a hug, pats him on the back and tells him that 'it's all right.' Jimmy apologises but continues to stab him nevertheless. Chopper remains patient, telling Jimmy, 'If you keep stabbing me you're gonna kill me, right!' Chopper then tenderly leans his forehead against Jimmy's and stares into his eyes. But this does not deter Jimmy, who persists in his stabbing until Chopper finally takes control of the situation and overpowers him. However, after taking off his shirt to display his wounds, Chopper soon begins to falter. Jimmy then lowers him carefully to the floor and places his head gently in his lap. He puts his cigarette in Chopper's mouth, then returns it to his. We see an extreme close-up shot in slow motion of Jimmy inhaling the cigarette through his lips. It is a strange, erotically-charged moment, suggesting that Jimmy has 'fucked' Chopper in more ways than one.[15]

Hoping that Chopper might confess all, the police tell him while he is recovering in hospital that Jimmy has made a statement against him. Chopper, once again, is bewildered but he keeps silent on the incident, much to their annoyance. His explanation for this, however, is very telling: 'What if your mum stabbed you? What do you do? You don't get

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[14] Ibid., 104.
[15] It is hard to look past the playful allusion here to the convention of smoking signifying in the cinema that sex has taken place.

angry … you just go to hospital.' In accordance with the love a son might have for his mother, Chopper does not get angry with Jimmy. Moreover, the mention of his mother in this context implicates Jimmy in the patternings of Chopper's desires represented in the film, which are informed by his relationships with his mother and father. Chopper has repressed his feelings for his mother (the feminine object) because she is absent from his life.[16] This corresponds to the repression of his homoerotic (feminine) desire for Jimmy, a desire which is confirmed a little later when he returns to prison. He tells Jimmy: 'I'm not angry with you Jim. You just broke my heart, that's all.'

Significantly, we see Chopper with his girlfriend Tanya in the next scene, after he has been released from prison. There is another close-up shot of a mouth: this time Tanya squirting heroin from a syringe onto her tongue. The visual correspondence between the two close-up shots cannot be overlooked, as it alerts the viewer, in a similar manner to the mother, to Chopper's homoerotic desire for Jimmy. Notably, Tanya injects Chopper with the syringe against his will, and when he collapses on the bed, she sits on top of him to have sex. In both instances Chopper assumes the passive position and Tanya (who, like Jimmy, penetrates Chopper's body) adopts the phallic position. This positioning is further reinforced by Tanya's taunting remark about Chopper's ears: 'I hope you weren't thinking of me when you did that.'

Nevertheless, despite the elements of homoeroticism in his relationship with Jimmy and his father, Chopper is avowedly heterosexual throughout the film. At the end of the film, while showing the interviewer his collection of photographs sent to him by tourists to Bojangles, he discards one, declaring distastefully that it contains someone who looks like a homosexual. Furthermore, Chopper desires the traditional heterosexual trajectory. During a surprisingly sentimental moment with Tanya in the car outside her home, after the visit to Neville Bartos' nightclub, he asks her to go to Tasmania with him and settle down. He concedes that he is 'a bit schizo' (because only moments before he had just stormed out of

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[16] This is revealed when he tells his father, in the scene cited above, that he wrote to his mother while he was in prison. His father asks if he heard back and, after a brief pause, Chopper responds, 'Naa.' This response initiates an outburst of laughter which releases the tension that had been building up due to Keith's teasing. In a manner similar to the laughter between Martin and Andy, the effect is orgasmic. The two once again become bonded through their tacit conspiracy against their wife/mother/feminine object. From this point on there is no further reference to his mother.

the nightclub firing his gun off in a rage of jealousy) but feels convinced that the proposition would work. However, Tanya just laughs at his absurd suggestion, reminding him that she is a prostitute and that it would never work. Initially, he looks and acts hurt. There is a visual correspondence here with the way he looked when his father teased him. However, in this case, Tanya cannot pacify him. She cannot humour him to relieve the pressure and defuse the situation, because like his mother, she is the perceived cause of his problems, the other that needs to be expelled.

When she goes to kiss him, he pushes her away, telling her that her mouth 'tastes of wog's cock.' She flees in disgust and refuses to answer the door when Chopper comes to apologise. Consumed with anger, he breaks in and chases her to the bathroom, where he punches her and headbutts her mother when she tries to intervene. He then turns to Tanya: 'Have a look at what you've gone and done. Your mum's upset.' Chopper believes that Tanya has impacted on him in the same manner outlined by Smith in the last chapter. It is here that we can observe the frightening logic of misogyny when, as with the Sprague brothers, it becomes inscribed in masculine subjectivity. Stung by the exposure of his vulnerability, Chopper vents his rage to rid himself of these feminised feelings. In Tanya's 'violated body,' Chopper creates an abjected image which, as in Kramer's observations mentioned previously, reaffirms for him his masculine superiority. It is a truly sickening moment in the film.

But, despite Chopper's appalling behaviour, he is fêted by the media within the film, particularly the television interviewer, who appears captivated by his charisma. As I have mentioned, Chopper is also liked by the prison wardens, and it is clear that Governor Beasley has a soft spot for him. Furthermore, the 'real-life' Chopper (Mark Brandon Read) has endeared himself somewhat to the public, though opinions are fairly divided. Post-prison life has been good for Mark Read. He continues to write and sell books (the latest being a children's book, *Hooky The Cripple*, 'recommended ... by AccessEd, the Queensland Government body which reviews educational resources'[17]), and he contributes to magazines such as *FHM* and *Pawn Queen*. He even advertises sunglasses and goes on

[17] *Adelaide Advertiser* June 5, 2002, 13.

public speaking tours throughout the country. What, then, accounts for the public interest in this person? How is it that this otherwise undesirable character (we cannot forget that he spent the earlier part of his life killing and torturing people—something he admits enjoying) has endeared himself to the public or viewing audience? More importantly, why is Chopper more endearing than Brett Sprague, given that both of them are very nasty characters? The short answer to these questions is humour.

'I'm just a normal bloke. A normal bloke who likes a bit of torture'

I have already indicated how banter serves to deflect attention away from homoeroticism. Elsewhere in *Chopper* humour performs a similar diversionary function. Massaged by laughter, the audience is predisposed to respond to Chopper's more appealing qualities. Indeed, the film provides its audience with many funny moments that construct Chopper as a charismatic character and divert attention away from the violent acts he commits. Chopper is quickwitted and full of one-liners, as we can observe on many occasions. When he visits Jimmy Loughnan in his hovel after getting out of gaol, he looks around at the poverty-stricken loungeroom and says: 'This is plush; this is swank. Who says crime doesn't pay?' When Neville Bartos complains that his minders keep following him around as if they want to 'fuck [him] up the arse,' Chopper quips, 'That explains the limp.' But Chopper is at his best when he has an audience. He is a consummate performer, the ultimate 'show pony,' as Jimmy Loughnan calls him. This can be observed when, in front of the other inmates, he jokes about Keith George's bootpolished hair and taunts George with a plan to avenge himself against Chopper. When Keith bites back, 'You're fucking sick, Read; you're insane,' Chopper feigns mock offence: 'I always thought I was a good bloke.' Keith then asks Chopper what he has ever done that was good. Chopper's reply is quick and provokes laughter from those assembled: 'I bashed you.' In each instance these moments of humour precede an act of violence: he pulls a gun on Jimmy, shoots Neville Bartos in the stomach and stabs Keith George in the neck and kills him.

Indeed, most of the humour of the film stems from the contrast between his

ordinariness (as displayed in his jokiness) and his violent behaviour. Because Chopper's manner much of the time is so familiar and everyday, there is humour in its incongruity with the horrific, gruesome acts he commits. This is particularly evident in the scene when he bashes Tanya. The words he uses typify an ordinary and harmless domestic dispute ('Mum, you stay out of it' and 'Have a look what you've gone and done … Your mum's upset'), provoking laughter, albeit uncomfortable. This is not dissimilar to the 'horrid laughter' that Nicholas Brooke observes in his analysis of Jacobean tragedy. Brooke argues that laughter and tears are not as diametrically opposed as we are led to believe and states that these opposites can 'easily and bewilderingly transpose into each other.' He adds that 'extreme emotions [such as 'cruelty,' 'torture' and 'horror'] are all *liable* to turn over into laughter.' [18]

While it is possible for this uncomfortable laughter to provide insight, as in the strategies of black comedy, it can also work the other way. One would hope that the discomfort such laughing provokes might cause the audience to wonder about its connections to this 'ordinary bloke,' who in gesture, manner and speech is so recognisable (like the audience members themselves, perhaps, or those they might converse with around the watercooler or barbecue); but it might also function to distance the audience from Chopper's excesses, as I have indicated above, thus deflecting attention away from any culpability or responsibility in the misogyny and violence that is inextricable to the patriarchal culture that Chopper (the 'ordinary bloke who likes a bit of torture') and the audience are both part. In sum, through humour, the 'banality of evil' can easily escape the attention of the audience. As Neale and Krutnik commented previously, humour turns on the 'play between identification and distanciation'[19] which, in *Chopper*, results in a tension between collusion and cognisance that remains throughout the film and is not resolved.

This ambivalence can be understood if we consider the inherent link between aggression and humour. Neal and Krutnik point out that 'aggression is always fundamentally involved in any instance or form of the comic ... because what is always at

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[18] *Horrid Laughter in Jacobean Tragedy*, 3.
[19] *Popular Film and Television Comedy,* 149.

stake in the comic is a position of superiority—hence narcissism and its object, the ego.'[20] Humour is one of the many strategies that humans use to fend off the uncomfortable aspects of reality and maintain the illusion of a seamless ego,[21] which, as Easthope pointed out in a passage cited in chapter one, is also maintained by aggression. If one can joke at the traumas of the world and appear unaffected by them, then one has demonstrated 'the victorious assertion of the ego's invulnerability.' As Freud explains, 'humour is not resigned; it is rebellious.'[22]

Here we can observe an important connection between Chopper and Darryl Kerrigan. Both use humour (or are constructed as humorous by the filmmakers) as a defiant gesture against the threats that the world poses to their masculine integrity. Moreover, the audience members, when they identify with the characters, experience vicariously the triumph of the ego over the contingencies of lived experience, which is reassuring when they leave the cinema doors and face their own day-to-day reality. Therefore, it is not so easy to draw the line between Darryl Kerrigan's humour (for example, his amusing taunts to the opposition barristers in court—'Suffer in your jocks' and 'Bad luck—ya dickhead!') and certain instances of Chopper's humour cited above (for example, his outwitting of Keith George in front of the inmates) as both assert their masculinity through defiant humorous gestures against the spectre of castration. Consequently, Darryl and Chopper (and Brett, though for different reasons) exist on the same continuum of violence that sustains hegemonic masculinity which, as Connell noted earlier, is continuous with violence against women. It is quite understandable, then, that audiences can be caught up in the ambivalence of identification and distanciation created by humour.

More importantly, however, for the purpose of my discussion, humour and defiance also characterise larrikinism, which significantly informs discourses of national identity and which both Darryl and Chopper exemplify. Hence, it is necessary now to take a look at the tradition of larrikinism in order to understand more fully why characters such as Darryl

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[20] Ibid., 75.
[21] Freud, 'Humour,' 163.
[22] Freud., 162–163.

and Chopper have appeal to their audiences. It will also provide more insight into the particularities of Australian masculinities.

The Larrikin Tradition

> Rebellion against authority, or at least a refusal to accept authority, is one of the cornerstones of the Australian mythic identity. (Neil Rattigan, *Images of Australia*, 125)

> That the larrikins are still with us, under other names, I am not the first to suggest, but I would go further and say that there is, in the Australian character, a lurking larrikin; a nobbling Ned Kelly; to be admired for independence but hardly for lawlessness. (James Murray, *Larrikins: 19th Century Outrage*, 9)

The spirit of larrikinism still insinuates itself into definitions of the national character, even though the word itself may not make much of an appearance these days. However, there are notable instances when the word is first in line to describe significant national events and celebrated people. The recent death of the last ANZAC, Alex Campbell, reveals how indispensable a part the word is in the ANZAC discourse. In its 'final salute' to the man, the *Adelaide Advertiser's* nine-page spread featured the heading, 'The Kid's larrikin deeds in those days in Cairo.' He is described as being a 'bit of a boy,' as records show that he was drunk and absent without leave.[23] Elsewhere, the spread commends the defiant, unconventional behaviour of the diggers, such as playing cricket in full military uniform as a diversionary tactic during the withdrawal.[24] These acts are celebrated as part of the Australian sensibility. However, Manning Clark notes: 'It is ironic that, in our fairly conformist society, the tradition of larrikinism, which stands for the rejection of received opinion and defiance toward insensible authority, should be the one with which we most strongly identify. Despite the fact that larrikinism no longer depicts us as we truly are,

[23] *Adelaide Advertiser* May, 18, 2002, 10.
[24] Ibid., 17.

every tribe must have a myth by which it defines and justifies itself. Larrikinism, no doubt, is ours.'[25]

There seems to be a virtue in being a larrikin, something that one can stake a claim on with a certain amount of pride. As Murray points out, 'there is something admirable about shouting out or speaking up against authority.'[26] Moreover, 'there is something of the larrikin in everyone who has any spirit.'[27] Bryan Brown (whose portrayal of Handcock in *Breaker Morant* is one of Australian cinema's classic larrikin performances) once stated, 'I'm as mad as the next bastard, but there is a difference between being a larrikin and a fool. I've been a bit of both, but I hope more a larrikin than a fool.'[28] Paul Hogan (whom Harry Oxley describes as the 'master of larrikin humour'[29]) during an interview once vehemently defended himself against being labelled a 'pub lout' in his younger days. His response was unequivocal: 'Larrikin, larrikin, I said, not lout. There's a difference. Louts break windows and throw bottles, and they're brainless loons. The police just break them on the head and throw them away. I never went around breaking things. Larrikins tend to do things that are fun.'[30] It is this 'fun' element that has lodged in the public consciousness. Indeed, larrikins are entertaining. Therefore it is no coincidence that two of the above public figures are actors. It is also no coincidence that Eric Bana, who plays Chopper Read in the film, is generally noted for his comic roles, particularly those of larrikin characters. And we cannot forget how the character he plays in the film loves to entertain an audience.

More interestingly, and particularly relevant to our discussion of the film *Chopper*, is the way the term is commonly used as a gloss for someone who has a murky or unsavoury past but has somehow redeemed himself in the eyes of the public. John Rickard notes, for example, that the use of the expression 'a bit of a larrikin' enables one to 'draw on different aspects of the larrikin without necessarily embracing the whole.'[31] So, for instance, when Bob Hawke made his bid to become Prime Minister, his drunken,

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[25] 'Larrikins—The Context,' 39.
[26] *Larrikins: 19th Century Outrage*, 13.
[27] Ibid., 200.
[28] Quoted in Rickard, 'Lovable Larrikins and Awful Ockers,' 84.
[29] 'Ockerism, The Cultural Rabbit,' 207.
[30] Hogan, 'Paul Hogan,' 17.
[31] 'Lovable Larrikins,' 81.

womanising past was explained away as mere larrikinism.[32] Also, one of hegemonic masculinity's prime figures, Alan Bond, managed to conceal his criminal behaviour for many years by playing the role of the likeable larrikin. Furthermore, fond reminiscences of those 'larrikin deeds in Cairo' do not include 'ill-disciplined soldiers looting and raping ordinary Egyptians.'[33] Bad behaviour, criminality and larrikinism have always gone hand-in-hand as the following brief historical survey reveals. Indeed, the spirit of larrikinism can be traced back to Australia's convict roots.

The Historical Context of the Larrikin

As most convicts were of the lower or working classes (like Darryl Kerrigan and Chopper Read, and Paul Hogan and Alan Bond in real life who started out as a painter and a signwriter respectively), when they were absorbed into settler society, 'the workingman's paradise,'[34] there was a convergence of values. Clark notes, 'convictism ... bred in the working classes those traditions of antagonism to people in high places, that spitefulness against those who put on airs.'[35] Moreover, of these free settlers, a large proportion were poor, working-class Irish, many of whom had a traditional gripe with the British.[36] Additionally, for the first fifty years of settlement, males significantly outnumbered females, especially in rural areas. It took until the turn of the twentieth century for the numbers of females to approximate those of males.[37] The greater majority of these men in the earlier years did not marry and were socially independent. As many men were labourers who often travelled to find seasonal work, most of their time was spent in male company. This largely accounts for the establishment of a masculinist view of Australian identity, observed by Rattigan and O'Regan, as noted in the introduction. There was a culture of hard work followed by the eager enjoyment of spare time. As one contemporary observer noted: 'These single men do not want wives, and the responsibilities and encumbrances of family life. They prefer working hard—working like slaves—four or five

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[32] Gorman, *Larrikin Streak*, xiii.
[33] O'Regan, *Australian National Cinema*, 20.
[34] White*, Inventing Australia*, 29.
[35] *History of Australia*, Vol. 4, 364.
[36] White, *Inventing Australia*, 112.
[37] Moore, 'Colonial Manhood and Masculinities,' 37.

days, and "larking" the rest of the week.'[38] And it was mostly in the cities that they spent their time 'larking.'

The first larrikins began to appear in gangs or pushes on the streets of Sydney and Melbourne in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Clark explains that these gangs were part of a world-wide phenomenon, pointing out that they developed as a result of a 'particular stage in the development of capitalism.' A large, unskilled, urban working class emerged 'as a result of the improvements in the means of production, distribution and exchange.' This meant an unprecedented amount of leisure time for these young men. However, as Clark explains, 'large-scale industrial production relieved a great number of people of their former drudgery, but substituted boredom.' In Australia, this boredom was accentuated because of the temperate climate and cramped living conditions, which caused young men to gather in the streets all year round.[39] Furthermore, parental control was diminished when fathers went to the goldfields, exacerbating the problem further.

Smarting from the sting of convictism, which was still fresh in the memories of the previous generation, this idle and disaffected Australian-born class turned its attention to anything that represented establishment values: in particular, respectability. Murray points out that every young man over seventeen was a potential larrikin.[40] Time spent on the streets was passed 'cutting someone down to size, chaffing and watching the world go by with a sardonic smile.'[41] However, though the larrikin may have been somewhat witty, daring and bold, he was more adept with the use of the half brick or the broken bottle when it came to fighting his enemies such as the police and rival pushes, as I noted in the last chapter.[42] When these were not at hand, 'throwing lumps of blue metal [became] one of his favourite modes of attack,' as a contemporary observer noted.[43] In many instances, however, the enemies were innocent citizens. The larrikin would hunt in packs, employing the common strategy of trip and rob before making away with a watch or a purse or

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[38] Mundy, *Our Antipodes*, 374.
[39] 'Larrikins—The Context,' 37.
[40] *Larrikins: 19th Century Outrage,* 128.
[41] Ibid., 10.
[42] Ibid., 143.
[43] Kinglake, 'Larrikins,' 155.

another valuable personal item.[44] Rape was also perpetrated by larrikin pushes.[45] In addition, many pushes instigated riots and committed acts of public vandalism that were brazen and highly dangerous.[46] All in all, the first larrikins were not very pleasant people. It is not surprising, then, that up until the turn of the nineteenth century, they 'remained a long-running scare' and evidence to respectable members of a decline in standards amongst the younger generation.[47]

Larrikinism, Masculine Protest and National Identity

The social conditions outlined here are not dissimilar to the ones Connell describes in relation to 'protest masculinity.' Indeed, the nineteenth-century larrikins were a marginalised masculinity, as they were generally impoverished and relied chiefly on abstract labour. Also, criminal behaviour, apart from its 'radical pragmatism,' bears a resemblance to Connell's observation that it was committed with an accompanying level of 'excitement and entertainment.' Furthermore, violence was the 'outstanding feature' of the larrikins' 'experience of power relations.'[48] Finally, the larrikin version of masculinity was an exaggerated posturing against hegemonic masculinity (the police, respectable citizens, the judiciary and prison) without any real effect, apart from the nuisance value it caused those who happened to stray in the larrikin's path. In short, the larrikin display was a performance aimed at 'embracing marginality and stigma and turning them to account,'[49] rather than causing a change in social circumstances. Murray comes to a similar conclusion in his analysis of the nineteenth-century larrikin. He uses the same word, protest, in his evaluation of their reaction to their circumstances. Murray claims that 'the larrikins could not detect their own protest' because they were ignorant of 'social criticism.' He concludes that 'their sense of justice was as well-defined as that of the legislators, but, unlike them,

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[44] Murray, *Larrikins: 19th Century Outrage*, 75.
[45] The most infamous being the Mt Rennie incident (ibid., 159–67).
[46] Ibid., 80–85.
[47] Crotty, *Making the Australian Male*, 16. Marcus Clarke was the most notable of these people who, in his journalism, gave voice to the despair over the larrikin that prevailed at the time (Hergenhan, *A Colonial City*, 79).
[48] *Masculinities*, 98.
[49] Ibid., 116.

they could not make their voices heard. They would protest, but in a way which most would find reprehensible.'[50]

But what makes this marginalised figure important in terms of national identity and Australian masculinities is what Clark describes as the coincidence of the larrikin element in the 'new' mainly male underclass, which had little 'regard to rules or hierarchies,' with the 'growing Australian myth of the rugged individual.'[51] It is this convergence of the values of an increasing number of disaffected young men with the development of nationalist discourses after Federation that accounts for the durability of the larrikin myth. At exactly what point larrikinism became linked to the question of national identity is arguable. Some say it began with the publication of C. J. Dennis' very popular, myth-making celebration of the larrikin in *The Songs of the Sentimental Bloke* (1915), [52] while others point to his subsequent publication *The Moods of Ginger Mick* (1916), in which the larrikin ventured to World War I and participated in Australia's greatest nation-building experience, the ANZAC legend.[53] Needless to say, what is certain is that the myth of the larrikin has a significant part to play in the construction of Australian masculinities.

