

SCREENING MOTHERS:
Representations of motherhood in Australian
films from 1900 to 1988

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The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text. The material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

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ABSTRACT

Although the position of mothers has changed considerably since the beginning of the twentieth century, an idealised notion of motherhood persists. The cinema provides a source of information about attitudes towards mothering in Australian society which is not diminished by the fact that mothers are often marginal to the narrative. While the study recognises that cinematic images are not unconditionally authoritative, it rests on the belief that films have some capacity to reflect and influence society.

The films are placed in an historical context with regard to social change in Australian society, so that the images can be understood within the context of the time of the making and viewing of the films. The depictions of the mother are scrutinised with regard to her appearance, her attitude, her relationship with others and the expectations, whether explicit or implicit, of her role. Of particular significance is what happens to her during the film and whether she is punished or rewarded for her behaviour. The conclusions reached after analysis are used to challenge those ideas which assume that portrayals of motherhood are unchangeable and timeless.

The study examines Australian feature films from 1900 to 1988. To augment its historical focus, it uses sociological, psychoanalytical and feminist theoretical writing with special relevance for motherhood and mothering practice. Looking at areas of importance to mothers, it comprises an exploration of what makes a mother good or bad; the significance of the birth of female and male children; the relationship of mothers to daughters; the mother's sexuality and the metaphor of the missing mother. It shows that images of motherhood on screen are organised according to political, social and economic requirements in the community. Further, films frequently show mothers in traditional roles which are useful for maintaining notions of patriarchal privilege in society. The analysis exposes stereotypical depictions of motherhood which are often inaccurate, unfair and oppressive to women.

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Finally, I want to thank Sydney University for allocating me the APA grant that has made it possible for me to complete this research. Beyond that, it has provided the venue to fulfil an ambition I had nearly forty years ago, when as a young girl of sixteen I walked into the impressive Main Quadrangle and resolved that one day I would be part of the university community. Times have changed and thankfully, today it is not uncommon for female children to be given the same opportunity as their brothers. With the completion of this thesis, a dream which I have clung to throughout domesticity and motherhood has at last been realised.

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chapter 1

introduction

Girls just wanna be mums. The celebrity mothers' club is growing bigger. Trading the body for the baby is the latest move for women who have everything that fame and fortune can buy.¹

In 1900, when the first flickering figures on a large screen marked the beginning of the moving picture industry, Victorian ideas of motherhood prevailed in Australian society. Representations in journals, newspapers, advertising and literature reinforced the belief that mothers were at the heart of domestic life, nurturing their families without concern for their own needs or desires. Their place was in the home, the perfect environment in which to undertake responsibility for the spiritual and physical development of children. Outside, in the public sphere,² men were contemplating ways to encourage mothers to do their national duty by producing more offspring. In 1903, for instance, the New South Wales Royal Commission on the Decline of the Birth Rate was set up. It signalled pronatalist governmental intervention in areas of abortion, contraception and infant preservation.³ Social, political and economic pressures combined to extol the virtues of motherhood and women's 'natural' role in a nuclear family home.⁴

By the end of the 1980s, the family unit had undergone a transformation. Women were employed outside the home and had secured a public career before starting a maternal one. With the availability of the contraceptive pill and the legalisation of abortion, they had gained control of their reproductive capacities. Mothers lived in a greater variety of

¹Alan Attwood, 'Girls Just Wanna Be Mums', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 February 1998, p. 11.

²Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle argued that the dichotomy of the public/private sphere ignored the existence of both men and women in all areas. Instead, they proposed the idea of 'two cultures': one, a heterosexual culture, where women mix with men and the other a 'women's culture'. While noting their point, I use 'public sphere' to denote the space of power which traditionally has been a male realm, although not their inevitable or rightful area. A. Game & R. Pringle, 'Beyond Gender at Work: Secretaries', in N. Grieve & A. Burns, (eds), *Australian Women: New Feminist Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1988, pp. 273-91.

³Kerreen Reiger, *The Disenchantment of the Home: Modernizing the Australian Family 1880-1940*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985, pp. 110-16.

⁴Lynn Stearney argued that the first step toward relieving women's oppression was to understand the social construction of motherhood, rather than its instinctive nature. L.M. Stearney, 'Feminism, Ecofeminism, and the Maternal Archetype: Motherhood as a Feminine Universal', *Communication Quarterly*, volume 42, number 2, Spring 1994, pp. 145-59.

family patterns, some parented alone, some in lesbian partnerships, others in communes. The impetus to have children in the 1980s was more individualised and self-centred than the motivation for service to the country which may have inspired women at the beginning of the century. For many women the birth of their infant was their most stunning achievement. Mira Crouch and Lenore Manderson concluded from their interviews of almost one hundred Australian women, that motherhood had become, in a theoretical, political and personal sense, a component of the 'feminine being' rather than designating a social position.⁵ Images in the media encouraged the desire to become a mother. Film stars, for instance, with enormous wealth and great beauty, became 'celebrity supermums' to be admired and emulated. These glamorous women who appeared to have everything, intimated that their babies gave them the best experience of their lives.⁶

Despite the considerable change to the mother's position in society, idealized notions of motherhood have endured. Examinations of cultural images provide one way of understanding the enigma of a maternal role which has altered markedly, while in a fundamental way remaining constant. The cinema offers a source of information about images of motherhood, with depictions of mothering in action over several decades. While the representations and the reactions to them are necessarily complex and often contradictory, it is possible to trace patterns within the films of the changing attitudes towards mothers in society. Although the mother may not be the subject or protagonist in many films, she is represented frequently, and her behaviour and relationships with other family members can be closely examined.

In films, stereotypical representations are used as a device to enable the audience to make sense of the narrative. These representations are, perhaps, particularly important in

⁵Mira Crouch & Lenore Manderson, *New Motherhood: Cultural and Personal Transitions in the 1980s*, Gordon & Breach, Yverdon, Switzerland, 1993, p. 10.

⁶Susan Maushart cited the maternal celebration of Hollywood actors, Kathleen Turner, Meg Ryan, Julie Walters and Susan Sarandon. S. Maushart, *The Mask of Motherhood: How Mothering Changes Everything and Why We Pretend It Doesn't*, Vintage, Sydney, 1997, pp. 29-30.

issues of motherhood, as the mother frequently takes a minor role on screen and her behaviour is accepted as normal and largely unexamined. In order to challenge stereotypical depictions which can be unfair, inaccurate and oppressive, the images need to be investigated and assumptions about the role mapped out. It is this aspect of the pervasive cultural medium of feature films that my analysis attempts to clarify. As films offer a primary source of images over several decades, they can be understood best when placed in an historical context. Accordingly, the introductory chapter on the representation of motherhood on the Australian screen begins with a survey of the social history of mothering in Australia. In the next part of this chapter, the research design of the thesis is outlined. The final section of the chapter describes the remaining chapters in the research.

The Australian Family 1900 to 1988

The survey of the history of the family in modern Australia focuses on motherhood and provides an overview of social change. Tracing the impact of historical variations on the mothering experience from the mother's point-of-view, the review allows both the spectators and the films to be placed into context. At its base is the understanding that the maternal role is not invariable and that it alters with requirements of community, economy, technology and the mother's own desires and needs.

The arrangement whereby men were designated as breadwinners while women stayed at home to care for the family, received official sanction in 1907 with the adoption of a basic wage for men. The wage was calculated to sustain an 'average' man's family of wife and three children. As Beverley Kingston noted, Australia was one of the first societies to use its wage structure to attempt to keep women unemployed and in the home.⁷ The basic wage was paid to all working men regardless of their family situation, while women, even those who worked in the same or similar occupations, received a

⁷Beverley Kingston, (ed.), *The World Moves Slowly: A Documentary History of Australian Women*, Cassell, Stanmore, NSW, 1977, p. 140.

lesser amount.⁸ The acceptance of a higher wage for men had far reaching consequences for Australian society because it affirmed a patriarchal view of women's 'place'. Its assumption that women were responsible for domestic chores was supported by images that showed women constantly in the home.

Motherhood was frequently a special target for state intervention. Politicians, worried about the declining birthrate, introduced pronatalist policies in the first decades of the century. In 1912, a Maternity Bonus of five pounds was offered on the birth of each child.⁹ The state similarly intervened to establish infant and maternal health centres and campaigns to instruct mothers in hygiene and nutrition.¹⁰ At the time, cleanliness was emphasised as the primary requisite of good mothering. The objective was to reduce infant and maternal mortality in order to ensure a rising Australian population.

Apart from health issues, mothers were charged with the moral responsibility of raising adults who would be upright Australian citizens.¹¹ Although their allegiance to the law and the nation was accepted as unquestionable, the mother's own sense of citizenship was tested on the outbreak of the First World War.¹² Mothers, who had been exhorted to devote themselves to their children's welfare, were called on to encourage their sons to join up to support the men already fighting. Judith Smart noted that there was a strong, though small, group of females in the Women's Political Association and the Women's Peace Army during the War.¹³ These organisations signified opposition to nationalistic political campaigns and showed contempt for the 'men's business' of war.

⁸Reiger, *The Disenchantment of the Home*, p. 109.

⁹Kingston, *The World Moves Slowly*, p. 140.

¹⁰Judith Allen reported that the concern about infant mortality centred on providing good milk for the baby, educating working-class women and improving public sanitation. While abortion was illegal, Allen noted that abortionists were rarely prosecuted. She concluded, perhaps rather harshly, that turning a blind eye to the murder of unwanted babies, was patriarchy's way of allowing male sexual freedom. J. Allen, 'Octavius Beale re-considered: Infanticide, baby farming and abortion in NSW 1880-1939' in Sydney Labour History Group, *What Rough Beast? The State and Social Order in Australian History*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1982, pp. 111-29.

¹¹Patricia Grimshaw, 'Gendered Settlements', in P. Grimshaw, M. Lake, A. McGrath & M. Quartly, *Creating a Nation*, McPhee Gribble/Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria, 1994, p. 181.

¹²Marilyn Lake 'Giving Birth to a New Nation', in *Creating a Nation* p. 214.

¹³Judith Smart, 'The Panacea of Prohibition: The Reaction of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Victoria to the Great War', in S. Willis (ed.), *Women Faith & Fetes: Essays in the History of Women*

Despite Sol Encel's assertion that the housewife's position in Australia hardly changed between 1914 and 1939,¹⁴ many had moved into the workforce to assist with the war effort. The post-war reassertion of the female domestic role was greeted by some women with 'hostility and resentment'.¹⁵ Working at responsible jobs during the war, they had expected a greater political role in society at its end. Many were less than exuberant about the Housewives' Association and the 'exaltation of woman's traditional role as wife and mother'.¹⁶ They drew attention to influences which encouraged the move to domesticity and precluded mothers from public life. Political pressures included the introduction of child endowment and the ban on employment of married women in the Commonwealth Public Service.

Another challenge to domesticity came in the early 1920s with an alternative figure to the mother as a symbol of temperance and rectitude. Fashionable young women with bobbed hair and short dresses were to be seen in public, smoking and drinking alcohol. Barbara Cameron noted that husbands were reported to be annoyed and alarmed at the self-confidence and independence exhibited by their wives.¹⁷ The problems for fathers in the 'flapper' era in Australia, however, were short-lived, and as Anne Summers argued, did not herald women's sexual emancipation.¹⁸ By the middle of the decade, women in Australia had again taken their traditional place in the home, caring for the family members.¹⁹

and the Church in Australia, Dove Communications, Melbourne/Australian Council of Churches (NSW), East Malvern, Victoria, 1977, p. 163.

¹⁴Sol Encel, Norman MacKenzie & Margaret Tebbutt, *Women and Society: An Australian Study*, Malaby, London, 1975, p. 72.

¹⁵Ann Game & Rosemary Pringle, 'The Making of the Australian Family', in A. Burns, G. Bottomley & P. Jools, (eds), *The Family in the Modern World: Australian Perspectives*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1983, p. 89.

¹⁶Smart, 'The Panacea of Prohibition', p. 163.

¹⁷Barbara Cameron, 'The flappers and the feminists: A study of women's emancipation in the 1920s', in M. Bevege, M. James, C. Shute, (eds), *Worth Her Salt: Women at Work in Australia*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1982, p. 259.

¹⁸Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police: The Colonization of Women in Australia*, Allen Lane, Ringwood, Victoria, 1975, p. 394.

¹⁹Cameron, 'The flappers and the feminists', p. 265.

Increasingly, images of the mother came from a variety of sources and the period marked a rise in understanding of the way advertising could be creatively manipulated to appear impartial and informative. Commercial radio, introduced in the 1920s, used programmes aimed specifically at women to disseminate advertising for consumer goods as well as advice about housekeeping and child rearing. The creation of specialised women's programmes on air segregated women in order to manipulate them as consumers. They had, perhaps, a serendipitous and rarely noted side-effect. Reinforcing the idea of 'women as a group' paved the way for the sisterhood which was crucial to the women's movement in the late 1960s.²⁰ Additionally, within the cinema world, it gave the opportunity for the special genre of 'women's films'.

With fewer children post-war and more leisure time,²¹ films were important to mothers. Females made up about seventy per cent of the Australian cinema audience.²² Perhaps in recognition of women's particular interest, a female was included on the Censorship Board of the 1927 Royal Commission into Australian cinema, where issues about morality and the influence of film were considered.²³ Filmmaking also attracted attention and there was a cohort of young women who moved into the industry. Most prominent were Lottie Lyell, Louise Lovely, and the McDonagh sisters who directed, produced and starred in several productions. Sally Speed pointed out that female involvement was limited to the years between 1921 and 1933. It was not until the 1970s that women in Australia were again involved in feature film production.²⁴

²⁰Lesley Johnson noted the defining relationship of women to the 'domestic sphere of family life'. L. Johnson, *The Unseen Voice: A Cultural Study of Early Australian Radio*, Routledge, London, 1988, p. 101.

²¹Judith Allen related the lower average family size of married women (from 7 in the 1870s to 3 in the 1920s, to the purchase of labour-saving devices, private vehicles and homes, and to the increase in time available for entertainment. Allen, 'Octavius Beale re-considered', pp. 111-29.

²²Deb Verhoeven, 'The film I would like to make: in search of a cinema (1927-1970)', in J. Sabine (ed.), *A Century of Australian Cinema*, William Heinemann, South Melbourne, 1995, p. 145.

²³Verhoeven, 'The film I would like to make', p. 145.

²⁴Sally Speed, 'Voices from the Silent Era', in A. Blonski, B. Creed & F. Freiberg, (eds), *Don't Shoot Darling!: Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*, Greenhouse, Richmond, Victoria, 1987, p. 25.

The affluence of the post-war period ended abruptly in 1929, when the Great Depression brought hardship to many families. While official directions from the Department of Public Health were free and available, some mothers were unable, or perhaps unwilling, to follow the advice about the infant's ideal dietary and living arrangements. Many families existed in appalling conditions with the mother's constant fear of becoming pregnant. While at this time there was no contraceptive pill, the low birth rate in the 1930s indicated that mothers controlled their pregnancies probably with abstinence, illegal terminations or spontaneous abortions brought on by ill-health. Despite governmental efforts, the birthrate fell to 1.66% in 1933, an all-time low compared with 2.7% in 1900, and 2.2% in the mid 1960s.²⁵

During the 1930s, mothers in the workforce on low wages struggled to augment their husband's pay or to provide the sole income for the family. They were castigated for taking men's jobs and, sometimes, even held responsible for causing the Depression.²⁶ The scarcity of jobs reinforced the belief that a woman's place was in the home. There was a double grievance against mothers as Marilyn Lake remarked: 'Not only were women "destroying" men [by taking their jobs]; they were failing to produce in the field in which they were created to produce'.²⁷ Women were meant to remain in their homes where cleanliness, piety and child rearing was to be their primary concern.

The guidelines for mothering altered suddenly and dramatically on the outbreak of World War Two. As in this 1943 advertisement, women were exhorted to move out of their homes and into a 'Victory job':

*What does it matter if the furniture does get a bit dusty...or the floors a bit dull. What does it matter—provided the man you love comes back sooner and alive:—
Come on housewife. Take a Victory job. You'll find it no harder than your house job. Easier perhaps. In fact, many war production factories, with their spic-and-span canteens, bright music*

²⁵Encel et al., *Women and Society*, p. 19.

²⁶Marian Aveling & Joy Damousi, *Stepping Out of History: Documents of Women at Work in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1991, p. 110.

²⁷Lake, 'Depression Dreaming', in *Creating a Nation*, p. 252.

*and carefully-planned rest breaks are more fun to work in than any house...Come on. Change your job for him—won't you?*²⁸

The rather patronising tone trivialised the mother's contribution to society by individualising her objective to one of having her partner back with her. The advertisement provided an example of how quickly the official polemic shifted to fit the needs of war. After years of being told that the prime requisite of the maternal role was cleanliness and devotion to child care, this imperative was put aside for the new need to leave her home to go to work.

The War changed Australian society in a number of important ways. On a national level, overseas involvement and the threat of invasion lessened insularity and parochialism. From an individual citizen's perspective, war had marked the end of the Depression and brought jobs for both men and women. Working in factories for the war effort, women experienced new skills and responsibilities. In addition, many had increased power within the home where they had taken over as head of the family for the duration. Conceptions of female sexuality also underwent a transformation. Many of the one million American servicemen who visited Australia during the War formed relationships with local women. Stories of females enjoying affairs with men in uniform, proliferated.²⁹

After the War, as Aveling and Damousi reported, women were expected either to return to their role as wives or to work in 'women's industries'.³⁰ Some mothers, Lake reported, did stay in the workforce, while others were happy to leave and return to the family in the hope of 'sexual and personal fulfilment'.³¹ In 1946, *The Australian Women's Weekly*

²⁸Copy of an advertisement, courtesy La Trobe Collection, State Library of Victoria, quoted by Aveling & Damousi, *Stepping Out of History*, p. 149.

²⁹Marilyn Lake, 'Australia Since the War', Open Learning, *ABC Radio National*, 5.05 am, 11 March 1998. See also M. Lake, 'Female desires: The meaning of World War II', in R. White & P. Russell, (eds), *Memories and Dreams: Reflections on Twentieth-Century Australia, Pastiche II*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1997, pp. 124-5.

³⁰Aveling & Damousi, *Stepping Out of History*, p. 151.

³¹Marilyn Lake, 'Freedom, Fear and the Family', in *Creating a Nation*, p. 265.

rather optimistically surveyed the scene and opined that women who had worked during the War and were now prepared to return to the home, would be better wives and citizens.³²

There was a post-war transformation of family life and relationships within marriage which Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle described as 'almost universal'. These included the move to the suburbs and the emergence of the modern housewife who expected 'domestic happiness based on marital compatibility and close relationships with...children'.³³ Institutions combined to reinforce the new social structure. Business corporations for example sponsored advertisements in the media which promoted ideas of a better life after the deprivations of the Depression and War. Economic prosperity made owning a home possible and was central to every couple's suburban dream of sexual compatibility and shared pleasures. On the surface, the sexual division of labour remained constant: mothers were still the home makers, and fathers, the breadwinners. The figure of the mother had changed, however. An interest in public life stimulated by work and responsibilities during the War and the recognition of her sexuality introduced the mother's own desires and aspirations into a maternal role which had previously focused on devotion to the family.

For many mothers, life in the suburban nuclear family did not turn out to be as fulfilling as it had been hoped. Mortgage repayments meant that the husband worked for long hours, often at an inconvenient distance from home. The wife in turn was required to keep up to date with child-rearing, far from a 'web of kin and neighbourhood relationships'.³⁴ Rather than advice from her own mother, post-war popular psychology, radio programmes, magazine articles and books provided information on the care for the mental and physical health of her children. While this development may have helped the

³²*The Australian Women's Weekly*, January 1946, in Aveling & Damousi, *Stepping Out of History*, pp. 151-2.

³³Game & Pringle, 'The Making of the Australian Family', p. 96.

³⁴Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*, Pantheon, NY, 1988, p. 207.

child, according to Jean Blackburn and Thelma Jackson, it was often detrimental to the well-being of the mother, who was 'terrified of being accused of un-motherly attitudes'. The result was that many housewives became frustrated in their own desires and often over-involved with their children.³⁵ Maushart described the housewife as 'financially dependent, emotionally isolated, overworked but underutilised'.³⁶ Inevitably, perhaps, some mothers decided to take paid work, either to expand their interests or keep up with the increasing demands of consumerism.

The 1950s, a time of full employment and economic prosperity, marked a further change in the social position of women in Australia. Large numbers of married women entered the workforce.³⁷ Although often involved in menial employment which paid a pittance, the economic contribution to the family helped to increase their authority. Further, women had built up a considerable amount of expertise in running a household and in making use of technology and labour saving devices. Their importance in child rearing, as well as these factors, meant that many mothers began to challenge the father's authority.³⁸ In a 1957 study of nearly nine thousand adolescents in Sydney, W. F. Connell determined that teenagers thought the most powerful influence on their lives was their mother.³⁹ Similarly, Dan Adler claimed that although the stereotypical Australian image was male, the mother was the dominant family figure.⁴⁰ Adler compared families in Mexico and the United States with Australia, and concluded that mothers in Australian families were the most powerful in making decisions and carrying them out. He described the Australian family as a 'matriduxy'. His oft-quoted⁴¹ and

³⁵Jean Blackburn & Thelma Jackson, (eds), *Australian Wives Today*, Victorian Fabian Society, Melbourne, 1963, p. 24 .

³⁶Maushart, *The Mask of Motherhood*, p. 5.

³⁷Encel et al., *Women and Society*, 1975, p. 75.

³⁸Game & Pringle, 'The Making of the Australian Family', pp. 80-102.

³⁹W.F. Connell et al., *Growing Up in an Australian City: A Study of Adolescents in Sydney*, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne, 1966, (1957), pp. 29-30.

⁴⁰Dan L. Adler, 'Matriduxy in the Australian Family', in A.F. Davies & S. Encel, (eds), *Australian Society: A Sociological Introduction*, Pall Mall, London, 1965, pp. 149-55.

⁴¹See S. Encel 'The Family', in A. F. Davies & S. Encel, (eds), *Australian Society: A Sociological Introduction*, Second Edition, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1970, (1965), pp. 273-91 and Lois Bryson, 'The Australian Patriarchal Family', in S. Encel, M. Barry, L. Bryson, M. de Lepervanche, T. Rowse & A. Moran, (eds), *Australian Society: Introductory Essays*, Fourth Edition, Longman Cheshire, 1990, (1984), pp. 113-69 and Encel et al., *Women and Society*, pp. 54-5.

somewhat misleading conclusions were predicated on the authority of the mother in child care and control. In other areas, such as social activities and economic decisions, Adler conceded mother and father were involved equally. Although it may have exaggerated the mother's authority, Adler's research drew attention to the changes in the power structure of many families.

The mother's authority within the family, however, should not be overstated. Some were powerless and abused: Game and Pringle have described mothers who endured marital rape and physical assault.⁴² Others, with little individual freedom, were subjected to male domination as a 'natural' patriarchal right. While some mothers may have been forthright or autonomous, the institution of motherhood to which they belonged was generally disparaged. Mothers in the workforce were blamed for neglecting their children, while mothers who stayed at home were often considered dull and unintelligent: 'I'm only a housewife' was a common self-designation. In a response that has almost become a stereotype, some mothers, perhaps, from feelings of guilt and anxiety, resorted to drugs such as headache powders, tranquillisers or alcohol.

The availability in 1961 of the contraceptive pill had vast repercussions on the sexual freedom of both sexes. It facilitated social freedom and equality within the family. Although Australia quickly became one of the largest consumers of the Pill, it should not be forgotten that the Catholic Church forbade it. Catholic mothers, often in the poorest and largest families, used the Pill at their peril and many declined to do so. On the other hand, women who did, were able to plan their families and their careers. Encel has pointed out that the mother's physical condition and vigour improved with fewer pregnancies and a smaller family.⁴³ As well, one could add the important improvement to women's mental health and autonomy in gaining control of her own reproductive life.

⁴²Game & Pringle, 'The Making of the Australian Family', p. 96.

⁴³Encel et al., *Women and Society*, p. 19.

Germaine Greer returned to Australia in 1972 with the message that women should not be content with domesticity. It was not long before the issues she raised began to be debated within the media, women's consciousness raising groups, and at home. Greer's polemic gave impetus to the growing women's liberation movement in Australia which had become interested in the writings from overseas from feminists such as Kate Millet, Betty Friedan and Juliet Mitchell. Attracting mostly white middle-class women, the movement argued for social and economic change throughout the community, particularly for wage parity⁴⁴ and the establishment of shelters for women suffering physical abuse. The goal at the time was equality of the sexes which would raise women's subordinate position. Ann Curthoys, for instance, described her ideal society as one where there were 'no distinctions between men and women'.⁴⁵ As well, the institution of motherhood came under scrutiny and as a consequence, perhaps, its fundamental concepts began to disintegrate. As Norma Grieve has pointed out, many women came to consider that motherhood was neither their primary goal nor was it necessary for their fulfilment.⁴⁶ Some blamed their own mothers for accepting domesticity and the subservient position of females. The decade of the seventies was a turbulent time which witnessed men's increasing anxieties about the changes to the structure of the family.

Feminists found an outlet for their grievances in the documentary film industry during the 1970s. As Annette Blonski and Freda Freiberg noted, female filmmakers began to object to the representation of the woman's role as exclusively wife and mother.⁴⁷ Filmmaker Jeni Thornley observed that it was a time when: 'many women were attracted to film as a means of disseminating feminist ideas and challenging traditional sexist

⁴⁴The Arbitration Commission awarded women equal pay in December 1972. Aveling & Damousi, *Stepping Out of History*., p. 157.

⁴⁵Ann Curthoys, 'Men and Children in the Feminist Utopia' *Refractory Girl: A Journal of Radical Feminist Thought*, number 10, March 1976, pp. 3-5.

⁴⁶Norma Grieve, 'The Psychology of Women and Feminist Thought: An Ambivalent Liaison?', in N. Grieve & A. Burns, (eds), *Australian Women: New Feminist Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1988, p. 127.

⁴⁷Annette Blonski & Freda Freiberg, 'Double Trouble: Women's Films' in A. Moran & T. O'Regan, (eds), *The Australian Screen*, Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria, 1989, pp. 191-215.

depictions of women that were rampant in the mass media.⁴⁸ Women saw film as an ideal medium to spread their views and with government assistance, set up groups to make independent and experimental films.⁴⁹ The Sydney Women's Film Group, established in 1971, for example, was instrumental in introducing contemporary feminist concerns to its filmmaking activities. By the end of the 1970s, many women had become proficient filmmakers and were attempting to raise consciousness in the community about women's oppression. Investigating the maternal role, they challenged the assumption of women's inevitable and sole responsibility for child care and domestic labour.⁵⁰

The dissatisfaction that many women felt with motherhood abated somewhat from the early 1980s. Mother-blame diminished as greater understanding of the mother's difficulties of child rearing came with the next generation's experience of having children of their own. It was still a conflictive and complex issue, although as Crouch and Manderson have shown, motherhood came to assume a new importance for women in political and personal areas.⁵¹ The idea of the mother being solely responsible for the child's 'physical, mental, social and emotional development' was replaced with a more equitable concept. In public life, for instance, problems like isolation, language, lack of money, single parenting, cultural difference and unemployment came to be seen as community problems.⁵² At the same time the pleasures of child rearing which often had been overlooked in the effort to reform the traditional family, were rediscovered.⁵³

⁴⁸Jeni Thornley, 'Past, Present and Future: The Women's Film Fund', in *Don't Shoot Darling!: Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*, A. Blonski et al. (eds), Greenhouse, Richmond, Victoria, 1987, p. 62.

⁴⁹Barbara Alysen, 'Australian Women in Films', in A. Moran & T. O'Regan, (eds), *An Australian Reader*, Currency, Sydney, 1985, pp. 302-13.

⁵⁰The documentary was seen as the most effective genre, for instance: Meg Stewart's *They Reckon a Woman's World's Just It and a Bit* (1977), Feminist Film Workers' *As a Matter Of Fact—A Film About Abortion* (1979) and Jeni Thornley's *Maidens* (1978).

⁵¹Crouch & Manderson, *New Motherhood*, p. 10.

⁵²Claudia Knapman, 'Reconstructing Mothering: Feminism and the Early Childhood Centre', *Australian Feminist Studies*, number 18, Summer 1993, p. 118.

⁵³Grieve, 'The Psychology of Women and Feminist Thought', pp. 122-41.

The joy in mothering in a more understanding community was not without problems.⁵⁴ Women, with paid work outside the home discovered that their responsibility for domestic labour had not lessened. The much-vaunted shared parenting of the seventies had turned out for most, to be an unattainable myth. In 1982, sociologist, Kathryn Backett completed fieldwork interviews with a series of married couples in Scotland. Typically, she found that 'The mother had the overall responsibility for the organisation of the home and children, with the father being regarded as the helper'.⁵⁵ Similarly in Australia, Maushart has commented, that the revolution in contemporary family life meant more work for the mother with little meaningful recognition of her contribution.⁵⁶ From a different perspective, the celebration of motherhood had acclaimed it so unreservedly, that as Christine Everingham remarked, it ignored those women who did not wish to be mothers.⁵⁷ Although women affirmed the joy of mothering a child and their unique ability and difference in giving birth, the difficulties in the actual experience of child rearing were sometimes overlooked.⁵⁸

The dynamic changes to traditional concepts in the 1970s and again in the 1980s stimulated interest in motherhood. Markets for films dealing with family situations increased. During the 1980s, women began to enter the feature film industry as directors, producers and screenwriters. Scott Murray has claimed that female directors took a depressing view of human relationships, citing the example of Gillian Armstrong in *My Brilliant Career* (1979) and *Hightide* (1987). Showing a lack of awareness of what was going on for women in the 1970s, Murray was critical of Armstrong's

⁵⁴A few women have recognised the mother's predicament. See for example, Joyce Nicholson, *The Heartache of Motherhood*, Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria, 1983; Anne-Marie Ambert, *The Effect of Children on Parents*, Haworth Press, NY, 1992; Maushart, 1997.

⁵⁵Kathryn C. Backett, *Mother and Fathers: A Study of the Development and Negotiation of Parental Behaviour*, Macmillan, London, 1982, p. 194.

⁵⁶Maushart, *The Mask of Motherhood*, p. 242.

⁵⁷Christine Everingham, *Motherhood and Modernity: An Investigation Into the National Dimension of Mothering*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1994, p. 3.

⁵⁸Feminist Sara Ruddick did look at the actual mothering experience and noted that her respondents confessed that they were struggling with problems with the children or with problems the society presents to their children. S. Ruddick, 'Thinking mothers conceiving birth' in D. Bassin, M. Honey & M.M. Kaplan, (eds), *Representations of Motherhood*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1994, p. 33.

portrayal of the women's view of men as an 'inhibiting force'.⁵⁹ His evaluation of the character of the eponymous mother in Glenda Hambly's *Fran* (1985) was also perfunctory. He commented on her 'perversely distrustful attitude to men', although it was precisely the opposite failing that caused Fran so much trouble.⁶⁰ Despite the persistence of male predominance, women's inroad into filmmaking was reflected in the growing complexity of the mother's role in film narratives.

The late-century mother is in many ways different from her earlier counterpart. For the first half of the century, the mother mostly worked within the home with her infant's health a major preoccupation. In the last decades, many mothers were concerned with managing a public career and attending to domestic responsibilities. The maternal role in Australian family life has undergone a transformation which has been influenced by government policies, technological developments, economic fluctuations, community expectations and the growing recognition of the mother's own proclivities and desires. The shifts were clear and, perhaps, surprising considering that motherhood has often been thought of as inevitable and unchanging.

Research Design

The broad endeavour of my research is to observe how mothers have been represented on the Australian screen. The study reaches from the early days of cinema at the beginning of the century, to the year of the bicentenary, in 1988. The foundation of contemporary family life was laid in this period. This is an appropriate date to end the analysis because it signalled a watershed in Australian history. Consideration of the repercussions of the bicentenary on Australian films would raise complex issues of interpretation beyond the scope of this thesis. Additionally, my focus has chiefly been on representation in the narrative and I have not included influences of sound, camera

⁵⁹Scott Murray, 'Australian Cinema of the 1970s and 1980s', in S. Murray, (ed.), *Australian Cinema*, Allen & Unwin/AFC, Sydney, 1994, p. 125.

⁶⁰Murray, 'Australian Cinema of the 1970s and 1980s', p. 125. Fran wanted the relationship with her husband to continue, even after he had savagely beaten her. She then found a lover, whom she trusted, with disastrous consequences as he sexually abused her young daughter.

positions and lighting in the analysis. I have noted, however, some effects where they were a particular and meaningful addition to the narrative.

Although no specific investigation so far has covered the representation of motherhood in Australian cinema, books with general information on feature films have been helpful. The foremost reference work on the history of Australian film from 1900 to 1977, came from Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper, whose synopses and historical information I have used extensively.⁶¹ A close-to-companion volume, edited by Scott Murray, covered the balance of the period from 1978 to 1988.⁶² Using the reviews in these volumes, I initially selected those films which listed a mother in the cast of characters. It was, perhaps, surprising that of more than seven hundred films cited, only about two hundred included a mother acting in any capacity. In very few was she the focus of the story. Despite her omission from the action of the narrative, it was hinted in some of the synopses that she had an important part in the diegesis, if only as a catalyst or as a stabilising influence for other characters. Other synopses did not list a mother in the cast, although their story, perhaps, because of a family focus, suggested the presence of a mother. These I included as well.

My greatest difficulty in carrying out the research was to obtain the early films. Very few made before 1927 remain intact. The year 1927 was significant as it marked the release of Norman Dawn's *For the Term of His Natural Life*, where over two tonnes of film were burnt to create a fire on a ship for a scene in the film. As William Routt noted regretfully: 'who knows how many early Australian and foreign classics [were destroyed]?'⁶³ Apart from other similar incidents of wilful burning,⁶⁴ many films have

⁶¹Andrew Pike & Ross Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977: A Guide to Feature Film Production*, Oxford University Press/AFI, Melbourne, 1980.

⁶²Scott Murray, (ed.), *Australian Film 1978-1992: A Survey of Theatrical Features*, Oxford University Press/ AFC and Cinema Papers, South Melbourne, 1993.

⁶³William D. Routt, 'Our Reflections in a Window: Australian silent cinema (c.1896-1930)', in J. Sabine, (ed.), *A Century of Australian Cinema*, William Heinemann, Port Melbourne, 1995, p. 62.

⁶⁴The pattern continued, as veteran filmmaker Ken G. Hall reported with no hint of regret, that in a bushfire scene in his 1933 film, *The Squatter's Daughter*, 'We left nothing to chance with that fire, lacing the scrub and tree trunks with thousands of feet of old film and then spraying the lot with old sump oil...', K.G. Hall, *Australian Film: The Inside Story*, Summit, Sydney, 1980, (1977), p. 61.

disintegrated owing to the volatility of the nitrate material of which they were composed. Of the fifty-one films from 1900 to 1926 which were of interest because of the mother role, only eighteen were still available. Most of these were incomplete, some only having a few valuable surviving minutes. From 1927 onwards, however, almost all the films needed were available.⁶⁵ Some had been restored and preserved by the National Film and Sound Archive,⁶⁶ others were owned and broadcast occasionally by television stations or were available for hire on video cassettes.

I viewed nearly three hundred films and constructed the synopses of the missing ones from photographic stills, reviews and articles in early journals such as *The Theatre Magazine*, *Smith's Weekly*, *The Green Room*, *Everyone's* and *The Picture Show*. While it was obvious that the image of the mother had changed over the years, both in her appearance and her behaviour, a more nuanced picture began to surface. The films displayed different facets of the mother's life and portrayed particular aspects of her behaviour. For instance, the appearance of a bad mother in films during the 1970s was so extraordinary, it drew attention to the nurturing and kind screen mothers of other decades. Likewise, when a baby girl born in a film in the 1980s came as a surprise, it prompted questions of why I was anticipating a boy. Other unexpected representations became evident. While the mother's association with the husband might seem central to the narrative, in many films it was clear that most of her time was spent with her daughter. Additionally, there was a transformation in the depiction of the mother's sexuality. The chaste mother at the beginning of the century was an amazing contrast to the passionate adulterous woman in recent films. Film genres were not of great assistance in explicating issues of motherhood, as the output of Australian film is neither prolific nor particularly formulaic. There was one genre, however, that aroused interest. Remembering pioneering tales of the hardships that women faced in early colonial days,

⁶⁵An exception was the McDonagh sisters' *Two Minutes Silence* (1933), of which no trace remains.

⁶⁶The National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra ACT has a branch office in Acheson Street, Crows Nest which houses a collection of otherwise unavailable films.

I expected the mother to be included in bush films. Her physical absence but emotional presence raised questions about where she might be found in the narrative.

The organisational patterns of the mother's portrayal which emerged after viewing the films, suggested that areas of maternal behaviour could be divided into the following groups: the good mother, the birth of a child, the relationship with the daughter, maternal sexuality, the unwed mother, and the mother in the bush. These categories, with the addition of a summary of theoretical research on motherhood, formed the chapters of the thesis.

The Layout of the Thesis

The review of literature in the second chapter specifically relates to motherhood and draws on an eclectic mixture of research from psychoanalytic, sociological and feminist viewpoints. Theories of motherhood, although primarily from the point-of-view of European and American scholars, are used to underpin the Australian historical framework with the aim of broadening the base of knowledge about the maternal role in our society. Additionally, overseas research which focuses on the way filmmakers have represented the mother on screen and importantly, the audience response, forms the final part of the chapter.

The 'good mother' has been seen as the linchpin of family life. The third chapter examines a number of films and focuses on an exploration of the behaviour of the mother as nurturer. There is a frequent expectation that the mother, while not taking part in the action of the narrative, has responsibility for raising the family. Her relationship with her children is often her main contribution to the film. Concepts about her maternal role and what makes a good mother are so 'naturalised' that they almost escape notice. Close examination of the films, however, can determine patterns in her role which can be explained by contemporary historical events. As well, information about attitudes in

society can be gathered from the way that she is judged by the outcome of the narrative, in terms of whether her actions are punished or rewarded.

Psychoanalytic, sociological and feminist theoreticians have long sought to understand sexual and gender difference. In polarised accounts, sexual roles have been explained as the result of either biological predisposition or cultural manipulation. Research which relied on biological explanations has argued for an inherited and unchangeable connection, while cultural theories pointed to societal influences on the growing child. The fourth chapter explores how films incorporate the sex of the newborn child into the narrative. Birth is always a significant event in films and how the infant is received and what difference its sex makes to the life of the mother can be clearly discerned. This part of the research may challenge or reinforce theories of sexual difference by its interpretation of the platitude 'Congratulations it's a boy!'

The mother's relationship with her daughter has a particular and special importance for the process of mothering. Both the biological connection and the cycle wherein the daughter learns about the mothering experience from her mother, are crucial in determining whether, and in what way, she herself will mother. Psychoanalysts have drawn attention to the manner in which mothers treat boys and girls differently and the consequent repercussions for the child's autonomy and independence.⁶⁷ Sociologists have pointed out the imitative behaviour of young daughters and the bonding with the mother in later years, particularly through the daughter's own pregnancy, childbirth and child rearing.⁶⁸ Individual feminists have questioned their own maternal relationship, some finding love and similarity with their mothers, others finding fault and difference.⁶⁹ The fifth chapter considers how films deal with the crucial association of mother and daughter and how the depiction compares with prevailing theoretical discourses.

⁶⁷See for example, the work of Melanie Klein, Nancy Chodorow and Dorothy Dinnerstein.

⁶⁸See for example the work of Adrienne Rich, Jessie Bernard and Lucy Fischer.

⁶⁹See for example, the work of Jane Flax, Sara Ruddick and Lynne Segal.

In general, images of the mother in society overlook her sexual desires and needs. While the sexuality of young women is frequently displayed in the media, the possibility that a mother could be desirable or desiring is rarely considered. Descriptions and images of the sexual woman as a whore have helped to consolidate the mother's exclusion from the realm of sexuality. Some writers have suggested that this has served the patriarchal end⁷⁰ of keeping women safely under control and within the home.⁷¹ The sixth chapter identifies the way films portray the mother's sexuality, how it is proscribed and what happens if it is 'unleashed'.

Traditionally, the Australian bush provided the setting in which the enduring male pitted himself against the rigours of isolated rural life. Although a myth from the early days of white settlement, this image has persisted to the present and is an integral part of national identity. There has been no place set aside for women in this concept, yet we know that women, although in the minority in early settlement, were not only there, but were necessary for the maintenance of daily life. Mothers were vital to the colony. They were responsible for the care of the children and often worked with men in hard labour under trying conditions. Stories about the bush have been at the heart of many film narratives. The seventh chapter investigates some of these in order to locate the women's place.

The chapters consider representations in films of good mothers, births, mothers and daughters, mothers' sexuality and the place of mothers in the bush, with a detailed summary and individual conclusion. The final chapter, the eighth, will point to the overall significance of the research and its location within women's experience and the understanding of motherhood.

⁷⁰Patriarchy in this research means the organisation of the social relations between men and women in western society where men have power and women are oppressed.

⁷¹See for example, the work of Betsy Wearing, Shulamith Firestone and Iris Young.

chapter 2

literature review:

theories of motherhood and motherhood in film

Women mother. In our society, as in most societies, women not only bear children. They also take primary responsibility for infant care, spend more time with infants and children than do men, and sustain primary emotional ties with infants.¹

Of all theoretical writings, those from psychoanalytic, sociological and feminist perspectives have proved the most useful in analysing the representations of motherhood on the Australian screen. While my study retains its historical focus, the theories, from emotional, experiential and political perspectives, are useful in assessing the way the maternal role has been constructed . Psychoanalytic theorists have examined the mother's unconscious actions, exploring her deep attachment to her children. Sociologists have attempted to trace the mother's actual experience of child rearing, identifying the way that society and culture have affected her behaviour and her attitudes. Feminists, especially since the beginning of the liberation movement in the late 1960s, have been concerned with the subordination of women in the mothering role and have offered impassioned and often contradictory ways of thinking about motherhood.

In the first part of this chapter, these theoretical positions are summarised in order to provide a foundation for understanding the maternal role. In the second part of the chapter, recent literature on the representation of motherhood in films is introduced to add a further and, perhaps, more specific dimension to the research.

Theories of Motherhood

Sigmund Freud described the mother as the child's primary love object and the parent most responsible for its optimal development. He argued that in the early years of the

¹Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978a, p. 3.

infant's life, the relationship with the mother was close, but during the Oedipal conflict, the boy renounced the love of his mother in fear of his more powerful father. The girl also moved away from her mother, whom she saw as powerless and 'castrated'.² Freud's ideas of difference between male and female behaviour provided a starting point for many theories on motherhood. Melanie Klein, Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow, for example, made use of his exploration of the unconscious instincts and drives of infant girls and boys.³ As well, his case studies and clinical appraisals on men were often from data collected from women. As sociologist, Sondra Farganis suggested, they provided a useful source of information about women's behaviour for the feminists, psychoanalysts and sociologists who came later.⁴

One of the most influential theoreticians and practitioners of psychoanalysis was Melanie Klein, whose work was crucial in understanding the unconscious side of mothering. Klein believed that the resolution of the Oedipal conflict was not as important as the developmental period which preceded it, when the mother, as the primary nurturer, was the most important 'object' in the infant's life. Drawing on Freudian theory, though with major differences from it, Klein established a psychoanalytic school of 'object relations' during the 1920s, which focused attention on the pre-Oedipal child's deep attachment to its mother.⁵ Klein's importance came from her work with children in psychoanalysis, and, importantly, with her understanding of the significance of the mother on the 'inner world' of the child. Although she took into account the father's involvement, she believed the mother was more important to the child because she was the source of its nourishment. The infant, Klein explained, fantasised the mother as the 'good' and 'bad' breast. As the infant's need for nourishment was its prime concern, nervous and depressive anxieties in later life could be related to

²Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity', *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Norton, NY, 1963, (c.1935), p. 129.

³Lisa Appignanesi & John Forrester, *Freud's Women*, Virago, London, 1993.

⁴Sondra Farganis, *Social Reconstruction of the Feminine Character*, Rowman & Littlefield, NJ, 1986, p. 78.

⁵Janice Doane & Devon Hodges, *From Klein to Kristeva: Psychoanalytic Feminism and the Search for the 'Good Enough' Mother*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1992, p. 8, p. 12.

the way the child had coped with the nursing experience.⁶ Although Klein's work emphasised the importance of the mother, it implied that any problem that the child may have had was an indication that the mother's care had been deficient.

Mother-blaming theories came to play a critical part in child psychology and psychoanalysis after the Second World War. John Bowlby was an influential figure⁷ who argued that the child's care in the early years was of vital importance for its future mental health.⁸ He developed the theory of 'maternal deprivation' which maintained that a child could be damaged if for any reason it was removed from its mother's care at least for the first three years of its life. The popularity of Bowlby and other 'experts' caused problems for many mothers in the workforce.⁹ Lois Bryson reported that tests carried out in 1959 on children of working and non-working mothers in Melbourne found no differences in their well-being. Because belief in Bowlby was so strong at the time, however, the findings were rejected and kept from the public.¹⁰ Unfortunately, perhaps, for those mothers who felt anxiety and guilt about leaving their children, nowhere was it acknowledged that Bowlby's conclusions were based on the neurotic and damaged children that he saw in his practice. His young patients may have suffered under cruel and inappropriate maternal management, nevertheless, his condemnation of all mothers who were not in constant attendance on their children was an untenable extrapolation.¹¹

⁶Although Klein related the child's problems to its nursing experience, she would not consult with the mother, but insisted on seeing the disturbed child alone. Melanie Klein, *Narrative of a Child Analysis: The Conduct of the Psycho-Analysis of Children as Seen in the Treatment of a Ten-year-old Boy*, Virago, London, 1989, (1961).

⁷Bowlby was especially important in Britain, according to Denise Riley, after the Second World War, when it suited national interests to entice the mother out of the workforce and into the home. Denise Riley, *War in the Nursery: Theories of the Child and Mother*, Virago, London, 1983, pp. 189-96.

⁸John Bowlby, *Child Care and the Growth of Love*, Second Edition, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1974, (1953), p. 13.

⁹Riley, *War in the Nursery*, p. 137.

¹⁰Lois Bryson, 'The Australian Patriarchal Family', in S. Encel et al., (eds), *Australian Society: Introductory Essays*, Fourth Edition, Longman Cheshire, 1990, (1984), p. 132.

¹¹Bowlby believed like Chodorow, that if clinical studies revealed 'systemic, patterned' responses, they were useful explaining 'normal' tendencies. See Nancy Chodorow, 'Reply: On *The Reproduction of Mothering: A Methodological Debate*', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, volume 6, number 3, Spring 1981, pp. 500-14.

Psychoanalyst and paediatrician D.W. Winnicott based his work on Kleinian theories, although rather than concentrating on the fantasies of the child, he focused on the performance of the mother. In radio broadcasts in Britain, he asserted that he did not want to place impossible demands on the mother and asked only that she be 'good enough', which he defined as adapting to the child's demands, enabling it to develop without 'anxieties and conflicts'.¹² He declared that although the mother must be prepared to put the infant's interests above her own, the child rearing process was natural and intuitive and the child's needs were easy to anticipate and accommodate.¹³ Although purporting to comfort mothers, Winnicott considered that problems with the child's growth and development were the result of a lack of maternal devotion. He did not take into account the paradox in his own role as expert and adviser. As Doane and Hodges pointed out, if the mothering role were natural, his recommendations would not be needed.¹⁴

Winnicott and Bowlby indicated that the mother's proper place was the home, where she was to spend her time caring for her infant. While they were well-respected figures,¹⁵ — Nancy Chodorow, for instance, described Winnicott as the 'pre-eminent British object-relations theorist',¹⁶ — there is no way of assessing the degree to which mothers followed their advice. It is, perhaps, likely that many did not, as the guidelines for mothering were unbending and did not take into account problems or variations in the family's social situation. The mother was assumed to be in a stable marriage; difficulties related to her economic situation, marital status, class and race were ignored. As historian, Jay E. Mechling found in his research, mothers did not always follow child care advice and sometimes, perversely, acted in the opposite way. Mechling found that

¹²D.W. Winnicott, 'Primary Maternal Pre-Occupation', *Collected Papers: Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis*, Tavistock, London, 1958, (1956). p. 300.

¹³D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, Tavistock, London, 1971, p. 10.

¹⁴Doane & Hodges, *From Klein to Kristeva*, p. 21.

¹⁵For instance the first edition of John Bowlby's *Child Care and the Growth of Love*, was reprinted six times and the second edition was reprinted eight times. Similarly, Donald Winnicott's output was extensive and was backed up by regular radio broadcasts.

¹⁶Nancy Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1989, p. 10.

interviews or questionnaires provided only unreliable evidence of behaviour as the mother's description of how she cared for her infant was frequently inaccurate.¹⁷

The notion that all women desired motherhood was not universally accepted. Simone De Beauvoir, writing in France in 1949, was one of the first and, perhaps, the most influential to proclaim that women's ability to give birth was the source of their subordination. In her view, motherhood signalled that women were twice doomed: biologically, during pregnancy when they lacked control over their bodies; and socially, when children restricted them to the home.¹⁸ Fourteen years later, and in the United States, Betty Friedan diagnosed what she called 'the problem that has no name'. She identified the unhappiness of middle-class, educated, suburban housewives who were pressured into their maternal role and, consequently, felt unfulfilled and discontented.¹⁹

Like de Beauvoir, the radical feminist, Shulamith Firestone argued that women's oppression lay in her child bearing and child rearing role. For Firestone, the denial of the mother's sexual desire within the social organisation of the family was the primary instrument of female control.²⁰ Clearly, an expectation that mothers were pure and chaste, limited their expression of sexuality. Furthermore, for some women the prohibition of sexual enjoyment was linked to restrictions on the joy of bonding with their children.²¹ As feminist, Iris Young pointed out, cultural pressures condemned the mother's pleasure even in breast-feeding. At the base of this, she argued, was the husband's requirement that his wife depend solely on him for sexual pleasure.²² In

¹⁷Jay E. Mechling, 'Advice to Historians on Advice to Mothers', *Journal of Social History*, number 1, Fall 1975, pp. 44-63.

¹⁸Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Translated and edited by H.M. Parshley, Landsborough, London, 1960, (1949), pp. 199-236.

¹⁹Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1972, (1963).

²⁰Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, Paladin, London, 1972, (1971).

²¹See for instance, Susan Contratto Weisskopf, 'Maternal Sexuality and Asexual Motherhood', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, volume 5, number 4, Summer 1980, pp. 766-82.

²²Iris M. Young, *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1990, p. 197. See also Rigmor Berg's assertion that the primary obstacle against recognition of the erotic pleasure women may derive from breast feeding, was the possibility that this may reduce her need for sexual gratification from her partner. R. Berg, 'Sexuality: Why do women come off second best?' in N. Grieve & A. Burns, (eds), *Australian Women New Feminist*

western society, the good mother was seen as pure and self-effacing and the bad mother as sexually active and self-interested.²³

Self-serving patriarchal interests were responsible for promulgating the notion of the asexual mother according to American feminist poet, Adrienne Rich. She urged women to become educated about their corporeal processes in order to reclaim their sexuality and form a united female culture.²⁴ Her book, *Of Woman Born* was pivotal to mothering theories because it investigated women's experience with their children and related it to their subordination in society. Writing from the mother's point-of-view, Rich criticised the ideological institution of motherhood. She argued that by commandeering the birth process, male institutions had devalued motherhood and kept women in an inferior position.²⁵ At the same time, Rich extolled the practice of mothering. Unlike de Beauvoir and Firestone, she considered that women's ability to give birth could become the main source of their power. Rich's idea to 'think through the body' was, perhaps, impractical for busy mothers. The main benefit of her work came from her compassion and understanding of the experience of mothering. Although her writing has an essentialist, biological base, she explored her own maternal ambivalence in her relationship with her three sons in a candid and enlightening manner.

Sociologist Alice Rossi also highlighted the connection of the mother to her children. In 1964, Rossi had advocated shared parenting in order to reduce the woman's involvement in mothering duties so that she would be able to work outside the home.²⁶ By 1974 she had changed her views. In her controversial article, 'Biosocial Perspective on Parenting', she argued that equality could not be achieved if the biological differences between men

Perspectives, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1990, (1986), p. 157.

²³Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1990, p. 125.

²⁴Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Virago, London, 1981, (1976). pp. 256-80.

²⁵Rich, *Of Woman Born*, p. 13, p. 127.

²⁶Alice Rossi, 'Equality Between the Sexes: An Immodest Proposal', *Dædulus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, volume 93, Winter 1964, pp. 607-52.

and women were ignored.²⁷ Although Rossi claimed to consider both the social and biological determinants of mothering, her arguments favoured the biological.²⁸ She asserted, for instance, that women were predisposed to the mothering role because of their unique ability to give birth and lactate. Using neuro-endocrinology and bio-evolutionary theories, Rossi contended that the mother-child bond was hormonally regulated and crucial for the survival of the species. In Rossi's opinion, it was the devaluation of the biological role that minimized the mother's contribution to society and allowed men's intrusive technological interference in the birthing process. She concluded that women's unique propensity to mother, as well as social conditioning from the media, schools and other institutions, meant that men could not share the parenting role. She appeared to revise this opinion in 1979 when she suggested men should have special training to assist them in fatherly duties.²⁹

Rossi was censured for her biological perspective of the mothering process.³⁰ Her articles were depressing because of their restrictions on women's choices, according to Farganis, who doubted that Rossi's belief in the mother's prenatal hormonal response to her infant could be authenticated. Farganis criticised Rossi's bio-evolutionary position because it limited men's responsibility for child care to the pecuniary. She noted that Rossi omitted to give data on the infant's connection to the father, which in some cases was equal to, or greater than, the mother's bonding experience.³¹ Rossi's belief that mothering came most easily to women was essentialist, as it ignored the variety of feelings women have toward their children and the nurturing capacity of some men. She did not allow for those women whose biological connection to their infant brought little

²⁷Alice Rossi, 'A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting', *Dædulus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, volume 106, Spring 1977, pp. 1-31.

²⁸Her biological perspective was noted by Harriet Engel Gross, 'Introduction: Considering A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, volume 4, number 4, Summer 1979, pp. 694-7.

²⁹Alice Rossi, 'Reply by Alice Rossi: Considering A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, volume 4, number 4, Summer 1979, pp. 712-7.

³⁰See 'Viewpoint: Considering A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, volume 4, number 4, Summer 1979, pp. 694-717, where Alice Rossi replied to critiques from seven women.

³¹Farganis, *Social Reconstruction of the Feminine Character*, pp. 126-33.

nurturing response, or for women who adopted babies and had no biological connection, but great love and commitment.

Dorothy Dinnerstein also disapproved of biologically-based notions of the mother as primary carer and asserted, moreover, that as motherhood was a social practice, it could be altered.³² She considered that the subordination of women was directly related to the social requirement for them to nurture their children, a problem increased by the extended period of dependence of human infants.³³ Dinnerstein's main proposition was that fathers should share equally in the parenting of their offspring. She argued that this was possible even from birth, as historical changes of technology allowed men access to formulae so that mothers were no longer tied to nursing. Co-operation between the mother and father could allow women to enter the workforce, thus gaining access to the public sphere.³⁴ According to Dinnerstein, with both mother and father providing the care, boys would not have the memory of the omnipotent mother to fear or despise and would reach adulthood without the hatred towards women and quest for power that currently prevailed. Girls would grow up with realistic attitudes to their own place in society and be able to accept independence and freedom instead of seeking domination by men.³⁵ Although Dinnerstein was speaking generally about women's subordination in society, Janet Sayers criticised her assumption that women necessarily colluded with male domination. She pointed out that Dinnerstein, as well as others in the women's movement, provided examples of women who resisted patriarchy.³⁶

Like Dinnerstein, psychoanalytic sociologist, Nancy Chodorow blamed sexual inequality in society on the division of labour which allocated the primary infant care to women at home, while men were in the workforce in more highly valued occupations.³⁷

³²Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise*, Harper Perennial, NY, 1991, (1977).

³³Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, p. 112.

³⁴Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, p. 103.

³⁵Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, p. 189.

³⁶Janet Sayers, *Sexual Contradictions: Psychology, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism*, Tavistock, London, 1986, p. 63.

³⁷Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, pp. 214-8.