What emerges, then, is not only a profile of the larrikin but a convenient term with which to describe Australian masculinity. However, it is necessary to point out that the term 'larrikin,' like any label, is one of convenience, a temporary, mobile configuration of elements that can be easily dismantled and reconfigured according to one's point of view. It is a shifting term on a continuum. Recall Rickard's commentary on the phrase, 'bit of a larrikin,' where he speaks of the 'lustre of the larrikin' perhaps as being more important than the adherence to any strict definition. Furthermore, as we have already seen, a larrikin can be a thug or bully (as in Brett Sprague), have criminal connections (Alan Bond), be a show pony or entertainer (Chopper), or simply a likeable, spirited character (Daryl Kerrigan and, to a lesser degree, Carl Fitzgerald). Inevitably, then, there are contradictions, as is the case in all constructions of masculinity. Chiefly though, there are two sides to the larrikin.

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[50] *Larrikins: 19th Century Outrage*, 96–97.
[51] 'Larrikins—The Context,' 37.
[52] Rickard, 'Lovable Larrikins,' 80.
[53] White, *Inventing Australia*, 132; Rickard, 'Lovable Larrikins,' 81.

On the positive side, the larrikin is celebrated when he[54] takes a spirited, defiant stand (like Darryl Kerrigan) against an 'insensible' or 'pompous and incompetent authority.'[55] Often no real harm is intended, apart from bruised egos, the point being the display which functions to mock and scorn undeserving figures of authority. Here the 'leery look,' the 'swaggering walk' and the cheeky 'grin of studied and often maddening contempt'[56] (which Chopper perfects), combined with the witty remark, mock 'the image of the respectable male bourgeois.'[57] As I explained earlier, this defiance is often enacted in the spirit of humour and is very entertaining. Even if one is not a larrikin, one can participate in the rebellious act by cheering the performer on, thus colluding with the defiant stance. For the performer, there exists an opportunity to affirm his masculine status through his phallic posturing in front of others and apparent imperviousness to the consequences of his actions. He can declare that even though he might be marginalised socially and economically, his masculine integrity is still intact. In diminishing the power of authority and establishing that no-one is above him (that is, proving that everyone is, as Chopper points out, 'just another bum in the shower'), he allays his fears of castration and subdues his masculine anxiety. But such posturing conceals uncertainties and tensions and exposes the subject to dangers.

While the larrikin performance can often appear amusing and innocuous, it is also a risky venture characterised by violence and aggression, signalled in my discussion of humour. Rickard notes that 'aggression, whether physical or verbal, is basic to the larrikin.'[58] To be sure, the menace or threat of violence is never far away, as we have seen in *Chopper*. After all, defiance is an act of aggression and can often incite retaliation. Therefore, despite the endearing qualities and good humour, the myth can never quarantine aggression because it is not only integral to humour itself, but also integral to the power

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[54] Note that even though some women have become honorary larrikins, for example Dawn Fraser (see Gorman's chapter on her in *Larrikin Streak*, 27–31), the larrikin ethos is firmly entrenched in the class-based, masculinist culture determined by the country's originating demographics described above.
[55] *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, 450.
[56] Murray, *Larrikins 19th Century Outrage*, 34.
[57] Rickard, 'Lovable Larrikins,' 79. It is this larrikin persona that Eric Bana perfects in his performance of *Chopper* and aptly describes the lead characters in the most successful Australian films. Note the performances of Handcock in *Breaker Morant*, Darryl Kerrigan in *The Castle* and the eponymous hero of the *Crocodile Dundee* trilogy.
[58] Ibid., 82.

relations of the culture from which the larrikin emerged, which inscribed violence on the myth at its inception. We can observe this today in the well-known screen larrikins who display an aggressive streak or resort to violence in order to deal out swift justice, which does not sit easily with the image of the likeable larrikin (for example, consider the scenes when Mick Dundee punches Sue's pompous boyfriend and the loudmouth from the city in *Crocodile Dundee*). Nevertheless, as Rickard significantly observes, 'from [*The Sentimental Bloke*] on, the violence and anger of larrikinism could be effectively contained by humour.'[59] It would seem, then, that humour creates a dividing line between the original larrikins and their modern day counterparts, and in doing so serves, in accordance with Freud, as the mark of this repressed violence and aggression. Nevertheless, an uneasiness remains over what lies behind the larrikin's performance, reflected in Paul Hogan's irritation at being called a lout.

This uneasiness is matched by an uneasiness about sexuality. A 'confident display of sexual bravado' can be observed in the larrikin performance, which is related to the anxiety over castration. This 'flaunting of sexuality,' as Rickard puts it,[60] affirms the larrikin's heterosexual status, which is reinforced when the larrikin sets out to 'subvert conventional mores' by acting in a sexually provocative manner towards other men. Rickard cites the incident of a footballer, Ray Biffin, who kissed his opponent in order to put him off his game.[61] The point is to assert a superior or more virile version of heterosexual masculinity over a lesser, and often more feminised, version. Chopper demonstrates this when he pulls out his enormous penis while talking to the detectives in a bar to taunt one of Neville Bartos' offsiders who has just walked in with a woman. Chopper, displaying a leery grin, is greatly amused (as, no doubt, is the audience) when they both scurry out. However, we must remember that his actions are menacing and tinged with the threat of violence.

Indeed, the larrikin character, like all masculine constructions, is unstable. While the more appealing aspects are valorised by the myth, my discussion reveals a dark underside

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[59] Ibid., 83.
[60] Ibid., 79.
[61] Ibid., 83. This has also been a ploy utilised by a more recent footballer, Dermott Brereton, whose Irish descent and on-field displays qualify him as larrikin. We may also note how Crocodile Dundee kisses the brawny Donk at the beginning of the film to win a bet.

that aligns it with the core issues of masculinity in the modern state. The larrikin persona maintains its distinctiveness but reveals continuities with masculine representations in other parts of the western world. As such, it serves as a useful focal point to examine Australian masculinities. To explore the larrikin myth in a contemporary context in more detail and to examine its tensions and discontinuities further, I would like to turn my attention to one of the most successful films of the 90s.

The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert: 'That's just what this country needs: a cock in a frock on a rock!'

One of the box office hits of the 1990s, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Elliot, 1994), along with *Muriel's Wedding* and *Strictly Ballroom,* continues the tradition of a quirky, campy style of filmmaking in this country. These films were popular with audiences and critics alike, both in Australia and overseas. *Priscilla*, particularly, with its gay and drag-queen characters, diverges from traditional representations of masculinity and suggests a new age of tolerance in what is unquestionably a homophobic country. The growth and popularity of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras would seem to support this shift.[62] But how much does the film promote a new level of awareness and understanding within its audience? To what extent does it rely on familiar assumptions or past traditions to coax its audience into accepting its provocative themes?

Pamela Robertson notes in her review of *Priscilla* that most of the critics in the Australian media 'ignore the specific content of the film—either in terms of the film's genre, its queer content, or its politics—in favour of its characterisation as an *Australian* film.' She points out that even though it has been perceived as 'a milestone of Australia's entry into the international gay film market—its gayness and Australianness … are [perceived as] equally important.'[63] I would go further and argue that its 'gayness' often recedes into the background, revealing some thematics very similar to those I have observed in *Chopper*. One would not expect in Australia, perhaps, that a film about a

[62] Moore, 'Behaving Outrageously,' 159.
[63] 'Adventures of Priscilla in Oz,' 33.

perversely violent criminal or a film about gays and drag queens venturing into the outback would be popular with audiences and critics alike. However, what these two films have in common, and what enables their audiences to identify with them, is that they both contain significant elements of larrikinism.[64]

The very title of the film (*The Adventures of* …) alludes to the most famous of those larrikin films in the late 1970s and early 1980s, *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie*. Indeed, the ocker, as the figure was known then, is an incarnation of the larrikin, albeit an unfavourable one. Adams disdainfully describes the ocker as 'that variant of larrikinism,'[65] and Rickard notes that while the ocker 'might well be characterised as the larrikin ... bloated by affluence, [he] has lost the sense of class deprivation which had conditioned his performance' and no longer has the 'need to contest the streets: he is happy patrolling the barbecue.'[66] Nevertheless, in the tradition of larrikinism, what these ocker films share is their lack of respect for authority.

The three main characters in *Priscilla* are wickedly irreverent. This is most evident when Bernadette, Tick and Adam dress up in drag and walk through the streets of Broken Hill to the local hotel. Their drag 'performance' is provocative and attracts the stares of bemused onlookers. It is a defiant act against the established sexual values of this traditional male stronghold. In the hotel, the noisy crowd of beer-swilling miners is brought to silence by the appearance of the 'girls.' Allan James Thomas points out, in reference to Rattigan's definition,[67] that the 'ocker characteristics of "non-conformism, irreverence and impudence" form something of a credo for the three drags (the film's set-piece of their parade around Broken Hill in full drag relies almost entirely on the reactions of the "normal" townsfolk to this non-conformism).' Furthermore, Thomas notes that 'Felicia's *Abba* turd memento [also] reflects a certain "lack of respect for culture and cultural authority."' He concludes that '*Priscilla* works through many of the same patterns and

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[64] Rickard makes a similar observation in relation to the deaths of the tough, heterosexual, Collingwood footballer, Darren Millane, who drove into the back of a semi-trailer while under the influence of alcohol and the actor, John Hargreaves, who died of AIDS. In the eulogies and newspaper reports, both were described as 'likeable' or 'lovable' larrikins; yet, as Rickard notes, 'The lives and deaths (and, one suspects, personalities) of Millane and Hargreaves could hardly have been more different' ('Lovable Larrikins,' 78).
[65] 'Coming to Terms with our Larrikins,' 124.
[66] 'Lovable Larrikins,' 82.
[67] *Images of Australia*, 31–33.

thematic concerns as the ocker films.'[68] Principal among these is defiance which, according to Tim Burstall, conformed at the time to the 'disruptive, anarchic entertainment values of the cinema going public.'[69]

Adam is perhaps the most defiant character of the three. Though his provocative appearance at the bush drinking party in Coober Pedy stands out as his most rebellious gesture, it is his constant teasing of Bernadette (for example, calling her Ralph and braking when she tries to put on makeup) that confirms his defiant nature. Bernadette, in setting herself above the childish, crass and noisy Adam, becomes an object of amusement for Adam, and audience members who share in his contempt for pomposity. However, Adam is not merely nasty and derisive, he also has a 'jauntiness of spirit' and a 'cheery optimism' in adversity[70] that establishes him as a larrikin character. When the roo-shooter and his companion drive off in disgust after they see Tic dressed in drag, he declares: 'Ah, look at yourself Mitzi; how many times do I have to tell you, green is not your colour.' But while this may all be done in the spirit of good humour, the behaviour of the characters, like those of Chopper and the ocker films, betrays an underside to the likeable larrikin. This underside is characterised by violence and misogyny.

The playful larrikin antics of the three drag queens are undermined by violence. Apart from the aggression we can observe in Adam's provocative displays of defiance, Bernadette, in particular, reveals a highly aggressive streak. She is verbally aggressive towards Adam, the butch woman, Shirley, in the Broken Hill hotel and the man at the bush drinking party who threatens Adam. Coming to Adam's aid she tells him: 'Stop flexing your muscles you big pile of budgie turd. I'm sure your mates would be much more impressed if you just go back to the pub and fuck a couple of pigs on the bar.' Bernadette is also physically aggressive. After this colourful insult, she goes on to knee him in the testicles when he mockingly asks if she wants a fuck. Bernadette tells him: 'There, now you're fucked.' A few scenes earlier, we saw Bernadette throw a lamp at Adam and slap him after he called her Ralph. Bernadette also lifts Shirley's hand from hers in a

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[68] 'Camping Outback,' 101.
[69] Quoted in O'Regan, 'Cinema Oz: The Ocker Films,' 81.
[70] *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, 450.

threatening manner after Shirley tries to prevent her from getting a drink. These aggressive displays enable actor Terence Stamp to sustain his phallic public image while playing a female character. Nevertheless, it is the scene in the hotel at Broken Hill that warrants closer attention, particularly in relation to its misogynistic elements.

Men are from …

After the 'girls' silence the bar it is, strangely, a woman, a very masculine woman (Shirley), cross-dressed in an athletic singlet and shorts, who challenges them about their attire and voices comments typical of homophobic males: 'Where did you ladies just come in from? Uranus?' But Bernadette is equal to the task, her response revealing contempt for conservative establishment values. She cuts Shirley down to size with an unsavoury reference to her lack of femininity, what Robertson calls 'an extremely misogynist joke at the expense of a butch woman': 'Now listen here, you mullet. Why don't you just light your tampon and blow your box apart, because it's the only bang you're ever going to get, sweetheart.' The bar erupts in laughter and Shirley is dismayed. She went into bat for the men, but they let her down when it counted the most. As Robertson explains: 'This cutting remark provokes straight male laughter in the diegesis (and presumably for the film's audience) at the biological woman's expense and momentarily enables the three drag queens to bond homosocially with the male redneck population.' There is a parallel here with *Chopper* in the way that male collusion is achieved through humour. As Robertson continues, 'the joke on [Shirley] presumes a failure on her part to achieve normal female sexuality,' adding that 'this scene privileges drag-queen femininity [the femininity of the 'wo-man']… over "natural", "heavy duty" femininity.' She concludes: 'The joke thus fulfils the stereotype of gay male misogyny by asserting that drag queens and transsexuals are more appealing than biological women.'[71] Furthermore, not only do the gay men or drag queens seem more appealing, they also seem to perform better all round. Bernadette goes on to prove her superiority by winning a drinking contest against Shirley, who the men assembled note has never been beaten before.

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[71] 'Adventures of Priscilla in Oz,' 34.

But this is not the only instance in the film where women are maligned. The inclusion of the woman marathon runner, whose parallel journey to the outback crosses the path of the drag queens at various points, is curious, to say the least. We first see her being sent off by a small crowd of mildly enthusiastic well-wishers. The camera then tracks back revealing a large, noisy crowd cheering on the 'girls,' and eventually the runner's supporters are drowned out. Later, in the middle of the desert, we see the same woman runner trudging past the 'girls'' bus at night with a portable trailer arrangement attached to her back, replete with flashing light. She provokes astonishment from Bernadette: 'What the fuck's that?' Similarly, other women are also constructed as oddities in the film. When the girls are about to perform in Bob's home town, Bernadette sneaks a look at the audience: 'Christ, you should see what this woman is wearing. It's not a frock it's a piece of corrugated iron.' This condescending and disparaging comment clearly attempts to elevate the taste of the drag queens over that of the outback women. In a similar fashion to the Broken Hill hotel scene, the film constructs the gay or drag-queen version of femininity as superior to the version that they encounter in this small town.

But it is Cynthia, Bob's 'mail-order bride,' who proves to be the most revealing with regard to this binary opposition that *Priscilla* establishes between the gay and drag-queen versions of femininity and the other versions of femininity played by female actors. Indeed, it is Cynthia's vagina that becomes the focal point of difference between the two versions of femininity. When she enters the pub during the drag performance dressed in stripper's attire, she is greeted by an uproar of cheering from what had previously been a lukewarm audience of mainly men. She then proceeds to shoot ping-pong balls out of her vagina as part of her act. The drag queens retreat to the side of the stage and are visibly horrified at what they see. Adam exclaims in disgust: 'Ah, you can't do that with a ping pong ball!' Cynthia then looks directly at the 'girls' and taunts them with a mischievous smile, which exacerbates their gynophobia further. Kym McCauley notes that 'Cynthia is a "real" woman who shows the drag queens that these rowdy outback men want women without balls.'[72]

[72] 'From Terror to Terylene and Fit for a Queen,' 210.

Notably, Cynthia's 'performance' simulates the act of castration: the loss of balls (testicles) from the genital area (an area that, in her case, already displays the lack of the penis), which constructs her as a castrating figure. This point is given credence later when, as she leaves home, she insults Bob by telling him he has a 'small dingaling.' On both occasions her actions disempower the phallic potency of the other characters. In the first instance, her act provokes an excited response from the audience, the sort of response that the drag queens would have hoped for. In the second instance, Bob is humiliated in front of the 'girls,' especially Bernadette, with whom he is beginning to form an attachment.

Carole-Anne Tyler points out that the performance of femininity 'can be a defense' and 'may not effect a symbolic castration.' She notes that 'men can assume femininity (and castration) in order to disidentify from it (as lack),'[73] adding that there is an 'irony in mimicry and camp' which she claims 'is all too often at the other's expense, a defense against castration anxiety.'[74] If this is the case, then the drag performers express this castration anxiety through their horror and disgust at Cynthia's performance. This reaction should seem surprising, given that it is no more crude or vulgar than anything they have done throughout the film (for instance, the ABBA turd incident mentioned above and the film's opening scene in which Adam tells a heckler from the audience: 'You know why this microphone has such a long cord? So that it is easily retrieved after I have shoved it up your arsehole').

Excluding Bernadette, whom the audience knows has not really had the operation, the women without penises and testicles (Shirley, Cynthia, country women, the woman runner) are positioned within the film as the other against which gay, drag queen and transgender subjectivities are constructed. They are abjected, revealing a strong current of misogyny which runs through the text in a manner similar to that in the films discussed in chapter two. It seems that there can be no escaping the phallic effects of our culture, as woman are still viewed in *Priscilla* as lacking, despite the film's valorisation of feminine characteristics. In contrast, Tick, Adam and Bernadette are constructed in the film as 'phallic women.' Bernadette, in particular, despite her more tender moments, behaves in a

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[73] 'Boys Will Be Girls,' 380.
[74] Ibid., 387.

very masculine way, as I have pointed out. Moreover, through the association with Terence Stamp's public persona created out of his usually virile acting roles and the knowledge that he has not really had the operation, Bernadette maintains her phallic status throughout the film. Tyler notes: 'Drag routines generally reveal the body beneath the clothes, which is made to serve as the ground of identity. Joking in double entendres, dropping the voice, removing the wig and falsies, exposing the penis all work to resecure masculine identity by effecting a slide along a chain of signifiers which are in a metaphoric and metonymic relationship with one another and with the transcendental signifier, the phallus.'[75] While the film is understandably coy about revealing Bernadette's body, there are many instances where the maleness of Adam and Tic's bodies is foregrounded after the removal of costumes, wigs and 'falsies.' In particular, Guy Pearce's muscular body receives close attention from the camera.

A number of commentators have observed misogynistic undertones in gay culture. McCauley states that 'representations of gay culture reproduce in their discourses the racism and misogyny which relate them back to the patriarchal codes they attempt to repudiate.'[76] Lucas points out that 'the representation of male homosexuality in film narrative need not necessarily cause a radical or significant disruption to dominant notions of masculinity and of gender; it may in fact work to reinforce the primacy of male-to-male bonds which underpins phallocentrism in any case.'[77] As I have noted, humour works effectively to facilitate this (as in the case of Shirley, for example). Furthermore, Andrew Ross observes that even though drag performance is self-deprecating, it is strange that 'the vehicle for this self-denigration' should be 'a parodic representation of a woman.' He adds that this 'is neither logical nor circumstantial, but is quite clearly bound up with the complex social expression of the parent culture's misogynistic forms, however much these forms may be intentionally rearticulated by the camp routine as a stylized tribute to the strength of long-suffering women.'[78]

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[75] Ibid., 375.
[76] 'From Terror to Terylene,' 208.
[77] 'Dragging it Out,' 145.
[78] *No Respect,* 162.