While her work was based on psychoanalysis, she moved away from Freud's concentration on the libido, instincts and drives, towards 'relational aspects of psychic development'. Drawing on the separation/individuation theories of Margaret Mahler, Chodorow used 'object relations theory', which positioned the mother as 'an object' — the first and most important in the baby's life. According to Mahler, the biological birth of the child occurred on its release from the mother's body, its psychic birth occurred when it separated from its primary love object (usually the mother) and established its relationship to 'the world of reality'.³⁸ Object relations theory was characterised by its concentration on the pre-Oedipal experience where pre-verbal social relations had a critical influence on the baby's development.³⁹ It explained that humans understood their existence by their connection to others.⁴⁰

Chodorow made the point that because women were responsible for mothering, daughters and sons were treated differently and in consequence, developed differently. The daughter, who shared a 'core female identity' with her mother was encouraged to imitate her, while the son was expected to be separate and autonomous.⁴¹ During the Oedipal conflict, the daughter remained in an 'attached' relationship, which ideally suited her for adopting the caring and nurturing responsibilities in the domestic sphere. The son, on the other hand, turned away from the mother and toward the father, whom he saw as more worthy. He adopted, as a consequence, competitive traits which were suited to the powerful public sphere.⁴² In addition, much like Dinnerstein, Chodorow concluded that the early memory of their powerful, omnipotent, mother left men, who struggled for ultimate control, with feelings of resentment and fear.⁴³ Chodorow strongly recommended the necessity for equal parenting in order to bring about social change. She maintained that it would be beneficial to women and girls as it would allow them

³⁸Margaret S. Mahler, Fred Pine & Anni Bergman, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant*, Basic Books, NY, 1975, p. 3.

³⁹Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, pp. 40-54.

⁴⁰Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p. 67.

⁴¹Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p. 151.

⁴²Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, pp. 8-10, p. 39.

⁴³Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, p. 6.

subjectivity and autonomy. Additionally, the 'individualism and competitiveness' of boys would be reduced and their 'commitment to the group' increased.⁴⁴

Chodorow's work was taken up by the women's movement as the most competently theorised new writing on mothering.⁴⁵ She was not without her detractors, however, and was censured for her presumption that families were healthy, white, western and middle-class, with a strong, rational father at the head.⁴⁶ In separate accounts, Pauline Bart and Judith Lorber criticised Chodorow for ignoring sociological research on the mother's practical experience by relying on clinical data in her analysis. They claimed that she overlooked variations in the mother's situation, for instance, the number of children in the family, the birth order of the sons and daughters and the mother's and the child's health.⁴⁷ Rossi pointed out that Chodorow's concentration on the mother's role in the pre-Oedipal period omitted life changes, particularly hormonal influences in the adolescent years which could have far greater effect on the adult's mental health.⁴⁸ Doane and Hodges warned that Chodorow perpetuated the myth of 'insatiable children and selfless mothers' which positioned the women's role as primarily maternal.⁴⁹ Historian, Carolyn Steedman also saw this as a problem. Growing up in a working-class household in the 1950s, Steedman revealed that her mother's economic problems and the absence of a husband led her to become resentful and exasperated with motherhood. She did not fit Chodorow's traditional nurturing role model.⁵⁰ Perhaps Chodorow's theories applied most appropriately to white, middle-class nuclear families where responsible

⁴⁴Chodorow, 'Reply: On *The Reproduction of Mothering*', p. 512.

⁴⁵Lynne Segal, *Is the Future Female?: Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism*, Virago, London, 1994, (1987), p. 136.

⁴⁶Janneke van Mens-Verhulst, 'Reinventing the Mother-Daughter Relationship', *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, volume 49, number 4, Fall 1995, pp. 526-39.

⁴⁷Pauline Bart, 'Review of Chodorow's *Reproduction of Mothering*', in J. Trebilcot, (ed.), *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory*, Rowman & Allanheld, NJ, 1983, pp. 147-52 and Judith Lorber, 'On *The Reproduction of Mothering: A Methodological Debate*', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, volume 6, number 3, Spring 1981, p. 483.

⁴⁸Alice Rossi, 'On *The Reproduction of Mothering: A Methodological Debate*', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, volume 6, number 3, Spring 1981, p. 496, n. 34.

⁴⁹Doane & Hodges, *From Klein to Kristeva*, p. 41, p. 51.

⁵⁰Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, Virago, London, 1986, p. 86.

husbands were in the workforce and the wives remained dependent and nurturing within the home.

Feminists in the 1970s, like Rich, Dinnerstein and Chodorow, introduced mothering theories which challenged, as Chodorow commented, 'nearly exclusive Freudian focus on the father and Oedipus complex'.⁵¹ Their revelations linked women's subordination in society to the gendered division of labour which allocated the mother total responsibility for child care and restricted her to the domestic sphere. As a result of their writing, many women questioned the socialisation of motherhood as 'natural and inevitable' and decided that women's ultimate fulfilment in life should not necessarily be maternity.⁵²

Perhaps as a reaction to the anti-motherhood position, philosopher, Sara Ruddick, in the 1980s, offered a new conception of the mothering experience.⁵³ She suggested that the mother's nurturing abilities led to a kind of 'maternal thinking', which was constructed out of 'reflection, judgment, and emotion' about their maternal role.⁵⁴ The mother's main task was to ensure that the child was protected and nurtured and grew up to be socially acceptable. The challenge to provide for her child's welfare and growth to an acceptable citizen in society, according to Ruddick, led to a particular maternal, co-operative way of thinking which was antithetical to the individualistic, competitive and aggressive ways of patriarchal social behaviour.

The romantic view of motherhood espoused by Ruddick and others restricted women to the role of 'child facilitator' according to psychoanalyst, Jessica Benjamin. The mother's individuality and rights were not recognised and she came to feel inferior and lacking in self-confidence.⁵⁵ Her authority was further undermined by the prevailing fantasy of the

⁵¹Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, p. 6

⁵²See for instance, Nancy Chodorow and Susan Contratto, 'The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother', in B. Thorne and M. Yalom (eds), *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions*, Longman, NY, 1982, p. 54.

⁵³Sara Ruddick, 'Maternal Thinking', in *Rethinking the Family*, pp. 76-94.

⁵⁴Ruddick, 'Maternal Thinking', p. 77.

⁵⁵Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*, Pantheon, NY, 1988, p. 23, p. 208, p. 215.

'perfect mother'. Chodorow and Contratto pointed out that any failure to live up to perfection, caused women to feel guilty or be denounced as bad mothers.⁵⁶ The assumption that the mother was primarily responsible for the care of the child was a concern as well of Anne Woollett and Ann Phoenix, as it left the mother open to blame for any problems in development.⁵⁷

One solution, which was suggested by many women, was for the fathers to share parenting duties. This proposal was, however, criticised on the grounds that it would allow men to infiltrate the domestic sphere and undermine women's major area of power. Young, for example, considered that motherhood was a source of authority and autonomy for women.⁵⁸ Additionally, in the contemporary workforce, the higher male pay rates made the father's contribution financially impractical for many families. In any case, however equitable the idea of shared parenting, child care remained the primary responsibility of the mother.⁵⁹

The family unit continued to be the foundation of society, and the contribution of the mother in upholding cultural values and state ideologies was recognised as especially important.⁶⁰ Sociologist, Jessie Bernard pointed out that the function of the institution of motherhood was to socialise girls to be mothers. Images of the mother were glorified in the culture, particularly in religion and art. The media portrayed motherhood as inevitable and worthy, while childlessness was seen as deprivation. As well, women were subjected to governmental pressure motivated by the economic necessities of population growth and the need for individuals for the labour market and the military.

⁵⁶Chodorow & Contratto, 'The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother', p. 55.

⁵⁷Anne Woollett & Ann Phoenix, 'Afterword: Issues Related to Motherhood', in A. Phoenix, A. Woollett & E. Lloyd, (eds), *Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies*, Sage, London, 1991, pp. 216-31.

⁵⁸Iris M. Young, 'Is Male Gender Identity the Cause of Male Domination?' in J. Trebilcot, (ed.), *Mothering Essays in Feminist Theory*, Rowman & Allenheld, US, 1984, pp. 129-46.

⁵⁹Anne Phoenix, Ann Woollett & Eva Lloyd, (eds), *Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies*, Sage, London, 1991, p. 4 and Kathryn C. Backett, *Mothers and Fathers: A Study of the Development and Negotiation of Parental Behaviour*, Macmillan, London, 1982, p. 194.

⁶⁰Ann Phoenix & Anne Woollett, 'Motherhood: Social Construction, Politics and Psychology', in A. Phoenix, A. Woollett & E. Lloyd, (eds), *Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies*, Sage, London, 1991, pp. 13-27.

Motherhood was legitimated in a political sense by subsidies and pensions and controlled by the laws relating to contraception, abortion and infanticide.⁶¹

Noting the effectiveness of this social pressure, Bernard asked why women were eager to mother when the task was so thankless. She pointed out that if mothers were home-bound, they were thought to 'smother-love' their children, while if they had paid work, they were accused of neglect and selfishness. Bernard identified an enigma in the culture where mothers were blamed for society's problems yet women continued to 'want at least one or two children'.⁶² Woollett and Phoenix also turned their attention to the problems of mothering. They argued that child care manuals and expert advice were unhelpful to women as they were most often based on white middle-class families which were seen as the 'norm'. Special difficulties were pathologised and essentialist accounts often neglected teenaged, older, lone and working mothers and issues of race, class and economy.⁶³ The development of the child was most often the primary focus and the mother's day-to-day experience of child rearing was ignored.⁶⁴

While sociologists identified the pressures placed on mothers in the home, Ruddick expanded her 'maternal thinking' theory to point to a way in which they could function in the public sphere. She promoted the idea of an 'ethic of care', where mothers could work for world conciliation and the preservation of the life of all children.⁶⁵ For Ruddick mothering was a 'work or practice', and she attempted to separate it from the act of giving birth. This, she determined, would break the cycle of envy of women's creativity, release them from the suffering they encountered as potential mothers, and allow them to relinquish care of the child to others; perhaps the father or adoptive parents. Her

⁶¹Jessie Bernard, *The Future of Motherhood*, Dial, NY, 1974, pp. 22-7 and p. 371, n. 32.

⁶²Bernard, *The Future of Motherhood*, pp. 7-15, p. 21.

⁶³Ann Phoenix & Anne Woollett 'Motherhood: Social Construction, Politics and Psychology', in A. Phoenix, A. Woollett & E. Lloyd, (eds), *Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies*, Sage, London, 1991, p. 21, p. 23.

⁶⁴Anne-Marie Ambert was also concerned that theoretical findings were most often from the child's point-of-view and ignored the mother's interest. Her book pointed out that most theories did not take into account experiences of mothering which could include ill-health of the mother, the effect of the child's emotional or health problems. A. Ambert, *The Effect of Children on Parents*, Haworth, NY, 1992.

⁶⁵Ruddick, 'Maternal Thinking', pp. 76-94.

radical concept rejected the idea of an instinctive mother love and encouraged women to make the choice of whether to refuse or to undertake pregnancy and child care. Enabling a women to control her own pregnancies, according to Ruddick, would develop a maternal commitment to cherish life and 'undertake a work of peace'.⁶⁶

The notion of women's role in the peace-making process was taken up and aligned with the ecofeminism movement's concern with the health of the planet. Ecofeminists tended to romanticize natural birth and child care, using it as a metaphor for nurturing of the earth. In their vision of the 'earth mother', women were close to nature and suited to nurture the earth. While these generalisations may have had the effect of bringing women together, for example, the remarkable group at Greenham Common,⁶⁷ some women saw the problem of the position. Lynn Stearney commented that it ignored the ideological and social construction of motherhood while stressing that women were inevitably tied to their capacity to reproduce.⁶⁸ The mother's work for the environment was also investigated by feminist peace researcher, Linda Forcey. Surveying one hundred and twenty mothers of sons, Forcey found that their attitudes towards peace were more ambivalent and complex than Ruddick and others had indicated. Forcey concluded that peace-making mothers should be praised without expecting the same of all women.⁶⁹

Theories of Motherhood and Film

Although theoretical perceptions and interpretations of motherhood frequently are conflicting, they can be used to elucidate the diversities of the representations of the mother in cinema. The film-mother reflects the experience of the mothering process and helps to construct ideas of what is 'normal' maternal behaviour. In order to understand

⁶⁶Sara Ruddick, 'Thinking Mothers/Conceiving Birth' in D. Bassin, M. Honey, & M.M. Kaplan, (eds), *Representations of Motherhood*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1994, p. 44.

⁶⁷See the account by Segal, *Is the Future Female?*, pp. 163-5.

⁶⁸Lynn M. Stearney, 'Feminism, Ecofeminism, and the Maternal Archetype: Motherhood as a Feminine Universal', *Communication Quarterly*, volume 42, number 2, Spring 1994, p. 146.

⁶⁹Linda Rennie Forcey, 'Feminist Perspectives on Mothering and Peace', in E. N. Glenn, G. Chang & L. R. Forcey, (eds), *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency*, Routledge, NY, 1994, pp. 355-75.

the representations of the maternal role more completely, it will be useful to survey the literature concerned with motherhood on the screen. This will enable an evaluation of the way in which the mother's role was 'normalised' in film narratives, as well as ascertaining what patterns if any were established and if this had changed over the decades.

The essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, written in 1973 by Laura Mulvey,⁷⁰ had a profound effect on theories of representation and was particularly relevant to women. Mulvey drew attention to the way filmmakers positioned their actors and the way the audience watched films. Using psychoanalytic concepts of fetishism, voyeurism, identification, castration and scopophilia,⁷¹ she argued that films served patriarchy by placing the male as the active subject and the woman as a passive — 'to be looked at' — object. With editing, change of distance, camera position and focus, the filmmaker could control what the spectator looked at in a way that theatre and other spectacle could not. Mulvey's 'theory of the gaze' was important in drawing attention to the male influence on female representation. Her insight, which assumed that the spectator was a male, who voyeuristically watched the seductive, exhibitionist, female body in the film, was taken up in feminist film criticism during the 1970s. Women began making their own films to provide an alternative to the male-dominated feature film industry. Many investigated the mother-daughter relationship, which was a crucial component of women's concern at the time.⁷² In this way, Mulvey's work was important to issues of motherhood, although her concentration on the male spectator did not adequately explain women's enjoyment of film.

E. Ann Kaplan, in her book, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, drew on Mulvey's work to investigate the objectivisation of the mother in film.⁷³ She found that:

⁷⁰Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1989, pp. 14-26.

⁷¹Mulvey defined scopophilia as 'pleasure in looking at another person as an erotic object', Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, p. 25.

⁷²For instance, Laura Mulvey & Peter Wollen's *Riddles of the Sphinx*, (1976), Joyce Chopra's *Joyce at 34*, (1973) and Michelle Citron's *Daughter-Rite*, (1978).

⁷³E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, Routledge, London, 1993, (1983).

The domination of women by the male gaze is part of patriarchal strategy to contain the threat that the mother embodies, and to control the positive and negative impulses that memory traces of being mothered have left on the male unconscious.⁷⁴

It was clear that Kaplan placed great significance on the unconscious of male filmmakers and their reaction to their own pre-Oedipal mothering. Her belief that it was the foundation for the cinematic point-of-view, in a way, elevated the mother to a position of fundamental, though admittedly masked, importance in the medium. The mother may have had a metaphoric presence, although the audience was deprived of her actual figure, for as Kaplan pointed out, films rarely focused on the mother's experience, but concentrated instead on her children or partner.⁷⁵

The representation of the mother as a person who reacts, rather than one who acts, was coterminous with the idea of the male gaze. The film mother was objectified by the way in which men looked at her and in the way she responded to other characters. By these means, her own desires and needs could be ignored without explicitly drawing attention to the inequity of her situation. To facilitate the consistent and controlled representation still further, Kaplan noted the use of archetypal images, familiar in the mythology and literature of western culture. She summed these up into four distinct types:

The Good Mother who is marginal to the narrative.
 The Bad Mother who is punished.
 The 'Heroic Mother' who sacrifices her own life for her family.
 The 'Silly, Weak or Vain Mother' whose contribution is trivialised.⁷⁶

These stereotypical representations showed a narrow maternal lifestyle and limited, at least for the spectator-mother, ways of understanding her relationship with her children and partner. In her research of Hollywood films between 1910 and 1940, Kaplan reiterated that the representation of the mother was restricted to traditional and rigid

⁷⁴Kaplan, *Women and Film*, p. 205.

⁷⁵E. Ann Kaplan, 'The Case of the Missing Mother: Maternal Issues in Vidor's *Stella Dallas*', in P. Erens, (ed.), *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1990a, p. 127.

⁷⁶Kaplan, 'The Case of the Missing Mother', p. 128.

notions of love and sacrifice, which omitted the ambivalences and contradictions inherent in the role.⁷⁷

In her 1992 book, *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama*,⁷⁸ Kaplan proposed that film, as a popular spectacle, had the power to transform the audience's perception and desire. She related the actual experience of watching a film to the spectator's own experience of motherhood. The theatre space and the images on the giant screen were appropriate metaphors for the omnipotent larger-than-life mother.⁷⁹ For Kaplan, watching the film in the theatrical space allowed a sense of fusion with the maternal body, an internal desire which was retained from the early 'mirror phase'. This traumatic moment in life, described by Lacan, occurred when the infant first discovered, by comprehending its own image in the mirror, that it was a separate being from its mother. Lacan inferred that there was a subconscious, inevitable, and everlasting desire to return to the comfort and safety of the bosom of the mother.⁸⁰ Kaplan's model offered an explanation for the continued popularity and influence of cinema-going on the audience.

Using literature and an historical and psychoanalytic framework, Kaplan argued that the foundation for the representation of mothers in early twentieth-century film was nineteenth-century white, middle-class American melodramatic fiction. In her examination of the ideology that underpinned the representation of the mother in films, she identified two important areas of early influence. She showed firstly, that the

⁷⁷E. A. Kaplan, 'Mothering, Feminism and Representation: The Maternal in Melodrama and the Woman's Film 1910-40', in C. Gledhill, (ed.), *Home Is Where The Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, BFI, London, 1987, pp. 113-37.

⁷⁸E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama*, Routledge, London, 1992.

⁷⁹Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation*, p. 28. See also Philip Dacey's poem about the cinema, quoted by Lucy Fischer, *Cinamaternity: Film, Motherhood, Genre*. Princeton University Press, NJ, 1996, p. 3:

*Something large enough
to be our mother
embraces us
with light, shadow and sound,
making us one.*

⁸⁰Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation*, pp. 30-1.

intervention by the church into child rearing perpetuated the tradition of 'the mother as angel'. Secondly, she proposed that the popularity of Darwinian theories of evolution upheld biological arguments for keeping the mother as the primary child carer within the home. Interestingly, Kaplan gave changes to the mother figure in films a historical perspective. She noted that in the period before the 1970s, when compliant women made few demands, the mother was represented as a relatively pleasant and uncomplicated character. After this time, when the women's movement was gaining strength, there was a shift in the mother's role in films. According to Kaplan this was a result of societal anxiety about women's growing visibility and dissatisfaction.⁸¹

While acknowledging that from the 1970s, the cinematic mother was portrayed with more complexity, Kaplan concluded that recent American films avoided representations which combined motherhood with work and sexuality in any meaningful way.⁸² Women commonly had to deal with these issues in real life and their omission from films was salient. For Kaplan, the reluctance to confront these aspects of the mother's experience was due to patriarchal concern about women's role in society. Changes brought about by the post-war influx of women into the workforce, the sexual liberation movement and the availability of new reproductive technologies, paved the way for the creation of different non-nuclear families and individual sexual freedom. Child birth and child care within heterosexual marriage were no longer necessarily women's inevitable goal and this, according to Kaplan, challenged the dominant establishment and placed financial pressure on the state. Proposing that popular images revealed unconscious anxieties and desires, she noted the current sentimental images of the nuclear family and non-working wife at home with her contented children. Additionally, the trend in films to locate the foetus or the baby as the most central aspect of the family was a concern for women, as it had the effect of reducing the mother to the disturbing position of 'biological receptacle'.⁸³ Kaplan's work on motherhood has been insightful in revealing the complex

⁸¹Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation*, pp. 179-81.

⁸²E. Ann Kaplan, 'Sex, Work and Motherhood: The Impossible Triangle', *The Journal of Sex Research*, volume 27, number 3, August 1990b, pp. 409-25.

⁸³Kaplan, 'Sex, Work and Motherhood', pp. 409-25 and *Motherhood and Representation*, p. 205, where

way in which ideological pressures worked in film representations to 'control female sexuality and reposition the nuclear family with the woman safely within it'.

Another illuminating examination of motherhood and films came from American scholar, Lucy Fischer, who used film genres as an organising device to understand representations of motherhood.⁸⁴ In the genre of 'trick' films, men's desire to emulate female creativity was connected to the magician's miraculous production of live rabbits, scarves, balls and other objects familiar to prestidigitators everywhere. *Rosemary's Baby*, a film in the horror genre, was analysed to show how childbirth could be related to anxieties about the threat of the unknown. In thrillers, such as *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle*, Fischer explored the prevailing concern about leaving infants in child care. The mother's relationship to her son was investigated in *White Heat*, a film from the crime genre, and several comedy films provided a source of information about male attempts at mothering.

Although Australian feature film production has not been extensive enough to allow research based solely on genre, Fischer's work is valuable in pointing out how metaphor and symbolism can provide a key to enter into the meaning of films. For instance, taking the example of D.W. Griffith's *Way Down East* (1920), Fischer showed how silent melodrama used the maternal body in a metaphorical way to examine the public attitude to illegitimate births. The heroine of the film, the unmarried Anna, has a baby and is abandoned by the scoundrel who had promised to marry her. When her little son dies, she is left alone. Later, as she works on a farm, she finds an honourable man who becomes her true love. A cinematic device brings them together. Anna, lost in a snowstorm and near death, floats on ice, perilously close to the top of a waterfall. She is rescued just in time by the suitor and presumably lives happily ever after.

she cited *Look Who's Talking* (1990), as an example of the foetus taking over from the mother as subject.

⁸⁴Fischer, *Cinamaternity*.

The use of metaphor for the maternal body, according to Fischer, can be traced throughout the film. Anna's promiscuity could be forgiven by the audience, even allowing for repressive attitudes to sexuality of the time, although her pregnancy out of wedlock, so physically visible, was inexcusable. As Fischer asserted, Anna's motherhood was 'written' on her body and could not be overlooked. The death of her son 'erased' her mistake, enabling her to start life afresh and find happiness in a suitable marriage. Drawing attention to the constant images of water in the film, Fischer reminded us of the long-term association of the element with female sexuality. The heroine drifted helplessly on a lump of ice as it floated in the river, her predicament metaphorically linking her to punishment for 'the sin of having broken maternal waters'.⁸⁵ The waterfall stood for her 'fall' into pregnancy and the breaking ice signified the hymen breaking during her seduction. Anna, reliving her earlier defloration, was rescued by a 'proper' partner. The very act of her rescue was an act of parturition which Fischer further aligned to the restoration of the original silent film which had been edited and cut and stored in a vault, before coming to life — or being reborn — in its 'legitimate' condition in 1984.⁸⁶

Sociologist and cultural theorist, Andrea Walsh concentrated on the genre of women's films for her research.⁸⁷ Drawing on the concept of hegemony developed by Antonio Gramsci and expanded by Raymond Williams, she showed how dominant groups attempted to use films to maintain their beliefs. At the same time, she argued against the Frankfurt school of critical theorists who believed that cinema had unrestricted power to influence the audience. According to Walsh, this view implied that women, because they were passive objects in films, were rendered powerless and without the means to resist state ideologies or private vested interests. She recognised the importance of the hegemonic effect, although she insisted that the dominant social values of the films could be negotiated or resisted. Consequently, the power of the film was mediated in a

⁸⁵Fischer, *Cinamaternity*, p. 64.

⁸⁶Fischer, *Cinamaternity*, p. 70.

⁸⁷Andrea S. Walsh, *Women's Film and Female Experience: 1940-1950*, Praeger, NY, 1984.

way which was 'dynamic, historically specific, and constituted through the ongoing power relations and struggles of class, race, age, and sex'.⁸⁸ It was unlikely, anyway, according to Walsh, that films could produce a united and totalitarian front because of the multi-layered institutional nature of film production. Filmmakers, creative industry workers, heads of studio, marketing agents and the state, were frequently engaged in conflict. Even if they managed to produce a 'preferred reading',⁸⁹ of a particular film, Walsh argued that it was possible for the spectator to accept, reject or interpret it in any way.

Walsh drew attention to the importance of historical changes in society in the way films were evaluated and interpreted. Targeting the plot, characters and structure of the narrative in American women's films of the 1940s, she found that the films tended to reflect the mother's experience at that time. Many mothers had gained authority from their work during the War and the domesticated mother of the pre-war years was replaced in post-war films by women with power in the community. Some films focused on the diverse mothering of working class and immigrant women. Others showed changes in the mother/daughter relationship and in films where the mother was the traditional, nurturing type, her daughter did not necessarily imitate her lifestyle, and had her own ambitions and ideas of self expression. Walsh noted ambivalences in the mothering role in films and a tendency to feminist influence, where although women remained as nurturers, they were often powerful, courageous and strong.

The Academy Award winner and box-office success, *Mildred Pierce* (1945), Walsh suggested, was different from other maternal dramas. Directed by Michael Curtiz, it appeared at first to indicate a conservative backlash against motherhood, as the mother was suffocating and alienated from her daughter. Even in this 'monstrous mother', however, Walsh found an ambivalence in which was located a certain strength and

⁸⁸Walsh, *Women's Film and Female Experience*, p. 15.

⁸⁹For a detailed explanation of 'preferred reading', that is, the prevailing ideology or the 'official line', see Stuart Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding', in S. Hall, et al., (eds), *Culture, Media, Language*, Hutchinson, London, 1987, (1980), pp. 128-38.

resilience. The film has been recognised as complicated and inconsistent.⁹⁰ Its portrayal of a successful business woman who failed as a mother, may have been designed to serve patriarchal ambitions to get women out of the workforce at the end of the War. On the other hand, women might have related to Mildred's ambivalent feelings about her daughter in an echo of their own confusion about maternal duties. Walsh's importance in understanding the mother's place in cinema, besides her recognition of the change in the role, was in her reiteration of the several possible ways of interpreting the narrative. She attempted to construct a framework for understanding the film rather than finding fault with its representations. Her own interpretations of the narratives tended to alternate between women's contemporary experience and the influence on them of vested patriarchal interests.

Suzanna Danuta Walters, a communications and cultural theorist, has been more concerned to expose and criticise the meanings built in to cinematic representations of the mother.⁹¹ For Walters, the sacrificing, vengeful or malevolent mothers she perceived on screen bore no resemblance to her own experience. Walters was critical of the practice of highlighting conflict between mother and daughter and holding the mother to blame. She argued that assuming the mother was responsible for her child's problems placed the daughter into the role of a victim, without control of her life. For Walters, conceiving the relationship as mutually beneficial was realistic, and preferable to the Freudian ideas of conflict which were currently fashionable in film narratives.⁹² Her research was based on the belief that films were part of society's methods of producing a commonsense understanding of mothering.⁹³ Although her relationship with her mother may not be representative of all families, Walters' work proved valuable in challenging the partial, often unfair and damaging view of mothers in some film narratives.

⁹⁰Apart from Walsh's discussion on *Mildred Pierce*, see Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, Penguin, NY, 1975, pp. 179-81. Additionally, Fischer referred to the many critiques of this film 'a virtual cottage industry', Fischer, *Cinamaternity*, pp. 12-14.

⁹¹Suzanna Danuta Walters, *Lives Together/Worlds Apart: Mothers and Daughters in Popular Culture*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992.

⁹²Walters, *Lives Together*, p. 11.

⁹³Walters, *Lives Together*, p. 17.

Conclusion

Various discourses on motherhood have provided a framework to assist in deconstructing the maternal images in films. The psychoanalytic writings of Freud and Klein explained the mother as the child's primary love object, the source of its nourishment and life. The strength of the connection of mother to child in film narratives can be evaluated in terms of their work. Their contention that the mother treated her son and daughter differently can be used to understand these aspects of the mother's relationship with her children on screen. The extent to which the mother cared for and devoted her life to her children, can be compared with expert advice which has commonly been dispersed through child care manuals. The writings of Bowlby and Winnicott are pre-eminent in this regard.

Sociologists and behavioural scientists, such as Dinnerstein, Chodorow, Phoenix and Woollett have considered the actual experience of mothering. Challenging the notion that women must always be the primary carers, they recommended instituting a system of shared parenting. They argued that sole responsibility for the child was unfair, and had the wider and potentially more important repercussion of keeping women in a subordinate position in society. The day to day behaviour of mother and child in films can be scrutinised with their research in mind. Additionally, the biological viewpoint from sociologists such as Rossi, which implied an inherent, instinctual connection of mother and child can be determined and evaluated in some films.

Societal pressure to mother has been criticised by the feminists, de Beauvoir, Friedan and Firestone, whose work is helpful in discerning representations of taken-for-granted notions of maternal bliss. Other feminists, such as Young, Flax and Rich promoted interest in the eulogising portrayals of motherhood which placed the mother on a pedestal as a chaste, virtuous woman. For them, the purpose of denying women's sexuality was clearly to benefit men. These presumptions, of the patriarchal influence on

popular culture pave the way for identifying ideological vested interest in film. They encourage the important questions: who is speaking and whose interest does the representation serve?

Some research had a direct and specific application to film and motherhood. Mulvey's perceptions served to alert us to the power of a gaze, which emanates from a male point-of-view and tends to disregard the mother's subjectivity. Additionally, it is important to explore Kaplan's findings on stereotypical representations of the mother and the omission of women's actual experience of work, sex and motherhood in films. The metaphorical analyses of Fischer can be instructive in making sense of a deeper meaning in the films to decipher the cinematic images of the maternal role. She revealed the situation where although the mother may not be the focus or the most active character in the film, her place can be found in metaphors. Walsh has explained how the text of films may be deconstructed in order to negotiate or resist the preferred reading. Finally, the prevalence of mother-blaming has been exposed by Walters as a damaging and inequitable representation which was frequently motivated by the filmmaker's homage to prevailing fashion.

These psychoanalytical, sociological and feminist theories on motherhood offer valuable insights into the representation of the mother in films. Film theories add a further dimension, although these have been restricted to a narrow frame of reference and primarily have taken into account well-known productions of classic Hollywood cinema.⁹⁴ Very little work has been done specifically on motherhood and cinema and even less on Australian feature films. The chapters that follow attempt to redress that omission.

⁹⁴An exception can be found in Lucy Fischer's analysis of Gillian Armstrong's Australian feature, *Hightide*, Fischer, *Cinamaternity*, p. 221.

chapter 3

good mother, bad mother and the changing boundaries

The mothering of a child is not something that can be arranged by rota; it is a live human relationship which alters the characters of both partners.¹

Traditionally, the good mother has been associated with self-sacrifice. An extract from a Catholic education course on marriage in 1958 illustrates the point:

To successfully fulfil her vocation of motherhood, the woman should possess great qualities of heart. Her entire life should be devoted to procuring happiness for those around her...It is natural for her to be devoted.²

This view of motherhood assigns women to a subservient position. It does not take into account the changing structure of the family, and instead, creates an environment which reinforces the belief that the mother's place is within the home, and primarily concerned with raising the children.

The restrictive maternal role is endorsed in part by images in films which have the capacity to both reflect and influence ways of thinking. This chapter considers the representation of the mother in Australian feature films to decipher the way in which the narrative characterises good and bad maternal behaviour. The introductory chapter of this research contained a broad overview of historical events which were significant for the maternal role. The present chapter, in its first section, deals in more detail with those aspects which relate directly to expectations of good mothering. The second section of the chapter examines the way the mother is depicted in films. The designation of her as either a good or bad mother can be determined by her demeanour, the attitude of others towards her and, perhaps, above all, by her treatment in the narrative in terms of penalties or benefits reaped by her behaviour. As the chapter attempts to evaluate the changing

¹John Bowlby, *Child Care and the Growth of Love*, Second Edition, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1974, (1953), p.77.

²From 'The Marriage Education Course', 1958, Oblate Catholic Centre, New South Wales, quoted by Betsy Wearing, *Gender: The Pain and Pleasure of Difference*, Longman, Melbourne, 1996, pp. 118-9.

boundaries of the maternal role, it is crucial to understand the portrayal of the mother in films in relation to the milestones in social history which are revealed in part one.

Good Mothering in Australia

At the beginning of the twentieth century, twelve babies died out of every one hundred births.³ As well, women were having fewer children and the birthrate had fallen from 42.6 per thousand in the mid-nineteenth century to 27 per thousand in 1900.⁴ Concern for Australia's falling population sparked a Royal Commission in 1903. The state's interest in women's maternal role, became, as Sol Encel declared: 'the single most important factor bearing upon the position of women in a modern industrial society.'⁵ Much of the official blame for infant mortality, according to Claudia Knapman in her research on early childhood, was attributed to maternal ignorance of child health, and in particular, poor hygiene practices.⁶ The dictum 'Where there's dirt there's danger' became entrenched in society.⁷ Mothering practices were spotlighted and good mothers came to be seen as agents of cleanliness.

Another aspect of the good mother's role, according to state policies, was her duty as an Australian citizen. Responsible for producing law-abiding adults in society, she was also expected to make her sons available to fight in wars. The onset of the First World War in 1914 and the call for Australian men to enlist, highlighted the contradiction in the mothering role. On the one hand, she was to devote her life to her children's welfare, and on the other, she was to encourage her sons to join up and risk their lives. The maternal predicament of whether a good mother upholds her duty to the state, or protects her child above all else, must also be confronted by women with lawbreaking progeny. The situation was a common focus of film narratives.

³Claudia Knapman, 'Reconstructing Mothering: Feminism and the Early Childhood Centre', *Australian Feminist Studies*, number 18, Summer 1993, p. 113.

⁴Sol Encel, Norman MacKenzie & Margaret Tebbutt, *Women and Society: An Australian Study*, Malaby, London, 1975, p. 19.

⁵Encel et al., *Women and Society*, p. 20.

⁶Knapman, 'Reconstructing Mothering', p. 113.

⁷Knapman, 'Reconstructing Mothering', p. 113, quoting an undated Royal Far West Children's Health Scheme article 'The wise woman'.

Apart from specific conflicts between her citizenship and her family which arose from time to time, the mother's role after the First World War was scarcely different from the period beforehand.⁸ Unceasingly expected to sacrifice their own desires for the good of the family, most women accepted that marriage and children meant a life of domesticity. Baby Health Centres were opened in the rapidly expanding suburbs in the 1920s, and trained nurses taught mothers how to provide for the physical health of their children.⁹ Kerreen Reiger noted that although there had been demands for women to be 'spotless housewives and perfect mothers' for many years, the new 'scientific mothering' urged the management of children with 'regularity, cleanliness and efficiency'.¹⁰ Women read popular magazines such as *Everylady's Journal*. Filled with articles on housekeeping hints, these magazines offered advice about child-rearing and the mothering process. Even so, Reiger indicated that there was a certain freedom in the mother's life during the 1920s, because there was less concern about separate roles for men and women. Reiger reported, for example, that women laboured beside their men on the family farms without compromising ideas of their own femininity.¹¹

The boundaries for good mothering shifted in the 1930s, as a consequence of the hardships brought by the Depression. By law, women were paid less than men and were often able to get work, albeit in menial positions. They were pilloried, however, for taking men's jobs.¹² Economic deprivation had resulted in a further fall of the birth rate¹³ and the desire to keep women out of the workforce and encourage them to have more children, served to reinforce the division in the male and female role. Many mothers must have found it a confusing and distressing period. While officially and publicly they were to

⁸Women in other countries experienced changes because they were closer to the conflict and were living in more industrialised societies than Australia according to Encel et al., *Women and Society*, p. 20.

⁹Knapman, 'Reconstructing Mothering', p. 114.

¹⁰Kerreen Reiger, 'Women's labour redefined: Child-bearing and rearing advice in Australia, 1880-1930s', in M. Bevege, M. James, C. Shute, (eds), *Worth Her Salt: Women at Work in Australia*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1982, pp. 79-82.

¹¹Kerreen Reiger, *Family Economy*, McPhee Gribble, Ringwood, Victoria, 1991, p. 30.

¹²Marian Aveling & Joy Damousi, *Stepping Out of History: Documents of Women at Work in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1991, p. 110.

¹³The birth rate fell to 16.6 per thousand during the Depression. Encel et al., *Women and Society*, p. 19.

retain their femininity and dependence within the home, their desire, in a decade of financial instability, was to ensure that the family was clothed and had sufficient to eat.¹⁴

After the Second World War, although the move to the suburbs and improvement to the economy brought changes to the family, the requirement for the good mother to be devoted to the children intensified. The advice of child-rearing experts at the time promoted the idea that any problems of the child were a consequence of bad mothering. According to the 'theory of mother-blame', the mother must be constantly with her children, ready to answer their every need. John Bowlby, an influential psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, advised the mother against going out to work so that her baby could experience 'a warm, intimate, and *continuous* relationship with his mother...in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment'.¹⁵ His contemporary, the psychoanalyst and paediatrician, D.W. Winnicott, who advocated 'good enough mothering' was, perhaps, not as inflexible as Bowlby. His insistence that the mother must always put the child's interests first, however, set parameters that were restrictive and in many ways impossible to achieve.¹⁶

The mother's situation altered considerably from the 1970s, when large numbers of women found paid employment. Sol Encel determined that 42% of the increase in the labour force at the time was composed of married women.¹⁷ Additionally, sociologist and commentator, Eva Cox, reported that by the middle of 1977, almost half of the mothers of children under twelve years old were working outside the home.¹⁸ Despite the change in lifestyle which foreshadowed an identity distinct from motherhood, women retained primary responsibility for their children. Lyn Richards, in her research on the social pressure on parenting in Australia in the late 1970s, commented that men were rarely involved directly in the child rearing process.¹⁹ The good mother was expected to be

¹⁴For a moving account of the humiliation that women felt trying to cope with food rationing, see Kay Daniels & Mary Murnane, *Australia's Women: A Documentary History*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, Queensland, 1989, p. 301.

¹⁵Bowlby, *Child Care and the Growth of Love*, p.13. [my italics].

¹⁶D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, Tavistock, London, 1971, p. 10, from a paper written in 1951.

¹⁷Encel et al., *Women and Society*, p. 75.

¹⁸Eva Cox, 'Beware the Call of Nature', *Social Alternatives*, volume 1, number 3, 1978, p. 69.

¹⁹Lyn Richards, *Having Families: Marriage, Parenthood and Social Pressure in Australia*, Penguin,

devoted to her children as well as maintaining a career. The difficulties that women faced found sympathy with feminists in the growing women's movement.

Idealised versions of good mothering persisted despite women's responsibilities in the workplace and increased self-confidence and financial independence. In a case study of one hundred and fifty Sydney suburban mothers in the 1980s, Betsy Wearing found that the good mother was defined as someone who was always accessible to her children, and who cared calmly and without anger for their physical and emotional state.²⁰ When Jan Harper and Lyn Richards asked sixty young Australian couples to outline the qualities of good mothers, they described women who were devoted to their children. As well, they 'were always there, passive, patient, unselfish, good listeners'.²¹ Stephanie Brown, Rhonda Small and Judith Lumley concluded from their research project involving Australian families in the 1990s, that a good mother was held to be 'caring, loving, patient, calm, relaxed, one who listens and talks to her children'.²² The good mother that these respondents discussed was the time-honoured, unselfish individual who neglected her own needs.

The often-espoused notion that good mothers are self-sacrificing, devoted and passive is central to the prevailing ideology on maternal behaviour. In the last decades of the twentieth century, when the maternal role has changed so much, its endorsement by the mothers themselves is, perhaps, surprising. According to recent research by Susan Maushart, women colluded with 'the mask of motherhood' as she described it, which she saw as a conspiracy to keep silent about the realities of the mothering experience in order to allow men to maintain their 'privileged status quo'. Maushart made it clear that the 'supermom' of the 1980s did not exist, that women struggled in silence to be good

Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1978, pp. 213-4.

²⁰Betsy Wearing, *The Ideology of Motherhood: A Case Study of Sydney Suburban Mothers*, George, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1984, p. 49.

²¹Jan Harper & Lyn Richards, *Mothers and Working Mothers*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1979, p. 5.

²²Stephanie Brown, Rhonda Small & Judith Lumley, 'Troubled Thoughts on Being a "Good" Mother', in S. Brown, J. Lumley, R. Small & J. Astbury, (eds), *Missing Voices: The Experience of Motherhood*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 140.

mothers, assuming all the while that any difficulties were their own responsibility and a mark of their shortcomings.²³

The myth of the selflessly devoted good mother has been supported by images in popular culture. In discussing American films, E. Ann Kaplan concluded that their representations promulgated an ideology of motherhood which perpetuated 'oppressive patriarchal myths'.²⁴ Psychologist Jan Swigart drew attention to 'grossly distorted images' which dichotomised the maternal role and allowed no room for the inherent ambivalences in bringing up children. Swigart argued that loving, generous, good mothers who had no serious problems were frequently set against images of selfish, abusive mothers who did irreparable damage to the child.²⁵ Representations of mothers 'just like you and me' except that they were perfect, as psychotherapist, Joyce Block showed, drew attention to an insidious side of the media.²⁶ Stereotypical depictions of the good mother were impossible to achieve in real life. These diverse studies focused on overseas images of the mother. The way in which Australian films depicted the maternal role is set out in part two below.

The Good and Bad Mother in Films

The narratives of early Australian feature films focused on bushranging, gold prospecting or the early settlement of the Colony. Concerned predominantly with male activities in the public sphere, the films depicted the mother generally confined to the home. The few meagre images remaining from the early days of the cinema typically showed the mother as a sturdy, respectable, middle-aged figure who was publicly powerless. Her tied back long hair complemented an apron-covered dark shapeless dress with a demure neckline. The apron was an important accessory which signified the mother's unending commitment to domestic cleanliness. The image suggested that mothers were nurturers, cleaners and

²³Susan Maushart, *The Mask of Motherhood: How Mothering Changes Everything and Why We Pretend It Doesn't*, Vintage, Sydney, 1997.

²⁴E. Ann Kaplan, 'The Case of the Missing Mother: Maternal issues in Vidor's *Stella Dallas*', in P. Erens, (ed.), *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1990a, pp. 127-8.

²⁵Jane Swigart, *The Myth of the Bad Mother: The Emotional Realities of Mothering*, Doubleday, NY, 1991, p. 241.

²⁶Joyce Block, *Motherhood as Metamorphosis: Change and Continuity in the Life of a New Mother*, Dutton, NY, 1990, p. 150, p. 158.

carers, devoted to domestic pursuits and to keeping everything in its place. In early cinema until World War Two, mothers were rarely seen without an apron or away from the kitchen, where they laboured unceasingly at their domestic chores.

In an era when cleanliness was next to godliness, the mother's responsibility for the hygiene of the family was enhanced by her saintly image. The spiritual head of the family, she ensured that her daughters attended church and conducted themselves in a seemly manner. She had no apparent similar influence on male family members, and indeed, frequently, as in Kenneth Brampton's *Robbery Under Arms* (1920), her progeny were involved in a life of crime. Despite her sons' behaviour, she retained her close association with religion. For instance, in an early scene of *Robbery Under Arms*, the mother is in the kitchen preparing Christmas dinner, when she hears her sons — partners of the notorious Captain Starlight — approaching on horseback. She immediately turns to a crucifix on the wall and the intertitle tells us that she intones: '*Mother of mercy has heard my pleas and brought my boys back to me*'.²⁷ Another intertitle is used to emphasise the religious component of her selfless maternal role: *And this was the Xmas Day that big unselfish heart had prayed for*. Later, when her sons have left, the police arrive and demand to be told their whereabouts. She hesitates, then reluctantly acquiescing, lifts her arm to point the way. A god-fearing woman, however hard it would have been for her not to try to protect her sons, her maternal loyalty was outweighed by her duty to the church and the state. Within the film, the good citizen-mother was rewarded with a happy ending, though only after her sons had served time in jail.

The mother in some films, however, reacted differently to the predicament of her duty to the state and to her own flesh and blood. In the many films about Ned Kelly and his gang, the mother resists the police in order to help her renegade son avoid capture.²⁸ In Harry

²⁷The association with the Roman Catholic church was clear. There was a class difference within the films, where the poor Catholic/Irish outlaws were contrasted with the righteous Protestant/English police.

²⁸These included Charles Tait's *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906), Harry Southwell's *The Kelly Gang* (1920), *When the Kellys Were Out* (1923) and *When the Kellys Rode* (1934). *The Story of the Kelly Gang* is considered by some to be the first long feature film in the world. It has been lost, though a few precious minutes of the film were discovered in 1977 in Melbourne. Unfortunately the fragments did not include the

Southwell's *When the Kellys Were Out* (1923), Mrs Kelly, playing her part without having to leave her domestic space, picks up a frying pan and attempts to hit the investigating constable over the head. This was sufficient to cause a diversion and delay the hapless policeman while her son escaped. These films, perhaps, followed the true story of Ellen Kelly, the mother of Ned.²⁹ Arrested in 1878, she was imprisoned for three years for assisting her son.³⁰ On the screen, the mother's attempt to save her sons was ultimately unsuccessful and the outlaws were always captured and imprisoned. The films recognised the mother's loyalty, while at the same time reinforcing the notion that requirements of the state for law and order were paramount.

The theme of outdoor adventure of many of the early films curtailed the involvement of the mother.³¹ Generally cast in a minor role, she was the good woman whose main responsibility was to nurture her family. The focus on male-dominated events in early films changed with the first film of a new director, Raymond Longford, who became one of the greatest and most prolific filmmakers in the early days of Australian cinema.³² Much has been written about Longford and his partnership with his leading actress, Lottie Lyell. They were inseparable, although they never married as Longford's wife outlived Lyell. Her close association with Longford allowed Lyell to become involved in filmmaking in a way that was unusual for a woman at that time. Indeed, as film historian Andrée Wright recorded, many contemporaries thought that Lottie Lyell had more

mother, though a remarkable photographic still of the film showed Mrs Kelly threatening to shoot the constable who had come to arrest Ned. Reprinted, Eric Reade, *History and Heartburn: The Saga of Australian Film 1896-1978*, Harper & Row, Sydney, 1979, p. 5.

²⁹The Kelly family's antagonism to authority was apparent in Ned's 'Jerilderie letter' which pointed out his hatred of the mainly Protestant policemen and his claim for rights as an Irishman. See Alastair Davidson, *From Subject to Citizen: Australian Citizenship in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p. 49.

³⁰Keith McMenomy, *Ned Kelly: The Authentic Illustrated Story*, Currey O'Neil Ross, South Yarra, Victoria, 1984, p. 63.

³¹After the success of Tait's *The Story of the Kelly Gang*, many imitators followed, including Charles MacMahon's *Robbery Under Arms* (1907), John Gavin's *Thunderbolt* (1910) and *Ben Hall and his Gang* (1911) and Gaston Mervale's *A Tale of the Australian Bush* (1911). For synopses and details of more bushranging films see Andrew Pike & Ross Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977: A Guide to Feature Film Production*, Oxford University Press/AFI, Melbourne, 1980.

³²Eric Reade described him as 'a director of sheer genius' and 'a man of clear vision', Reade, *History and Heartburn*, p. 8. Brian McFarlane claimed that Longford was 'perhaps the greatest director of the Australian silent film'. B. McFarlane, *Australian Cinema 1970-1985*, William Heinemann, Richmond, Victoria, 1987, p. 6.

influence on the films than Longford.³³ The presence of a woman with this type of creative power changed the substance of film narrative in Australia.

It would be difficult to overestimate the influence of Longford and Lyell on early Australian cinema. Apart from their practice of using a female actor (usually Lottie Lyell) as the principal protagonist, they brought a previously unknown complexity and depth to Australian film narrative.³⁴ Proficiency in using advanced cinema techniques such as the close-up, and their taste for melodrama, ended the almost unbroken focus on masculine concerns. Perhaps the most important aspect of their work for the representation of mothers in films came about because Lyell was a young woman. Her portrayal of the sprightly, youthful mother marked a change from the matronly, passive figure common in cinema of the time. Additionally, whereas daring exploits in films were usually the province of the male star, in Longford/Lyell productions, Lyell, even when she played the role of mother, was always strong and adventurous. For example in 1911, when other films were concerned with such ostensibly male activities as chasing outlaws and escaped convicts, Longford and Lyell produced *The Fatal Wedding*.

A synopsis of the film, the print of which unfortunately has been lost, traced the story of the Wilson family, — mother, father and young children, — whose happy and comfortable home life was disrupted by the intervention of a scheming woman.³⁵ The malicious female ruins the mother's name and precipitates a divorce. Because his wife is now seen as a bad mother, the father is given custody of the children. Not content to submit passively to her fate, however, the innocent mother abducts the children. Living for five years in great poverty, she struggles valiantly to care for her children. By the end of the film she has been able to prove that she is a good mother and she returns to the family home. Mabel Wilson, the mother in *The Fatal Wedding* perfectly fitted the

³³Andrée Wright, *Brilliant Careers: Women in Australian Cinema*, Pan, Sydney, 1986, pp. 2-15.

³⁴Although he concentrated on Raymond Longford's abilities, see John Tulloch, 'Raymond Longford's The Sentimental Bloke', in A. Moran & T. O'Regan, (eds), *An Australian Film Reader*, Currency, Sydney, 1985, pp. 38-44.

³⁵Lottie Lyell played the mother, Mabel Wilson. Her husband, Howard, was played by Raymond Longford, Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p. 23.

prototype of the good mother: having risked all for her children, her tenacity and capability were rewarded. The Longford/Lyell production ran for an 'unprecedented five weeks',³⁶ suggesting that a film which focused on the difficulties of a good mother was a subject which struck a chord with Australian audiences.

Longford and Lyell sustained their interest in family films. In 1912, they made *The Tide of Death*. Longford wrote the story, which in a typically complicated plot, told of the trials and tribulations of a man and woman in the search for happiness. The mother, played by Lottie Lyell, is kidnapped by her step-father and taken from her loving husband and child. However, as in other Longford/Lyell films, the feisty mother does not accept her misfortune and manages to escape from the villain. In what is, perhaps, a metaphorical purification of any sexual misdeeds she has suffered at the kidnapper's hands, she enters a convent. Her demonstrable and undoubted innocence inevitably ensured the return to her rightful place as wife and mother.³⁷

One of the most acclaimed of Longford's films was *On Our Selection*, made in 1920. Lyell, who eventually succumbed to tuberculosis in 1925 at the age of thirty-six, was too ill to act in the film, although, as Wright has pointed out, she probably was involved in scriptwriting and editing.³⁸ The figure of the mother, Mrs Rudd, deserves attention because of the long-term popularity and influence of *On Our Selection* in Australian society. The film is also important because it is intact, whereas most other Longford films have been lost or destroyed and can be assessed only from written synopses. *On Our Selection* has been made into a film three times, yet many view the first, the 1920 version, as the best and most representative of Australian rural life.³⁹

³⁶Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p. 23.

³⁷The film is lost, for more details of the plot, see Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p. 46.

³⁸Wright, *Brilliant Careers*, p. 108, n. 63.

³⁹Raymond Longford's film in 1920 was the first, followed by Ken G. Hall's film of the same name in 1932. The most recent remake, titled *Dad and Dave's On Our Selection*, was directed by George Whaley in 1994.

In *On Our Selection*, the mother is presented as a virtuous, devoted woman, although she is outside the strictures that good mothering usually implies. Mrs Rudd is introduced with a eulogy which avoids the sacrificial aspect of the traditional good mother:

The big kind-hearted soul, the light and love of the home, the willing help-mate of us all. Never sad, never selfish, never despairing, never desponding, and ever thoughtful, ever making, ever mending, ever hoping for the better days to come.⁴⁰

This Mrs Rudd is a 'help-mate' rather than a person who is expected to sacrifice everything for her children. In keeping with the good mother's obligation for domestic competence, she keeps the earth-floored bark hut clean and tidy. As well, though, she shares the lifestyle common to many rural women who labour on the property. When there is work to do, she can be found in the fields, sewing corn and working beside her husband and children. Additionally, despite the accolade of the intertitle, Mrs Rudd is shown in the film to be a practical mother who has problems in her life with which the audience could identify. For instance, she reacts angrily when any of her seven children misbehave. She is portrayed from time to time even slapping her youngest child, Joe. Far from being defined as a bad mother because of her anger, Mrs Rudd's status as a good mother is endorsed. Joe's consistent bad behaviour is seen as childish naughtiness rather than evidence of her deficiency and his punishment is an appropriate reaction. In Mrs Rudd, the filmmakers have pointed to the ambivalences of being a mother: to what mothers are supposed to be and what they are in real life.⁴¹

Longford allowed Mrs Rudd to break out of the traditional 'good mother' mould. She was depicted as having power within the family, which was uncommon in those mothers who more precisely fitted the maternal stereotype of selflessness. Although in general, Mrs Rudd agreed with Dad's prognostications on life, occasionally she managed to defy him. For instance, she was friendly and encouraging to her youngest daughter's suitor, Billy Bearup, despite Dad's banning him from the house. Without the artifice and manipulation

⁴⁰Intertitle used to introduce Mrs Rudd in Raymond Longford's *On Our Selection* (1920).

⁴¹Mrs Rudd was also outside notions of chastity and purity, usually the province of the good mother. See discussion on sexuality and motherhood, chapter 6.

common to wives in later films, she was able eventually to persuade her husband to accept Billy. As well, it was she who was the strength of the family, a position underlined at the wedding of her eldest daughter, Kate, where she happily watched her plans come to fruition, while Dad, perhaps unsure about their future, shed a tear.

In the 1930s, several of the films of the 1920s were remade. A comparison of the mothers in each, highlighted changes the economic conditions of the decade made to the mother-role. A new and sharp division in the roles of men and women could be detected in the films of the 1930s. Women's femininity was paramount and their place was in the home, while outside labour was deemed the man's responsibility. In the earlier films, the mothers retained their good mother status despite their freedom of self-expression. During the 1930s, maternal images reinforced the ideological preference for women's dependence and domesticity.

This change was most clearly demonstrated in an early Australian 'talkie', Ken G. Hall's *On Our Selection*, which was a remake in 1932 of the 1920 Longford film discussed above. Whereas Longford had attempted to follow the original writings of 'Steele Rudd', (Arthur Hoey Davis), Hall used the stage adaptation of the tales of the Rudd family. The later film depended on farcical situations and burlesque humour which, perhaps, were designed to lift the spirits of the audiences during the Depression. For whatever reason, Hall's film strongly contrasted with Longford's approach of relying on the original stories and attempting to portray real problems encountered by poor farmers in rural Australia.

Although most of the players in Hall's film are designed to be amusing caricatures, Mrs Rudd is not a figure of fun. Known as 'Mum', dressed in a long sombre frock and a cap, she is constantly weary. As her primary role is to prepare food, she is distraught when she is unable to provide the visiting parson with a scone for his afternoon tea. When Dad makes an impassioned speech about the spirit of Australia and his vision for the land, Mum stands by, content to support his rhetoric. She is 'heartbroken' when her daughter

decides to leave the farm. Her weakness and passivity are in marked contrast to the stronger Mrs Rudd of the twenties, who worked beside her husband in the fields and was proud of her daughter's independence and accomplishments in the city. Hall's Mrs Rudd, however, was a good mother according to public and official guidelines during the Depression. She knew her place and remained within the home, dependent on her husband.

A similar comparison of the two decades can be made in *The Hayseeds*, a 1933 Beaumont Smith update of his successful silent films.⁴² The synopsis of one of the earlier films, *The Hayseeds' Melbourne Cup* (1918), discloses that Mum goes with Dad to the Melbourne Cup and behaves as she does on the farm. In what was probably an hilarious scene, resplendent in her rural attire which contrasts with the stylish city fashions, Mum boils a billy for tea on the lawn at Flemington racecourse.⁴³ It would be difficult to imagine the mother in the 'talkie' remake displaying such enterprise as she was old, tired and ill. In *The Hayseeds* (1933), the long drought signals the problems of making a living from the land. These are construed, however, as a male responsibility, while the mother's task is restricted to looking after the house. When Dad Hayseed in 1933 discusses the trials of farming with his new 'townie' friend, it is significant that he reveals that his wife has been in bed with lumbago all through winter. Mum appeared to take no active part of farm life and is portrayed as no more than an adjunct to her husband. As with the 1932 Mrs Rudd, Mrs Hayseed is a passive figure who reacts to others, rather than doing anything on her own behalf.