Finally, 'dominant notions of masculinity' and gender remain intact because *Priscilla* is not threatening to its audience in any way. Like *Chopper*, humour is used to deflect attention away from any overt homosexual behaviour, which is safely avoided. Even though Bernadette and Bob (played by the quintessential Australian personality Bill Hunter) spend the night together, it is implied the following morning that they were too drunk to have sex. Adam and Tic discover Bernadette lying face down in the cake. Consequently, the film works towards strengthening continuity with familiar and comfortable themes more than facilitating acceptance for its provocative subject matter. It thus maintains consensus and affirms dominant cultural assumptions about masculinity, namely that phallic power is the privilege of those who have a penis and that women are a threat to this power (both of which engender the fear of castration). Despite the film's focus on the fluid nature of identity, it never seriously challenges how the elements of violence and misogyny I have identified underwrite male subjectivities. But these shortfalls do not disqualify *Priscilla* from further consideration, as there is one aspect of the film that marks it as significant in the context of Australian cinema as a whole. It is to this aspect that I now turn my attention.

Masculinity as Performance

Though the male identities in *Priscilla* are significantly informed by the larrikin myth, revealing continuities with dominant images of masculinity, the film draws our attention to the performative nature of subjectivity and provides us with some refreshing insights into Australian masculinities. Notably, there is one important link that connects the drag queens, Chopper Read and the larrikin persona: they are all performers. Thomas, referring specifically to such films as *Strictly Ballroom* and *Muriel's Wedding*, notes that the film is part of a 'camp turn in recent Australian film.' He claims that *Priscilla* 'could be understood in terms of a rejection of essentialist notions of national identity in favour of the performance of a multiplicity of possible identities, of race, of gender, of culture.'[79]

[79] 'Camping Outback,' 108.

This performative nature of identity, specifically gendered identity, is an argument developed by Butler. She points out that there is no essence to masculine or feminine identity; instead, these identities become polarised through the repetition of gendered acts, gestures, dress and discourse. What results is a 'sedimentation of gender norms [which produces] the peculiar phenomenon of "natural sex."' Butler adds that the effect of this sedimentation is to create 'a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form, appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes existing in a binary relation to one another.'[80] The camp act of the drag queens, and the camp aesthetic in general, is specifically intended to draw attention to categorisations based on essentialist assumptions. As Butler notes, the 'parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture … of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities.' She points out, however, that even though 'the gender meanings taken up in these parodic styles are clearly part of hegemonic, misogynist culture [as in *Priscilla*], they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic recontextualization.'[81] This is where the importance of the film lies, not in its promotion of awareness and tolerance toward gay culture. As Thomas notes, '*Priscilla* does indeed add to our understanding of the representation of national identity within the cinema, in its articulation of "Australianness" in terms of a camp logic of identity.'[82]

Specifically, in reworking some of the thematics of the ocker films, like *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie*, the film does go some way in challenging recurrent images of Australian masculinity. O'Regan notes that ocker films are self-conscious and are characterised by excess, and describes Bruce Beresford's film as a 'camp parody of an outdated Australian masculinity,' what he calls the 'hyper Australian.'[83] This attempt to draw attention to the more pronounced elements of masculine posturing is echoed in *Priscilla* when Tick, dressed in moleskins, Akubra hat, boots, and stubby in hand, presents a display of the rugged bushman in an attempt to impress his son. The fact that we have previously seen him in drag, and that he looks decidedly uncomfortable in this new role, highlights the performative nature of this identity. Thomas points out: 'His dismal failure at acting out this role, at "acting like a man," makes it clear that this role and the version of

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[80] 'From Interiority to Gender Performatives,' 366.
[81] Ibid., 364.
[82] 'Camping Outback,' 107.
[83] 'Cinema Oz: The Ocker Films,' 80–83.

masculinity that is associated with it is just as much a performance as the drag queen he performs on stage.'[84]

We can also observe a connection between the hypermasculine figures of Barry McKenzie and Chopper Read. Like the drag queens above, their overdetermined subjectivity turns them into extravagant grotesques, making them fruitful subjects for camp's contemplative gaze.[85] We have been accustomed to viewing the performance of femininity as camp, but Tyler notes that 'now not only femininity but even macho masculinity is read as drag.'[86] Richard Dyer argues that 'you can find things camp which are, on the face of it, the very antithesis of camp—John Wayne, for instance.' He explains that the 'camp way of looking at things' simply involves 'prising the form of something away from its content.' Hence, in accordance with camp logic, nothing is inherently camp. There is no essential content; it all depends on the way it is perceived. Camp is therefore a framework of interpretation and functions, as Dyer explains, to demystify 'by playing up the artifice,' exposing and loosening the attachment people have for the form of their subjective expression (in this case, precious notions about what it means to be male).[87] However, he does warn that straight camp, as opposed to gay camp, does leave the door open for images of masculinity to retain their hold instead of being scrutinised. He points out in relation to the camping of John Wayne that 'because it is so pleasant to laugh, it also allows for a certain wistful affection for him to linger on.'[88] Humour, in the way it promotes male collusion, can thus work to dilute the radical transformative power of a camp perspective.

Mindful of Dyer's reservations, what then do we discover when we do a queer reading of *Chopper*? The film presents Chopper as a spectacle of strength, virility and toughness. His indifference to pain marks him as a superhuman being seemingly immune from the effects of castration that mark all individuals in society. Hence, there is a clear contrast between his spectacular and exaggerated version of masculinity (form) and the lived

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[84] 'Camping Outback,' 102–3.
[85] Furthermore, we can observe a more subtle link between the two: both carry a conspicuous bag (Barry has his airways bag and Chopper his 'Tiger' bag).
[86] 'Boys Will Be Girls,' 369.
[87] 'It's Being So Camp As Keeps Us Going,' 113.
[88] Ibid., 115.

subjectivity of the (male) cinema-goers in general (content). Tyler notes that this form of 'hypermasculinity' can, effectively, 'allay the castration anxiety evoked by man objectified as spectacle.'[89] Therefore, in a similar manner to the drag act in *Priscilla*, Chopper's hypermasculine subjectivity, as in the case of the larrikin, can be seen as a defence, or performative gesture, against the fear of castration. Nevertheless, when we prise the form from the content in this manner and highlight the artifice, we can observe how vulnerable Chopper is, despite his frightening persona. The fact that the film draws our attention to his vulnerability, as I have mentioned, indicates awareness in the filmmakers' mind of the unstable and artificial status of the masculine position. While it is arguable that *Chopper* consciously deploys camp elements, focusing on the camp elements does concur with the film's attempt to deconstruct Chopper's public persona.

Certainly, the attention that the film pays to Chopper's body and the way that it is turned into a spectacle would support a queer reading. Though Chopper is decidedly masculine, he is also decidedly on display which, according to the logic of the male gaze that cinema generally constructs, feminises him into a passive object. This works in tandem with those instances I have already observed where he is feminised in relation to his father, Jimmy and Tanya. Mulvey notes that identification 'coincides with the active power of the erotic look,'[90] but such recognition, however, is disqualified in our patriarchal, heterosexual society. As a consequence, the body of a male character, as Neale points out, 'cannot be marked explicitly as the erotic object of another male look: that look must be motivated in some other way, its erotic component suppressed.' He adds that this can be achieved through such things as 'mutilation' which can be read as a 'mark' of this repression and the 'means by which the male body may be disqualified … as an object of erotic contemplation and desire.'[91] Indeed, Chopper fits this category with the mutilation of his own body.

Masculine display could be said to mark a trend in cinema lately, particularly action movies from the USA. The baring of Chopper's body is reminiscent of recent Hollywood

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[89] 'Boys Will Be Girls,' 371.
[90] 'Narrative Cinema and Visual Pleasure,' 20.
[91] 'Masculinity as Spectacle,' 14.

films that feature muscular torsos that have been battered and scarred.[92] Margaret Morse notes that males are 'on their way to becoming as dependent on "image" as females.'[93] Yet, as Dyer observes in relation to male pin-ups, 'images of men must disavow this element of passivity if they are to be kept in line with dominant ideas of masculinity-as-activity.'[94] Hence, as Mulvey points out above, there is an element of eroticism which must be negotiated when male members of the audience identify with images of masculine subjectivity. Therefore, in addition to highlighting the question of castration, a queer reading of this film provides a focal point for the analysis of homoerotic desire. It makes this desire visible, which in hegemonic, heterosexual contexts is deflected or displaced.

We can see this displacement occurring in the tattoos that adorn just about every part of Chopper's body. Ostensibly, they are a sign of toughness, as I indicated at the beginning of the chapter, but tattoos are also a mark of repression as Neale has observed. There are three instances in the film when we see the tattoos that adorn Chopper's body. The first and second occur in the two scenes I described at the beginning of the chapter, when Chopper assumes a passive position in relation to Jimmy and Tanya, and the third occurs when he is in his cell at the end of the film. In all three instances, he is feminised or castrated by his circumstances, undercutting the image of his potent masculinity. Connell, in his discussion of protest masculinity (a version of masculinity that Chopper's character, like all larrikin figures, exemplifies), refers to tattoos when he discusses the spectacle of this form of marginalised masculinity. He claims that this 'sense of display ... in conventional role terms is decidedly feminine.'[95] Even when Chopper is making a show of his body in an aggressively heterosexual way, as in the instance when he flashes his penis, one has to question the positioning of his subjectivity. In addition to displaying his virility towards the woman and his sexual superiority over Bartos' offsider (we are led to believe that Chopper has a bigger penis), his penis also becomes a visible symbol of desire for phallic potency. Hence it is a performance aimed at the man and the detectives as well as the woman, a point noted by Rickard when he questions the larrikin's apparent unselfconsciousness about his sexuality by asking, 'How much is the performance directed at women, how

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[92] Refer to *Fight Club*, *Gladiator* and earlier films such as *First Blood* and *The Terminator*.
[93] Quoted in Flitterman, 'Thighs and Whiskers,' 44.
[94] 'Don't Look Now,' 66.
[95] *Masculinities*, 112.

much at men?'[96] This is similar to Dyer's observations about male pin-ups. He claims that in the pose of the male pin-up, an 'apparent address to women's sexuality,' works in tandem with the 'actual working out of male sexuality.'[97]

To be sure, the larrikin performance, or the masculine protest, can be seen as camp. Homoerotic desire is invoked and disavowed simultaneously in the larrikin display of defiance against authority when, like Chopper, an individual creates a spectacle of phallic posturing. As Thomas notes, camp is 'a performance which works to articulate the performer's ambivalent relation to cultural and economic power.'[98] As much as the 'frenzied and showy' performance of the larrikin can provoke admiration, it can also be dismissed on the basis that it is making 'a claim to power where there are no real resources for power.'[99] Thomas concludes: 'It is in this sense that the notion of "Australian national identity" might be understood in terms of camp; as an ambivalent and ambiguous performance by a marginal figure which reworks and re-contextualises the definitions and demands of those influences which position it *as* marginal, asserting and articulating itself in terms of elements which are in some sense external to its identity whilst simultaneously forming it.'[100]

Nevertheless, at the end of *Chopper*, there is a sense of what Fabio Cleto calls a '*failed seriousness*.'[101] Referring to his television interview, Chopper says to the wardens, 'I come across all right, didn't I? I came across intelligent but tough.' However, he fails to convince either himself or the guards, as it is all an act without any substance. The state has ultimate authority over him, despite his posturing. Alone in his cell, the audience is given some insight into the complexity of his character. Like all other mortal beings, he is perplexed about the contradictions of his life. His subjectivity may be a performance, but in this most private of moments, when there is no-one to perform to, he is left to reckon with feelings he barely comprehends (content). As Dyer observes, camp 'holds together

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[96] 'Lovable Larrikins,' 83.
[97] 'Don't Look Now,' 66.
[98] 'Camping Outback,' 105.
[99] Connell, *Masculinities*, 110–11.
[100] 'Camping Outback,' 105.
[101] 'Introduction: Queering the Camp,' 24.

qualities that are elsewhere felt as antithetical: theatricality and authenticity […] intensity and irony, a fierce assertion of extreme feeling with a deprecating sense of its absurdity.'[102]

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter I pointed out that the filmmakers emphasise humour in the construction of their male characters. I also suggested that it is integral to the representations of Australian masculinities in general, especially with regard to the larrikin figure. In addition, I posed the question, in relation to my discussion of the castrating, hegemonic masculinity of the penal colony, of what unfinished business Australian men have with the uncastrated man. Given the prevalence of humour, we could argue that it is a symptom of this unfinished business, as it is the mark of the repression of the castrating other. As Neal and Krutnik observe, 'the true butt of humour is always *repressed*.'[103] Therefore, humour serves to deflect attention away from desire for and fear of the phallic power of this castrating other through its ability to assert the seeming invincibility of the ego against 'the provocations of reality.'[104] It also functions as a bonding strategy among men who collude in the repression of this desire and fear. Inevitably, women become implicated in this process when repressed desire and fear are projected onto them and they become the targets of rage and frustration.

In *Chopper* we have seen how desire for the phallus inevitably raises homoerotic elements that unsettle heterosexual representations and audience expectations alike. Chopper's penis literally and figuratively (in the power that it symbolises for the other characters and the audience) serves as a tangible symbol of this desire. But though Chopper may seem to be a phallic male, he does not possess ultimate power. His desire for his father, who is symbolically linked to the power of the patriarchy, reveals Chopper's own desire for the phallus. Furthermore, his desire for Jimmy reveals his own vulnerability in the economy of homosocial desire. The tensions that this desire creates are massaged by humour, particularly banter, which simultaneously signals desire and denies it. But the

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[102] Quoted in Cleto, 'Introduction: Queering the Camp,' 28.
[103] *Popular Film and Television Comedy*, 76.
[104] Freud, 'Humour,' 162.

vulnerability remains and Tanya becomes the target for Chopper to assuage his anxieties about his own fear of castration and prove his perceived absolute masculine status.

On the other hand, homosocial desire follows different directions in *Priscilla*. While ostensibly admitting the feminine into male subjectivity, desire for the phallus retains its privileged position in the gay and drag-queen characterisations. Throughout the performances of femininity in the film, the audience is left in no doubt that these are men or, more precisely, phallic women.[105] Hence, homoeroticism is more pronounced in this film. Femininity may be celebrated or honoured in the drag acts and behaviour of the characters, but it is rejected when it is linked to flesh and blood women without penises, as we have seen in the case of Shirley and Cynthia. As I have explained, this rejection is based on anxieties over castration. Here, once again, the spectre of misogyny reappears as these men place biological women in the position of the other as a ground to their own subjectivities.

The films' reliance on humour, which links it to dominant and traditional images of masculinity (namely the larrikin figure), is not only consensualising but obscures the workings of violence that sustain the status quo. While Australian screen males are often likeable and amusing, there is unavoidably another darker side to their characters. *Chopper* does go some way in exposing this darker side and *Priscilla* makes an attempt to reconfigure masculine subjectivity, but the stress they both place on humour does tend to distract from these good intentions. Inevitably, the effects of ideological clawback take their toll and limit the political efficacy of mainstream cinema in a similar manner to my observations about *The Boys* in the previous chapter. When the appeal of humour wears off, Chopper can be dismissed as just another pathological case, thus deflecting attention away from any culpability in society's relations of power.

These relations of power are bound up with the phallocentrism of western culture or the privileging of the phallus, the transcendental signifier of the symbolic order. But though

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[105] We must remember that part of the appeal of this film was to see assertive heterosexual characters like Terrence Stamp and Guy Pearce in these feminised roles. The same curiosity value can be observed in Russell Crowe's performance of a homosexual in *The Sum of Us*, which was followed up a few years later with the performance of a neo-Nazi thug in *Romper Stomper*.

the phallus may be privileged, it is something that can never be acquired. Consequently, recalling Kramer's comments that I noted in the introduction, constructions of male subjectivities will always be 'masculine in content but feminine in structure.' A queer reading of these subjectivities helps us to see this by exposing the conceit of claiming the phallus and hence revealing the artificiality of masculine posturing. Indeed, all representations of masculinities that gesture towards the absolute can be put under the lens of camp to uncover this basic flaw at the foundational level.

Being a man is a very precarious and angst-ridden occupation, determined as it is by the tension between presence and absence. In moments of what Kramer describes as 'positional terror,' claiming the phallus but apprehending its imminent loss, the subject faces the breach of his own subjective unity. Anger, rage and violence are some of the responses to this predicament I have observed so far in my examination of masculinities. But when the subject has spent himself on these energies, he is left alone, like Chopper at the end of the film, to contemplate his existence. What happens when the male subject, often as a result of a significant relationship with the opposite sex, is forced to re-evaluate his life? What happens when the subject turns his gaze inwards is the focus of the next chapter.

V

Love, Sex, Marriage and Sentimental Blokes

> Men originally learn their sexual identities by differentiating their masculinity from the femininity of their mothers, but must as adults reunite with women in marriage to fulfil their roles in society. After a profound separation from women, they must enter into a profound union with them. Patriarchy presents a second problem: though it gives men control over women, it also makes them dependent on women indirectly and covertly for the validation of their manhood. Paradoxically, their power over women also makes them vulnerable to women. (Kahn, *Man's Estate*, 17)

Introduction

At the end of *Chopper* we are left wondering exactly what is going through Mark Read's mind as he sits alone in his cell. Without an audience he is unable to express his masculinity or project it onto the world. As in the films of the preceding chapters, we get little insight into his most private and intimate thoughts and feelings.[1] In contrast, the films of this chapter contain men who are overtly contemplative. The main characters of *Mullet* (Caesar, 2001), *Praise* (Curran, 1998) and *Thank God He Met Lizzie* (Nowlan, 1997) refuse the masculine position and self-reflexively attempt to renegotiate their identity in its absence, with varying degrees of success. Eddie abandons the public world of work and returns home to face his past. Gordon also quits his job and retreats to his squalid domestic space. Guy, on the other hand, maintains his job and links to the public world but, seduced

[1] Darryl Kerrigan's personal feelings are hidden behind the brave face he puts up for his family, and we are distracted from David Helfgott's interior world by his constant patter. Martin occasionally provides personal insights (as in the observation at the drive-in about men's desire for the killer to get the girl) but they are tinged with bitterness and act as a smokescreen for his vulnerability. (What was he thinking when he cried after the symphony concert?) Carl has a moment of reflection when he returns with Dave from the graveyard ('I can't live like this any more'), but he cannot follow through with his resolve to change as it gets lost in the events that lead up to his marriage to Sophie. Similarly, in *Priscilla*, moments of personal reflection are soon forgotten amidst the glitzy performances and frenetic activity. Finally, while Brett spends a few moments in the film contemplating his existence, his observations can easily be dismissed as the ramblings of a psychopath.

by the myth of romantic love, places emotional fulfilment in a relationship ahead of any considerations about his own masculine identity.

Indeed, significant heterosexual relationships feature strongly in these films, in contrast to the other films, where they are positioned on the periphery of the masculine crises. The relationships serve as the focal point of the characters' self-reflective gaze. Marilyn Friedman remarks that in relation to romantic love 'people often come to know themselves better through love than they did before,' and that one's sense of self 'might actually intensify in the course of love.'[2] Notably, all three films utilise the voice-over device which, as in the first-person perspective employed in novels, is more conducive to the expression of private thoughts and feelings than the usual third-person perspective of the cinema.[3] However, what these voice-overs reveal is not so much the curative effects of romantic love but the challenge of intimacy that women present to the male characters in the films. Anthony Giddens explains that 'intimacy means the disclosure of emotions and actions which the individual is unlikely to hold up to a wider public gaze.'[4] This usually occurs in those private moments when the relationship is expressed at the physical level. As Giddens notes, 'for both sexes today, sex carries with it the promise—or the threat—of intimacy, something which itself touches upon prime aspects of self.'[5] Consequently, the demand for intimacy in a relationship has the potential to expose the uncertainties and anxieties associated with the masculine subject position.

These tensions become manifest in a melancholic disposition as the characters in the films spend a lot of time brooding on their predicaments. The need to reconcile their lives and their relationships with primordial loss becomes increasingly urgent as the characters work their way through a major crisis point in their lives. An unacknowledged reliance on women is revealed that alters the usual binary opposition between masculinity and femininity. Nonetheless, as for the other characters examined in this thesis, misogyny, violence and castration anxiety still inform their subjective expressions. Indeed, as Connell

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[2] 'Romantic Love and Personal Autonomy,' 176.
[3] We have already observed this effect in the voice-over narration of Dale Kerrigan when he reveals moments of sadness that would not otherwise find expression in his relationships with the other characters.
[4] *Transformation of Intimacy*, 138.
[5] Ibid., 78.

reminded us earlier, in the introduction to this thesis, we must remain mindful of the global western forces and the impetus of modernity that frame Australian gender relations. However, as I observed in the last chapter, it is possible to isolate certain particularities of the Australian context that impact on the construction of local masculinities. In particular, C. J. Dennis' *Sentimental Bloke* (both the book of verse and the film version by Raymond Longford) provides us with an archetypal figure against which to evaluate contemporary Australian masculinities.