One mother of the decade, although a compliant nurturer, shows a distinguishing talent. In Beaumont Smith's *Splendid Fellows* (1934), the mother, Mrs McBride, is given a mystical gift of spirituality and healing. Her appearance and behaviour throughout the film belie her celestial abilities, and her remarkable ability is revealed only in the last stages of the

⁴²These popular rustic characters were featured in: *Our Friends the Hayseeds* (1911), *The Hayseeds Come to Town* (1917), *The Hayseeds' Melbourne Cup* (1918), *Townies and Hayseeds* (1923) and *Prehistoric Hayseeds* (1924). They were all directed by Beaumont Smith. None of the silent films survives.

⁴³Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p. 98.

narrative. While she is tending to guests at an after-theatre supper, Mrs McBride meets a long-lost blind friend. Revealing her connection to the divine, and probably to the surprise of the guests as well as the audience, she tells him not to be concerned, as God will give him back his sight. Soon after, as he is transported in the Parson's plane, (the Parson of course being God's messenger on earth), the blind soul crashes to the earth and finds that his sight has been miraculously restored.

The mother in *Splendid Fellows* showed a spirituality which, however bizarrely depicted, was in tune with the customary maternal role. In Ken G. Hall's *Mr Chedworth Steps Out* (1939), the mother displayed the opposite characteristics. Mrs Chedworth was a selfish, bad-tempered, insensitive and unkind woman, which were unpardonable sins in a mother. Above all, perhaps, she expressed her own desires in life and, as they fell outside the parameters of the sacrificing good mother role, she was punished for them. The very fine actor, Cecil Kellaway, played Mr Chedworth and made him a very sympathetic figure who was adored by his children. His gentle, sympathetic demeanour contrasted with their shrill and critical mother. Until the final scenes of *Mr Chedworth Steps Out*, the traditional depictions of the parents were reversed. Mrs Chedworth, the mother, was aggressive, non-nurturing and competitive. Mr Chedworth, the father, was loving, submissive and compliant.

The film tells the story of a suburban family in the last year of the Depression, immediately before the outbreak of World War Two. Mr and Mrs Chedworth rent an unpretentious suburban home where they live with their three children, a young man and woman and a bright teenaged daughter who is still at school. In the opening scene of the film, the children and their father are eating breakfast. The setting is inharmonious and cluttered. Because it is traditionally the mother's place, her absence from the kitchen sends an immediate signal that Mrs Chedworth functions outside the usual mothering role. When she finally sweeps into the room, her appearance and behaviour come as a shock, in contrast to the kindly mothers common to the family genre. Unglamorous in hair curlers

and dressing gown, she enters nagging and shrieking at her family. She harps at her husband, making his life miserable as she hectors him to keep up with the neighbours. 'I do wish you had a bit more push in you', she reproaches. Out of his mother's hearing, the son asks his father for help with a gambling debt and they conspire to hide the problem from his mother.⁴⁴

Although Mrs Chedworth's duties did not include the preparation of breakfast, the film maintains a semblance of normal family life. She stays in the home, while Mr Chedworth goes out to work. As his wife continues to rage, he, quietly resigned, leaves for his dull office job, murmuring pathetically: 'I have to keep going to keep up'. In the subsequent scene, Mr Chedworth's boss thanks him for his many years of work and sacks him. It is a poignant moment, although Mr Chedworth's dismissal marks the beginning of his good fortune and he goes on to make a large sum of money on the stock exchange. Despite his cheerful blundering, everything he touches turns to gold. The delighted Mrs Chedworth joins the *nouveau riche* and is able to buy a suburban mansion.

Success has changed Mr Chedworth. He is now a forceful man and not the acquiescent timid soul he once was. This is signified in the film as he varnishes the floor in the new home. Literally painting himself into a corner, he is forced to re-evaluate his lifestyle. In a plan to punish his wife for her pretensions, he employs an actor to play a bailiff who comes to repossess the furniture. Unkindly, although as a mark of the resumption of his rightful role as head of the family and to reinforce Mrs Chedworth's subordinate place, he arranges for this to happen as she entertains guests at the house-warming party. She is crushed and humiliated. As though serving to underline her punishment, when a mix-up about his wealth is at last resolved and Mr Chedworth celebrates in his palatial new house with his daughters and son, the wife is nowhere to be seen.

⁴⁴Interestingly, there was no inference drawn between her bad mothering and the son's behaviour. The son's gambling was structured as his weakness, because the Freudian imperative of mother-blame had not begun to infiltrate the cinema and parents in films were not yet held directly responsible for the children's misdemeanours.

Mr Chedworth Steps Out was an important film, because it sent a warning to women, both in its title and final scene, about the requirement for them to observe their traditional self-sacrificing role. It signalled that the men who may have been disempowered during the Depression, would resume their role as income-producer and head of family. Mrs Chedworth was represented as a bad mother with selfish desires. As a punishment, she was not allowed to enjoy the fruits of the family's improved financial position. It is disturbing that the posters advertised the film as a portrayal of 'Mr and Mrs Average Man'. Also worrying was film historian, Graham Shirley's assessment in 1994, describing it as 'the only 1930s feature to reflect the suburban life and aspirations of most Australians'.⁴⁵ For Shirley it was unproblematic that mothers like Mrs Chedworth should be treated so cruelly and summarily.

The onset of World War Two ended most feature film production and any interest in motherhood in films. There were only twenty-eight feature films made in Australia during the 1940s.⁴⁶ In the first half of the decade, during the war, filming was limited to newsreels, military recruitment and propaganda. The most successful feature films at this time were Charles Chauvel's *Forty Thousand Horsemen* (1940) and *The Rats of Tobruk* (1944), both of which concentrated on mateship during war. Production of films with a focus on domestic life did not begin again until the second half of the 1940s. Five family films were produced, and the first of these, in 1946, was Eric Porter's *A Son is Born*.

A landmark film for the representation of mothers, *A Son is Born* heralded a departure from the matronly figures of the 1930s and introduced a young attractive actress, Muriel Steinbeck, to play the role of the mother, Laurette. Despite her beauty, devotion to her husband, Paul, and her capable home management, Laurette is unable to prevent Paul's affairs with other women, or his bouts of alcoholism. Hoping that the birth of their son, David, will improve the marriage, Laurette is disappointed when the baby causes further

⁴⁵Graham Shirley, 'Australian Cinema: 1896 to the Renaissance', in S. Murray, (ed.), *Australian Cinema*, Allen & Unwin/AFC, Sydney, 1994, p. 23.

⁴⁶This is in contrast to eighty nine in the 1920s, fifty in the 1930s and an amazing one hundred and sixty two in the second decade of the century. Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*.

conflict. Paul, as the bad parent, constantly undermines Laurette's attempts to instil moral values in the child. Confronted with Paul's increasingly abusive behaviour, Laurette decides to divorce him. Although she is heartbroken when her young son chooses to stay with his father, Laurette is firm in her resolve to leave the marriage. She finds a good secretarial job and becomes a career woman. In a traditional ending to this otherwise unusual film, Laurette finds happiness in a new marriage with her kindly and wealthy employer and is rewarded as well with a reunion with her long-lost son. The latter, as an adult, in a heartrending climax to the film, realises that his father has been the wrongdoer and his mother has always been the good parent.

Previous Australian films had rarely shown mothers in the workforce, even before the dire warnings of maternal deprivation in the 1940s. According to Ann Kaplan, films from the United States castigated any woman who would choose a career over motherhood. Kaplan criticised the American films of the 1980s, *Baby Boom*, *Raising Arizona* and *The Good Mother* for emphasising the value of domesticity and disregarding the mother's satisfaction or need to work.⁴⁷ By contrast, in the 1940's Australian film, *A Son is Born*, the mother was not prepared to sacrifice her life for her child. She managed to escape from her oppressive maternal role to find autonomy and fulfilment. Although Laurette was portrayed as far from the stereotypical selfless person that had been the distinctive sign of motherhood in films, she was shown to be a devoted, good mother and in the end, she was not punished for moving away from her maternal responsibilities, and was rewarded with a better life.

Notwithstanding the strong-willed Laurette, mothers who took control of their own lives were rare in post-war films. More commonly, they were represented as sacrificing their own needs for the family. A divergence from the typical maternal behaviour, however, could be discerned in two films set in outback Australia. Although the mothers were portrayed caring for the family, each showed unusual strength in dealing with the

⁴⁷E. Ann Kaplan, 'Sex, Work and Motherhood' in D. Bassin, M. Honey & M.M. Kaplan, (eds), *Representations of Motherhood*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1994, pp. 263-5.

exigencies of her harsh rural life. In her examination of Hollywood films of the 1940s, Andrea Walsh noted the introduction of strong mothers who displayed 'power, courage, physical stamina and perseverance'.⁴⁸ The mothers in these Australian films exactly fit the American model described by Walsh.

The first, Harry Watt's *The Overlanders* (1946), takes place during World War Two and tells of a family of mother, father and two grown-up daughters who travel a vast distance overland in Northern Australia to take a herd of cattle safely away from the possible invasion and possession by the Japanese army. In the prologue of the film, the mother appears as a passive figure, much like her counterpart of the 1930s. She sits patiently waiting while her husband destroys all her precious household possessions, muttering, 'The Japs will get nothing from me'. The domesticity of her life is reinforced by her role as camp cook during the ensuing droving expedition. By the end of the film, however, it is clear that she works as hard as anyone in the camp. Effectively stopping a physical argument among the men, she asserts: 'While we're in camp, I'm boss'. To the surprise of the leader of the expedition, she hits the men with a saucepan, stops the fight and orders the miscreants to leave, telling them that 'we don't want dingoes'. This scene is reminiscent of the 1923 film *When the Kellys Were Out*, when the mother uses a saucepan in the same way against the policeman sent to arrest her son, Ned.

In the second film, Ralph Smart's *Bitter Springs*,⁴⁹ the pioneers, Wally and Ma King, with their adult daughter and son, attempt to set up a home in the outback.⁵⁰ The family's subsequent conflict with an Aboriginal group which has been in the area for many years, is central to the narrative. Ma King, showing her strength of character like the mother in *The Overlanders*, moves away from her role of camp cook on several occasions. In one

⁴⁸Andrea S. Walsh, *Women's Film and Female Experience 1940-1950*, Praeger, NY, 1986, p. 132.

⁴⁹Although the film was released in 1950, it was, as Pike & Cooper concluded, 'characteristic of the Ealing [Studio's] liberalism of the 1940s', and so belonged in this decade. Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, pp. 275-6.

⁵⁰Perhaps a connection could be made with the name King and the English origins of the film and the struggle to settle the outback without regard to the original inhabitants. The husband's name may only be an amusing coincidence.

memorable scene where Aborigines confront the settlers, mother and daughter stand on a riverbank with the men, rifles raised, ready to protect their new home. When her house is burned down almost as soon as it is completed, the mother resolutely insists that they remain on the property and rebuild. Ma King's stoic endurance of the hardship and desolation of outback life coincides with many stories of early pioneering experience. At the same time, her traditional maternal qualities are not overlooked. During a siege when the family's drinking water is almost finished, she selflessly gives her own ration away.⁵¹

While the mothers in *The Overlanders* and *Bitter Springs* were undoubtedly strong, the selfless, devoted aspect of good mothering was always part of their image. The sacrificing-mother theme reached its pinnacle in another 1940s production, T.O. McCreadie's *Always Another Dawn* (1947). In this film, motherhood was linked to issues of citizenship and loyalty to the nation. Set during the World War Two, the film tells the story of Molly Reagan whose husband lost his life in the navy during the First World War. Molly is firmly within the paradigm of the good citizen-mother. She supports her only son's decision to enlist, and when he is killed, instead of railing against the futility of the wars which have claimed the men in her family, this noble mother is proud and resolute. Her spirit of nationalism and her attitude toward the loss of her son, however, was not acclaimed universally. Pike and Cooper have reported that the film was criticised for its banality and war-mongering platitudes.⁵² While depictions of the mother who tolerated her subordinate, unselfish lifestyle were commonly accepted, a woman who could lose both her husband and son to war without demur was not credible.

Despite the scepticism shown toward the selfless mother in *Always Another Dawn*, those few films which featured mothers during the 1950s retained the traditional expectations of the role. Devoted mothers were rewarded, while conversely, those women who were not

⁵¹She gave the last drop of water to her husband, Wally. This brought up a peculiarity, — at least to audiences of the 1990's — of many films in which there was a sense that the woman must be selfless and devoted to her family, while the father took the top position in her list of people to care for. See observations about *The Sundowners* (1960), this chapter.

⁵²Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p. 270.

prepared to conform to guidelines were punished. Michael S. Gordon's *Wherever She Goes* (1951), based on the true story of the early life of Eileen Joyce, the brilliant concert pianist, provided an example of the first type. The family is poverty-stricken, as Eileen's father is an unsuccessful gold prospector. Living with the family in a tent on the goldfields, the mother spends her spare time making dresses for Eileen out of old clothes. One scene epitomizes her sacrifice. Resignedly, she cuts up her best dress so that Eileen might have a new outfit. The mother's load is never lightened and though she does not complain, she is rarely happy or carefree. Her life does not change until the last scene of the film. As the train which is carrying the teenager Eileen away from poverty to international fame draws out of the station, the mother's tense face lightens. The scene fitted the conclusions of cinema scholar, Linda Williams, who has argued that the mother's greatest sacrifice was to be separated from her child.⁵³ Mrs Joyce was a good mother who was pleased to make such a sacrifice. The loss of her daughter could have been seen as a punishment, but the final moments of the film left the impression that she had been rewarded.

The second type of mother, who did not conform to ideals of sacrifice and devotion, could be found in Charles Chauvel's *Jedda* (1955). Sarah McMann is a complex and not an entirely unsympathetic figure. She lives on an outback property, taking charge of the family home while her husband, Douglas, tends to their vast cattle station. At the beginning of the film, Sarah's baby son dies. Although the death of a child can sometimes be seen as the result of poor mothering, this is not the case, as Sarah is clearly distraught at the death. In any event, when Sarah is asked to care for a motherless Aboriginal baby, she refuses. This is, perhaps, an understandable reaction, although it is voiced in harsh terms which serve to emphasise her own personal, rather selfish feelings more than the tragic loss of her son. She cries: 'Take it away, I won't die twice'. After a period, she relents and agrees to take care of the orphan whom she names Jedda. The child, whom she comes to love, is now a happy toddler and is able to make Sarah laugh once again.

⁵³Linda Williams 'Something Else Besides a Mother', in C. Gledhill, (ed.), *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, BFI, London, 1987, p. 300.

The film narrative confronts the problems caused by raising an Aboriginal girl in a white environment. Sarah plays a crucial part as she educates Jedda in the same way that she would her own biological child. She denies Jedda's tribal ancestry and openly attempts to deter her from any association with other members of her aboriginal family. Douglas, perhaps ahead of his time, points out to Sarah that Jedda needs her own culture, while Sarah, somewhat selfishly, refuses to understand the point he is making. The clash of cultures and tension created from this situation is dramatically portrayed in a pivotal scene of the film. Jedda, now a young woman, is at the piano, significantly practising classical European music, when she hears the sound of traditional aboriginal music through the open window. Although she loves her white mother, the full-blood Aboriginal, Marbuk,⁵⁴ is too much for her to resist and she goes away with him, and ultimately to her death. Sarah has lost her own baby and now, also, her adopted daughter, Jedda. While not overlooking the important ramifications and problems of assimilationist policies, the film's outcome has a direct bearing on the representation of the maternal role. It suggests that Sarah's concern with her own happiness and her failure to encompass Jedda's aboriginality was selfishly motivated and in consequence, she was harshly punished.

The only film in the next decade to feature a substantial part for a mother was American Fred Zinneman's, *The Sundowners* (1960). Although outspoken and respected, Ida Carmody cheerfully accepts her itinerant life and the deficiencies of Paddy her gambling husband. When he loses all the money she has painstakingly saved for a deposit on a house, she generously and immediately forgives him. Although her dream of a home is gone, she shows no sign of anger or disappointment. Laughingly, she remarks that she loves her husband and will never be able to change him. It is an idealistic, almost ludicrous reaction and a more appropriate one, perhaps, would be resentment and disillusionment. As Ida had been a good devoted mother, however, it was not appropriate

⁵⁴Pike & Cooper in *Australian Film 1900-1977*, used the spelling 'Marbuck' as did the video release cover of the film. The film itself, in the introductory frame spelt it Marbuk, although it should be pointed out it also used 'Aboriginee'. The film titles listed Robert Tudewalli and Narla Kunoth, when elsewhere, for instance in the film's publicity, they were known as Robert Tudawali and Ngarla Kunoth.

that she be punished. In order to conform more closely to the traditional maternal paradigm, the final scenes of the film worked to ensure that, despite her loss, she appeared to be rewarded.

Historically, *The Sundowners* was interesting as it contained a scene, which was relevant to the changing family pattern. The mid-1950s marked the beginning of the youth culture, when teenagers, in a time of full-employment, were obtaining some financial independence with the availability of part-time jobs. From the earlier position of 'being seen and not heard', they began to be allowed some voice and authority within the home. In this 1957 film, Ida Carmody is a good mother who recognises her son, Sean's emotional need for a more secure home life, although her duty to her husband overrides her maternal responsibility. When Sean complains about their itinerant life, his mother replies, 'Don't ask me to choose between you and Dad, because I'll choose him every time'. Her expression of allegiance to her husband was important in drawing attention to the end of an era. From this time on, good mothers in films were expected to put their child's interests first.

There was an immense change in the figure of the mother in films from the 1970s. Idealised depictions of the traditional mother were rare in the decade, and when the mother appeared in films, she appeared to have slipped from the pedestal which she had occupied almost since the beginning of cinema. Throughout the decade, most mothers were represented as inadequate, selfish, repressed, or even monstrous.⁵⁵ Because she had usually been depicted as a good selfless woman, the bad mother may have come as a shock to Australian cinema goers.

The mother, Susie, in Tim Burstall's *Petersen* (1974) was cast in a mould that many of her contemporaries in the real world were trying to reform. McFarlane's insensitive and

⁵⁵Curiously, perhaps, bad mothers were often depicted ill-treating daughters but not sons. The analysis of these films can be found in chapter 5, which is devoted to the mother/daughter relationship. They included Brian Kavanagh's *A City's Child* (1972), Jim Sharman's *Patrick White's The Night the Prowler* (1979) and Simon Wincer's *Snapshot* (1979).

patronising review has summed it up when he referred to her 'a nice dim little wife'.⁵⁶ Susie provides a quintessential representation of maternal inadequacy that was the hallmark of the decade. The seeming-normality of her domestic life, the happiness of the children, her sexual compatibility with her husband, makes this an extremely disturbing film. That she is not vilified, but presented as an inept mother and an irritation to her husband, substantiates the point. The film, perhaps, is an exploration of the sexual promiscuity of the time, although it implies an underlying hostility to motherhood and an indifference to the contemporary problems they were facing. It is worth noting as well that it was written by David Williamson, who is not usually celebrated for his sympathetic portrayal of women.

Throughout the film, although Susie is shown cleaning up and preparing meals, the deficiencies of her mothering abilities are underlined. This is achieved by frequent comparisons with Petersen's superior fathering capacity. Three episodes are central to understanding the film's representation of the mother figure. In the first, an early and important establishing scene, Petersen is fixing a faulty electrical plug, perhaps as a signal of his ability to save family from harm. He chats to his two daughters, while Susie, significantly out of sight in the kitchen, attends to her chores. Secondly, later in the film, a gang of violent youths interrupts a party that Susie and Petersen are attending. The children are asleep outside the house, in a van. Petersen, fearing their vulnerability, swiftly removes his daughters from the vehicle and brings them to safety into the house. It is easy to feel contempt for Susie, smiling inanely in the *melée* of the party, oblivious to the children's danger. In the third scene, Petersen, returning from an idyllic weekend with his lover, is met by his wife who is distraught and almost hysterical. One of their daughters is very ill. Calmly, Petersen takes charge of the situation, and sits with the child while the mother goes to bed. Needless to say, the child is better in the morning. For the third time in this film, the father is cast, not as sharing the parenting tasks, but as the domestic saviour. In effect he takes over the caring side of Susie's mothering role.

⁵⁶McFarlane, *Australian Cinema 1970-1985*, p. 130.

The misogynist nature of this film is most obvious in the heavy-handed contrast it draws between the characters of Susie and Petersen. She is vapid, happy, incompetent, content with her life. He, on the other hand, is a capable electrician, striving for a university degree. Petersen is the acclaimed hero of the film. His many extra-marital sexual encounters are portrayed humorously or as a sign of his virility, not as a betrayal of a loyal wife. Susie, on the other hand, remains so trusting and accepting, that she appears gullible and ignorant. Even at the end of the film when Petersen fails his university course and is rejected by his lecturer-lover, whom he rapes savagely, he retains the understanding of the audience.⁵⁷ McFarlane, for example, was sympathetic to Petersen and claiming that the rape was in response to the tutor's rejection. Even more alarming, perhaps, McFarlane confessed to sympathy 'for [Petersen's] pain and for the failure implicit in his return to mindless sexual availability'.⁵⁸

In *Petersen*, despite a superficially cordial marriage, there is an underlying malice toward the mother. A similar conclusion can be drawn from Paul Cox's film *Inside Looking Out* (1977), which traces a constant and unresolvable dispute between husband and wife. The mother, Elizabeth, who loves their small child but finds domesticity unsatisfying, is angry with her husband, Robert. After a row, she leaves home to seek solace with her friends. Although Elizabeth telephones later to ensure that the daughter is being cared for by the babysitter, she has committed an unpardonable sin which signals that she is a bad mother. Even though it was for only a short time, she had deserted the child. Robert, who is seen more often within the home with the child, plays the good parent who is permanently bewildered by his wife's dissatisfaction with a marriage which he clearly finds satisfactory.

⁵⁷Eric Reade explained the success of *Petersen* at the box office: 'It didn't make you think. You knew scores of blokes just like him'. Reade, *History and Heartburn*, pp. 216-7.

⁵⁸McFarlane, *Australian Cinema 1970-1985*, p. 130.

The film forms part of the oeuvre of a somewhat eccentric director. Cox's films focus on the relationships of characters who typically do little else than discuss their emotional problems.⁵⁹ Although *Inside Looking Out* showed the mother's desires and allowed her to articulate her problems, her dissatisfaction appeared to be without real cause. The film's mis-en-scene, a trendy middle-class suburban home with appropriate accoutrements and intelligent, articulate friends, served to invalidate her complaints. Ultimately, Cox endorsed the ideological question of the 1970s, which asked, 'what are women complaining about?' Elizabeth came across as a hard-to-please woman whose selfishness threatens a comfortable relationship, while the perplexed husband was valiantly struggling to preserve the life of the family. The mother's problems were never depicted with compassion, and were seen as selfish and the cause of the marital disharmony.

Phillip Noyce's *Newsfront* (1978) presented a similar relationship in which the mother is dissatisfied with her child rearing responsibilities. Although her problems are obvious and understandable, she too is treated harshly in the film. A devout Catholic, Fay finds it difficult to care for her young children, when Len is away for long periods, working. She complains that she is tired of coping with the children without his help and ultimately they divorce. Fay is represented as a whining, sanctimonious woman. Len, in contrast, is a likeable and competent journalist. The setting of the home adds to the implied criticism of her role. In one scene, when he returns from an 'important' political assignment, she is in the kitchen. It is messy and cluttered, the children are noisy and complaining and adding to the muddled domesticity of the scene, she is changing the baby on the kitchen table. Kindly, he moves to comfort her, and she shrieks: 'Don't touch me!' Her behaviour scotches any sympathy an audience might feel for the hardships his absences from home could bring to a mother of three small children. While the film pays lip service to the problems of rearing children without help from a partner, it offers no solution except the

⁵⁹Cox continued this theme of the puzzled husband and unreasonable wife in his 1984 film, *My First Wife*. For a detailed analysis of this film, which made the point that the film reflected Cox's own state of mind, see chapter 6.

punishment of divorce and there is no sympathy for the frazzled mother, who is depicted as difficult, selfish and inadequate.

In these films, Susie, Elizabeth and Fay were all portrayed as inadequate mothers who were ultimately responsible for the disharmony within the family. Their maternal performance was contrasted with their husband's behaviour which was rational and competent. These images possibly can be explained when viewed in the context of the political and economic conditions taking place in Australian society in the 1970s. Many women had entered the workforce, gained some independence and buoyed by the growth of the women's movement, had begun to question ideas of traditional motherhood and demand equality and recognition within the home. Many of the film narratives of the decade were presented from the male point-of-view which however unconsciously, selfishly and deliberately undermined the woman's changing position.

An additional conspicuous characteristic during the 1970s, which weakened the mother's importance and made the good mother in films even more rare, came from images of her alienation from her teenaged children. The teenager, whose point-of-view the narrative most commonly presented, was often depicted sympathetically. In contrast, the mother was represented as provocative, old-fashioned or carping.⁶⁰ The father in these narratives was usually good-natured and easy-going and remained outside the conflict. This cinematic representation of the relationship between family members was marked in 1970 by the appearance of filmmakers Phillip Adams and Brian Robinson's *Jack and Jill: a postscript*. Their treatment of the mother and the teenaged girl provided a model for other similar representations in the decade.

Concerned with contemporary families in suburban Australia, the film focuses on the problems of two teenagers from different classes. Gillian O'Keefe is a young woman from

⁶⁰These films include *The Set* (1970), *Three to Go* (1971), *Demonstrator* (1971), *Bonjour Balwyn* (1971), *Shirley Thompson Versus the Aliens* (1972), *Just Out of Reach* (1979), *My Brilliant Career* (1979), *Patrick White's The Night the Prowler* (1979) and *Snapshot* (1979).

a comfortable, middle-class home who is attracted to Jack Anderson, a motorcyclist and panel beater from a poor working-class family. Almost a caricature, Mrs O'Keefe is overweight and badly dressed. A headscarf completes her image of middle-class mediocrity. Her husband, in contrast, is a barrister and Gill, an intelligent and responsible pre-school teacher whose interests include the cinema and art galleries. Gill has no respect for her mother, whom she describes to Jack as 'someone who does nothing but knit and make preserves'. In every scene they share, mother and daughter are at loggerheads. Mrs O'Keefe is appalled when she learns of Gill's relationship with Jack and orders her daughter to stop seeing him, describing him as 'a hoodlum — or even worse, lower class'. Eventually, Mrs O'Keefe's constant nagging pushes the ill-matched pair closer together. In a dramatic and tragic end to the film, Jack is killed in a motor cycle accident and Gill 'comes tumbling after', desolate and heartbroken.⁶¹

While the bad mother was a hallmark of films of the 1970s, in the next decade mothers were shown with more compassion. Part of the transformation can be explained by the entry of female filmmakers into the industry. Gillian Armstrong, one of the first and, perhaps, most well-known of the new directors, explored the subject of family relationships with great sensitivity and complexity in many of her films.⁶² Armstrong and other female directors such as Barbara Boyd-Anderson, (*The Still Point*, 1985), Robyn Nevin (*The More Things Change...*, 1986), Jacki McKimmie,⁶³ (*Australian Dream*, 1987) and Martha Ansara (*The Pursuit of Happiness*, 1988) made films that were from the woman's point-of-view. As a consequence, films were more sympathetic to the difficulties that mothers experience.⁶⁴ As well as showing love to their children, mothers were frequently depicted as highly skilled, intelligent and self-motivated. Those women who

⁶¹The film used the idea of popular nursery rhymes to make the point. See Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p. 320.

⁶²An early Armstrong film was *The Singer and the Dancer* (1976), which questioned women's relationships with their husbands. Her interest in family dynamics continued with the documentary style films of young women growing up: *Smokes and Lollies*, 1976, *14's Good, 18's Better*, (1981), *Bingo, Bridesmaids and Braces*, (1988) and, perhaps, reached a peak with *Hightide* in 1987.

⁶³Later known as Jackie McKimmie.