Modernity and Contemporary Masculinities

In his book *The Transformation of Intimacy*, Giddens argues that men have lagged behind the changes that have occurred in the sphere of intimacy since the industrial restructuring of western society in the nineteenth century.[6] Specifically, as families became smaller and the split between the private and public spheres widened, a clear division of labour was created between men and women. Chodorow notes that in pre-industrial times, 'production was centred in the home' and the father's absence was 'less absolute.'[7] Economic interdependence between husband and wife saw an indistinct division between private and public life.[8] Furthermore, the nuclear family did not exist as an isolated social unit as much as it does today. Instead, it was linked more closely to the extended family (which often resided in the same domestic space) and the local community with its support networks.[9]

In contrast, within the newly emerging nuclear families, mothers were charged with the sole responsibility of raising their own children and developing 'emotional warmth' within the domestic sphere. They became, as Giddens notes, the 'specialists of the heart,' and in this milieu came to be viewed as mysterious, 'different' and 'unknowable,' because they were 'concerned with a particular domain alien to men'—namely motherhood.[10] For men

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[6] Ibid., 59.
[7] 'Oedipal Asymmetries and Heterosexual Knots,' 78.
[8] Juliet Mitchell notes: 'Pre-capitalist society flourishes on individual private property—the peasant has his bit of land, the artisan his tools. Capitalist organisation of work deprives the individual of his private property and takes all the separate pieces of private property (land, tools, etc.) pools them, and makes the newly accumulated wealth the private property of a few—the capitalists' (*Woman's Estate*, 153).
[9] 'Oedipal Asymmetries,' 78.
[10] *Transformation of Intimacy*, 42–44.

trapped in a public world that eschewed emotion, the ability to develop their intimate lives was limited. As Chodorow explains, men are compelled to reject the 'affective' and 'relational' world of the maternal figure in favour of 'ties based more on categorical and abstract role expectations, particularly in relation to other males.'[11] Giddens points out: 'For men self identity was sought after in work, and they failed ... Their unconscious emotional reliance upon women was the mystery whose answer they sought in women themselves; and the quest for self-identity became concealed within this unacknowledged dependence.'[12]

Chodorow provides us with another, yet related, explanation of this concealed dependence. In her investigation into the tensions in heterosexual relationships, she argues that the almost universal responsibility women have for infant care inevitably produces strain in these relationships later in life. Girls, when they grow to women, are less emotionally reliant on men than men are on women because the paternal figure is a secondary form of identification within the oedipal matrix. This has been exacerbated by the father's often physical and emotional absence from the family sphere since the industrial restructuring of society. The relationship with the paternal figure therefore does not substitute for the mother; instead, it is 'tacked on' to the relationship with the mother. Hence, men 'cannot become emotionally important to women on the same fundamental level as women are to men.'[13]

On the other hand, for men, the female figure remains primary throughout life due to the almost exclusive role that women have in caring for children during infancy. Inevitably this produces tensions within the male child, who simultaneously desires intimacy with the mother, yet strives for distance, due to the pressure of defining his masculinity in opposition to femininity. This ambivalence towards women remains with the boy as he grows to maturity and becomes intensified if he engages in an intimate heterosexual relationship. Men both want and fear women, 'demanding ... what they are at the same time afraid of receiving,' which makes it 'difficult and threatening to meet women's

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[11] 'Oedipal Asymmetries,' 77.
[12] *Transformation of Intimacy,* 60–61.
[13] 'Oedipal Asymmetries,' 75.

emotional needs.'[14] These needs have grown since the separation of sex from reproduction (what Giddens terms 'malleable' or 'plastic sexuality') due to more widespread birth control, as a result of the influence of the family planning movement after World War One. Women have demanded more emotional commitment from men other than the responsibilities of fathering their children and attending to the duties of a husband. Furthermore, with the rise of the notion of romantic love, and the new possibilities that this provided for a relationship (namely the 'pure relationship,' a relationship of sexual and emotional equality), men have been increasingly challenged to lay bare their emotional reliance on women.[15]

Coinciding with the rise of the romantic novel in the 18th century, the notion of romantic love, influenced by the tradition of courtly love, began to exert its influence. Romances were the first form of literature to reach a mass audience and hence had a profound influence on the way men and women (particularly) understood their relationships. The ideology of romantic love propagated by these romances and public discourse at the time was a unique blend of elevated passion, a sense of destiny, mystical unity and sublime 'psychic communication'—in short, it was a transcendent love.[16] But it is important to note that romantic love 'was essentially feminised love,'[17] and for the 'first time' love was associated with freedom.[18] Women began to place demands on men who viewed marriage only in the light of conquest and seduction, 'access,' reproduction and domestic comfort.[19] For women, love had a transformative power, but for men, with little motivation to reform, the contradiction between a love that transcends the physical and *amour passion* resulted in a lingering cynicism. Giddens explains that this tension was 'dealt with by separating the comfort of the domestic environment from the sexuality of the mistress or whore.'[20] Hence, a schismatic view of women developed in order to resolve the

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[14] Ibid., 77.
[15] *Transformation of Intimacy*, 2.
[16] Ibid., 45.
[17] Ibid., 43.
[18] Ibid., 40.
[19] Though reformers at the turn of the twentieth century were quick to denigrate this form of love in favour of a more spiritual, or 'true,' love that empowered women even more and liberated them, to an extent, from oppressive husbands, the endless round of childbirth and domestic drudgery (Seidman, *Romantic Longings*, Chapter 2, 'True Love, Victorian Style: A Spiritual Longing').
[20] *Transformation of Intimacy*, 43.

contradiction men perceived in the romantic love ideology. Women were either good or bad, pure or impure, marriageable or ineligible, Madonnas or whores. Here we can observe one of the main determinants of what is often called the 'double standard.'[21] Like the displaced mystery of their own unexamined feelings, this projection onto women of men's own divided nature became another strategy for men to obscure their ambivalence towards women.

While these challenges to masculine identity and practice have accelerated in recent times (particularly the sharp increase in female sexual autonomy and homosexual identification in the 1960s and 1970s, which are but a logical extension of plastic sexuality and the pure relationship), Giddens claims that mainstream men have remained steadfastly resistant to these changes: 'At the moment, an emotional abyss has opened up between the sexes, and one cannot say with any certainty how far it will be bridged.'[22] Chodorow concurs, explaining that in pre-industrial society, 'family life and marriage was not and did not have to be a uniquely or fundamentally emotional project.' Instead, it was 'only one aspect of the total marital enterprise, and, therefore, did not overwhelm it.' However, today she claims that the heterosexual relationship 'gains in emotional importance at the very moment when the heterosexual strains which mothering produces are themselves sharpened. In response to these new emerging contradictions, divorce rates soar, people flock to multitudes of new therapies, politicians decry and sociologists document the end of the family.'[23] Both commentators agree that as long as men expect women to do their emotional work for them, gender relations will always remain troubled. While women have often obliged in the past, resulting in an uneasy status quo, Giddens notes that there is a 'waning of female complicity,' which accounts for the increase in levels of violence.[24]

In a society of 'high reflexivity,' where identity can no longer be taken for granted (as in the identity founded on marriage), Giddens suggests that what is lacking for men is a coherent, personal narrative or ongoing, reflexive project of self, which he defines as a

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[21] Sarsby provides another, claiming that the double standard originated in men's desire to minimise the threat to the inheritance of property and family succession resulting from a wife's possible adultery (*Romantic Love and Society*, 40).
[22] *Transformation of Intimacy*, 3.
[23] 'Oedipal Asymmetries,' 78.
[24] *Transformation of Intimacy,* 122.

'more or less continuous interrogation of past, present and future. It is a project carried on amid a profusion of reflexive resources: therapy and self-help manuals of all kinds, television programmes and magazine articles.'[25] He claims that evidence reveals that women are far more capable than men of providing 'fluent' narratives of self,[26] adding that 'many men are unable to construct a narrative of self that allows them to come to terms with an increasingly democratised and reordered sphere of personal life.'[27] He concludes: 'On the psychological level, male difficulties with intimacy are above all the result of two things: a schismatic view of women that can be traced to an unconscious reverence for the mother, and a lapsed emotional narrative of self.'[28]

Ironically, one persuasive and coherent narrative does present itself as it dominates public discourses in western societies. This is the 'quest' or 'odyssey' of romantic love in which 'self-identity awaits its validation from the discovery of the other.' Giddens states: 'The capturing of the heart of the other is in fact a process of the creation of a mutual narrative biography. The heroine tames, softens and alters the seemingly intractable masculinity of her love object, making it possible for mutual affection to become the main guiding-line of their lives together.'[29] Within the ideology of romantic love we can observe all of the contradictions of masculine subjectivity and heterosexual relations. In the Australian context C. J. Dennis' *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke* serves as the prototype for the masculine quest for love.

C. J. Dennis' *Sentimental Bloke*

Summers notes that in Australia from the late nineteenth century until the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the bourgeois, nuclear family replaced the single man as the basic unit of society. The rate at which this occurred, she claims, 'was probably unequalled anywhere else in the Western world.'[30] Conditions in Australia were conducive

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[25] Ibid., 30.
[26] Ibid., 49.
[27] Ibid., 117.
[28] Ibid., 130.
[29] Ibid., 45–46.
[30] *Damned Whores and God's Police*, 353.

to marriage. Higher wages for men and few labour-intensive manufacturing industries meant that women could stay home and devote themselves to the home and family.[31] Furthermore, in contrast to the motherland, many men in Australian were able to rent or buy their own cottage, which provided the requisite space and privacy for a marriage and a nuclear family to flourish.[32] Since this time home-ownership on the legendary quarter-acre block has become an integral part of the domestic scene. Hence, we could argue that the division between the private and public spheres has always been more pronounced in this country.

But this did not all happen as an inevitable consequence of the transition from a penal colony to a settler's colony. Individuals such as Caroline Chisholm and John Dunmore Lang initiated large-scale social engineering projects which brought marriageable women to Australia to redress the imbalance in the gender ratio noted in the previous chapter. Furthermore, the 'domestication of the self-professed independent man became a standard theme in late nineteenth century fiction, especially that written by women.'[33] But, not only were women required to civilise their men, they were also required to fulfil 'a moral policing … role,' according to Chisholm's notion of 'God's Police.'[34] However, while this role provided women with a certain amount of respectability and status, in contrast to the 'damned whores' stereotyping of their convict counterparts, it was a role that men simultaneously 'acknowledged' and resented.[35] Here, the particularities of Australia's colonial history saw a reinforcement of the schismatic view of women, particularly the categorisation of women into 'damned whores and god's police.'

These are important elements in the context in which *The Songs of the Sentimental Bloke* was written. Dennis' book of verse tells of a city barrowman and larrikin, Bill, who falls in love with a factory girl, Doreen, and marries. More than 60,000 copies were sold within eighteen months of its publication. Graham Shirley and Brian Adams note that Longford's film version 'received better reviews and made more money than any other

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[31] Ibid., 341.
[32] Ibid., 353.
[33] Ibid., 352.
[34] Ibid., 357.
[35] Ibid., 359.

Australian feature before it.'[36] The book and the film obviously contained much that audiences could identify with, as a contemporary journal, *The Referee,* noted: 'The film makes an instant appeal to high and low, rich and poor … there has been nothing quite like it before … wholesome, humorous, pathetic … the sort of thing one feels better for having seen.'[37]

Rickard points out that 'in setting the larrikin to verse [Dennis] immediately takes him into the realm of myth,' a myth that has largely informed images of Australian masculinity and national identity ever since.[38] Les Murray observes that 'what happened to the Bloke is what happened to most Australian men, at least before the 1960s.'[39] Significantly, the current crop of Australian film directors fall into this category. So what do we observe in 'the Bloke' that might have relevance for contemporary representations of masculinities?

'Ar, if a bloke wus only understood!'

From the opening lines ('A Spring Song') we learn that Bill is haunted by a sombre mood. He has 'got / The pip wiv yearnin' fer—I dunno wot.' While spring is in the air, he is 'Jist mooching round' and troubled by 'A mournful sorter choon thet gits a bloke / Fair in the brisket 'ere, an' makes 'im choke.' He is 'seekin' somethin' on the sly.' It is 'Somethin' or someone' that he does not 'rightly know,' but it seems to him that he is 'lookin' for / A tart [he] knoo a 'undred years ago, / Or, maybe, more.' Bill comes to the realisation that it might be his 'ideel bit o' skirt.' The Bloke's sombre mood here can be accounted for by a sense of loss; something significant is missing in his life and he can't quite articulate what it is. All he knows is how he feels: sad, despondent and restless. Indeed, the Bloke exhibits the characteristics of a melancholy man, which is not surprising given the traditional associations between love-sickness and melancholy.[40]

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[36] *Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years,* 54.
[37] Quoted ibid., 56.
[38] 'Lovable Larrikins,' 80.
[39] 'Filming a Poem,' 101.
[40] Easthope, *What a Man's Gotta Do,* 148.

Freud explains that, unlike mourning, in melancholia 'one can recognize that there is a loss of a more ideal kind. The object has not perhaps actually died, but has been lost as an object of love.' More importantly, however, 'one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost'; it is more an unconscious loss.[41] The Bloke's disenchantment appears 'to waken echoes of old traumas,' as Kristeva describes it, creating 'a sad voluptuousness, a despondent intoxication [which] make up the humdrum backdrop against which our ideals and euphorias often stand out.'[42]

Melancholia or a depressive mood, like mourning, is generated from a primordial loss, the exact nature of which is unknown to the melancholic subject. To be sure, it often involves the maternal object, some disappointment or failure due to 'a real slight or disappointment.'[43] But, as Kristeva notes, the subject 'mourns not an Object but the Thing,' which she defines as 'the real that does not lend itself to signification, the center of attraction and repulsion, seat of the sexuality from which the object of desire will become separated.'[44]

We are all affected by what Melanie Klein describes as the 'depressive position,'[45] but for most primary identification with the father enables the subject to be reconciled with the loss of the thing through that 'bond of faith,' the symbolic, which prevents the disintegration of subjectivity. However, for the melancholic person, Kristeva points out that 'primary identification proves to be fragile, insufficient to secure other identifications, which are symbolic this time, on the basis of which the *erotic Thing* might become a captivating *Object of desire* insuring continuity in a metonymy of pleasure. The melancholy Thing interrupts desiring metonymy, just as it prevents working out the loss within the psyche.'[46] Nevertheless, though the identification proves to be fragile, the melancholiac survives disintegration by utilising the depressive effect to provide comfort. Paraphrasing Juliana Schesari, Mark Nicholls points out that what often results is that 'the object of loss is totally devalued in favour of empowering the ego through the love of loss

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[41] 'Mourning and Melancholia,' 245.
[42] *Black Sun,* 4–5.
[43] 'Mourning and Melancholia,' 249.
[44] *Black Sun*, 13.
[45] Hinshelwood, *Dictionary of Kleinian Thought*, 138.
[46] *Black Sun*, 14.

for its own sake,' which lends support to Kristeva's notion of the impersonal thing.[47] Freud himself acknowledged the 'pleasurable' aspects of melancholy.'[48] As Nicholls concludes, melancholia itself can become a fetish for the afflicted.[49]

Despite the rather wounded nature of the melancholic subject, he (or she[50]) conceals an aggressiveness toward the lost thing. In order not to lose the object, the subject incorporates it within the self so 'the love relation need not be given up.' This is established, as Freud explains, through 'an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object [falls] upon the ego, and the latter [can] henceforth be criticized by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object.'[51] Hence, those disappointments or feelings of anger and resentment felt toward the lost object can be played out in the form of self-reproach. The melancholiac usually succeeds in the end 'by the circuitous path of self punishment, in taking revenge on the original object … in order to avoid the need to express … hostility … openly.'[52] As Kristeva notes, 'the complaint against oneself is a hatred for the other, which is without doubt the substratum of an unsuspected sexual desire.'[53] Here we can understand further the origin of the ambivalence that men feel towards women when that lost object is feminine, which it is in most cases. We can see this in the Bloke.

When Bill and Doreen break up over Bill's jealousy toward the 'Stror 'at Coot' and his broken promise not to fight again, Bill is initially resentful towards women. In the verse ('The Stror 'at Coot') he states: 'The 'ole world over they are all the same: / Crook to the core the bunch of 'em.' His defiance and bitterness toward women borders on misogyny: 'Their tricks is crook, their arts is all dead snide.'[54] However, these feelings slip away when he stumbles upon Doreen at a 'beano' ('The Siren') and he is gripped by remorse:

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[47] 'Something for the Man Who Has Everything,' 46.
[48] 'Mourning and Melancholia,' 251.
[49] 'Something for the Man,' 46.
[50] To be sure, women can be affected in the same way.
[51] 'Mourning and Melancholia,' 249.
[52] Ibid., 251.
[53] *Black Sun*, 11.
[54] Note also:

> When she 'as got 'im good an' 'ad 'er fun,
> She slings 'im over like a carst-orf glove,
> To let the other tarts see wot she's done.

'wiv suddin shame me guilty soul wus smote.' On hearing her sing (in the film, the love song 'My Aching Heart'), he exclaims 'an' orl at once I seen / The kind o' crool an' 'eartless broot I been.' This self-reproaching behaviour returns later when, after he is married ('Beef Tea'), he is tempted by his mate, Ginger Mick, to get 'on the shick' and play two-up, and he returns home penniless at two in the morning. Instead of getting angry, Doreen remains silent and feeds him beef tea to cure his hangover when he wakes up in the morning. This causes Bill to break down and cry in shame. He says: 'I ain't fit / To kiss the place 'er little feet 'as been!' Then he exclaims that 'shame an' sorrer's roostin' in [his] soul.' Nevertheless, while Bill's ambivalence toward women is often given expression in self-reproach, it is also projected onto others in the form of aggression and violence.

Despite his shame and remorse, Bill can barely repress the violence and aggression that is always lurking below the surface. At the commencement of the verse ('Spring Song'), in frustration at his inconsolable state, he declares: 'I'm longin' to let loose on something rash….' He expresses this desire to give vent to his aggression in numerous places in the verse but Dennis rarely devotes time to describing those occasions where he does. However, the film foregrounds his aggression and larrikin ways. In the opening scenes, the audience witnesses Bill 'stouchin'' with the police after a raid on the two-up game. He is consequently incarcerated, but despite his promise to Doreen to put his past ways behind him, he still cannot help picking a fight with the object of his jealousy and dreams of throwing the 'stror 'at coot' over a cliff. As I have previously indicated, figures of authority, or anyone putting themself above the larrikin, will tend to provoke a defiant stance.

This displaced aggression toward the lost object is also expressed in the ambivalence the Bloke feels toward the domestic space. At the same time that he yearns 'fer this 'igher life,' he also exhibits much trepidation towards domesticity, in particular the powerful, maternal figure. This is most vividly imaged in the film when he goes to meet 'mar' for the first time. We see him dressed in an ill-fitting suit for the occasion, constantly tugging at his collar. Outside 'mar's' place, he insistently feigns excuses to Doreen to leave, but she pulls him back. Later this ambivalence is transferred to Doreen, when she gives him the silent treatment after his night on the 'shick.' He exclaims that he would 'sooner fight wiv fifty men / Than git one look like that frum 'er agen!' Indeed Bill, in his desire to fight fifty

men, expresses that resentment noted by Summers when men feel their behaviour is being policed by women.[55] But the realisation of his dividedness and the push-pull relationship with Doreen is always beyond him, and he remains emotionally innocent and regressive. As Rickard notes of the larrikin persona: 'When they see the domestic writing on the wall, they come quietly.'[56]

We can also note how the division of labour and the resulting mystification of women (namely motherhood) fuels the ambivalence Bill feels towards the home sphere. When Doreen goes into labour, he hurries into town in panic to fetch help; but, once the midwife arrives, he is shuffled out the door and has to wait on the porch as Doreen gives birth. This has been a fairly typical scenario for fathers right up until recent times. When Bill is finally allowed to see his child, he describes his apprehension thus: 'I thinks of church, when in that room I goes.' However, the baby begins to bawl and he is ushered out once again. This scene exemplifies that 'unknowable' domain of womanhood or how the ways of 'wimmin' have been mystified to men. Segal notes that 'not only are men excluded by pregnancy … but pregnancy can rearticulate all the terrors and pleasures of men's early relations to their own mothers … The intense emotions aroused in men watching childbirth and handling infants take them back to the emotionality, generalised sensuality and tenderness of childhood so utterly tabooed in most areas of adult masculinity.'[57]

'You could er knocked me down wiv 'arf a brick'

But at the point of closure, when Bill is sitting on the porch smoking his pipe, with his wife and child, all these tensions are forgotten. To present-day audiences this happily-ever-after ending may not seem that convincing, but it does reveal an important connection to the current crisis of identity and relations between the sexes. Indeed, it is through the ideology of romantic love that all of Bill's conflicts are resolved. Lawrence Stone outlines the key elements of this ideology, what he terms the romantic love complex, which embodies:

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[55] *Damned Whores*, 359.
[56] 'Lovable Larrikins,' 83.
[57] *Slow Motion,* 42.

> the notion that there is only one person in the world with whom one can unite at all levels; the personality of that person is so idealised that the normal faults and follies of human nature disappear from view; love is often like a thunderbolt and strikes at first sight; love is the most important thing in the world, to which all other considerations, particularly material ones, should be sacrificed; and lastly, the giving of full rein to personal emotions is admirable, no matter how exaggerated and absurd the resulting conduct may appear to others.[58]

What is significant about these observations is the way the rest of the world is bracketed off. Struck by the thunderbolt of love ('You could er knocked me down wiv 'arf a brick!') and in awe of his woman, his 'queen' and 'angel,' Bill leaves the troubles of the public world behind him (his socially marginalised, protest masculinity[59]) and loses himself in the largely feminised domestic world. Doreen, as the other, 'answers a lack.' His melancholic disposition retreats; 'the flawed individual is made whole.'[60] The lost object, the 'tart [he] knoo a 'undred years ago,' his 'ideel bit o' skirt,' is recovered. Easthope remarks: 'If the masculine individual is more liable to idealise a love object, it is because the image of the mother trenches so much more immediately on to the image of the bride. Idealization, seeing someone as transcendentally perfect, is yet another way in which male heterosexuality may hope to re-find love for the mother in an adult object of desire, The (Perfect) Woman.'[61] This all fits the pattern of the 'mutual biography' or narrative project of self noted by Giddens: 'The telling of a story is one of the meanings of "romance", but this story now becomes individualised, inserting self and other into a personal narrative which [has] no particular references to wider social processes.'[62]

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[58] Quoted in Sarsby, *Romantic Love and Society*, 15.
[59] Though he does demonstrate some class awareness when he takes Doreen to see *Romeo and Juliet* ('The Play'):

> They scraps in ole Verona wiv the'r swords,
> An' never give a bloke a stray dog's chance,
> An' that's romance.
> But when they deals it out wiv bricks an' boots
> In Little Lon., they're low, degraded broots.

[60] Giddens, *Transformation of Intimacy*, 45.
[61] *What a Man's Gotta Do*, 148.
[62] *Transformation of Intimacy*, 39–40.

Moreover, the culmination of this story confirms Bill's masculinity from a social point of view. Normative marriage enables him to take his proper, socially-sanctioned place as a man in the patriarchal hierarchy of the times and achieve status and respectability above that of a street larrikin. Nock notes that marriage has significant consequences for masculine subjectivity and is an important rite of passage because of 'the connection between marriage and conventional ideas about masculinity.' He states that 'marriage changes men because it is the venue in which adult masculinity is developed and sustained,' adding that 'the adult roles that men occupy as husbands are core aspects of their masculinity.' [63] Hence, when a man is in control of his social circumstances and in control of his family, he feels that he is in control of himself.[64] Here we can see an important connection between the Bloke and Darryl Kerrigan.

Significantly, Bill chooses the right (marriageable) person, which invokes the schismatic view of women. At the start of the verse Bill is looking for a woman who is 'square' and 'no ordinary tart' or 'commin bit er fluff,' and Doreen certainly meets his criteria. He points out that 'A cove 'as got to think some time in life / An' get some decent tart, ere it's too late, / to be 'is wife.' A 'decent tart' as opposed to an 'ordinary tart' will ensure that he complies with the norms of respectable behaviour, which meshes with the ideology of the reforming power of women. This is most vividly imaged in the film when Bill is seen earnestly reading a book called *The Etiquette of Australia*. This once 'self-professed, independent man' is tamed and softened by Doreen and his 'seemingly intractable masculinity' is moulded into the character of a responsible husband and family man. Furthermore, he claims to have left behind his larrikin ways: 'I've sent the leery bloke that bore me name / Clean to the pack wivout one pearly tear' ('Uncle Jim'). In the process his masculinity has been improved, but his transformation depends entirely on the woman.

While the civilising influence of women may have been a theme at the turn of the nineteenth century in Australia, it must be noted that it is not new and stretches back to the tradition of courtly love, as exemplified in medieval love literature. In her investigation

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[63] *Marriage in Men's Lives*, 6–7.
[64] Ibid., 47.

into romantic love, Jacqueline Sarsby notes the insistence of 'love as an improving quality in men.'[65] Citing the contemporary writer Ulrich von Lichtenstein, Sarsby notes: 'No man may come to any worth his whole life long, but if he be ready steadfastly to serve good women.'[66] Easthope concurs with Sarsby. He points out that 'the tradition of romantic love stretches back to the courtly love of the feudal period ... transmitted above all in the poetry of the high cultural tradition, by Shakespeare, Donne, and the English Romantic poets.' He adds that in recent times 'through the songs of popular culture,' romantic love 'imposes itself through Western culture.'[67] It is here that we can observe an important continuity with regard to masculine subjectivity.

Nevertheless, though closure would suggest that the civilising of this rough larrikin is complete ('Ther' ain't no joy fer me beneath the blue / Unless I'm gazin' lovin' at them two'), Bill's 'hankering for his former joys' and his aggressive tendencies sit uneasily with his new domestic status. One wonders whether this newly domesticated man will continue to have an uneasy relationship to the home space. How many more times might he be tempted by Ginger Mick and his mates to go on the 'shick' or stick the boots in when the mood strikes him? There will always remain two sides to this larrikin, as I pointed out in the last chapter. Joan Long sums it up well: 'Tauchert's Bloke faces the world with a blend of aggressiveness and bewilderment, of swagger and shyness, of resentment that life should be dishing it out to him, yet readiness to meet whatever comes. Despite his urge to stoush cops and beat up his rival lover, he remains innocent and vulnerable.'[68] Rickard's summary of the larrikin figure also notes this slippage: 'It is as though there is something incomplete about the larrikin. Even as we are drawn to the performance, we are wondering at the risks he is taking—from alcoholism to suburban domestication. For the larrikin defies domesticity even while surrendering to it. His is a masculinity whose strength and charisma mask a core of inner uncertainties.'[69]

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[65] *Romantic Love and Society*, 31.
[66] Ibid., 27.
[67] *What a Man's Gotta Do*, 147.
[68] Quoted in Murray, 'Filming a Poem,' 91.
[69] 'Lovable Larrikins,' 84.

Both Long and Rickard eloquently articulate the struggle that the larrikin subject has with the reconstituted world of intimate life. Long summarises a larrikin character created nearly a hundred years ago, while Rickard has distilled his perceptions of the larrikin persona from the vantage point of a social observer at the turn of the twenty-first century. The continuities between the two cannot be overlooked.

Mullet: 'I don't like that bloke any more'

In a feature in *The Weekend Australian* on Ben Mendelsohn and his then forthcoming film *Mullet*, Lynden Barber claims that the actor 'has been an unfailingly likable representative of a certain type of Australian masculinity—the amiable larrikin.'[70] When critics try to make sense of films that feature masculinity, what do they mean when they apply the larrikin tag? What shared cultural assumptions are they drawing upon to mediate their understanding of the film to the audience? What vestiges of the persona of an inner city barrowman and ex street larrikin who finds a woman, settles down and gets married still reside in our understanding of the modern larrikin? Furthermore, what insights might these parallels provide for understanding the representations of contemporary masculinities?

Eddie Maloney is a brooding, disaffected, solitary and disconsolate figure who reluctantly returns to his home town after a protracted absence because, as he explains to his mother, he has 'nowhere else to go.' Throughout the film his sullen, dour face, lit occasionally by a leery grin, dominates the screen. Like the Bloke, he is trying to put his past ways behind him, but this proves to be difficult as he has to reckon with his ex-girlfriend, Tully, whom he left without a word of goodbye three years previously. Her initial response to seeing him is to punch him in the face. She apologises, but he tells her he deserved it. When she asks him why he came back, he tells her, 'This is where I come from.' In response to her chiding, he defends himself by saying, 'I don't like that bloke anymore.' However, we get only a hint of what this bloke must have been like. We hear

[70] 'Home Alone,' 7.

the owner of the hotel off-camera warning Eddie to behave or he will be kicked out.[71] To justify violent treatment of Eddie in order to teach him a lesson, a fellow officer tells Peter that as Eddie has a past, he would be able to get away with it. Later, Peter tells Eddie that he was not invited to his wedding because he would only start a fight. These instances indicate that Eddie was perhaps a wild and untamed person, similar to the Bloke when he was with the push. However, instead of dealing with his past, Eddie retreats in protest to his caravan parked on the edge of his parent's property and spends his time catching mullet, hence the nickname. Indeed Eddie Maloney fits the melancholy profile.

Eddie is a mystery to all those around him. Freud explains that 'the inhibition of the melancholiac seems puzzling to us because we cannot see what it is that is absorbing him so entirely.'[72] He frustrates everyone. Kay tells him, after his cruel observations about James' Aboriginality, that he makes it 'so hard' for anyone to like him. She tells Peter later in the film that 'people might love him but they don't like him.' His sister, Robbie, is also frustrated by Eddie. She watches him with bemusement when he meditates on the life of fish in the shop where she works and where he sells his mullet. Seemingly hypnotised by the dead, silent fish in the glass counter before him, he tells her that if we had the short memory of a fish, we could relive that 'perfect moment when you first meet someone … over and over again.' It is here and later, when she tells him that no one is buying his fish, that he is at his most sullen and melancholy. He resentfully observes that 'everyone works together to get rid of what they don't want.' But Robbie has had enough: 'You know what I never miss about you? I never miss you going on about your opinions of the world. And what makes you think that your opinions are interesting anyway?' Yet it is the mysteriousness of Eddie's opinions that fascinates as much as it frustrates. We are drawn to Eddie because, as the central character, we expect him to provide us with some insight into the world of the film. As Freud explains, the melancholiac seems to have 'a keener eye for the truth than other people who are not melancholic.'[73]

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[71] The voice of Bryan Brown here is a nice touch. It is like the changing of the guard: the old archetypal larrikin figure passing on a word of advice to the new breed of larrikin.
[72] 'Mourning and Melancholia,' 246.
[73] Ibid., 246.

Eddie also displays the rebellious spirit typical of the larrikin in his determination to make a nuisance of himself. Freud points out that the melancholiac 'proceed[s] from a mental constellation of revolt,'[74] which is linked to the aggression felt towards the lost object. Kay says to him when he first arrives, 'So why are you back?' His response is pure larrikinism: 'Thought I'd see how many people I can give the shits to.' Observe also the incident when he will not drink the beer that is 'shouted' for him. His refusal to follow the masculine drinking code provokes the following response from his mate: 'Why bother with the mug? He's always been up himself, so stuff him.' Indeed, Eddie, like most melancholiacs, does not suffer in silence. As Freud observes, 'they make the greatest nuisance of themselves, and always seem as though they feel slighted and had been treated with great injustice.'[75] This is the 'resentment that life should be dishing it out to [the larrikin]' that Long talks about. Tully reminds him, 'it used to be you and me against the world,' but Eddie's response clearly displays this resentment: 'Now it's the world against me.' We can observe parallels here to the Bloke who talks about 'crool forchin' and how 'Even's crool'd 'is pitch.'

Eddie is the 'passive rebel' against 'sanctioned social behaviour' that Nicholls, citing the sociologist Wolf Lepienies, describes. He is the 'despairing individual' who retreats 'in the face of stifling social oppression' to a 'brooding condition of "interiority" and " a homesickness for the past and apathy for the present."' However, ultimately, Nicholls observes (citing Schiesari) that the melancholiac 'owes greater allegiance to his "overdeveloped super ego" than to "the effects of a turbulent unconscious."'[76] In the end, his concerns are conservative, as he stands both in reaction to, and in complicity with, the values of the patriarchy, because of the elevated position he adopts as a privileged observer.

But it is Eddie's resistance to the domestic scene that provides the most interest for this discussion. As with the Bloke, Eddie retains an ambivalent regard toward the domestic space and the women who occupy it. This is signalled at the start of the film when he

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[74] Ibid., 248.
[75] Ibid.
[76] 'Something for the Man,' 50–51.

refuses to flush the toilet at Kay's request. It is also evident in his response to the news that one of his mates has been married. Eddie says in disbelief, 'He isn't!' But the news is affirmed when he is told, 'Three years, three kids.' Later when he meets this mate, he asks him sarcastically, 'So it's all right, this marriage business?' Yet, despite his show of defiance towards the domestic scene, the narrative momentum pulls him inevitably in this direction. Love, as in *The Sentimental Bloke*, emerges as the chief theme in taming this larrikin.

'Women! You can't live with them; you can't shoot them'

The theme of love is announced at the beginning of the film when Eddie, hitching a ride in the back of a ute, sings a love song ('I'm not looking for anyone else ... I'm just sifting through memories of you'). In addition to pointing out that popular music is a significant site where the ideology of romantic love is perpetuated, Easthope notes that within the lyrics of love songs, men can 'cry, moan, sob, sigh, ache and suffer... as though everything repressed by the dominant image of the masculine ego—hard, firm, self-possessed, watchfully defensive—is here expressed in excess.'[77] Notably, the other significant male characters in the film also sing love songs. In fact, most of the main characters sing a love song that foreshadows their position within the narrative. Peter sings a mournful sort of tune while waiting in the car when he visits Eddie. The most audible line of the lyrics is 'When you look at me I feel that I'm no good.' His father sings, 'One day you're gonna feel sorry, sorry for the love you let slip through your hands,' as he dances Eddie's mother around the kitchen. The lyrics of Eddie's and his father's songs point to the myth articulated by Stone above that there is 'only one person in the world' for each person. Peter's song points to the connections between love and melancholy mentioned by Easthope. However, it is not only the boys who sing love songs. To labour the point, the film also shows Kay ('I'm tired of hanging around with all the boys in town') and Tully ('I'm still in love with you') singing songs which serve to comment on the events of the narrative.

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[77] *What a Man's Gotta Do*, 143.

These love songs underscore the indispensable link between romantic love and narrative. The film's point of view is ostensibly Kay's, though she points out in the voice-over: 'This isn't my story. I'm in it but it's not about me ... This one's about someone coming back.' Indeed, the story is about Eddie, as there is a clear narrative trajectory toward the taming of this larrikin. At the film's end Kay wraps up her story: 'When you think of finishing, something else is always starting up.' We are left with Eddie in his ute, torn between the decision to drive on or stay for the one person who doesn't want him to leave. Is Kay his 'ideel bit o' skirt' or 'tart'? Will he be like the Bloke and find his place in the country and settle while 'life mooches on'? Does the audience will him to drive on or stay? No doubt the director plays with our expectations, informed as they are by the ideology of romantic love. This sort of willing 'betrays an intense longing for the restitution of faith in the stability of the heterosexual couple as some kind of bulwark against the modern world.'[78] Note that we have just seen Peter and Tully reunited at the barbecue scene. Indeed, Caesar works through a number of the myths of romantic love, the first being the schismatic view of women, which is foundational to it.

It would seem that Eddie has a choice between Tully and Kay. We are led to believe that Tully still has feelings for him despite now being married and living a respectable life with his policeman brother, Peter. When she sings, 'I'm still in love with you,' we are positioned to believe that Eddie is the object of her song, given the rather insipid response Peter has to his wife's erratic behaviour ('Women. You can't live with them; you can't shoot them'). Everyone, it seems, is waiting for Eddie to make his move, which seems imminent when he questions her about whether she married for love or convenience. She responds angrily: 'You're a bastard! I really missed you.' Later, when he reminds her of the things she told him in the past, the things that made him feel good about himself, she explodes in rage: 'I didn't say those things because I was being kind. I said them because I loved you ... that's love, you stupid bloody idiot—that's all it is. You do something nice to someone because you think they're all right. It's not that bloody hard you know.' It is clear from this that Tully presented Eddie with an honest, enduring, yet challenging love that he was unable to return. She is positioned in the film as the marriageable girl, the one who,

[78] Krutnik, quoted in Evans and Deleyto, 'Introduction: Surviving Love,' 2.

given her outburst, seems the most capable of transforming the recalcitrant Eddie. And, like Doreen, she seems to be the one that is causing all his angst. However, unlike the Bloke, Eddie does not end up with the idealised marriageable woman. It is certainly arguable whether he ends up with anybody, but it is Kay who eventually looms as the most suitable love object for Eddie.

Kay is a 'barmaid,' which traditionally in Australian society links her to the 'Damned Whore' stereotype identified by Summers. She notes that this stereotype has usually been associated with women 'outside the confines of family and maternity,' adding: 'These were the women who worked in pubs, or as prostitutes, who were sexually free, who had "illegitimate" babies.'[79] This stereotype is reinforced when, in the bar after their disastrous night together, Kay tells Eddie that she has slept with half the men in town, a fact alluded to in the song she sings. Eddie is unfazed by this, though he opts not to do the same, despite her insistence that 'it would have just been a root.' He tells her that 'it would have made it complicated when [he] came in ... for a drink.' It appears that he considers her unworthy at this point and places drinking and socialising ahead of her feelings, though his subsequent explanation tends to contradict this: 'I don't know much about anything, but I do know when you root someone, things are different forever, and that doesn't have to be a bad thing.' At this point we are not sure if he is referring to Tully or Kay. Furthermore, we cannot be certain whether he refuses to 'root' her because he respects her and glimpses the possibility of romance or because she is uncomfortably close to the image of a whore. The answer hinges on whether he decides to stay or not. Consequently, the film remains somewhat ambiguous in its representation of the 'impure' woman.

Another possibility is that he does not have sex with her because he is completely incapable of intimacy. It is significant that the only time in the film where he displays any intimacy is when he kisses Tully's finger after she cuts it on the glass. It would appear, then, that Tully and Kay, like Doreen with the Bloke, are doing Eddie's emotional work for him. Tully's outburst above is an attempt to jolt him into recognising his problems with intimacy, to disclose his feelings, admit his vulnerability and provide some emotional give

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[79] *Damned Whores and God's Police*, 359.

and take. She has the same problem with her husband. She tells Peter: 'For once ... why can't you just tell me how you feel about something?' She tells his sister Robbie that she wants Peter 'to lose it just for once ... anything just to show his heart is still beating.' She confronts both Eddie and Peter with the demands of 'confluent love,' the opening of 'oneself out to the other,' outlined by Giddens.[80] As Horrocks notes: 'Part of the desperate need that men have for women is that they want them to do their feeling for them, so that they feel complete. But that leads in the end to frustration and hatred—because it's emotional experience by proxy. You can't really get someone else's heart to function as your own.'[81]

Fortunately for Tully, however, Peter does 'lose it' in the end. When the two brothers eventually confront each other over Tully, Peter, in response to Eddie's plea that he doesn't know how to get what he wants, grabs Eddie's face in his hands and tells him: 'It's not about what you get! It's what you give mate. I love Tully more than anything, but if she'll be happy with you, then she'll go.' Here he asserts himself as the man Tully expects him to be and reunites with her after she tells him she is pregnant. A moment of high drama slips to melodrama as Peter and Tully's conflict is resolved. The audience is positioned to believe that all Tully wants (and by extension, women in general) is the love of a good man, marriage and a baby. Romantic love and the nuclear family receive their greatest endorsement at this point. It is also here that the continuities with the sentiments of Dennis' tale are most visible. Note how everyone ends up in their rightful coupled place. But while Peter (and his father and James, by the implication of the *mise en scène*, which shows the couples retreating from the barbecue) may have been resurrected and transformed by the love of a good woman, Mullet's closure still awaits him.

One might expect, perhaps, that an older brother, and a policeman, would provide a guiding influence for a younger sibling. However, to Eddie, Peter is just a part of that insensible authority against which he is rebelling (for example, when Peter asks him if he has a licence to net mullet). The same applies to Eddie's father. One would anticipate that he too could provide some guidance, but he spends too much time not speaking to Eddie's

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[80] *Transformation of Intimacy*, 61.
[81] *Masculinity in Crisis*, 177.

mother to be helpful, despite his protest that he and his wife 'do all right.' He does have some wisdom to impart to Eddie on those occasions when they have father-son chats, but their relationship is too contentious for Eddie to receive any benefit from it. The best example of this occurs near the end of the film. Eddie is attempting to chop wood for the barbecue but is unable to split the block. His father tells him he is 'swinging like a poof' and that even his mother 'knows how to use an axe properly.' Here we see his father, as coach of the football team, representing the values of hegemonic masculinity and policing the boundaries of Eddie's masculinity.