⁶⁴Women other than directors contributed. For example, Ann Brooksbank scripted *...Maybe This Time* in 1980 and Helen Garner wrote the screenplay and collaborated with Ken Cameron on *Monkey Grip* in 1982.

had interests outside domesticity, were not classed as bad mothers for attempting to realise their own vocation. After sympathetic portrayals of women's needs and desires, however, the resolution of the films was often conventionally and disappointingly traditionalist. While the women were not punished like the bad mothers of earlier films, their fantasies and dreams were found to be unrewarding and their only option was the limiting one of returning to the status quo of their family life.

The difference between maternal representations in the 1970s and 1980s, perhaps, can be demonstrated most clearly by considering the mother's relationship with her teenaged children.⁶⁵ While conflicts persisted in the 1980s, disagreements with children were not the one-sided affairs typical of the 1970s. The attitude of the mother was shown as well as that of the child, and both were explained in more depth. This produced the kind of ambivalence which was closer, perhaps, to actual experience.⁶⁶

Barbara Boyd-Anderson's *The Still Point* was a case in point, as it concerned the break-up of a marriage and the very special problems of parenting a deaf child in her teenage years. The film depicted a critical point in the relationship of the daughter, Sarah, to her mother, Barbara. Sarah's character on screen was as contradictory and unsettled as are most real-life adolescents. She was moody and unreasonably resentful of Barbara's new boyfriend. Barbara was a good mother who loved Sarah, although she wanted to continue her very successful career and her association with her male companion. Film reviewer Adrian Martin based his criticism of *The Still Point* on its deficiencies as a 'teen movie',⁶⁷ although the film was more properly seen as an investigation of the conflict between a newly-divorced mother and her teenaged daughter.

⁶⁵These included *Duet for Four* (1982), *Monkey Grip* (1982), *The Coca-Cola Kid* (1985) and *Fran* (1985).

⁶⁶While the representation of the mothers in Michael Caulfield's *Fighting Back* (1983) and Ken Cameron's *Fast Talking* (1984), appeared to revert to the mother-blaming which was common in the previous decade, a closer examination found that their behaviour was explained by the difficulty of mothering with a violent alcoholic partner. Although they could not be thought of as good mothers, the women were not made scapegoats for the problems of the children.

⁶⁷Adrian Martin, 'The Still Point' [rev. art.], in S. Murray, (ed.), *Australian Film 1978-1992: A Survey of Theatrical Features*, Oxford University Press/AFI and Cinema Papers, South Melbourne, 1993, p. 176.

Barbara's involvement in her career is established from the start of the film, when she becomes angry at Sarah for interrupting her work. She does not take on the customary mother role of preparing meals, hanging out clothes, ironing or sewing, and she is never in the kitchen. In most scenes she is reading or busy writing at the computer. She is a university graduate, dresses as a career woman and probably does not even own an apron. Despite this, she is a good mother whose concern for her daughter is apparent. Her parenting difficulties are expressed and treated sympathetically. When an impasse between the two women is reached, however, and there seems to be no way to settle their differences, the film reverts to traditional ways of solving problems. Sarah is sent to the country to stay with her wise and understanding grandfather, who is able to negotiate a peaceful solution. Although Barbara retains her daughter's love as well as her job and her male friend, the film disappointingly undercuts her ability to manage without male intervention.

While *The Still Point* showed special problems associated with the mothering experience, other films used the mother's behaviour to subvert a central element of the Australian identity. Depicting women in ordinary suburban situations, two films used a satirical approach to question the idea of home ownership. The women in each were not fulfilled by motherhood and were intent on improving their lifestyle. In previous years, they would have been construed as bad mothers, although in the eighties, they were likeable protagonists and loving mothers whose actions did not appear to harm either children or their partners. In Denny Lawrence's *Emoh Ruo* (1985) and Jacki McKimmie's *Australian Dream* (1987), both mothers wanted more out of life than the domestic experience.

The mother in *Emoh Ruo*, Terri, lives with her husband, Des, and young son, Jack, in a caravan in a beachside camping area. Although they seem to have a happy, almost enchanted life, Terri lacks what she perceives to be the security of a house in the suburbs. The film becomes a comedic portrayal of everything that can go wrong in the purchase of a home. By the end, the dream house has fallen down, both parents have lost their jobs

and Jack longs for life at the beach. The last scene shows the family with the caravan in tow, on their way back to their former beach existence. Sadly, *Emoh Ruo* undermines its own challenge to traditional notions of mothering. While it is sympathetic to Terri and blames bad luck for her misfortune, rather than bad management or naivety, at the end, Terri and her family return to a situation she was desperate to leave. The film suggests that rather than aspiring to a house in the suburbs, she should have been thankful for her mortgage-free life at the beach.

In some ways *Australian Dream* is similar to *Emoh Ruo* as it satirises the banality of Australian suburban life. Dorothy lives with her butcher-husband Geoffrey and their two children in a middle-class home in Brisbane. Geoffrey's comical, frequently absurd political aspirations provide the main source of humour. At first glance, it appears that Dorothy has made a stimulating life for herself. She is an attractive thirty-five-year-old who is studying creative writing at university. Her family does not intrude on her writing, her sexual fantasies or her party-going. She is not in the traditional good-mother mould, as in an early scene, she is shown flirting with a stripper at an all-women's party. When she finally returns home, she expects that her husband will have arranged dinner for the children. Despite her apparent freedom, Dorothy is discontented and spends her day indulging in sexual fantasies. Her lifestyle might have indicated that she was selfish and a bad mother, however, the film represents her as amusing and likeable and the audience can sympathise with her irritation at Geoffrey's pretensions. Finally, though, the narrative highlights the limitations of her attempt to make radical changes in her life. Her fantasy-man turns out to be no more exciting than her husband.

A single film stood out in the decade in attempting to come to terms with a woman's changing role in society by allowing her the choice of moving into a new and productive lifestyle within an ecologically justifiable framework. This was Martha Ansara's *The Pursuit of Happiness* (1988). The mother, Anna, decides that she is at a turning point in her life now that her teenaged daughter, Mandy, is no longer dependent on her. She takes

a job in journalism and gathers information which she uses to educate herself about issues of peace. Preservation of the planet becomes her uppermost preoccupation. Her conservative husband, reflecting the desires of many men at the time, is anxious that she continues in her traditional home-maker role. Other disagreements develop about his dubious business ethics and his desire for financial gain, which conflict with Anna's new and highly moral views. While her objections begin tentatively, Anna gains strength of purpose, eventually deciding to stop playing the part of the good, docile wife. In a pivotal scene, she refuses to accompany her husband to a business function. It is inevitable, perhaps, that she eventually leaves him, although she does so of her own choice and in the hope of a more autonomous life.

The Pursuit of Happiness was a rare film in that the mother stepped out of her traditional role, yet retained a good relationship with her child. As well she changed her lifestyle when it had become unacceptable according to her principles. The strength of its position as a feminist film was undermined slightly, perhaps, as the point of assessing her domestic life was only reached when her daughter had left home and the requirement for constant mothering had ceased.

Conclusion.

Representations of the good mother altered considerably in Australian feature films during the period from the beginning of the century to the late 1980s. Although there were exceptions, changes in depictions of the mothering role could be delineated broadly by decade and were determined by shifts in the way mothering was viewed in society at large. For instance, in line with the official concerns about infant mortality in the first decades of the century, the duties of the early cinema mother centred on physical care and cleanliness. She was most often shown in the kitchen, preparing meals or washing and hanging out clothes. At the time, Christian principles were also a crucial part of the maternal role. The mother carried the primary responsibility for regular church attendance although she was not held to blame when in early outdoor adventures, her sons became

bushrangers. Moreover, despite her saintly personality, she defended her progeny against the law, even occasionally using physical force. While the state demanded that citizen-mothers sacrifice their sons for the benefit of the nation, the good mother in early cinema put the well-being of her offspring before considerations of loyalty to the nation.

The good mother of the films of the 1920s worked beside her husband and was a 'helpmate' rather than a subservient partner. Perhaps reflecting the notions of affluence and freedom for women at the time, she had her own opinions on family matters and was unafraid to express them. The representation changed in the 1930s, especially during the Great Depression, when mothers were depicted as agreeing with their husbands in all matters. Good mothering in films at this time reflected the official line and public opinion which held that women should not compete with men for the few jobs available, and rather, should concentrate on taking care of the family. Filmmakers could have shown the hardships of the women in the 1930s and their resourcefulness and creativity in coping with insufficient money to provide nourishment for the family. Instead, they chose to portray mothers who were tired, worried and ill and unable to make any worthwhile contribution to the household. Women on screen were financially, emotionally and physically dependent on husbands who were portrayed as undisputed heads of the households.⁶⁸

Mothers in films during the 1940s, although revealing their physical strength and stoicism, were characterised by typical maternal love and devotion to the family.⁶⁹ A

⁶⁸This deferential mother can be found in many films of the thirties. For example, Beaumont Smith's *The Hayseeds* (1933), Raymond Longford's *The Man They Could Not Hang* (1934), Beaumont Smith's *Splendid Fellows* (1934), K.G. Hall's *Grandad Rudd* (1935), Charles Chauvel's *Heritage* (1935) and K.G. Hall's *It Isn't Done* (1937) and *Dad and Dave Come to Town* (1938).

⁶⁹Australian films of the decade did not mirror overseas imports, which in the 1940s, began to portray mothers as damaging their children. This trend could be discerned in American films like *Now Voyager* (1942) and *Mildred Pierce* (1947). In America, though not in Australia, the concern in society that mothers who had entered the workforce during the war were spending insufficient time with their families was translated to the screen. Their damaged children were meant to serve as a warning to women who might insist on staying in the workforce after the war, rather than leaving the jobs to the men and taking care of their children in the home. Film scholar Ann Kaplan noted that many of the Hollywood mothers were 'blatantly monstrous, deliberately victimising their children for sadistic and narcissistic ends, and thereby producing criminals'. Kaplan cites *Secret beyond the Door* (1948), *Marnie* (1964), *Mommie Dearest* (1981) and *Frances* (1982). E. Ann Kaplan 'Mothering, Feminism and Representation: The maternal in melodrama and the woman's film 1910-40' in C. Gledhill, (ed.), *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and*

single film, Eric Porter's *A Son is Born*, broke away from this pattern and allowed the mother to exhibit independence, while still managing to retain her good mother image. She was, perhaps, a reflection of those mothers who had moved into the workforce during the war, earning respect because they demonstrated that they could maintain the family without the constant presence of their husbands. Rather than the domesticated good mother, she represented the historical experience of the mother in the public sphere.

The migration to domesticity in the suburbs during the 1950s and 1960s, was not taken up by the few Australian films made during that period. Mothers in films who approached contemporary reality were rare, and despite the prevalence of real-life middle-class affluence in the suburbs, most maternal images recalled the poverty-stricken rural families of earlier decades. While the usual constraints on depictions of mothering behaviour prevailed, however, the mother was able to show more strength of character than the passive 1930s mother. All the same, mothers who pursued their own desires and needs before those of the family were punished. Those who conformed to the practice of traditional selfless mothering were rewarded in some way.

By the time the filmmaking industry began again in the 1970s, the family structure had changed dramatically. A movement into paid work and higher education had paved the way for women to fight for equality as well as a life outside the family. In films of the decade, the idealised maternal role was replaced by the figure of the inadequate or selfish mother. This surprising transformation can be explained best, perhaps, by anxiety at the changes to the family and the fear of the power women had accrued with the women's movement. The happy family rarely appeared on screen and dissension between husband and wife was a mark of the decade. The rise of the society's interest in adolescence resulted in the sympathetic focus on teenaged children and films most often represented mothers as out of touch and insensitive to contemporary problems. There had been very few allusions to the bad mother over the years,⁷⁰ but in the 1970s the confusion about the

the Woman's Film, BFI, London, 1987, p. 134.

⁷⁰I can find only three. In *Just Peggy* (1918), the mother rejected her daughter because she feared she would

mother's role led to frequent depictions of her as contemptible, incompetent or downright monstrous.⁷¹

Albeit tentatively, films in the 1980s began to reflect the growing acceptance in the community of changes in the family unit and the validity of women's claims for equality. Mothers were portrayed as intelligent and successful in the public arena, in addition to coping with the relationships in the family. The contribution of female filmmakers should not be underestimated in this transition to representations of a variety of ways of mothering. New Australian female filmmakers began to introduce narratives which focused on mothers and most critically, were from her point of view. Teen conflict continued, although with a heightened sympathy for the difficulties that mothers confronted. Although mothers were usually represented as dissatisfied with domesticity, those who desired self-fulfilment outside the home were acknowledged, and what is more important, perhaps, were not shown to be neglectful or harmful to their children. Vivien Nice maintained that the patriarchal affinity with binary distinctions had, since the beginning of cinema, made it convenient for male filmmakers to split mothering into 'good' and 'bad'.⁷² By the 1980s, the polarised mothering experience appeared to be replaced with diversity in the maternal role. The freedom to choose, however, was not absolute, and frequently, after a dramatic flutter of their wings in public, women in films most often returned to take up their responsibility of nurturing and caring for their families.

grow up with a disability. Similarly, in *Mr Chedworth Steps Out* (1939), Mrs Chedworth was a shrew and social climber, and in *The Shiralee* (1957), it was suggested that the mother's sexuality was seen as more important to her than the welfare of her daughter.

⁷¹The few good mothers of the decade could be found in: Bruce Beresford's *The Getting of Wisdom* (1977), Carl Schultz's *The Blue Fin* (1978), Donald Crombie's *The Irishman* (1978) and *Cathy's Child* (1979), Ken Hannam's *Dawn!* (1979), George Miller's *Mad Max* (1979) and Michael Pate's *Tim* (1979). In each however, any power the mother may have accrued by her virtue was subverted in some way.

⁷²Vivien E. Nice, *Mothers and Daughters: The Distortion of a Relationship*, Macmillan, Hampshire, 1992, p. 135.

chapter 4

congratulations - it's a boy!

*Birth is the primary numinous event. It is our major metaphor for life and coming into being. We talk about birth of the universe, the birth of galaxies. It is how the world came into being. It is the first act of magic — and physical testament to the continuity of human and all life.*¹

A short film shown at a festival in Sydney in 1995 begins with an image of an imposing Catholic church. The dark chords of heavy organ music overlay the images and serve to intensify the religiosity of the scene. The genre of tragedy is indicated. An Italian woman, dressed in black and wearing a head scarf, enters slowly by the central aisle, lights a candle, crosses herself, and bows her head and solemnly prays. Above and around her are numerous familiar icons and statuary: crucifixes, stained glass, a haloed Jesus and a dolorous Mary. She looks up at the melancholy Madonna and entreats: 'Mother, why are you always so sad?' Tears flow surreally from the moulded eyes, there is a pause and the statue speaks. It declares: 'Because, my child, I wanted a daughter'.²

Icon, directed by Di Cousens, although only one minute in length, was both startling and humorous because of the novelty of its concept which subverted the most fundamental level of Christian doctrine. As well, it challenged and therefore undermined the preference for a male child which had been a part of most cultures for centuries.

The birth of a child is a momentous occasion, described by Judith Lumley and Jill Astbury in their Australian study on the subject, as: 'that most creative and joyous of events'.³ Birth marked the crucial moment of woman's transition to becoming a mother according to British sociologist Ann Oakley.⁴ She maintained that 'birth is an event with

¹Arisika Razak, 'Toward a Womanist Analysis of Birth' in I. Diamond & G.F. Orenstein, (eds), *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 1990, p. 168.

²*Icon* was directed by Di Cousens. It formed part of video collection 'Visions of Women' presented at the Women on Women Film Festival, May 27-28 1995, Valhalla Cinema, Sydney.

³Judith Lumley & Jill Astbury, *Birth Rites Birth Rights: Childbirth Alternatives for Australian Parents*, Sphere Books, West Melbourne, 1980, p. 126.

⁴Ann Oakley, *Becoming a Mother*, Martin Robertson, Oxford, 1979, p. 59.

great psychological, emotional and social meaning'.⁵ Similarly, Arisika Razak considered birth 'an event of incredible human significance' with a 'profound spiritual, psychological, and emotional importance'.⁶ These writings indicate that the moment of a child's birth is extraordinarily powerful. From them we can gather that all the connotations surrounding the event are salient in understanding the issues of motherhood.

Because the birth of a child is so important to the family, films frequently used the event for the beginning or the conclusion of a story. In 1992, the cinema review journal, *The Velvet Light Trap*, devoted an entire issue to the phenomenon of birth in films. In it, Lori Shorr discussed the cinematic construction of the maternal body in childbirth. She analysed educational videos of birth and was critical of the paternal presence which appropriated the mother's part in the labour and delivery process.⁷ Robin Blaetz, in the same journal, examined films for the sounds of childbirth, and astutely observed that 'birth has traditionally been shown in terms of its effect on a male listener'.⁸ Other articles in the journal considered surrogacy, abortion and working mothers in films. While these offered useful insights into research into motherhood in the cinema, they paid curiously little attention to the difference the sex of the child made to the narrative. This aspect was also ignored by Lucy Fischer in her study of birth in Roman Polanski's film, *Rosemary's Baby*. In a long, detailed and exemplary reading of the film, the issue of the child's sex was not considered.⁹ The difference the delivery of a female or male baby made for the mother in films has not been fully analysed. This has been a significant omission.

⁵Ann Oakley, *Women Confined. Towards a Sociology of Childbirth*, Martin Robertson, Oxford, 1980, p. 121.

⁶Razak, 'Toward a Womanist Analysis of Birth', p. 168.

⁷Lori Shorr, 'Performing Birth: The construction of female bodies in instructional childbirth videos', *The Velvet Light Trap: Review of Cinema*, number 29, Spring 1992, pp. 3-14.

⁸Robin Blaetz, 'In Search of the Mother Tongue: Childbirth and the cinema', *The Velvet Light Trap: Review of Cinema*, number 29, Spring 1992, p. 17.

⁹Lucy Fischer, *Cinematernity: Film, Motherhood, Genre*, Princeton University Press, NJ, 1996, pp. 73-91.

This chapter investigates the different meanings attached to birth in films and in particular demonstrates the difference that the child's sex makes in the life of the mother. The aim is to understand whether the context and the reception of the cinematic birth work to reinforce beliefs about the superiority of the male in society. It would be no surprise to find that the exuberance which traditionally greets the arrival of a boy child has been replicated on screen. The acceptance, even expectation, of the preference, raises the question of how the context of the films might have reinforced it. In other words, were narratives organised to support these particular notions? Was the mother of a male child rewarded by appearing to be a more significant figure? What happened to the woman if she delivered a girl baby rather than a boy? These questions can be answered quite simply by an examination of the trajectory of the narrative.

There were thirty-six births in Australian feature films from 1900 to 1988. Of these, twenty-one, or fifty-eight per cent were male. In a patriarchal society, perhaps, it was not surprising that male births predominated in films. It was the context surrounding the birth, however, that was most interesting in understanding how popular images might reflect the preference for a male child which had been a part of most cultures for centuries. This chapter argues that the sex of the child is an important predictor of narrative outcome. Within the films selected, there is a tendency to reward the mother of a son, and to consider the mother of a daughter as less meritorious. That this trend is routine and normalised to a degree that it becomes almost imperceptible, suggests that it reflects a set of beliefs that are both firmly entrenched and unquestioned in the society.

The analysis is arranged in four sections. The first part examines the expectations surrounding the birth. It concentrates on the preferences stated by the parents for a daughter or son, and uses historical, social and psychoanalytical research to understand the position taken in several typical films. The second part considers the events after the birth, particularly in relation to changes the new baby brings to the life of the mother. The punishment and rewards that are attached to female and male births are assessed in

this section of the study. The special circumstances of births to unmarried women are analysed within this context, to identify any differences that female or male births have on the mother's future wellbeing. The third section describes those films in which the birth of a son is used to provide credibility or power in the development of the narrative. These are contrasted with the films in which the birth of a daughter is trivialised by its link to humorous situations.

Expectations: The preference for a son

My readings of the films concentrate on birth and gender, despite this not necessarily being the primary concern of the filmmakers at the time. The incorporation of births into films and the decisions regarding the sex of the infants are, perhaps, part of a normative process, largely unquestioned by the filmmakers and audiences. As historian, Gerda Lerner, observed, 'Patriarchal concepts are...built into all mental constructs of...civilisation in such a way as to remain largely invisible'.¹⁰

Reflection on the history of childbirth and its relation to modern practice is helpful in gaining some insight into the representation of births in films. Historical writings made it clear that sons have been considered more desirable than daughters for many centuries and across many cultures and countries. Lloyd de Mause, in his European history of childhood, noted that before the fourth century AD, when infanticide was not considered a crime, girl babies were often killed. He concluded that: 'Girls were, of course, valued little'. De Mause cited Hilarion's letter to his pregnant wife Alis in 1 BC, in which he ordered her to expose a daughter and let a son live.¹¹ Lerner also noted that in 8-5th century BC Athens: 'The main function of wives was to produce male heirs... Many female children were exposed at birth and left to die, with the decision over their fate always made by the father'.¹² Additionally, Adrienne Rich observed that ancient

¹⁰Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of the Feminine Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy*, Oxford University Press, NY/Oxford, 1993, p. 3.

¹¹Lloyd de Mause, 'The Evolution of Childhood' in L. de Mause (ed.), *The History of Childhood*, Harper Torchbooks, NY, 1984, pp. 1-73, see particularly pp. 25-6.

¹²Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Oxford University Press, NY/Oxford, 1986, p. 202.

Upanishad texts privileged male births by maintaining that the father welcomed the birth of a son, as a representation of his own second birth.¹³ The preference was widespread. George Payne noted the commonplace habit of drowning baby girls in China and the habitual infanticide in India. He claimed that authorities as recently as 1871 attempted to curtail the practice, by issuing an edict which required midwives to report when girls in the child population fell to below twenty-five per cent.¹⁴

The situation where boys tended to be more highly valued than girls had its foundation in antiquity, and has continued into modern patriarchal and patrilineal cultures.¹⁵ Its continuing existence is verified by research into modern society.¹⁶ American psychologist, Lois Wladis Hoffman, found that men were three to four times more likely to prefer sons to daughters.¹⁷ Additionally, investigation in the 1970s in the US by Michael Lamb and colleagues, revealed that: 'American men overwhelmingly desire male rather than female offspring, with a degree of preference far exceeding that of their wives'.¹⁸ Similarly in Australia, Lyn Richards found that the impetus to have a third child often came from a father wanting a son.¹⁹

¹³The Upanishad, the Sanskrit sacred books of Hinduism from between 400 and 200 BC quoted by Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Virago, London, 1981, (1976) p. 226.

¹⁴George Henry Payne, *The Child in Human Progress*, The Knickerbocker Press, NY/London, 1916, p. 60, p. 137.

¹⁵A fascinating contradiction of this conclusion was reported recently by Tim Radford who wrote about the discovery of a 'mass grave of more than 100 babies—all only one or two days old—in a Roman settlement from 4th-century Israel'. Scientists had examined nineteen of the skeletons, Radford noted, and found that fourteen were boys and five were girls. The surprise that more boys had been murdered can be explained by the position of the grave. It was under a brothel, a place where mature girls would have been more valuable than boys. Tim Radford, 'Roman infanticide: Mystery of the brothel babies', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 January 1997, p. 8.

¹⁶See for example Jacqueline McGuire 'Sons and Daughters', in A. Phoenix, A. Woollett & E. Lloyd, (eds), *Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies*, Sage, London, 1991, pp. 143-61, and Susan A. Basow, *Gender Stereotypes and Roles*, Third Edition, Brooks/Cole, Pacific Grove, California, 1992, (1980), p. 129.

¹⁷Lois Wladis Hoffman, 'Changes in Family Roles, Socialization, and Sex Differences', *American Psychologist*, August 1977, pp. 644-57.

¹⁸Michael E. Lamb et al., 'The Father-Daughter Relationship: Past, present and future', in Claire B. Kopp, (ed.), *Becoming Female: Perspectives on Development*, Plenum, NY/London, 1979, p. 95.

¹⁹Lyn Richards, *Having Families: Marriage, Parenthood and Social Pressure in Australia*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1978, pp. 274-5.

Charles Chauvel's *Sons of Matthew* (1949), one of the most androcentric of the early films, consistently offered examples of the worth of sons over daughters. The film told of Matthew's difficulties in setting up a home for his family in the inhospitable outback of Australia. When his sons grew to manhood, they were expected to search for new land for their own families. They found virgin land and a monumental challenge on the wild Lamington Plateau and eventually, succeeding in overcoming the many hardships, they were able to make a new life for themselves. *Sons of Matthew* emphasised the value of male children, not only in its title, but from its very first frame. In keeping with the genre of the family saga, the characters were introduced as though in a book. The image of each of the four sons appeared on two pages, the first depiction as a child and the second as an adult. The male narrator described their personalities as infants and as they had grown up. Blatantly and laughingly confessing to the idea of the daughters as an afterthought, he added: 'I almost forgot the two girls'. The narrator trivialised the girls' function in the family and they were presented in a much smaller space, on a single shared page.

Indeed, Matthew's daughters remained incidental to the story. The usefulness and value of the boys was a conspicuous theme of the film while the two girls were almost absent in the progression of the narrative. Any discussions about the future of the property took place with the sons. This was a reflection of way the patriarchal Australian land settlers operated, although it served to underline the lack of importance of women for the 'real work' in running a property. The daughters were not consulted and remained confined with their mother in the domestic environment. When hard times hit the family, Matthew lamented, 'There'll be no Christmas for my sons'. It would have been just as easy for him to say 'There'll be no Christmas for my children', and his failure to even mention his daughters in these circumstances made his lack of interest in them quite clear.

Fathers in Australian films expressed a desire for sons, never anticipated the birth of a daughter with pleasure, and when they did appear, frequently treated them poorly. The father's predilection for a son can be clearly observed in Phillip Noyce's *Newsfront* (1978). Fay is about to have her third baby. Len, her husband, tells her that he 'painted the bedroom blue, so God gets the hint'. Fay remonstrates with Len, suggesting that it is his preference, not hers. She is worried that finding a separate room for a son will be a problem, because their house is too small. Len is not concerned with practicalities and clearly blames the devout Fay, (and her God), for the birth of their two existing daughters. Logically, the audience could sympathise with Fay's concerns, however, film reviewer Brian McFarlane summed up the position taken by the filmmakers: 'Len [is] married to a nag for longer than most would bear it, ...finally leaving her without losing integrity'.²⁰

Paternal preference was also evident in Fred Zinneman's *The Sundowners* (1960). Liz and Bluey are about to have their first baby. Liz is understandably anxious about the birth, although Bluey's main concern is not for his wife, but for the sex of the child. One of his friends teases him while they are drinking beer in the hotel: 'What are you going to call this girl of yours when it's born?'. Bluey drunkenly replies: 'I told you a dozen times, it's going to be a boy'. When he finds out that he has a son, Bluey is delighted. His first words reveal his priority: 'I gotta tell the fellas'. Had the child been a female, his reaction may have been different.

Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born* explained the specificities of man's historical preference for sons. Besides needing them to 'enhance his position in the world', she suggested that throughout history, fathers have desired sons, because they provide: 'heirs, field hands, cannon-fodder, feeders of machinery, images and extensions of themselves'. In this way sons were able to guarantee 'immortality' for their fathers.²¹ Her

²⁰Brian McFarlane, *Australian Cinema 1970-1985*, William Heinemann, Richmond, Victoria, 1987, p. 195

²¹Rich, *Of Woman Born*, p. 119, p. 195.

insights were pertinent to several scenes in *Sons of Matthew*. As soon as he sees his first-born son, Matthew takes the baby's hand and tells Jane: 'Here's a hand for the plough Jane, strong and confident. It's a straight furrow he'll make'. Baby Shane grows to manhood and echoes Matthew's view of the importance of male descendants. He attempts to persuade the neighbour's daughter, Cathy, to marry him by arguing, 'You are going to be my wife and bear my sons, because that's the way it was meant to be'. His beliefs were echoed in Australian rural films where, commonly, the hero proposed marriage and immediately spoke of an expectation of sons to help him on the farm.²²

However lighthearted it might appear to be, the assumption that the husband-to-be could direct his wife about the sex of the unborn children was coterminous with notions of men's jealousy and attempted appropriation of women's ability to give birth. This occurrence has been frequently observed by female scholars. Barbara Creed noted that men appear to exhibit jealousy and awe at the act of birth.²³ Fischer has argued persuasively that Freud invented the notion of penis envy to counteract male jealousy of women's undeniable creativity in giving birth.²⁴ Similarly, Susan Dermody interpreted the male involvement with the adolescent's rite of passage as a compensation for his fear that there was no 'equivalent to the precise and weighty flesh and blood matter of giving birth'.²⁵ Evelyn Nakano Glenn has written about the social construction of mothering and argued that male-dominated institutions have in many ways tried to control the birth process. Glenn cited the professionalisation of medicine which has resulted in the suppression of midwifery and the belittling of women's knowledge of childbirth.²⁶

²²See for example, *The Squatter's Daughter* (1933) where the hero observed coyly: 'I'll be needing some young chaps to help me' in the same breath as his proposal of marriage.