We can also note that the axe serves as a reminder of the threat of castration that this hegemonic masculinity, embodied in the father, poses to Eddie. However, Eddie protests that the axe is blunt, showing his resistance to the phallic power of the patriarchy. But his father deflects Eddie's defiance and, figuratively, tells him that 'maybe [he] should do with what [he's] got.' Eddie taunts him by asking him if that is his 'contribution to fatherly advice,' then decides to challenge him on the issue of love: 'I don't get it—this family life ... love. I don't get it.' His father's reply is blunt: 'What do I know about it?' But Eddie is insistent and forces his father to attempt some sort of explanation. He has now taken over the chopping and has his back to Eddie: 'Want to know what I know about love? I'll tell you. Some mornings I wake up next to your mother and I think, who the bloody hell are you?' Eddie is exasperated and walks away without hearing the rest of what his father has to say: 'Then there are other mornings and I think, thank Christ you're here, 'cause at least I know where I am.' Despite the simple, genuine, homespun truth, we once again see, most vividly, the unconscious emotional reliance men have on woman. The audience is left to wonder whether Eddie will ultimately follow in his father's footsteps and rely on women in the same way or whether he will be able to sustain an adequate level of intimacy in his potential relationship with Kay.

At the film's end, Eddie's story has still not really begun. When Kay says, 'When you think of finishing, something else is always starting up,' her words could refer to the beginning of Eddie's reflexive project of self. Though, as a copyrighter in the public world of work, he feels entitled to criticise her writings ('This is your life's work? Stuff that happens in town?'), these writings point to the reordering of Eddie's intimate life. Significantly, it is a woman who, in line with the feminine-influenced myth of romantic

love, is able to provide narrative coherence to Eddie's life. Yet, while the quest narrative of romantic love might avail Eddie with a possible trajectory, for him to set aside his melancholy disposition, his resentment and aggression towards the domestic space, and engage meaningfully in a significant loving relationship, he must embark on 'an emotional reconstruction of the past in order to project a coherent narrative towards the future.'[82] He must develop a narrative of self-identity 'which writes out the pain of the deprivation of early mother-love.'[83] In short, he requires a reordering that is necessary for him to achieve 'emotional autonomy' in order to sustain intimacy and become less reliant on women.[84] The film leaves us with a suggestion of this possibility.

Praise: 'To have enthusiasm is more than the job is worth'

From my discussion above we can observe that *The Sentimental Bloke* clearly endorses certain key myths about romantic love: all women want marriage; the love of a woman tames a man; a man must choose the right woman for marriage; women are mysterious creatures; and, there is a right person for everyone. *Mullet*, while striving to rework these myths, still manages to confirm them. *Praise*, however, is very self-consciously unromantic and deliberately works towards undercutting these myths. The North American director Curran states: 'I was actually responding more to the culture I grew up with, and trying to make an anti-Hollywood romantic comedy.'[85] This is signalled at the beginning of the film, when Gordon first stays over at Cynthia's place. She asks him if he could go out the room so she can have a 'wank' because she gets 'horny in the mornings.' Nevertheless, despite its obvious undermining of romantic love, the film still evinces continuities with Dennis' and Caesar's tales.

Like the Bloke and Eddie, Gordon is a melancholy character. From the first moment we hear his dispassionate, apathetic, voice-over narration at the bottle shop where he works, we recognise a man with no direction in his life, a man who is lost. He states later that

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[82] *Transformation of Intimacy*, 60.
[83] Ibid., 116.
[84] Ibid., 125.
[85] Quoted in Danielson, 'The Snigger Factor,' 22.

'expectations are the problem with everything.' Indeed Gordon is a loner who exists at the periphery of his world, exemplified during the cricket game at his family's Christmas get-together. The *mise en scène* reveals Gordon sitting on the boundary, beer in hand and ostensibly fielding. He calls to the others, 'I'm ready, I'm keen.' Shortly after, the ball rolls past him and is retrieved by another player, who promptly smacks Gordon on the head in mock disapproval. His physical presence here and elsewhere, where he cuts a dejected figure in just about every scene, reveals his indifferent attitude to his life circumstances. In one instance, Cynthia points this out to him and tells him that he sits 'all wrong.' He remains passive and allows her to rearrange him into a more assertive, confident posture. This moment alludes to the transformative power that women can have over men, but it is undercut by Cynthia's emotional instability and loneliness.

But, despite Cynthia's aggressive, violent and destructive behaviour, which directs the audience's sympathies toward Gordon, he still feels compelled to take the blame. When she apologises for smashing a plate on his head, he calmly responds by telling her it was his 'fault anyway.' Later, when Rachel tries to reassure Gordon that it is best Cynthia has gone, because 'she was getting dangerous,' he once again assumes the responsibility: 'It was me; I made her like that.' However, Gordon never gives any reasons why he thinks this and leaves the audience guessing. Nevertheless, here we see that form of self-reproach so common to the melancholic subject. Indeed, of the three characters discussed so far, Gordon's melancholic disposition is the most pronounced, especially with regard to his self-destructive lifestyle. He is a chronic asthmatic, yet chain-smokes, and is unconcerned when told by a counsellor that the amount of alcohol he drinks is excessive. Both of these examples can be read as forms of self-punishment, which reinforces his melancholic status.

Furthermore, we can note in him a repressed aggression similar to that of the Bloke and Eddie which surfaces when he hails the taxi after he has dragged the reluctant Cynthia away from a nightclub. His frustration at her excessive partying is beginning to show as they engage in a heated argument. When the taxi arrives a skinhead intercepts the taxi, enraging Gordon. He drags the skinhead out and begins to beat the startled young man, who scurries away in fear. This violent act sits at odds with Gordon's otherwise passive behaviour. Indeed, we could note that Gordon is more of a passive rebel than Eddie Maloney in his complete rejection of the masculine position. However, for most of the

film, Gordon's repressed aggression is displaced onto his neighbour and reveals a misogynistic strain that haunts the film.

Not long after Gordon meets Cynthia, he gets new neighbours, a Spanish man and his live-in partner, who fight constantly. We hear crashes and a woman's screams while Gordon and Cynthia are in bed talking intimately or having sex. When Cynthia first hears them row, she asks Gordon what all the noise is about. There is a sudden silence. 'There, he's killed her,' Gordon says to her. Cynthia, tellingly, states that 'it must be love,' which establishes the connection between their passionate relationship and the neighbour's.[86] This link is further enhanced when Cynthia farewells Gordon at the door to his room. With her back to the hallway, we see the Spanish man wearing a white dressing gown wrapping a cord menacingly in his hands. He pulls it tight, as if to indicate to Gordon how to deal with troublesome women. Later when Cynthia goes out into the hallway and abuses the residents for stealing her light globes, he once again appears in his dressing gown and mutters to her under his breath, 'Puta' (whore). For Gordon, this man represents a version of masculinity, machismo, that plays out the anger and rage that men feel toward women. The machismo associations are reinforced by the non-diegetic tango music sung by the Argentinian, Carlos Gardel, the master exponent of this form of music. The connection to the Spanish character establishes Gordon's link to hegemonic masculinity, despite his apparent indifference to the pressure of its conventions.

To be sure, Gordon is aware of his marginalised status in the patriarchal hierarchy and exhibits a desire for more of the 'patriarchal dividend' than he is currently receiving. When Cynthia asks how big his penis is when erect, he tells her honestly that it is only five inches. However, when she reassures him that size does not matter and that she thinks it looks cute, he complains: 'I don't want cute. I want something huge and purple and bulging.' Gordon wishes to have phallic power, but the threat of castration ensures that he remains in his rightful place in the pecking order. This threat is most evident when Cynthia's father (the one who kicked her out when she was fourteen for 'bringing boys home and fucking them') returns unexpectedly as Gordon and Cynthia have sex on the

[86] This connection is reinforced when we hear non-diegetic Spanish flamenco music playing the first time Gordon and Cynthia have sex .

carpet. Gordon, responding to Cynthia's panic, flees to the toilet with his clothes clasped to his penis. His fear of her father is understandable, given that he is a major in the army, a 'decorated veteran of Vietnam, a commander of men, a father,' as Gordon tells us in voice-over in the toilet. Moreover, he is the owner of the large decorative sword that Gordon fondles with awe when he first meets Cynthia, which casts him as an image or fantasy of the uncastrated man, a threatening, forbidding primitive father. Indeed, he is a reminder that Gordon, as a castrated man, will never be able to assume those responsibilities associated with hegemonic masculinity, particularly being a father, despite his brief flirtation with a romantic attachment to Cynthia

Like the Bloke and Eddie, Gordon is enticed reluctantly into the domestic sphere, but his route is far different and he proves harder to tame than his counterparts. The Bloke allows his own idealism of Doreen to lead the way to the domestic scene. In *Mullet*, it is Kay who gently coaxes Eddie toward domesticity. But in *Praise*, we see Cynthia forcing herself onto Gordon and subverting all the myths of ritual courtship. While Kay does ask Eddie to her bed, Cynthia is far more aggressive in her pursuit of Gordon. It is here that we see most obviously Curran's attempts to be 'unromantic.' Cynthia calls Gordon and invites him over to her parents' place while they are away, and when he is slow to pick up the hints, she asks him directly, 'So when are you going to fuck me?' When they do have sex, it is transacted like a business arrangement. Later, when she is instructing him in cunnilingus, Gordon notes in voice-over: 'It wasn't sex; it was vectors. It was speed and mathematics and mathematics was something I was good at. It was a victory for science.' The public mathematical discourse here, as opposed to the private discourse of lovers, de-eroticises the sex and underscores Gordon's alienation from the sphere of intimacy. [87]

Sex does not provide Gordon with a feeling of intimacy. This is highlighted when Cynthia performs felatio on him 'for love.' He is watching television, and the point-of-view shot reveals a girl trapped in the back seat of a car, frantically clawing at the window to get out. Instead, his most intimate moment occurs when he scratches Cynthia's back to provide her with some relief from her eczema. Indeed, when it comes to sex, both Eddie

[87] Note also the orgasm competition, counting the thrusts, which further links the act of sex to the public, patriarchal world.

and Gordon are passive, subverting the conventional stereotype of the male as seducer and conqueror. In fact, they both appear to dislike sex altogether. We recall that Eddie rejects Kay's offer to sleep with her. In *Praise*, when Cynthia asks if Gordon likes sex, he just shrugs his shoulders and in voice-over tells the audience: 'Enjoy it? I wasn't even sure if I could get through it. The truth was, when it came to sex, something always seemed to be missing.' This lack of interest in sex might account for Eddie's and Gordon's lack of concern over promiscuity. We have seen how unfazed Eddie is when Kay tells him she slept with half the men in town. Likewise, Gordon is remarkably sympathetic and understanding toward Cynthia when she tells him that she slept with someone while he was away for a few days staying with his family. He tells her: 'Cynthia, you're crazy about sex ... This isn't something terrible ... Don't kill yourself over it.' Both instances significantly challenge the myth of the double standard.

'Look, I might even love her; I know it is a terrible thing to say'

Despite these most unromantic moments, *Praise*, like *Mullet*, works within the discourse of romantic love, albeit in a fragmented way. For a brief while Cynthia contemplates their relationship from the perspective of the romantic love complex. She says to him, 'I think I've fallen for you … what about you?' Gordon also positions himself within this framework. In defending Cynthia at the wedding against his family's snide comments about her suitability for him, he remarks, 'Look, I might even love her, I know it is a terrible thing to say.' When they return home, he mockingly carries her over the threshold. Furthermore, Cynthia momentarily projects herself into the future, constructing a brief narrative of self after she finds out she is pregnant. Encouraged by his comment that she could 'still have it,' she says to him: 'Be a nice kid …' She then asks him if he would leave her if she had the baby. Gordon's response is disappointing and leaves her with the inevitability of the abortion: 'I'll try not to, but in the long run, I'm not sure. Look at me Cynthia, where would a baby fit into my life?' While Cynthia may be able to piece together the fragments of a romantic narrative, Gordon seems incapable of constructing any meaningful narrative of self because, like Eddie and The Bloke before him, he dreads domesticity. After inviting her to move in with him, he has second thoughts. He is sexually aroused by her cooking eggs, but in voice-over articulates his fears: 'Maybe, I was turning

into a husband after one day ... Maybe she was turning into a wife.' The domestic figure, the wife, the mother, is something that attracts as it appals. But not only does Gordon feel revulsion toward Cynthia, the film also images her as a figure of consternation and mystery.

Despite *Praise* being one of the few Australian films that explore women's sexuality to any significant degree, it is curious that the film reinforces the fear of domesticity by the way Cynthia is pathologised. Her chronic eczema serves as a trope pointing to the fact that she may be psychologically diseased. In the language of the recent burgeoning classification of psychological disorders, Cynthia can be seen as 'a sex addict,' or as having 'Hyperactive Sexual Desire Syndrome.'[88] As with most sex addicts, Gordon notes, 'If she could fuck, then everything was ok.' For Cynthia, sex is a way to get power, providing her with a measure of control in a world where her real influence is limited and problematic. Hence, sex becomes a quest, a frustrated search for self-identity.[89] Despite the film's subversion of the myth that women want love and men want sex, we observe once again in *Praise* another instance of women's sexuality being mystified. Cynthia is almost monstrous, the madwoman Gordon keeps in the attic of the boarding house. Like Charlotte Brontë's Bertha, she physically attacks him. Moreover, Gordon is dwarfed by her physical size as Rochester is by mad Bertha. Cynthia is big and sexually voracious, a castrating figure, like the all-powerful mother.

Furthermore, Cynthia calls Gordon 'my beautiful boy,' and when she leaves she asks him, 'Who's going to look after you?' Here Cynthia alludes to the unconscious reliance that men have on women, a reliance articulated by Vass, who stands in momentarily as a sort of father figure for Gordon. He tells Gordon that the only thing that will 'save' him is a woman, as that was the 'only time' in his own life that he had been happy. But as he is saying this, the Spanish man looks down on them menacingly from the balcony. Indeed Gordon cannot share in Vass' sentiments. However, is this because Cynthia's pathological condition is responsible for their dysfunctional relationship, or are other factors at work here?

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[88] Giddens *Transformation of Intimacy*, Chapter 5.
[89] Ibid., 69.

In the end, Gordon retreats to the more restrained Rachel, a seemingly more suitable love match for him. She is the girl Gordon refers to when Cynthia asks if he has ever been in love, the girl next-door that Gordon fell in love with when he was twelve. Her sudden reappearance in Gordon's life is a cause of great consternation for Cynthia, who vents her jealousy in a fit of rage and embarrasses Gordon in front of his friends. This may be the turning point in their relationship, but when Cynthia leaves, he is unable to realise his love for Rachel, and she too walks out of his life. It would seem that Cynthia is too sexually aggressive for Gordon, too impure, 'a barmaid' (like Kay) as his mate and family remind him. Therefore, she is not suitable as a love object within the ideology of romantic love because of her 'lust, and ... earthy sexuality.'[90] On the other hand, Rachel is too idealised by Gordon, and when the time comes to consummate their relationship, the gap between his fantasy of her and the present-moment reality is too great. The director, Curran, appears to be subverting the schismatic perception of women here, but the pathological emphasis in Cynthia's characterisation does tend to limit its effectiveness. The audience might be inclined to think that while it didn't work out with Rachel, someone more suitable (than Cynthia) will turn up in Gordon's life. Yet, while the monstrous Cynthia is safely expelled from the narrative, she cannot be repressed, as her absence is strongly felt at the film's close.

There seems to be little hope of a coherent narrative of self for Gordon, despite the glimmer of redemption at the end. Gordon appears reformed after he checks himself out of the hospital. His unruly locks are cut and he is not smoking. After allowing Vass and his woman friend, Angie, to watch television in his room, he walks into Vass' room and looks through Angie's suitcase. This prompts him to light up a cigarette, which could be construed as reinforcing the good woman/ bad woman myth, given Angie's suspect morality.[91] He then puts on a song with Mediterranean resonances and watches in amusement as Vass and Angie dance down the hallway, smiling for the first time in the film. But he remains unchanged. He is still lost and aimless and still smoking. He cannot

[90] Ibid., 45.
[91] Or, if her morality is not in question, it could be read as a playful subversion of the myth of the reforming power of women.

find his identity in love or work. Gordon seems to epitomise that intractable gulf between the sexes that Chodorow and Giddens referred to earlier.

Thank God He Met Lizzie

While *Praise* is an anti-Hollywood romantic comedy, Nowlan's *Thank God He Met Lizzie* sits more comfortably with the genre. Nevertheless, it still manages to critique this most enduring film mode. It is one of a number of films in recent times that have adapted the formula to an Australian context (*Dear Claudia*, *Dating The Enemy* and *Better Than Sex*, to name just a few). However, the importance of this film for this chapter is its focus on the function of marriage in men's life. *Mullet* deals with the tentative beginnings of a relationship; *Praise* focuses on a sexually orientated live-in relationship; and *Lizzie* frames its tale about the sensitive, new-age Guy with a wedding ceremony.

Peter Evans and Celestino Deleyto point out that 'love and marriage … [are] indissolubly linked in romantic comedy.'[92] Here they refer to the often inevitable outcome of Hollywood romantic comedies, when a heterosexual couple is put through a predictable series of trials and tribulations before they both finally realise they were meant for each other. This formula has generally been successful, despite the genre's loss of favour in the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, there has been a resurgence in recent times showing just how resilient the genre is.[93] This is because contemporary romantic comedies are adapting to the current crises in relationships, particularly those relating to men. As Constanza del Rio points out, 'the central issue of contemporary romantic comedy might be said to be the enigma of masculinity rather than the enigma of femininity.'[94] Guy, like the other main characters in this chapter, must reckon with the ideology of romantic love, but in his case he must come to terms with the disjunction between his own traditional and conservative views of romance and a changing, unpredictable realm of heterosexual relations. Furthermore, he has to renegotiate his identity as a married man in the light of this reordered sphere of personal life.

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[92] 'Introduction: Surviving Love,' 6.
[93] Ibid., 1.
[94] '*Something Wild*,' 78.

'You know at one look that she's going to be the one forever'

The film works through the main myths of romantic love. It begins with the disconsolate Guy looking for a new love interest at a party. As he circulates amongst the other party-goers, we hear single people discoursing on love and sex. After making a botched attempt to chat up a woman, the frustrated Guy is comforted by a friend who tells him that the 'place is crawling with women,' to which he replies: 'I don't just want anybody; I want the right girl!' Guy is on a quest to find that one, special person Stone mentions in his description above of the romantic love complex. And, predictably, this person arrives in the form of Lizzie.

His first sighting of Lizzie comes as 'a bolt from the blue' and is imaged in the film as a miraculous moment. The slow motion camera work and Cate Blanchett's graceful, sweeping movements, the turn of her head and the subtle flick of her hair, ensure that the audience recognises this moment as love at first sight. However, it is important to note that this moment is neither sexual nor erotic but rather, as Evans and Deleyto describe, reveals 'potentialities in the other for a life together.'[95] Giddens explains that the first glance 'is a communicative gesture, an intuitive grasp of qualities of the other. It is a process of attraction to someone who can make one's life, as it is said, "complete."'[96] Hence lust never enters the equation, as it is 'incompatible' with the elevated, almost epiphanous experience of love at first sight. As Guy articulates at his wedding: 'It was a magical moment. It was preordained ...You know at one look that she's going to be the one forever.' In voice-over, he writes to his foster child in Vietnam: 'I've finally met someone I want to spend the rest of my life with. I can't imagine ever needing anyone else. I think I am very lucky because she is the most beautiful girl I've ever seen.'

Here we see a clear reference to the myth of the predestined person perpetuated in the ideology of romantic love.[97] However, his sentimental musings are undercut when he discovers that Lizzie had planned all along to be married at this point in her life and that he just happened to cross her path like the stray, pregnant cat that became the reason for their

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[95] 'Introduction: Surviving Love,' 5.
[96] *Transformation of Intimacy*, 40.
[97] A myth confirmed when the two single cynics get together at the end of the wedding.

first meeting. Furthermore, these musings also sound as if they had been lifted out of a romance novel (or romantic comedy) and sound rather trite in the mouth of a character that spends the whole film searching for the truth. Perhaps he has been too influenced by his reading and, like Eddie Maloney with Kay, should not be quick to judge the 'life-like' stories offered by his past love Jenny that more closely resemble lived experience. Nevertheless, though Lizzie may not be the ideal woman for Guy, in the end she still emerges as the more suitable woman for Guy to marry.

To be sure, the film does not endorse the ideology of romantic love. Its foregrounding of romantic clichés and tongue-in-cheek representation of the wedding ceremony (particularly the master of ceremonies and the over-sentimental music), in addition to the critical voices of the cantankerous Scottish woman in the wheelchair, whose heckling disturbs the sentimental formalities of the wedding, and the man from the Belgian embassy, Raul, who as a model of masculinity provides a cynical, European perspective on the proceedings, ensures that the discourse and practices of romantic love are held at an ironic distance. In particular, Raul tells Lizzie's parents that 'in Europe, weddings are so important. They mean a great deal.' But when he has Guy on his own, he tells him, 'of course, in Europe they mean very little.' Later Raul tells Guy that love and marriage in Europe do not always go together. This unsettles the romantically-idealistic Guy, who has been struggling to reconcile himself with his memories of Jenny and the events that are occurring around him. Indeed, marriage to Lizzie is one thing and his relationship to Jenny quite the other.

'I think you're taking a big risk there ... you might get to know me and find out you don't like me and miss out on a good root'

Nock points out that normative marriage provides structure to a man's life by channelling his ambitions, effectively becoming an 'asset' or form of social capital that establishes new obligations and kin networks.[98] 'Mate selection,' then, is often governed by 'market

[98] *Marriage in Men's Lives*, 12–13.

principles.'[99] Hence it is mutual or individual dependence that sustains marriage and not necessarily love and affection, which he claims is the reason so many cohabiting relationships fail (like Guy's relationship with Jenny, and Gordon and Cynthia's, perhaps).[100] Furthermore, normative marriage as an institution develops and sustains adult masculinity in so much as the role of husband becomes a 'core aspect' of his masculinity, as pointed out earlier in relation to the Bloke. The fact that Guy is hopelessly awkward, nervous and insecure at the start of the film, compared to the wise, resigned voice-over at the end of the film, would seem to confirm this. In contrast to Gordon and Eddie, Guy has taken the path expected of him as a man. He marries, becomes a husband and then a responsible father, as the final *mise en scène* indicates. Social control flows over into personal control. Notably, it is the ideology of romantic love that has specifically channelled him in this direction. However, in doing so, it has left Guy feeling ambivalent about his life as a married man. He remains haunted by Raul's comments about the disjunction between love and marriage. Indeed, Guy is a divided man living in the midst of a contradiction, a contradiction emphasised by the flashbacks to his times with Jenny.

The fact that we do not see the courtship with Lizzie and that their relationship is viewed through the formal wedding procedures mobilises our sympathy for the earlier relationship and intensifies his dilemma. The flashbacks reveal a past relationship that was spontaneous and unrestrained, passionate and frenzied, compared to the constraints of the wedding formalities and those less than intense intimate moments Guy has with Lizzie. In particular, observe the lack of passion on their wedding night. We can also note how Guy has longer, ruffled hair in the flashbacks, yet on his wedding day it is shorter and combed back. Furthermore, the often unsteady camerawork in the flashbacks reinforces the turbulent and passionate times Guy had with Jenny. Finally, we can observe a contrast in the respective families of Jenny and Lizzie. The simple, eccentric, honest and authentic lifestyle of the former is set against the wealthy, sophisticated, yet fake lifestyle of the latter. In short, these flashbacks flesh out the fundamental tension that governs Guy's life. We understand the grip that nostalgia has over him. He may have been 'truly' in love with Jenny but, ostensibly, they were not compatible. But is she not right for him because their

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[99] Ibid., 26.
[100] Ibid., 9.

personalities clash, or does she (like Cynthia) not fit the image of the right, marriageable woman that Guy wants to be with forever? Here we can observe also the doubling of love interests that features in the other films: Tully/Kay, Rachel/Cynthia, and now Lizzie/Jenny.

Jenny is clearly too passionate, vengeful and petulant for the restrained Guy. For instance there is the occasion when she piles everything on the dinner table before his parents arrive. 'I hate you,' she says to Guy as he stands embarrassed in front of his parents. He tells her that he hates her too, but adds, 'That's all right as long as you haven't gone off me.' They have strong feelings for each other, but their passion is too unstable to sustain a relationship. Giddens notes that 'on the level of personal relations, passionate love is specifically disruptive …it uproots the individual from the mundane and generates a preparedness to consider radical options as well as sacrifices.' He adds that 'from the point of view of social order and duty, it is dangerous.'[101] Indeed Jenny's passionate behaviour positions her in the text as the impure woman. She is the dark-haired one as opposed to Lizzie, who is blond, in case the audience misses the point. She is the sexually assertive female (like Kay and Cynthia) who propositions Guy. When he tells her that he would like to get to know her first, she responds: 'I think you're taking a big risk there ... you might get to know me and find out you don't like me and miss out on a good root.' Furthermore, there is the question of the teapot acquired as payment for a sexual transaction, which reinforces the image of Jenny as impure. Finally, the last image for Guy of Jenny is an apparition of her walking towards him in the street. Her face appears very white and her lips are a vivid rose red. She looks remarkably like a Geisha girl. Once again the schismatic view of women emerges in relation to the representations of masculinity.

At the centre of this film and the energy that drives the narrative is Guy's yearning for his lost love object, Jenny, a 'loss of a more ideal kind.' He has resigned himself to his life with Lizzie, yet is still haunted by her spectral presence. This haunting begins on his wedding day when flashbacks of Jenny are juxtaposed against images of Lizzie. As Kristeva notes: 'Conscious of our being doomed to lose our loves, we grieve perhaps even more when we glimpse in our lover the shadow of a long lost former loved one.'[102]

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[101] *Transformation of Intimacy*, 38.
[102] *Black Sun*, 5.

Indeed, Guy, like the other characters discussed in this chapter, exhibits a melancholic disposition. This is most openly expressed in the letter he sends to his foster child: 'You also asked if I am happy. Well, that's a hard question to answer. The trouble with happiness is you don't know when you have it. You remember it. Ask me in another ten years. Maybe I will be able to tell you.' These sentiments are achingly poignant and end the film on a seemingly bleak note.

Yet, though Guy shares this melancholy disposition with the other characters discussed in this chapter, he diverges in some significant ways. He does not display that aggression towards the lost object that Eddie and Gordon do. There does not even appear to be a hint of repressed aggression. The only times we see Guy angry are when he exhibits annoyance and frustration toward Jenny because of her irregular behaviour and when he is deceived by the letter. The rebellious larrikin traits are also not evident in his character. Furthermore, he is more capable of intimacy than the other two characters, as the flashbacks to Jenny and his moments with Lizzie indicate. However, like Eddie and Gordon, the woman is the dominant partner in the relationship, as Guy can have a relationship with Lizzie only on her terms. Ironically, he loses control of the relationship the moment he goes to meet her parents to make plans for the wedding. In Guy's discomfort during the first meeting with his future mother-in-law, we can observe a parallel here with *The Sentimental Bloke*. Hence, while he exhibits some continuities with the other characters, his character is less recognisable as an Australian male, adhering more to the universal western cliché of the sensitive, new-age guy (Guy), stereotypically signified by his culinary expertise.

While *Lizzie* could be read as a sceptical portrayal of the SNAG trying to express his feminine side in an age of liberated, independent women,[103] the film does highlight the tensions that are central to men (re)negotiating their identity in the contemporary western world. Amidst the myriad of possibilities of masculine conduct, there is a desperate need to discover a truthful one. Guy places his faith in the quest for romantic love, but it fails him. It is somewhat ironic that a character finally appears on the screen ready to embrace

[103] In which case he might as well return to outmoded codes of masculine conduct, which suggests that the film takes a conservative stance.

uncynically what started out as an ideology promulgated by women to reform intimate relations between the sexes, only to find that the paradigm has shifted again. To be sure, despite its shortcomings (namely the schismatic view of women), the discourse of romantic love does provide a plausible and coherent narrative on which to base the self-reflexive project. It did have a transformative effect for women in earlier times (as suggested by Sarsby, Giddens and Seidman cited above) and no doubt continues to have this potential for both sexes today. But, faced with the cynicism of Raul, who represents traditional male cynicism about marriage, and the predatory attitude of his mates, Guy can reach only a compromise at best, because the promises of the romantic love myth can never be attained. As long as he hinges his identity on finding that one true love, he still relies emotionally on women and thus gives them a power in excess of the circumstances. This accounts for why the relationship is maintained on Lizzie's terms. In contrast to Guy, Lizzie is quite content with her choice of marriage partner because her happiness does not depend on it, which lends support to Chodorow's observations noted at the beginning of this chapter. Ironically, Lizzie is sustained by the pragmatism of the marriage arrangement, noted by Nock, above, which is normally associated with men. This inverted situation is further evidence that men can no longer take traditional identity for granted.

Indeed, marriage as an institution is riddled with compromises, as it is a social contract involving numerous parties in addition to the married couple (children, parents and brothers and sisters-in-law to name a few). The fake letter ostensibly from Guy's Vietnamese foster child but actually composed by Lizzie's mother signifies this compromise in settling for less than Guy had hoped in a life partner. Yet it is significant to point out that the letter moves the guests to tears when Guy reads it out at the wedding. He may have to compromise (his life might seem like a fake) but marriage to Lizzie does have its benefits, as noted above. Furthermore, the final *mise en scène* reveals that he is still with Lizzie some years later, with two young children in tow. If we fill in the gaps, it could be argued that his marriage to Lizzie so far was not as bad as his melancholic disposition would suggest. Knowing how Guy values the truth, we could conclude that he found enough of it in his relationship with Lizzie to sustain him. Giddens points out that 'most heterosexual marriages ... which do not approximate to the pure relationship are likely to devolve in two directions if they do not lapse into codependence.' He explains:

> One is a version of companionate marriage. The level of sexual involvement of the spouses with each other is low, but some degree of equality and mutual sympathy is built into the relationship. This is marriage of a late modern type, organised in terms of a model of friendship. The other form is where marriage is used as a home base by both partners, who have only a slight emotional investment in one another. This differs from the old 'standard type' of heterosexual marriage, in which the male used marriage as a place from which to operate, while the wife organised the means for his settled existence. Here both partners treat the marriage as a relatively secure environment from which they issue out to face the wider world.[104]

It is possible, then, to interpret the discontent Guy expresses in the voice-over at the end as an indicator of the character's own possible psychopathology or, more simply, his regret at not being able to savour the present moment (as in his memories of Jenny), more so than a comment on heterosexual relationships. And this is where the film reveals its value in the examination of contemporary masculinities. There is no ultimate state of human subjectivity that, once achieved, ensures self-esteem and harmony between the sexes. Compromise, bricolage, 'making do with what you've got' are the guiding principles of what is inevitably an ongoing project of selfhood.

Conclusion

Back in 1987, in his survey of Australian film, Brian McFarlane observed a tendency in local films 'to exploit the commonly accepted images' of the Australian male as 'aggressive, conscious of the need to assert his virility, sexually confident or sexually aggressive, and wary of tenderness.'[105] Given the diversity of representations of masculinities in recent Australian films observed so far, it is not surprising that we can note a divergence in the masculinities of the films in this chapter. At first glance Eddie, Gordon and Guy subvert traditional male behaviour by refusing the masculine posturing expected of them, especially in their relationships with women, where there is a distinct lack of assertiveness. In fact, the women characters are more forthright than the men, who in their

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[104] *Transformation of Intimacy*, 154–55.
[105] *Australian Cinema 1970–1985,* 115.

rejection of the masculine role become submissive, apathetic and passive. Moreover, McFarlane also noted that in earlier films, few considered 'the nature of [a] relationship itself as engrossing or important enough to build a whole film on.'[106] Often, as Meaghan Morris identified a short time later, there was 'a fascination with group behaviour,' which stood in the way of developing this theme. [107] Significantly, Eddie, Gordon and Guy (to a lesser degree) are loners, as they have no close male friends and consequently do not fit into an extended network of mateship, marking a trend in recent film (*Paperback Hero*, *Mr Reliable*, *Strictly Ballroom*, *Death in Brunswick* and *Chopper*). This allows the filmmakers the opportunity to explore the heterosexual relationships in more detail, albeit from a masculine point of view. All three characters spend the whole film working through their feelings in relation to the two love objects that are presented to them before making their decision. However, the decisions they make reveal more continuities with constructions of masculinities of the past than divergences.

At the point of closure in these films, each character remains uncertain and alienated from his love object and falls short of Friedman's notion that love is the path to self-knowledge. The *mise en scène* reveals Eddie sitting alone in his ute, pondering his decision. While Eddie has gone through some changes (his emotional outburst at the end being the most significant) which might lead the audience to assume that he will stay, there is also a strong chance that his fragile new beginning with Kay could be aborted by the difficulty of the task ahead of him. On the other hand, Gordon has rejected love altogether and remains unchanged, except for the quasi-epiphany in the last scene. Similarly, though Guy has adopted the socially-conditioned identity of a husband and a father, he continues to be as emotionally unfulfilled as he was at the start. Each character is left feeling melancholic and haunted by an absence in his life that the films position us to think will be filled by the true love of a woman. This belief lies at the heart of the romantic love complex and seems to be a very plausible solution to these men's troubled masculinities. However, as my discussion of these films indicates, until men's unconscious reliance on women is recognised and their schismatic view of women is resolved, the efficacy of this solution is severely limited. Moreover, transformation cannot occur by simply refusing the

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[106] Ibid., 122.
[107] 'Personal Relationships and Sexuality,' 135.

masculine position, as the ubiquitous elements of misogyny, violence and castration anxiety evident in these characters show that men cannot quarantine themselves from the workings of the symbolic or wider society.

Morris noted back in 1980 that 'Australian cinema could scarcely be accused of promoting the virtues of life-long love and marriage.'[108] To be sure, this still applies to the films in this chapter and, apart from *Shine* and *The Castle* which endorse these virtues, also to the rest of the films explored in this thesis. What virtues do Carl, Martin, the Sprague brothers and Chopper Read reveal in their relationships and what insights do these relationships provide into the shaping of their masculinities? Furthermore, as McFarlane noted in relation to the characters played by Bryan Brown and Jack Thompson, the male leads in the films dealt with in this thesis 'do not seem actually to *like* women very much.'[109] Women are more a source of wariness and fear than a means to these men's salvation. Indeed, one could ask whether the characters in these films would be a whole lot happier if they did not have women in their lives altogether. Certainly, the possibility exists for Eddie, and Gordon seems to be heading this way at the end of *Praise* which, like *Proof*, points to the desire in men to exclude women entirely 'from the male universe.'[110] What hope, then, is there to transform their subjectivities when relationships between the two sexes remain so oppositional and contentious?

Creed observes that Australian films 'frequently—and perversely—tend to construct the "normal" heterosexual couple as in excess. Marginalisation of the couple is accompanied by the general failure of Australian films to deal convincingly with encounters between the heterosexual couple which are sexually charged and erotically powerful.'[111] This particularly applies to *Mullet* and *Thank God He Met Lizzie*. She concludes that 'oedipal narrative forms which emphasise an erotic relationship between men and women have not yet found a voice in Australian films.'[112] *Praise*, in its explicit and personal subject material, had not been made at the time of these observations and, along with *Better Than*

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[108] Ibid., 135.
[109] *Australian Cinema 1970–1985*, 116.
[110] Creed, 'Mothers and Lovers,' 15.
[111] Ibid., 22.
[112] Ibid., 20.

Sex, the only other comparable mainstream film since then, suggests that there may be some signs of change. However, Curran's handling of the sexually voracious Cynthia is somewhat one-sided in its pathological emphasis and supports Morris' observation that, in Australian cinema, 'there are no fully-developed creatures of impossible allure, mystery and fatal charm.'[113] Similarly, while Jenny reveals some of this allure, Lizzie is somewhat vacuous, and Tully and Kay are reduced to pragmatism in their relationships because of the lack of intimacy from their men.

While these recent relationship films ostensibly reveal a departure from traditional representations of masculinities, in that they provide more complex varied characters and seem to be dealing more meaningfully with the contemporary masculine crisis, there are more continuities with than divergences from films of the past, because men fundamentally have stayed the same; only the circumstances around them have changed. The fact that we can still trace these continuities right back to *The Sentimental Bloke* confirms Chodorow's and Giddens' bleak observations that nothing much has changed in current relations between the sexes in the western world. The masculine subject position since the industrial restructuring of western society has remained an ongoing, unresolved drama, which the Bloke, as an archetypal figure, plays out. His character is coloured by local 'intensifications' but his dilemmas are global, as the late capitalist state still provides little opportunity for men to reckon with the lost or repressed part of their humanity. As a consequence, men will continue to be resentful, aggressive, violent or melancholic as they misapprehend their divided subjectivities. They will continue to have an ambivalent relationship with women when they project their own divided natures onto their wives and girlfriends.

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[113] 'Personal Relationships and Sexuality,' 135.

Conclusion

> As law, essence, or nature, gender polarity does nothing but harm. As metaphor, it can sometimes do good; it can offer figures, symbols, and narratives of the separate masculinities and femininities under whose wings most of us, at times, need to find shelter and solidarity. Doesn't every man, for instance, somewhere cherish a private narrative of how he won his masculinity by passing through an ordeal? (Kramer, *After the Lovedeath*, 224)

Looking at the films in this thesis as a whole, we can observe a diversity of representations of masculinities. This diversity is highlighted when we juxtapose the character of David Helfgott against that of Chopper Read, the Boys against the 'girls,' Guy against Gordon, and Darryl against Eddie. At one level, these representations enter into dialogue with the change in gender relations inaugurated in the 1960s and 1970s by the feminist-inspired, cultural revolution, which has resulted in what many dub the crisis of masculine identity. Consequently, it would seem that the unproblematic, monolithic versions of traditional masculinities, informed by the bush and pioneer legends of the previous generation of films (exemplified by the performances of such actors as Jack Thompson and Bryan Brown), no longer serve filmmakers in contemporary Australia.

To be sure, each film stages the anxieties and uncertainties of masculine identity that I have elaborated throughout this thesis. *Thank God He Met Lizzie* charts the struggle of an aspiring 'sensitive new age guy' who is trying to maintain his integrity in a changing world of gender relations. *The Castle* attempts to revive traditional notions of masculinity and, along with the odd, eccentric characterisation of David Helfgott in *Shine*, is put into service to retrieve a distinct sense of local, (masculine) cultural identity. Eddie and Gordon reject traditional notions of masculinity altogether but are left with nothing in their place. Anxiety about the power of women, particularly the maternal, is revealed in *Death in Brunswick*, *Proof* and *Praise*. Finally, there is the downturn in the economy which has eroded the foundations of the traditional determinant of masculinity—work—as played out in *The Boys*.

However, while there might be divergences from representations of the past, significant continuities are observable, as I noted in my conclusion of the last chapter and my discussion of *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. I have outlined these through the model of the larrikin figure exemplified by the Sentimental Bloke, which is still, as these films indicate, a common reference point for filmmakers in their representations of Australian masculinities. Humour and defiance as performative gestures against their subordinated status are strong themes in the narratives of these characters. However, these gestures merely serve as a gloss and barely conceal the aggression, melancholy, disavowed homoeroticism, misogyny, violence and ambivalence towards women that lurks just below the surface. While the use of the larrikin figure can be seen as a nostalgic or comforting strategy to reaffirm national identity, in the context of this thesis it is more important as a model of the drama of masculine identity that has been played out since the industrial restructuring of the western world or, indeed, the drama of masculinity that is played out across the globe, as cross-cultural evidence suggests.[1]

We must always be mindful that when speaking of masculine identity, one irreducible fact stands out: men are born of women and are condemned to differentiation—especially when they are raised exclusively by women. Badinter notes:

> Contrary to the old story of the damnation of Eve, God has made her his accomplice. Not only did he deny the procreative power to Adam and give it to Adam's companion but, at the same time, he granted women the privilege of being born from a belly of the same sex. He thus spared them all the work of differentiation and opposition that so indelibly marks a man's fate. … As long as women give birth to men … it will always take a little longer and be a little more difficult to make a man than to make a woman.[2]

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[1] For example, in his comprehensive survey of diverse cultures, *Misogyny : The Male Malady*, Gilmore mounts a convincing argument for the near universality of misogyny as an element of men's 'painful conundrum in relating to and living with women' (13). He argues that across the globe 'most men love and hate women simultaneously, and in equal measure,' pointing out that they 'need women desperately' but 'reject this driving need as unworthy and dangerous' (9). The pervasiveness of this phenomenon in nearly every culture results, he declares, 'from the shared psychic course of the male of the species' (10).