²³Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Routledge, London, 1993, p. 57.

²⁴Fischer, *Cinematernity*, p. 47.

²⁵Susan Dermody & Elizabeth Jacka, *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a National Cinema*, Volume Two, Currency, Paddington, 1988, p. 184.

²⁶Evelyn Nakano Glenn, 'Social Constructions of Mothering: A thematic overview', in E.N. Glenn, G. Chang & L.R. Forcey, (eds), *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency*, Routledge, NY, 1994, pp. 1-29.

The issue has been explored within a cinematic context by Virginia Wright Wexman, who described the inclination of men to commandeer women's 'procreative power' in D.W. Griffith's *Way Down East*.²⁷ An Australian counterpart occurred in *Sons of Matthew*, where respect for the mother's travail in childbirth was undercut by her husband's actions. In the film, wild horses had come to take Matthew's brood mares at the exact moment of the beginning of Jane's first confinement. Scenes of Matthew's fight to save his stock were counterposed with Jane's time in labour and underscored by powerful, dramatic music. The chiaroscuro lighting which Chauvel used could have served to highlight the drama and importance of the birth, instead of emphasising Matthew's struggle with the herd of stallions. While Matthew's strength and courage were accentuated by filmic effects, Jane's efforts were restricted to shots of the midwife boiling water on the fuel stove. When Matthew finally has time to see Jane, he is dishevelled and dirty after his arduous night, while she rests in a clean white-lined bed, with the baby miraculously by her side. As Shorr in her observations of birth in cinema pointed out: 'No long hours of false labor, no vomiting or tearing interrupts the classic narrative'.²⁸ *Sons of Matthew*, by contrasting Matthew's courage with Jane's apparent comfort, has transfigured the birth as Matthew's accomplishment. The importance of the birth and concomitant merit which more properly should accrue to the mother has been displaced on to the husband.

It is not surprising, given the importance the father placed on a male heir, that the mother was encouraged to share his preference. In Australian feature films, the prospective mother's position was rarely canvassed, although in *A Son is Born* and *Unfinished Business*, the mother professed a desire for a boy, as she clearly expected a son rather than a daughter would please the husband and save her marriage. The position may have a foundation in beliefs that the wife was meant to provide her

²⁷Wexman cited Margaret Mead, Karen Horney, Simone de Beauvoir, Lucy Fischer and Nancy Huston among others, who had noted male envy in this regard. V.W. Wexman, 'Suffering and Suffrage: Birth, the female body, and women's choices in D.W. Griffith's *Way Down East*', *The Velvet Light Trap: Review of Cinema*, number 29, Spring 1992, p. 63, n. 9.

²⁸Shorr, 'Performing Birth', p. 7.

husband with a male child. It was almost law, as Lerner in her discussion of the Middle Ages discovered: women without sons were frequently replaced by another woman, and subsequently lost any privileges gained during their marriage.²⁹ Lerner also observed that in Hebrew societies based on the writings of the Old Testament, the wife's barrenness or inability to produce sons was cause for divorce.³⁰

The pressure on women to produce sons was still apparent in Hoffman's recent study of American families. She observed that twice as many women favoured sons rather than daughters. The most common reason they gave was that the birth of a son pleased their husbands, as the baby would carry on the family name and be a companion to him.³¹ The husbands' influence on the preference women showed for sons was recognised by psychologist, Dana Breen in her study of the bonding of American mothers to their first-born child.³² Breen detected that women with daughters were more likely than those with sons to have post-partum depression. She discovered that women's disappointment resulted from their belief that their husband required a son and their guilt stemmed from their inability to provide one. Oakley ascertained in her research on coping mechanisms of mothers, that 44% of women were disappointed to have daughters, compared to 93% who were pleased to have sons.³³ Many of these modern studies, appeared to reinforce the idea that women deferred to the wishes of their husbands. Vivien Nice revealed a possible explanation for this in her study of mother/daughter relationships. She found that because the mother's primary concern was for the health of the child rather than its sex, she was content to echo the father's preference for a son.³⁴

In these studies the mother's aspirations about the sex of the baby appeared to be directed by her husband. Recent sociological and psychoanalytical research, however,

²⁹Lerner, *The Creation of the Feminine Consciousness*, pp. 119-22.

³⁰Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, p. 170.

³¹Hoffman, 'Changes in Family Roles', pp. 644-57.

³²Dana Breen, *The Birth of a First Child: Toward an Understanding of Femininity*, Tavistock, London, 1975, pp. 175-6.

³³Oakley, *Becoming a Mother*, p. 118.

³⁴Vivien E. Nice, *Mothers and Daughters: The Distortion of a Relationship*, Macmillan, London, 1992, p. 20.

has indicated there were more complex explanations. For example, sociologist, Judith Arcana, argued that women wanted female children, or both female and male, and were swayed by the response in society to birth, in which sons attract more praise and status.³⁵ In Australia, likewise, Babbette Smith commented on the prestige that accrued to mothers of sons, who were envied and praised after World War Two.³⁶ Psychologist, Phyllis Magrab, concluded that women often preferred sons, to avoid reliving the experience of low status and security they had themselves encountered.³⁷ Rich's views about the desirability of sons coincided with Magrab's. Her own preference for a son derived from memories of her childhood where she related to more positive masculine roles, the result of which was that she wanted to give birth: 'to my unborn self, the self that our father-centred family had suppressed in me, someone independent, actively willing, original.'³⁸ From another point-of-view, Lerner believed that some mother's desire for a male child could have been instigated by the Catholic religion and doctrinal worship of Mary and her son.³⁹ As Julia Kristeva observed in her essay, 'Stabat Mater', the maternal element of Catholicism was a powerful part of the religion.⁴⁰ In these accounts, a society which gave more status to women with sons, created an environment which had the potential to influence birth preferences.

For many film mothers, the appearance of a son was a cause for celebration. Hoffman's study, however, cited above, revealed that one third of the women she questioned confessed that they were hoping for daughters. These women, albeit in a minority, gave reasons which included wanting a companion; someone who was fun to dress; was more like themselves and was easier to live with and more obedient.⁴¹ Additionally, some expected that daughters could help with the housework and their siblings, and would

³⁵Judith Arcana, *Our Mother's Daughters*, The Women's Press, London, 1984, (1979) p. 193.

³⁶Babbette Smith, *Mothers and Sons*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1995, p. 17.

³⁷Phyllis R. Magrab, 'Mothers and Daughters', in Claire B. Kopp, (ed.), *Becoming Female: Perspectives on Development*, Plenum, NY/London, 1979, p. 116.

³⁸Rich, *Of Woman Born*, p. 193.

³⁹Lerner, *The Creation of the Feminine Consciousness*, p. 127.

⁴⁰Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater' in S.R. Suleiman, (ed.), *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1986, pp. 99-118.

⁴¹Hoffman, 'Changes in Family Roles', pp. 644-57.

stay closer than would sons. Alexandra Towle in her book, *A Celebration of Mothers*, quoted Gloria Vanderbilt, who, thinking about her own pregnancies, wrote: 'My only regret was that I haven't had a daughter. That experience must be extraordinary—for a woman to have a daughter and really see another woman, part image of herself'.⁴² Nice was also interested in the notion of a woman seeing a daughter as a reflection of herself, and she noted the additional advantage of the attachment and bonding between women in the relationship, and of the possibility of getting a second chance in the mother/daughter relationship.⁴³ Women such as these, who indicated a preference for a daughter, were not represented in Australian films. The closest comment came from Fay in *Newsfront*, discussed previously, who had two daughters and when expecting a third child, thought another daughter would be less trouble as she would not have to provide a separate room.

After the Birth

The second part of this analysis of birth in Australian films considers the changes the new child brings to the life of the mother. Examination of the narrative reveals that the mother's future is based on a system of reward and punishment governed by the sex of the child. For instance, in Jack Lee's *Robbery Under Arms* (1957), the wife, Jean, gives birth to a son soon after the young couple is married. The father, Jim, who is an habitual bushranger, looks at his small son asleep in his cot and immediately decides to give up his life of crime. He surrenders to the police knowing that when he has served his sentence in jail he will be able to return home to be with his son. The birth of a boy marked a pivotal part in the resolution of the story, as the baby provided a credible reason for Jim to give himself up. A catalyst for change, the birth pointed to the beginning of a new life for Jim as well as his son. Additionally, it signalled a reversal of the previous habitual criminality of all the males in the family. The birth of a less-valued daughter would not have provided as suitable a plot device. The reward for the mother

⁴²Gloria Vanderbilt 'Woman to Woman', in Alexandra Towle, (ed.), *A Celebration of Mothers*, Pan, London, 1993, pp. 20-1.

⁴³Nice, *Mothers and Daughters*, pp. 21-2.

came with the status which accrued from the birth of her son, and the promise of a better lifestyle with a loving and law-abiding husband.

Interestingly, this film was a remake of a 1920 feature. In the earlier film of the same name, directed by Kenneth Brampton, Jim married, although there was no mention of a child. The emphasis in the narrative was on his punishment rather than his redemption. There was a cultural and historical explanation for the difference between the construction of the plots in both films. In 1920, it was necessary to reinforce the message that crime did not pay, particularly as authorities were sensitive about the proliferation of bushranging films.⁴⁴ When the film was remade in 1957, the concern in society had shifted to the encouragement of domesticity, and the son's birth provided a suitable and believable explanation of Jim's desire and ability for respectability in the context of family life.

The representation of a woman's reward for giving birth to a son can also be found in *Unfinished Business* (1986), a film directed and written by Bob Ellis. Maureen and her husband George have everything in their life: wealth, companionship and security, except Maureen has been unable to become pregnant. Because she has had an abortion some years earlier, she realises that it is her husband who is sterile. When Maureen chances to meet her former lover, Geoff, who was the father of the aborted baby, she asks him if he would be willing to make her pregnant without the knowledge of her husband. She tells Geoff that George is desperate to have a child and in particular, a son. Maureen, unsure and nervous throughout the affair, is trying to convince herself when she reasons plaintively: 'It's not just for him, it's for me too'. After all her soul-searching, Maureen is successful. The final scene shows George with a one-year-old son on his knee, unaware of the lover's part in the event. The camera hovers outside the room, constructing a voyeuristic picture postcard of a happy family gathering in an opulent setting where the little son is the crowning glory.

⁴⁴Andrew Pike & Ross. Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977: A Guide to Feature Film Production*, Oxford University Press/AFI, Melbourne, 1980, pp. 135-6.

This film was not judgemental about the actions of the wife. The blissfully happy association of George and his son was instrumental in alleviating whatever guilt may have been attached to the adultery. Despite Maureen's anxiety about the method she used to conceive the baby and the consequent risk to her marriage, the result has been successful and she has been rewarded for her effort.

Many psychoanalytic viewpoints which celebrated the birth of a son could be related to the writing of Sigmund Freud, in particular, his 1935 essay, *Femininity*. Freud argued that woman's most powerful desire was for a penis and when she translated this desire into a desire for a baby, she was able to achieve femininity. He contended: 'Her happiness is great if later on this wish for a baby finds fulfilment in reality, and quite especially so if the baby is a little boy who brings the longed-for penis with him'. For Freud, a mother's relationship with her son was 'the most perfect, the most free from ambivalence of all human relationships'. Through the son, the mother could experience those ambitions which had been thwarted in her own life, thus finding satisfaction by the resolution of any remnants of her masculinity complex.⁴⁵

An exemplary demonstration of the psychoanalytical viewpoint which noted the mother's attachment to her son could be seen in a film which relied on Freudian concepts for its narrative and sub-text. In Michael Thornbill's *Between Wars* (1974), the effectiveness of psychiatry and psychoanalysis was openly debated and the lives of the main characters were affected by their acceptance or rejection of Freudian arguments. Additionally, and germane to discussions in this chapter, the narrative also included the birth of a son.

Between Wars is a political, social and historical portrayal of Australian life from 1918 to 1941. Its protagonist is a male doctor, Edward, who suffers discrimination because of

⁴⁵Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity', *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Norton, NY, 1963, (c. 1935), pp. 112-35.

his radical views, which include pacifism and an interest in psychoanalysis. During World War One, he befriends a German psychiatrist with Freudian sympathies who has been interned in the hospital where he works. Edward discusses Freud with the German and appears to share his theories. A sub-textual Freudian connection is also signalled with the birth of Edward's son, Rodney, who becomes a close companion to his mother, Deborah, while being largely ignored by his father. In a scene in a dressing room after the grown-up Rodney's appearance in a university revue, he learns from his mother that his father has missed his performance because of an emergency at the hospital. Rodney is clearly delighted to have his mother to himself and he raises his glass of champagne to toast his missing parent: 'Here's to father's little emergency'. The Oedipal parallel is obvious: the father has been vanquished and the son is united with his mother. The Freudian influence is increased by the scene's sexual energy, as a coquettish Deborah allows herself to be persuaded by Rodney to be his companion at the after-show party.

Ultimately, the resolution of *Between Wars* can be understood with reference to the Freudian theory of the son's acting out the mother's suppressed desires.⁴⁶ In the course of the film, Deborah has grown to resent her husband's introspective nature which has limited the family's financial and social success. She has been unable to either influence Edward or communicate her opinions about his behaviour. Rodney is able to achieve Deborah's desire for her, when he manages to take a stand against his father. The antagonism brewing in the family reaches a symbolic climax, when, as an ultimate blow to the staunchly pacifist Edward, Rodney joins the army to fight for Australia in the Second World War. Deborah's triumphant words end the film. Although it is possible that her child may lose his life in the war and it is, perhaps, only a Pyrrhic victory, there is no regret in her voice. She indicates Rodney, standing in uniform in front of the fire, and announces to her husband: 'He sails on Wednesday'. The feminine sounds of Debussy piano music underline her words and contrast with the masculine hardness of the Dixieland jazz used up to now in the film. Deborah looks up to meet Rodney's eyes

⁴⁶Freud, 'Femininity', p. 133.

across the room as he stands in the traditional patriarchal place, elbow on the mantelpiece. Edward, defeated, slumps in his armchair.

If mothers who produced sons could look forward to either the father's approval, or at least, a better life, the reverse was usually true for mothers of daughters. A disturbing example of this can be found in *Libido* (1973), a quartet of stories, one episode of which is David Baker's *The Family Man*, written by David Williamson. In this film, a real estate agent, Ken, telephones a male friend with the news that his wife has had another daughter. He is infuriated because he now has 'three girls in a row' and adds that 'girls give me the shits'. His displeasure with the birth and the blatant misogyny of the film is made clear when he jokes in an admiring way about a man who has sex with his wife while she is in labour. Ken compounds his anger with a desire to punish his wife. While she is in hospital with the newborn infant, he gets drunk with his friend and picks up two young women, taking them to his holiday house at the coast with the intention of having sex with them. The evening does not turn out well and arguments and misunderstandings develop among all the characters. Angry because of Ken's chauvinistic treatment of them, the two young women place a large sign on the roof of Ken's house which accuses him of adulterous behaviour. The film could have ended there and made the point of embarrassing Ken in front of his friends and neighbours. The final, otherwise extraneous scene, is used to make the wife's punishment explicit. The offensive sign is plainly evident when the family with a new baby daughter arrives home from hospital. Significantly this is the wife's only scene in the film and her reaction, although she shows some irritation, is oddly resigned. She snaps at Ken: 'Get that off before the girls see it'. It should be remembered that of course the sign would not have been there, had she delivered a boy.

The plot of *The Family Man* was based on the behaviour of a father after the birth of his daughter. By all accounts his treatment of his wife was reprehensible, yet it appeared to be accepted as an understandable reaction. Ken, played by actor Jack Thompson, in

some ways was a stereotypical Australian male: beer-drinking, licentious, shallow and reliant on his mates. He was successful in business, as witnessed by his luxurious house, expensive car and holiday home. Film historians, Graham Shirley and Brian Adams, claimed that the film was a powerful and accurate portrayal of Australian middle-class masculinity. They concluded that the film, 'perfectly captures middle-class speech patterns and ocker male vulnerability'.⁴⁷ The film critic, Sandra Hall, writing at the time of the film's release in 1973, described Thompson as ideally cast because of his representation of 'the physicality, the competitiveness, the materialism and the partial familiarity with fashions like pot smoking and Leonard Cohen'. Significantly, Hall indicated that 'the shocks of recognition were felt all over the theatre'.⁴⁸

Hall, like other writers on film, while recognising that Ken's behaviour was typical, failed to acknowledge that the birth of a daughter was a critical factor in his response. The critic, Bob Ellis, also missed that point. He claimed that the film was a 'class struggle between a well heeled sophisticated alf and a couple of rather naive hash headed women's libbers'.⁴⁹ A more nuanced reading of the film could place Ken as a most pitiful and unlikeable creature, at odds with those around him, including his wife and male friends. Perhaps, his disappointment with his new daughter reflected a subconscious desire, noted by Rich, in which a son allowed a father a second chance, an opportunity to start life afresh.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, whatever the evaluation of Ken's lifestyle, his preference for a son and the punishment of his wife was entirely predictable.

In whatever way it was done, it was more common for mothers of sons to be rewarded, while mothers of daughters were punished. The tendency can be deduced from the synopses of two early films from Australian cinema. Raymond Longford's *A Maori*

⁴⁷Graham Shirley & Brian Adams, *Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years*, Angus & Robertson/Currency, Australia, 1983, p. 268.

⁴⁸Sandra Hall, *Critical Business: The New Australian Cinema in Review*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1985, p. 13.

⁴⁹Bob Ellis, *Nation Review*, 19-27 April 1973, quoted in Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p. 345.

⁵⁰Rich, *Of Woman Born*, p. 193.

Maid's Love (1916), reveals that a surveyor, who is married to a nagging and shallow wife, has an affair with a Maori woman while he is on a field trip. The woman subsequently has a daughter and dies. She has transgressed and her demise can be seen as retribution.⁵¹ While Nina Auerbach concluded that it was common in Victorian melodrama for an unwed woman to die at the end of the story, in Australian films, the woman usually gives birth to a daughter before doing so.⁵² The plot of Kenneth Brampton's *The Dingo* (1923) is bizarre.⁵³ A dissolute drunkard, (the 'Dingo' of the title), inveigles a country girl into marriage. She gives birth to a daughter and later dies from shock brought on by distress, on learning that her husband has been arrested for murder. The woman had married a man whom she apparently did not love, and died as a result of being told of his wrongdoing.

Although the birth of a daughter foreshadowed the death of a mother in these films, the mother of a son rarely died. At first view it appeared that Charles Chauvel's *Heritage* (1935), set in the early days of Australian white settlement, was an exception. In the film, a young woman, Biddy, comes to Australia on a 'bride ship' and marries a settler after having been deserted by the hero, Jim. They have a baby son. In a subsequent fight with Aborigines, Biddy and her husband are killed. Initially, Biddy's death may have appeared to overturn the tradition in films in which a son could mean wealth and happiness for the mother and a daughter, death or illness. Biddy, however, has hidden the baby under the floorboards of their hut and the child is found by Jim. As a poor servant, Biddy had little hope of a decent existence and her son is commandeered by the hero and his lawful wife, to be brought up in their wealthy respectable household. Underlining the contrast with Biddy's privations, Jim assesses his good fortune as: 'What more could a man ask of life than a loving and virtuous wife and a son, and successful achievements?' Had Biddy's child been a girl, his speech would, perhaps, not

⁵¹The film has been lost, but can be examined from the synopsis of Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, pp. 76-7.

⁵²Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1982, pp. 160-1.

⁵³Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p. 153.

have had the same resonance. In *Heritage*, Bidy's son was the beginning of a lineage which was important to the finale of the film. It was crucial that in the massacre in which his parents were killed, that he should survive.

The paradigm wherein sons signify plenitude and love within the marriage, and daughters foreshadowed those that are doomed, violent or pilloried, was depicted in three films. These are Ken Hannam's *Dawn!* (1979), Frank Shields' *Hostage: The Christine Maresch Story* (1983) and Fred Schepisi's *Evil Angels* (1988). The female protagonist in all of these films gave birth, and in each case she had a daughter. This followed the expected course of events seen so far in the investigation of Australian cinema, although these films were set apart from the others already examined. Their plots were based on true stories, so in one sense the directors and scriptwriters had no alternative except to represent female children.

Logically, it must be coincidental that the births in these films in which the mother's life ranges from dysfunctional to horrific, were invariably of daughters. These 'real life' female births, however, raised interesting questions of whether they influenced and/or reflected the representation of the births in the fictional films discussed in this chapter. In other words, would Dawn Fraser's husband have walked away and the marriage have broken up in the same manner had the child been a boy? Would the protagonist of *Hostage*, Walter Maresch, have treated his wife so brutally, if she had delivered two sons instead of two daughters? Would the Lindy Chamberlain story, reenacted in *Evil Angels*, have had the same outcome and reaction in society, if her daughter Azaria, and the subsequent baby had been sons? A plausible deduction from the crossing over of films and reality is impossible, although it is noteworthy that each of these mothers was punished by husbands, society or both, in the aftermath of the birth of their daughters.

In films, although the birth of a daughter usually prefigured the breakdown of a marriage, there was one film in which the son's arrival at first appears to have this

effect. This was Eric Porter's *A Son is Born* (1946). The son is not responsible for bringing unhappiness to the marriage, however, as it was doomed from the start. On their wedding day, the husband, Paul, leaves his new wife, Laurette, alone when he goes out to meet another woman. The question of why she married this alcoholic womaniser is never answered and the marriage deteriorates to a point where she is both physically and verbally abused. The birth of a son serves to consolidate the sympathy we have for Laurette. She pleads with Paul for a better life as she tells him she is pregnant: 'Are you pleased? I thought you wanted a son. I know we'll be much happier'. Paul does grow to love his son, David, although he undermines the marriage still further by setting the child against his mother. Eventually Laurette leaves and David, now thirteen years-old, is so embittered that he rejects his mother and decides to stay with his father. Laurette's move, however, foreshadows a better life and the conclusion of *A Son is Born* complies with the usual association of the birth of a son with fulfilment for the mother. Laurette remarries, this time to a loving, wealthy man. She is blissfully happy once she is reunited with her son.

The Unwed Mother

The representation of unmarried mothers in films forms a sub-category of the broad trend identified so far, which links the sex of a newborn child with punishment and reward. The birth of a daughter to an unwed woman in Australian feature films tended to signify that the woman was destined to remain with the problems and stigma of single parenthood. The birth of a son on the other hand was an indication of better fortune which usually led to a reconciliation with the father and a name and security for the child. While this was a recurrent formula in cinema for many decades, a single film, *The More Things Change...* made in 1986, perhaps reflecting the beliefs of its female filmmakers reversed the usual narrative outcome.

During the early days of the cinema, unwed motherhood was not condoned. In Raymond Longford's *The Woman Suffers* (1918), the innocent heroine, Marjory, is

seduced by Philip. She suffers great distress because of the disgrace she is inflicting on her family and becomes ill and is near to death. By a great stroke of good fortune, however, she gives birth to a boy, and this is a signal that she is about to be rescued. As a reward for her delivery of a son, Philip agrees to a marriage ceremony in the hospital, with the bride in bed, post-partum. Marjory's recovery is immediate.

A reconciliation of this type also occurs in Lawson Harris's *Circumstance* (1922). A young woman has fostered out her small son, after being abandoned by the father before the birth. By chance, the suitor re-enters her life, although he does not recognise her. He falls in love with her, and before they marry, in another chance meeting, he happens upon his son at the foster home and is beguiled by him. It is only at the altar that all is revealed and he confirms his desire to provide both mother and son with a suitable home. The mother has been rewarded, albeit with a man with a dubious memory, by being united with her son and freed from a life of financial hardship.⁵⁴

This situation was not limited to the melodramatic narratives of early films. The plot of *Circumstance* was echoed sixty-four years later in George Miller's *Cool Change* (1986), where a young woman has given birth after the immature and irresponsible father has left the district. After many years he finds out about his son and the parents renew their love and prepare for a happy married life together. As in *Circumstance*, the reunion was reinforced and enhanced by the presence of a son, the living metaphor for his father's second chance.

The birth of a son is a symbol of salvation for the woman in Tom Jeffrey's *Weekend of Shadows* (1978). This film tells the story of an unmarried woman in a small town who is pregnant and not sure who the father could be. The film suggests that it might be any one of the adult males in the town. The men, in a misogynist parody, draw straws to see

⁵⁴An eleven minute section of this film was discovered recently and has been restored by the National Film and Sound Archive. The synopsis from Pike & Cooper has been used to augment the valuable fragment of film. Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p. 148.

who should marry her. If the winner/loser were to be as appalling as the rest of the men in town, the marriage would have been doomed and one could predict that the baby may have been a girl. The man is, however, the hero of the film and an honourable and sympathetic figure. The woman is reformed, and her new respectability is explicitly shown in an otherwise extraneous scene, when she repels the advances of a former beau. Her marriage, now successful and loving, is complemented by the birth of a son.

In all of these films which dealt with pregnancy and birth outside marriage, the issue of the sex of the child had a symbolic inference. The birth of a son was used to substantiate both the reward and redemption of the mother, and to strengthen the plausibility of the reappearance or presence of the father. On the other hand, the birth of a female child to an unwed woman signalled that there would be no felicitous reunion. In Ken G. Hall's *The Silence of Dean Maitland* (1934), because of the scandal caused by her pregnancy outside marriage, Alma is forced to leave her home, her town, and consequently the father, Dean Maitland. She is represented as an immoral woman and is blamed for seducing Maitland. The birth of a daughter rather than a son can be seen as a punishment. She takes little part in the remainder of the story, although we learn from her adult daughter of the hardships her mother has faced in her sequestered existence. Without the rescue that was available to Marjory in *A Woman Suffers* on the birth of her son, Alma becomes gravely ill and is soon to die.⁵⁵

A similar instance of a female birth which heralded punishment and abandonment of the mother, occurred in the Franklyn Barrett feature, *Know Thy Child* (1921).⁵⁶ As Shirley and Adams observed: '*Know Thy Child* (1921), recalled the abandoned mother theme of

⁵⁵ The major part of the film concentrated on Maitland. He married a woman deemed more suitable to his religious calling than Alma. This marriage was doomed as Maitland, apart from betraying Alma, had allowed his friend, Everard, to be sentenced to jail for a crime that Maitland committed. The birth of Maitland's son might initially be seen as surprising in the context of this chapter. However the little boy was blind and according to the wronged man, Everard, he was Maitland's punishment for his sins. I see an equivalence between the birth of this blind child, figured especially in the 1934 context as lack, and the birth of a daughter.

⁵⁶For a more detailed analysis of this film, which recognises the daughter's appropriation of the mother's sexuality, see chapter 6.

The Woman Suffers, but here there was no retribution and no convenient escape to the country'.⁵⁷ Although Shirley and Adams did not make the connection, in the former film a daughter was born, in the latter, a son, and this difference fitted the mother's prognosis of ill-health and unhappiness. The synopsis of *Know Thy Child* revealed that a man deserts a country girl, leaving her pregnant and without resources.⁵⁸ A baby daughter, Eileen, is born and the mother suffers poverty and despair when her child is shunned by other children simply because she is illegitimate. In an echo of the plot of *The Silence of Dean Maitland*, mother and daughter live a life of isolation in the country, until the mother becomes ill and dies.