[2] *XY: On Masculine Identity*, 185.

Here we gain a clearer perspective of the troubled and troubling masculinities in the films of this thesis and a more fundamental understanding of the so-called crisis in masculinity than explanations such as the change in gender relations (equity for women and gay rights) and the downturn in the economy, or such arguments as biological determinism and the breakdown of morality or the nuclear family. Moreover, if we add to the basic fact that man is born from the belly of the opposite sex the fact that patriarchal society, both materially and symbolically according to the oedipal logic which governs it, invests power and prestige in the agent of sexual differentiation (the phallus, which happens to be male), then we can understand the significance of the masculine ideal, the force that drives the hegemony of the masculine. It is this ideal that is the primary cause of the troubles of masculine identity and its representations when it is taken to be absolute, as it presupposes the abjection, rejection and subordination of the feminine and limits men's potential to be fully human.

In the films studied in this thesis, the main characters either attempt to inhabit this ideal or are pressured to inhabit it. Most notably, Darryl Kerrigan, Peter Helfgott, Martin, Brett Sprague and Chopper Read try to assume the masculine ideal with varying consequences. Darryl might have retained his masculine integrity through good fortune at the end, but Peter dies a broken and damaged man. Both Brett and Chopper end up in gaol, oblivious to the main cause of their troubles, believing themselves to be gods in their own worlds. Only Martin has some inkling of the forces that motivate him when he analyses his feelings at the drive-in. On the other hand, David Helfgott, Carl Fitzgerald, Tick and the sentimental blokes of the films of the last chapter feel the pressure of the absolute masculine position and, once again, deal with it in various ways, ranging from outright rejection and subjective disintegration, particularly in the case of David Helfgott, to token acceptance, with ludicrous results, as we have seen with Carl and Tick.

The masculine subjectivities examined in this thesis seem to be located somewhere in the interstices between the promises of masculine agency (phallic power) and feminised passivity (castration). They exist in the midst of a contradiction as men are condemned to navigate their identity in the treacherous sea of gender relations bounded by the twin dangers of the masculine and feminine subject positions, both having the power to castrate. Neither position appears as a safe anchorage to moor one's identity. Instead, men remain in

turmoil, tossed and turned in the eddies and cross-currents generated by gender polarity and blown about by the winds of violence and fear of castration, which becomes the modality of their existence.

Hence, there has always been a crisis in masculinity and will continue to be as long as the patriarchal order reigns and masculinity remains the 'natural,' biologically-sanctioned, privileged centre in culture and contingent on its opposition to femininity (which in turn is viewed as the polar opposite and absolute in itself). It will continue as long as men conceive of themselves as gods in their own worlds and as long as men feel they have to prove or protest their masculinity. It will continue as long as ideological regimes remain unchanged and people collude in the 'fantasy' of masculine conduct. And, finally, it will continue as long as the unfinished business with the uncastrated man is not attended to.

To be sure, similar observations have been made before. We can recall from the third chapter the comments of Adler, who, at the beginning of the twentieth century, decried 'the excessive pre-eminence of manliness' as the 'arch evil of our culture.'[3] In 1932 Karen Horney drew attention to a blind spot in men's attitudes toward women, claiming that men harbour a secret dread of women because they represented a threat to masculine self-respect.[4] She attributed this to the 'exigencies of the biological differences between the sexes,' explaining that, as a result of these exigencies (man is born from woman), men are 'obliged to go on proving [their] manhood ... again and again to themselves and others.' Horney notes that there is 'no analogous necessity' for women: 'She performs her part by merely *being*, without any *doing.*'[5] Chodorow revisited this argument in the 1970s in her book *The Reproduction of Mothering* and later refined it in her comprehensive cross-cultural review of the socialisation of males and females. She claimed that 'many different sources [among them Horney and Margaret Mead] reiterate' the point that 'feminine identity is "ascribed" and masculine identity "achieved."'[6] And it is precisely within the achievement of masculine identity that the problem lies.

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[3] 'Masculine Protest and Critique of Freud,' 55.
[4] 'Dread of Women,' 136.
[5] Ibid., 145.
[6] *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, 33.

Deconstructing the Absolute Masculine Position

> As a reader, listener, or spectator, I can identify with the position of an imaginary subject no matter how unlike me that subject is. But I do not thereby delude myself that I am that subject. Why should I entertain that delusion by naively identifying with the "real" subject I imagine myself to be? (Kramer, *After the Lovedeath*, 263)

An obvious solution then presents itself: to avoid many of the troubles of masculine subjectivity, we must free up, dismantle or undo the authority of the masculine ideal. We must recognise the inevitable diversity of men's reality and understand that a single subject position does not accommodate this. Badinter notes:

> It is time to tell our sons that Terminator, far from being a superman, is a miserable parody. Even more important, it is also high time to sing the praises of masculine virtues that are not acquired either passively or easily but that find expression in effort and struggle. These virtues are: self-control, the desire to surpass oneself, a love of risk and challenge, and resistance to oppression, among others. They are the conditions for creation, but also for dignity. They belong to every human being in the same way as the feminine virtues. The latter preserve the world, the former widen its boundaries.[7]

As was pointed out in chapter three, Kaufman has suggested that many of the things that we associate with masculinity 'are valuable human traits.' The problem lies not with the traits themselves but with the 'distortion of these traits in the masculine norm and the exclusion of other traits (associated with femininity)' which can result only in 'oppressive and destructive' consequences.[8] Badinter concurs: 'Even though a centuries-old tradition has opposed [these traits] by attributing them to one or the other sex, we are gradually becoming aware that having one set of qualities without the other risks turning into a nightmare: self-control can become neurosis, a love of risk may be suicidal, resistance can change into aggression. Inversely, the feminine virtues, so celebrated these days, can, if

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[7] *XY: On Masculine Identity*, 184.
[8] 'Construction of Masculinity,' 3.

they are not tempered by masculine virtues, lead to passivity and subordination.'[9] This nightmare is fully imaged in *The Boys*, while the neurosis and aggression can be observed in the main characters of the other films.

Horrocks notes that 'a truly powerful man is sensitive, emotional, is able to cry, can sometimes admit he can't cope, can allow himself to be passive at times, and can accept feeling powerless, but can also accept feelings of rage, brutality and sadism, indeed the whole spectrum of emotions which human beings are privileged to enjoy.'[10] Women have been fighting for over a hundred years to be able to enjoy the privileges of this spectrum by reconciling themselves to their masculine side, traditionally denied them in patriarchal culture, but men have lagged behind, as Giddens has pointed out. Conventionally, women in the regime of oedipal culture have been viewed as lacking, but with men compelled to amputate half of their humanity to be men, in the manner I have explained, it would seem that it is men who are the ones that are lacking.

Against this, Badinter proposes the term 'reconciled man' to initiate the project of reintegrating the lost, amputated part of men's subjectivity. She states that 'reconciliation illustrates better the idea of a duality of elements that must have separated, even opposed each other, before returning to each other.' She posits that we cannot be complete human beings without this sense of androgyny 'which has two elements or does not exist at all.'[11] After clarifying her understanding of the androgyne by contrasting it with popular perception and historical figures, Badinter claims that 'the modern androgyne results from neither a conjunction of the two sexes nor a fusion that eliminates them.' Instead, men cannot be fully human or achieve proper manhood until they have reintegrated the feminine which they have lost in the process of initially becoming a man through the inevitable social rituals such as employment, marriage and fatherhood. She explains that a man cannot overlook his 'apprenticeship first in femininity and then masculinity' and that a 'return to femininity' is unavoidable in order to be a complete human being. She concludes: 'By the end of the journey, the androgynous human being … *alternates* the

[9] *XY: On Masculine Identity*, 184–85.
[10] *Masculinity in Crisis*, 106.
[11] *XY: On Masculine Identity*, 161–62.

expression of its two components according to the exigencies of the moment … [allowing] a coming and going of feminine and masculine qualities … [which] resembles a game between complementary elements whose intensity varies from one individual to another.'[12]

Thinking along similar lines, Easthope also focuses on this alternation between gender positions. Citing Juliet Mitchell from her introduction to *Feminine Sexuality*, he notes that for all human beings, 'the "asocial dyadic unit of mother and child"' needs to be broken, but to date this 'third term' has been represented by the father. He argues that while the 'function performed by the phallus is necessary if there is to be human culture,' this third term does not have to be a 'male symbol' as the phallus is, according to Lacan, 'by nature empty ... merely a symbol.' He explains that 'if a new unisex or ungendered definition of the third term came into existence it would save men from the impossible burden of trying to perpetuate the phallic system' and the ever-present struggle to live up to its promises.[13]

Most importantly, Easthope argues that the schismatic view of women would break down in a culture that is not phallocentric, as women would not loom as a significant threat to masculine integrity. The sense of dread that men have toward women would be greatly diminished and so would the violence that accompanies it. Easthope explains:

> Under the presently dominant system the little boy must give up his homosexual desire for the father so as to contest possession of the mother. If the system were no longer patriarchal he would not have to do this. The figure of the father would be retained for a while as an object of desire, and this would interpose a figure *between* the mother and the bride. If the little boy's trajectory moved from the mother to the father to the bride, the latter would be much less susceptible to being idealized. The damaging effect of seeing a woman as The Woman might be diminished or disappear entirely.[14]

However, Easthope admits that radical change is necessary before this can occur. Before the 'new third term' as 'the signifier of sexual difference' can be made 'into a real symbol,

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[12] Ibid., 165–66.
[13] *What a Man's Gotta Do*, 170–71.
[14] Ibid., 172.

active at the deepest levels of the unconscious,' there would need to be 'wholly new forms of human culture.'[15]

Badinter doesn't see the problem of change as so great. She believes that, contrary to common perceptions, it is when men father that they are most able to reconnect with the feminine. Studies show that boys need their fathers in the first two years more than was previously thought. However, what these studies reveal is that it is the feminine side of their humanity and not the masculine side.[16] Badinter acknowledges that androgyny might create confusion but argues that it diminishes the extreme of polarisation. Instead, a child can distinguish '*subtle differences*' around which the new masculinity will be organised. The father, making 'use of his bisexuality,' begins as a 'father-mother' and then 'mobilize[s] all his virility' to become a 'father-mentor.'[17] Ultimately, Badinter believes that the reconciled man can only be realised 'through a far-reaching revolution involving the father.'[18] As mentioned in the introduction, Segal reminds us that the health of an individual depends on the models of masculinity and femininity they have internalised: 'We can never escape the influence of our mothers and fathers.'[19] The third term, then, can take on the loose 'unisex or ungendered definition' that Easthope describes when the newly reconciled father reconfigures the meaning of the third term.[20] Indeed, the films of this thesis point to the importance of the father in maintaining equilibrium in the masculine psyche.

Certainly, to focus change on the agency of the father is significant, as the symbol of the father is the foundation of the symbolic order. Kramer observes that while it is important to foster 'sociologically inspired means for curing society of sexual violence,' unfortunately they are condemned to be 'straws in the wind' because it is the symbolic order itself that has to be changed. He states that what is required is a 'new unconscious,' adding that 'much that once seemed right and natural must come to seem toxic; much that

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[15] Ibid.,173.
[16] *XY: On Masculine Identity*, 177.
[17] Ibid., 178.
[18] Ibid., 162.
[19] *Slow Motion*, 28.
[20] *What a Man's Gotta* Do, 171.

used to make us queasy must come to give unforced pleasure.'[21] Kramer explains that the non-toxic occupation of the masculine position can only be achieved as an 'illusion' but adds, 'not in the sense of a mirage but of a professional magician's trick. It must be occupied in all the ways that that gender polarity prohibits: playfully, ironically, provisionally, fictitiously. The masculine image must be something I both see and see through, like my reflection in a pane of glass.'[22]

Kramer terms this 'gender synergy,' which he advocates will develop a new consciousness and change the symbolic order itself. The practice of gender synergy will subvert 'the polarised structures that privilege an abusive virility.' However, rather than eliminating these 'assertive energies' altogether, it will tend to 'demote' them. Kramer argues that they will 'cease to be necessary to the articulation of sexual difference' and that they will 'circulate freely around and through possible positions instead of belonging exclusively to a single position.' Moreover, simultaneously, gender synergy 'uncouples sexual difference from the heterosexuality that, in the modern era, has come to ground it.' Like Badinter's model of the androgyne, gender synergy permits an individual to inhabit 'both masculine and feminine positions either simultaneously or in rhythmic succession, in representation or behavior, in solitude or company, in whole (by cross-identification, literal or figurative cross-dressing) or in part (by redistributing the traits characteristic of each position).' Kramer concludes that 'authority, truth, and pleasure inhere in the ad hoc ensemble of positions rather than in a fixed and prepotent masculine position,'[23] culminating in a 'fluid, uncoercive duality.'[24] Here we can observe resonances with 'the body without organs,' an element of 'schizoanalysis' proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* that resists the 'linked, connected, and interrupted flows' of the 'desiring machines' created by the oedipal regime in western culture.[25]

Nevertheless, despite the fecundity of Kramer's ideas, he does warn that 'gender polarity is basic to the order of culture we have inherited' and that gender synergy is

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[21] *After the Lovedeath*, 262.
[22] Ibid., 122.
[23] Ibid., 12.
[24] Ibid., 17.
[25] *Anti-Oedipus*, 9.

always at risk of slipping back to reductive expressions. He also concedes that we cannot 'expect gender polarity to whither away,' because it is historically entrenched in our institutions and ways of behaving. Furthermore, he points out that we desire 'transcendental natures' and that merely outlining a model for change will not have much of an effect.[26] The trick is in prising the form from the content, to borrow Dyer's phrase: that is, prising elements associated with masculinity and femininity away from biologically-sexed bodies. The trick is also in recognising that the desire for an absolute transcendent nature and its dangers is the first, but most difficult, step. What is important is to be mindful that 'the vitality of gender synergy consists precisely in its ability to prompt or embody an interpretation that can defer the reinstatement of the polarised norm.'[27] But, before this can happen, men must be made aware of the fiction of masculinity and they must be prepared to embrace the challenge of gender synergy. As Kramer points out: 'When women practice it, they assume privileges historically denied to them; when men practice it, they surrender—or, better, repudiate—privileges historically reserved for them.'[28]

Indeed, despite the difficulties observed by Easthope, Badinter and Kramer, awareness must always be the first step toward change. This has been the motivating force behind my thesis. While the theorists I have explored provide us with some vigorous and compelling arguments towards change, agendas for change are another matter entirely. The question of how we can put the theory into practice remains. But this is the topic for another thesis. For now we can be comforted by a significant observation made by Connell in the final chapter to his book *Masculinities*. While he concedes that change is slow and difficult, he does point out that the change so many people are trying to bring about within the 'material and institutional structures of patriarchy' has resulted in a significant weakening 'in the industrial countries' of the '*legitimation* of patriarchy.'[29] He explains that 'at the heart of this cultural change, deeper than the liberal concept of "equal rights" through which it is often expressed, is the emergence of a historical consciousness about gender.' Hence, though we might become dispirited at times, change is inevitable because of this

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[26] *After the Lovedeath*, 263.
[27] Ibid., 13.
[28] Ibid., 16.
[29] *Masculinities*, 226.

awareness. As Connell concludes, 'the shift in cultural presuppositions about masculinity marked by the liberation movements of the early 1970s is irreversible.'[30]

The films in this thesis engage with this shift in their exploration of the diversity of the masculine experience, as I have pointed out. At one level, they articulate the difficulties of masculine identity in the ever-changing, contemporary world, but at a more fundamental level they highlight the unchanging conditions of masculine subjectivity within the patriarchal form of society. Moreover, they foreground the significance of cinema as an important forum for change. As Catherine Belsey (paraphrasing Lacan) notes, fiction 'demonstrates most fully the rules of the symbolic order, which in reality are the conditions of its possibility as they are the conditions of the possibility of subjectivity. The story, which presents itself as fiction, offers to the reader [or viewer] able to analyse it, a *knowledge*, albeit displaced, of the laws of both its own and the reader's (contradictory) construction.'[31] This takes us back to Kramer's quotation cited at the beginning of this thesis. When we watch a film, we actively participate in both the making of and the making by culture, which empowers us, however modestly, with culture's 'undoing.'

While constrained by patriarchally-determined, industry conventions, the films in this thesis do provide audiences with transgressive possibilities in accordance with these comments and along the lines suggested by Badinter and Kramer. Despite the films' ideological skewing toward hegemonic masculinity, through the cracks and fissures we can observe the seeds of their own undoing. The 'intransigence of the ideological opposition' has already been observed in relation to David Helfgott's sexuality and the unacknowledged forces that operate in the Kerrigan household. Indeed, other possibilities present themselves, if we extend some of the discussion I initiated throughout the thesis. For example, while *Proof* might affirm the misogyny that underpins the homosocial bonds between men and finds closure in the unified masculine subject, Lucas claims that the film 'may actually illustrate, in a more direct or "truthful" way, the homoeroticism that inevitably and implicitly informs any homosocial economy, leaving the way open for men

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[30] Ibid., 227–28.
[31] *Critical Practice*, 143.

such as Martin and Andy to explore different ways of enacting the masculine.'[32] Moreover, it is not too difficult to envisage, if we fill in the gaps and let our imagination wander, what the relationship between Peter and David Helfgott might have been like if Peter's obvious love for his son displayed in those moments of tenderness had not been corrupted by the masculine ideal. The same can be said of Chopper's relationship with Jimmy Loughnan. Indeed, *The Castle*, *Shine*, *Proof* and *Chopper* draw our attention to the inevitable, intimate bonds that exist between men, be they fathers and sons or mates and brothers, and hint at the transformative possibilities that expression of these bonds might bring about. If such expression is perceived as right and 'normal,' then perhaps it will become less fearsome and less susceptible to projection or displacement onto women and therefore less susceptible to violence. We can only hope that, some day, men like Eddie's father will be able to speak truthfully to their sons without an axe in their hands.

[32] 'Dragging it Out,' 145.

Filmography

The filmography lists all the films that are mentioned in this thesis, together with the name of the director and the year of production. All films listed are Australian, unless otherwise indicated.

Bad Boy Bubby, Rolf de Heer, 1993.
Better Than Sex, Jonathon Teplitzky, 2000.
Breaker Morant, Bruce Beresford, 1979.
Chopper, Andrew Dominik, 2000.
Crocodile Dundee, Peter Faiman, 1986.
Dating the Enemy, Megan Simpson Huberman, 1996.
Dear Claudia, Chris Cudipp, 1998.
Death in Brunswick, John Ruane, 1991.
Don's Party, Bruce Beresford, 1976.
Doing Time For Patsy Cline, Chris Kennedy, 1996.
Everynight Everynight, Alkinos Tsilimidos, 1994.
Fight Club, David Fincher, 1999 (USA).
First Blood, Ted Kotcheff, 1982 (USA)
Gallipoli, Peter Weir, 1981.
Gladiator, Ridley Scott, 2000 (USA).
Guilty by Suspicion, Irwin Winkler, 1991 (USA).
Holidays on the River Yarra, Leo Berkeley, 1990.
Idiot Box, David Caesar, 1996.
Inherit the Wind, Stanley Kramer, 1960 (USA).
Kiss or Kill, Bill Bennet, 1997.
Mr Reliable, Nadia Tass, 1995.
Mullet, David Caesar, 2001.
Muriel's Wedding, P. J. Hogan, 1994.
Ned Kelly, Gregor Jordan, 2003.
Paperback Hero, Antony J. Bowman, 1999.
Philadelphia, Jonathan Demme, 1993 (USA).
Praise, John Curran, 1998.
Proof, Jocelyn Moorhouse, 1991.

Romper Stomper, Geoffrey Wright, 1992.

Shine, Scott Hicks, 1996.

Strictly Ballroom, Baz Luhrmann, 1992.

Sunday Too Far Away, Ken Hannam, 1975.

Thank God He Met Lizzie, Cherie Nowlan, 1997.

The Adventures of Barry McKenzie, Bruce Beresford, 1972.

The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert, Stephan Elliot, 1994.

The Big Steal, Nadia Tass, 1990.

The Boys, Rowan Woods, 1997.

The Castle, Rob Sitch, 1997.

The Club, Bruce Beresford, 1980.

The Interview, Craig Monahan, 1998.

The Sentimental Bloke, Raymond Longford, 1919.

The Silence of the Lambs, Jonathan Demme, 1991 (USA).

The Story of the Kelly Gang, Charles Tait, 1906.

The Sum of Us, Geoff Burton, 1994.

The Terminator, James Cameron, 1984 (USA).

To Kill a Mockingbird, Robert Mulligan, 1962 (USA).

Two Hands, Gregor Jordan, 1999.

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