Another type of punishment for those unwed mothers who delivered female children can be found in two later films. In Leslie Norman's *The Shiralee* (1957), the hero, Macauley, is told that when he left the area some years previously, his lover, Lily, was pregnant. Their baby was stillborn. Lily's father recounts this to Macauley and quite deliberately mentions that it was a daughter. In Bruce Beresford's *The Fringe Dwellers* (1986), Trilby insists that she will not marry the father of her baby girl. While still in hospital after the birth, she carries her daughter into the bathroom and the child dies mysteriously and, perhaps, accidentally. In both of these films, the death of the child was not a central or even a particularly noteworthy part of the plot and the sex of the baby had no other relevance in the narrative other than to downplay the importance of the birth and retain sympathy for the parents. The lives of the mothers were not especially affected and the stories concluded, notwithstanding the baby's death, on an optimistic note. They chillingly recalled the earlier historical instances of infanticide when it was considered that the family was better off without its newly born female child.⁵⁹

⁵⁷Shirley & Adams, *Australian Cinema*, p. 61.

⁵⁸The film has not survived but a synopsis can be found in Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, pp. 144-5.

⁵⁹Karen Jennings reported that in Nene Gare's novel, *The Fringe Dwellers*, on which the film was based, the narrative remained sympathetic to the mother, but it was clear that she killed her baby. K. Jennings, *Sites of Difference: Cinematic Representations of Aboriginality and Gender*, AFI, South Melbourne, 1993, p. 51

Australian feature films, in their depictions of the importance of sons, supported the preference for male children that had become firmly entrenched in society. Rich in 1976, however, observing that women's preference for sons was declining, proposed that a social transformation was imminent. She acknowledged that although some women would continue to prefer sons, as women began to take charge of their own lives, they would rethink the position which overvalued male children in society.⁶⁰ Perhaps, Rich's words were prophetic, as a celebration of the birth of a daughter can be observed in a film of the 1980s. Significantly, it was directed, written and produced by women.⁶¹

In *The More Things Change...* (1986), directed by Robyn Nevin, the birth of a girl resulted in acceptance and love from the suitor and augured a better and more fruitful life for the new family. This was a divergence from other Australian films, in which the birth of a son was the essential catalyst for the male's desire to consolidate the family. In this role-reversal film, the wife works in the city, while her husband cares for their child on their hobby farm in the country. A young unmarried, pregnant woman is hired to help him and her relationship with her employers proves satisfactory. It is only ended when her daughter is born and she decides to marry a young man, who despite not being the father of the child, will provide a loving home. If the film followed the typical pattern, the young man's 'altruism' would have been substantiated by the birth of a son. In *The More Things Change...*, however, happiness and the resolution came with the birth of a daughter. The uniqueness of this event served to reinforce conclusions about the way films have historically represented female and male births to communicate ideological positions about the superiority of the male in society.

⁶⁰Rich, *Of Woman Born*, p. 204.

⁶¹In a review of the film, *The More Things Change...*, Debi Enker interviewed the producer Jill Robb, who disclosed that 'we set out to make a film about contemporary relationships from a woman's point of view'. Robb described the ending as ambiguous, drawing attention to an ambivalence that perhaps was more suitable to women's senses. At the end of the film it is not clear whether the successful businesswoman/mother will leave her impractical husband. It is clear, however, that she intends to keep her son. Debi Enker, *The More Things Change...*, [rev. art.], *Cinema Papers*, number 56, March 1987, p. 71.

Credibility by Association

Apart from the principle of reward for the 'good' mothers of sons, and punishment for the 'bad' mothers of daughters, the birth of a male child has had a special significance in western culture, which is related to the acceptance of men's superior status. It is this aspect of authority which is associated with male births in films that forms the third part of this analysis.

Social-psychologist, Hilary Lips, noted that men had a higher standing in the community. They were economically better off and their position in the public sphere attracted more prestige. She pointed to the acceptance of men's 'patriarchal power' as a reason for the inequality of males and females in society.⁶² Modern legislation has added to male status by reinforcing the laws of male inheritance. In this way, the esteem of the male in most societies has been enhanced by the tradition of the eldest son succeeding the father in authority and possessions.⁶³ This historical privilege has helped to ensure that there is an almost universal incidence of the predominance of men over women in terms of power and eminence in the world today.⁶⁴ The acceptance of this situation has relegated women to the subservient position of sustaining daily life.⁶⁵ In western culture, this has meant that the male presence epitomized greater credibility.

In the medium of film, the representations of gender in childbirth reflected this hierarchy of power. The choice of the sex of the child born in the diegesis was significant and many films used the birth of a son to gain credibility in the plot. The narrative of Simon Wincer's *The Lighthorsemen* (1987), provided an example. The story is set in World War I, where a British intelligence officer is trying to assemble personal documents in order construct a false identity for a soldier. The soldier is to be a decoy, whose belongings must appear authentic to the enemy when he allows himself to be

⁶²Hilary M. Lips, *Women, Men, and Power*, Mayfield, Mountain View, California, 1991, p. 155.

⁶³Breen, *The Birth of a First Child*, p. 176.

⁶⁴Basow, *Gender Stereotypes*, pp. 113-4.

⁶⁵Lerner, *The Creation of the Feminine Consciousness*, pp. 3-4.

captured. The officer asks an Australian nurse to write a letter to the soldier as though she were his wife who is longing to see him and show him their newly born baby. She is not directed what to say or given a briefing about the sex of the child, although as the situation concerns plausibility in the role of the soldier, it is, perhaps, predictable that she writes: 'Our little son...!'

The birth of a baby boy was used in other films to confirm the significance of the protagonist. This type of honour by association can be discerned in *The Umbrella Woman*, directed by Ken Cameron in 1987.⁶⁶ The narrative worked to establish a contrast between Marge's early stability and her subsequent transgressions when she became entranced with a dissolute stranger. At the beginning of the film, Marge is diligently scrubbing the floor in her country home. She is interrupted by a call to deliver a neighbour's child. The child she delivers is a boy and this underlines her status and worth in the community. Similarly, in an earlier film, Beaumont Smith's *Splendid Fellows* (1934), the clergyman is an exemplary figure whom the family acknowledges as 'the best in the world'. The narrative works to reinforce his righteousness, in scenes of his travelling through the outback, ministering to the country folk. Four episodes of his worthwhile life are shown. These are: reading the rites at a funeral; conducting a marriage ceremony; visiting a sick woman and baptising a baby. Obtaining maximum value from the situation, the baby is a healthy boy, and he baptises him 'William Ernest'. The birth of a male child in these films was used to reinforce the integrity of the associated character in the narrative. On the other hand, if it were argued that the sex of the child had no real relevance to the plot of these two films, it must be concluded that the male births were set up as 'the norm', the birth of a girl was not even considered.

Another film which used the idea of credibility by association, depended on the worth of a son for its narrative resolution. This situation occurred in a McDonagh sisters' film, *Those Who Love* (1926),⁶⁷ in which a wealthy man marries a dancer. The latter realises

⁶⁶The correct title is *Peter Kenna's The Umbrella Woman*.

⁶⁷The print of the film has been lost but for a synopsis, see Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*,

that her husband may lose his inheritance because of her low social position, and in an act of self-sacrifice, she leaves him. By chance, several years later, the couple is reunited as she nurses him after an industrial accident in which he has been injured. She realises that she still loves him. In order to effect a reconciliation, she takes their son, born after the separation, to the husband's family. The hard-hearted old father is captivated by his grandson and welcomes the reunion. It was possible to conclude that the choice of a male child has been made to give the maximum plausibility for the about-face of the grandfather and the consequent happy ending. Had the child been a daughter, the reconciliation, perhaps, would not have been as believable.

In *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978), the birth of a son was used to underscore the tragedy of Jimmie's victimisation both as a half-caste and an Aborigine. He has been cruelly treated, despite his attempts to find favour with a succession of white bosses. Jimmie marries a poor white servant girl, Gilda, because he believes he is the father of her unborn child. The importance and significance of the birth for Jimmie are reinforced by a most moving scene where Jimmie does a joyful tribal dance to welcome his son. It is a cruel blow when he finds out that the baby is white. Although his dreams are shattered as the baby is demonstrably not his, it *is* a son, and he decides to stay with his new wife. He is however, unable to bear the situation when his arrogant and insensitive employer will not allow him enough money for food to feed his new family. His rejection proves to be a catalyst for tragedy as, now out of control because of his despair and anger, he attacks and murders the farmer's wife and daughters.

Despite the depiction of brutality and violence in Jimmie's actions, the director of the film, Fred Schepisi, was sympathetic to his plight. He wanted to understand his rampage with as much compassion as possible. In an interview, Schepisi commented that: 'it is the story of an underdog, of a person who is trying to make a go of it and isn't allowed to'.⁶⁸ Hall also acknowledged Schepisi's purpose in ensuring that the audience 'stays on

pp. 176-7.

⁶⁸David Roe & Scott Murray, 'Fred Schepisi Producer/Director/Scriptwriter', *Cinema Papers*, number 15,

Jimmie's side'.⁶⁹ The birth of a son rather than a daughter, gave Jimmie hope and the possibility of a second chance in his poor life. His subsequent frustration, brought to a head by the ridicule and cruelty of the farmers, was closely connected to the birth and was instrumental in offering an explanation of his uncontrollable rage.

It may be beneficial to offer a reading of *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* from the mother's point of view, in order to add a further dimension to the significance of the male birth in the narrative. Gilda, an uneducated maid, is treated as poorly as the aboriginal servants by the ignorant white farmers and their wives. They view her marriage to Jimmie with disdain or indifference. From the moment of her white son's birth, however, she is sought out by the farmer's family. It is the desire to reinstate her as family servant that presses the farmer to deny Jimmie food and wages. Without sustenance, Gilda and her son would have to return to the farmhouse, leaving Jimmie alone and once more an outcast of the community. Although his plan does not anticipate Jimmie's rampage, clearly, the realisation that Gilda's son is white is fundamental to the farmer's desire to regain control over her.

The attempt to re-establish the patriarchal power of the middle class farmer was precipitated by the birth of a male child in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. The baby was valorised as the focus of interest and desire of the household, briefly displacing the story of the Aboriginal father and his pathetic wife. Almost sixty years earlier, in Raymond Longford's *The Sentimental Bloke* (1919), the birth of a son brought a similar change. Doreen and her 'mar' have a close and loving relationship during the courtship and marriage of Doreen to Bill (the Bloke). When her mother dies, Doreen is inconsolable and unable to care for her new husband. Bill remarks: 'I'm glad I never knowed the mar I must have had'. The concentration on the relationship between mother and daughter is broken with the arrival of Uncle Jim, who offers the couple a house and orchard in the country. Doreen and Bill move from the city to the farm and away from

January 1978, p. 244.

⁶⁹Hall, *Critical Business*, p. 77.

the pervasive female influence of the newly departed mother. According to film scholar, Susan Dermody, when Doreen almost immediately has a son, male-centredness was restored and Bill was 'firmly reborn'.⁷⁰

The birth of a son was similarly crucial to the narrative of *Break of Day*, set after the First World War and directed in 1976 by Ken Hannam. Here, the pregnant wife, Beth, is neglected while her husband, Tom, has an affair with Alice, a female artist who is visiting the country town where they live. Throughout the film, Beth's domestic environment is juxtaposed with the world outside. Bedrooms, kitchens and verandahs confine her, while Tom roams through great rural paddocks along picturesque rivers. Typically, she plies the silver brush to her long hair as Tom hunts rabbits with his shotgun. Tom finds the outdoors infinitely more appealing and takes up with Alice, who is an exciting part of the landscape. Alice rents a house and sets her easel in the bush, attempting with her artist's brush to capture the environment. At home, Tom is bored with his wife's details about her pregnancy and uncomfortable with the housekeeper, whose conversation is restricted to criticism of his behaviour and concern about their meals. By contrast, he is more at home in public, showing marked animation in the local hotel and at the all-male cricket match. In the end, though, Alice, his paramour, returns to the city, leaving Tom with Beth, who by this time has had the baby.

Beth's excitement and preoccupation with the birth of their first child are figured as dreary and boring. Her attempts to get her husband's attention as she shares her thoughts about the coming child remain fruitless throughout the film and she has to endure both her husband's unfaithfulness and his obvious disinterest. Her life is transformed on the birth of her son. If the child had been a daughter, the feminine presence of the household would have been overwhelming and Tom might have been driven further to escape. The conflict, however, between husband and wife is resolved with the birth of a male child.

⁷⁰Susan Dermody 'Two Remakes: Ideologies of film production 1919-1932' in S. Dermody, J. Docker & D. Modjeska, (eds), *Nellie Melba, Ginger Meggs and Friends: Essays in Australian Cultural History*, Kibble, Malmsbury, Victoria, 1982, p. 53.

It establishes a male centrality which is redemptive for both Beth and Tom and indicates a more propitious outcome for their marriage.

In *Break of Day* and other Australian films examined, the birth of a male infant sent a signal of regeneration for the protagonists and the opportunity for a new start. While the birth of a daughter, on the other hand, indicated hardship and bad luck, it could also be trivialised by its association with humour. The 1917 film, Beaumont Smith's *Our Friends the Hayseeds*, was a type of backwoods farce recalling the Romeo and Juliet story, where there is an uneasy peace in two bickering neighbouring families when the son of one family married the daughter of the other.⁷¹ The feud is rekindled, however, when the newlyweds announce that they are to have a child. Each prospective grandfather insists that the baby be named after him. The birth of twin daughters instead of the expected grandson is designed to teach the old men a lesson. A similar joke is repeated in a later film, Jacki McKimmie's *Australian Dream* (1987).⁷² Here, a visibly pregnant guest at a chaotic party in suburbia, goes into labour by the swimming pool. After scenes of general mayhem and confusion, there is a cry of 'It's a boy', followed briskly by 'It's a girl'. It is significant that the arrival of the boy was used to establish the birth and that of the girl to provide the humour of the situation.

Conclusion

In the Australian feature films examined, it was apparent that female and male births were represented differently with regard to desirability, aftermath and significance. The conventional desire of fathers for sons, shared by men since antiquity, was consistently depicted in the films. Mothers-to-be appeared to reflect the preferences of the father. Those few mothers who were found in recent sociological research to desire daughters, were not represented in the films. It was not surprising that women favoured sons, as those who produced male children were constructed as 'good mothers', their lives were improved, their problems resolved and the benefit of having sons was reinforced. The

⁷¹The film has been lost but a synopsis can be found in Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p. 88.

⁷²Later credits of this director use the spelling Jackie McKimmie.

birth of a daughter indicated a predicament of some sort and the penalty for the 'bad mothers' who delivered daughters was so harsh, that in some instances it meant death, either of the baby, or of the mother herself.

This situation was particularly noticeable in pregnancies of unmarried women. Those women who delivered sons were rewarded subsequently with a reunion with the father and more often than not, made a socially acceptable marriage. In such cases almost invariably, the male child was assured of a comfortable and happy future life. Women who produced daughters were punished by having to face the dreary prospect of life alone without wealth or comfort: there was no reunion to alleviate their life of poverty and loneliness. As a consequence, the films gave a clear signal that a woman with a son was a more worthy and more likely marriage prospect. The birth of a son was used to entice the previously absent or reluctant father to exonerate the 'fallen woman'. From another point-of-view, perhaps, it was simply more believable that the father would want to marry her, if he were to gain a son.

Additionally, the films relied on an ideology which attached more status and authority to the masculine identity. An extrapolation of these ideas about the birth of male children was used to re-establish patriarchal order, give credibility to the plot, and reinforce the strength of the character closest to the birth. On the other hand, the births of females were trivialised by treating them as a joke. Consequently, the birth of a son had the connotation of worthiness, while the opposite applied to the birth of a daughter. It can therefore be concluded that in the Australian feature films which have been examined in this chapter, the cry 'Congratulations it's a boy!' stimulated assumptions and expectations which relied on male-centred notions of sexual difference. That the representation previously has been unexamined and accepted as normal is, perhaps, a cause for concern.

chapter 5

mothers and daughters: bonding and separation

In spite of the problems and grief between mothers and daughters it seems that there are few women who do not still, at some deep level, long for their mother's approval.¹

An old proverb which was meant to offer joy and solace to mothers of girls, proposed: 'A son's a son till he gets a wife, a daughter's a daughter all of her life'. Although these words tended to ignore the ambivalence of the relationship, they drew attention to its special qualities.² Adrienne Rich, in her influential book, *Of Woman Born*, considered that her observations on mothers and daughters were at the heart of her work.³ She explained:

Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has labored to give birth to the other. The materials are here for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement.⁴

Her words were a poetic evocation of a special biological relationship between two women; a mother who was both mother and daughter, and a daughter who was most likely to have the experience of being a mother.⁵ Rich clearly believed that mothers and daughters were connected from the start in a rapport which, despite some pain, extended throughout both of their lives.

¹Rosalind Coward, *Our Treacherous Hearts: Why Women Let Men Get Their Way*, Faber & Faber, London, 1992, p. 104.

²Although the relationship of mothers to their daughters was of crucial importance, the connection of mothers to their sons has been given priority in cultural and psychological discourses. Our understanding of history also privileged the relationship of mother to son, because of its predominantly masculine authorship which focused on men and their activities. Commenting on the pervasive influence of religion, theorist Margaret Whitford noted that Christian iconography emphasised the Madonna and her male child. M. Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*, Routledge, London/NY, 1991, p. 76. Additionally, Edith Neisser referred to the preponderance of mothers and sons in literature, citing examples of Shakespeare, the Bible and poetry. E.G. Neisser, *Mothers and Daughters: A Lifelong Relationship*, Harper & Row, NY, 1967, pp. 331-2.

³Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Virago, London, 1981. (1976), p. 218. Rich it should be pointed out, was a mother and a daughter, but not the mother of a daughter. She had three sons.

⁴Rich, *Of Woman Born*, pp. 225-6.

⁵Sara Ruddick proposed that all women think maternally, whether they give birth to a child or not. S. Ruddick, 'Maternal Thinking', *Feminist Studies*, volume 6, number 2, Summer 1980, pp. 342-67.

Behavioural theorist, Edith G. Neisser, has observed that: 'During most of the history of the Western world, what two women in the same family felt about each other or how they behaved toward each other simply was not considered important'.⁶ As though in support of Neisser's conclusions, filmmakers, especially during the early years, rarely made the mother/daughter relationship the focus of the narrative. On the other hand, they frequently included mothers and daughters as an integral part of the domestic life of the protagonists. Unwittingly, perhaps, and although not central to the story, filmmakers created images of the way the two women related. This chapter attempts to determine what those images were and to understand them in relation to theoretical views about mothers and daughters.

Research on women's relationships within the family has come from several areas including biological, sociological, feminist and psychoanalytic. The first part of the chapter summarises the most important findings, which because of their disparity, are useful in the compilation of a broad picture of the many aspects of a complicated relationship.

The second part of the chapter begins the examination of the films with reference to the first of four major positions of the mother/daughter relationship delineated in theoretical research. In summary, these are: mother-love, mother-blame, the maternal cycle and mother-bonding. This section considers those films which represent the mother's love because of their ease of communication, the passing on of the mother's skills of nurturance and her responsiveness to the needs of the girl, particularly to her marriage.

The third part of the chapter analyses the representation of mothers and daughters in those films which take the opposite position, which hold that the mother exerts a powerful and damaging influence on the girl. The mother, with her own selfish agenda, is shown as either interfering or unresponsive. The girl, who may have been psychologically impaired as a result of her mother's attitude, is at the least, resentful.

⁶Neisser, *Mothers and Daughters*, pp. 331-2.

The fourth part of the chapter examines the behaviour of daughters of nurturing and non-nurturing mothers to discover if films represent a cycle of maternal behaviour. It is not concerned with whether daughters are close to and love their mothers, but concentrates on the influence of the mother as a role-model. Investigating if caring mothers are depicted as producing caring daughters, the study also looks at daughters of unresponsive mothers to determine whether they are portrayed as necessarily imitating their mother's lack of maternal love.

The final part of this chapter analyses representations in the films with regard to links between bonding and autonomy. It asks whether the closeness of the mother to her daughter is depicted as affecting the daughter's self-confidence or ability to act independently. As a postscript to this aspect of the mother-daughter relationship, a film made at the end of the 1980s is presented as an example of the use of new ideas which challenge the importance of autonomy to women and replace it with the, perhaps, more appropriate idea of flexibility and tolerance.

Theoretical Perspectives on the Mother/Daughter Relationship

The mother's unique bond with her daughter has been illustrated by studies of women in nineteenth-century America. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg found that the relationship marked the beginning of all female friendships, which at the time, were both prevalent and prized. Smith-Rosenberg found that daughters were born into a 'female world' where they were trained to be good mothers and wives. As a young adult, the daughter took over her mother's role when it was required; perhaps, when her mother was ill, or during a confinement. Their association was both mutually rewarding and without discord. Smith-Rosenberg admitted that perceptions about their love and support of each other could have been influenced by the cultural expectation that women were not given to aggression. She

could find, however, no examples of repression in their correspondence that might indicate undercurrents of hostility in the relationship.⁷

Nancy Theriot wrote about the 'bio-social' bond of women in nineteenth century households, where male and female roles were sharply divided and the father often adopted a commanding and authoritative stance over all the women in the family. Theriot made the point that although he was respected as the 'head of the household', the father's influence in family matters was relatively minor. This division of power provided a space for women's coteries to develop within the home, when the men were out at work. Theriot reported that the mother cared for her daughters in a loving manner, seeing her primary task as preparing them for marriage. Where necessary, mothers were resourceful and thrifty and continually sacrificed for the benefit of other family members. According to Theriot, adult daughters who witnessed this aspect of the mother's nurturing responsibilities, learned that they would also be expected to lead a selfless life in marriage.⁸

While acknowledging a biological connection, the work of Smith-Rosenberg and Theriot argued that the daughter modelled her behaviour on the mother, by imitating her attitudes and traits. Their work supported social-training or cognitive role-learning concepts, which referred to the cyclical component of mothering. Recently, Carol Boyd has concluded that the daughter's ideas of self, sexual behaviour, nurturing and occupations were related to the attitudes of the mother.⁹ In this model, the women supported each other and each was sympathetic to the other's problems. The daughter's maternal abilities, which she learnt from her mother, were not only directed towards her own children, but in some cases, were transmitted back to her mother. She eventually reached a point where, as Lucy

⁷Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 'The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between women in nineteenth-century America', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, volume 1, number 1, Autumn 1975, pp. 1-29.

⁸Nancy M. Theriot, *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America: The Biosocial Construction of Femininity*, The University Press of Kentucky, Kentucky, 1996, p. 68-75.

⁹Carol J. Boyd, 'Mothers and Daughters: A Discussion of Theory and Research', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, number 51, May 1989, p. 299.

Fischer proposed in her book, *Linked Lives*, she moved between mothering and being mothered. Working on research from the women's actual experience, Fischer coined the term 'mutual mothering', which she explained was a 'sense of mutual responsibility and protectiveness'.¹⁰

Biological and cognitive role-learning theories offered an explanation of why many daughters were close to and imitated their mothers, although they did not reveal the whole story. Importantly, according to Boyd, role-model theories did not differentiate between male and female children and thus failed to account for the special union that mothers and daughters appeared to enjoy.¹¹ As well, as Nel Noddings proposed, the capacity for mothering was too powerful to be simply a result of biology or socialisation.¹² The notion of motherhood as an inherited or 'learning-by-imitation' process overlooked the psychological component which brought a different perspective to the role.

The daughter's subconscious relationship to her mother was examined by Sigmund Freud in his paper, *Femininity*. He argued that the daughter, as an infant, was closely bonded to her mother until she entered into the Oedipal situation. Freud's observations, notably from the daughter's point-of-view, claimed that the girl rejected her mother when she realised she was 'castrated' and blamed the mother for what she saw as her own lack. The girl's 'penis envy' forced her to turn to her father. From this time, the mother became her enemy, and her rival for the father's affection. According to Freud, the event marked the start of hostility and hate which continued throughout the daughter's life. Although eventually the girl replaced her wish for a penis with the wish for a child, Freud was doubtful that she ever satisfactorily resolved her Oedipal conflict. He believed that this incomplete resolution accounted for the ill-formed female super-ego, which resulted in her inferior strength of character and lack of independence.¹³

¹⁰Lucy Rose Fischer, *Linked Lives: Adult Daughters and Their Mothers*, Harper & Row, NY, 1986, pp. 58-60.

¹¹Boyd, 'Mothers and Daughters', p. 292.

¹²Nell Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984, p. 128.

¹³Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity', *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Norton, NY, 1963, (c.1935),

Although feminists, such as Betty Friedan and Shulamith Firestone, were critical of the misogynist claim by Freud which implied that women were inevitably inferior to men,¹⁴ the idea of mother-blame that Freud has espoused persisted. Psychotherapy was commonly sought to deal with relational problems and therapists and their female patients frequently held the mother responsible for all neuroses.¹⁵ Jane Flax, for instance, claimed that the girl's inability to separate from the mother was at the core of her psychological problems.¹⁶ Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach, in their clinical practice in the Women's Therapy Centre in London, argued that the relationship with her mother was central to the daughter's problems. They noted that in therapy, the daughter transferred 'feelings about her little girl self' to the therapist.¹⁷ In their treatment, therapists did not find love and closeness between the women, and suggested that the daughter hated her mother and saw her as a rival who had the power to deny her separate existence.

Motherhood was seen by many feminist daughters as a source of their subordination. In the late 1960s and 1970s, they had the common aim of liberating women from a domestic role and the limitations to independence that such a lifestyle imposed. They wanted a different and less restricted life than their mothers and were vocal about what they saw as their mother's passive acceptance of the domestic role. Ann Kaplan described her own participation in a women's group, where she discovered motherhood issues became the primary focus of the attempt to understand women's lack of power in the society.¹⁸

pp. 128-35.

¹⁴Betty Friedan, Chapter 5, 'The Sexual Solipsism of Sigmund Freud' *The Feminine Mystique*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1972, (1963), pp. 91-111 and Shulamith Firestone, Chapter 3, 'Freudianism: The Misguided Feminism', *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, Paladin, London, 1972, (1971), pp. 46-72.

¹⁵See Lynne Segal, *Straight Sex: The Politics of Pleasure*, Virago, London, 1994, p. 143.

¹⁶Jane Flax, 'Mother-Daughter Relationships: Psychodynamics, Politics, and Philosophy', in H. Eisenstein & A. Jardine, (eds), *The Future of Difference*, Barnard College Women's Center, Boston, Massachusetts, 1980, pp. 21-40.

¹⁷These theories were developed out of the psychoses and neuroses of women whose problems were attributed to their mothers. Although the women in therapy were often part of disturbed and dysfunctional relationships, their case studies tended to be extrapolated to apply to all mothers and daughters. Luise Eichenbaum & Susie Orbach, *Understanding Women: A New Expanded Version of Outside In...Inside Out*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1985, p. 91.

¹⁸E. Ann Kaplan, 'The Case of the Missing Mother: Maternal issues in Vidor's *Stella Dallas*', in P. Erens (ed.), *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1990a, pp. 126-7.

According to Kaplan, feminism 'provided an arena for separation from oppressive closeness with the mother; feminism was in part a reaction against our mothers...we came to feminism as daughters, and we spoke from that position'.¹⁹ Marianne Hirsch noted that the typical feminist voice was the voice of the daughter who was critical of her mother whom she saw as demanding or unresponsive to her daughter's needs.²⁰ In the 1970s, matrophobia, described by Rich as not the fear of one's mother, but the fear of becoming one's mother,²¹ was rife.

One of the most prominent theorists, whose work was accommodated in the spaces between these theoretical, polarised, positions of mother-love and mother-blame, offered a way out of the dilemma. Nancy Chodorow noted the women's bonding and connection and also acknowledged the ambivalence in the relationship. Her work, according to Meryle Mahrer Kaplan, 'provides the most detailed and influential exposition of the place of motherhood in women's development'.²² Chodorow, from her position as a sociologist, used psychoanalytic theory and Freudian insights about the unconscious working of the mind to construct a new understanding of mothering which did not have the misogynist foundation of Freud's writing. Chodorow pointed out that girls cannot be taught to be mothers, arguing that theories based on cognitive role-learning ignored the psychological role of the daughter's development.²³

The crucial aspect about Chodorow's research into why women were subservient in society, was her emphasis on the mother-daughter relationship. She maintained that mothers treated girls differently from boys because of the link of gender and the mother's own experience of daughterhood. The mother sensed a double identification with her own mother and herself through the child, as she could relate to the daughter as an extension of

¹⁹E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, Routledge, London, 1993, (1983), p. 172.

²⁰Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 1989, p. 164.

²¹Rich, *Of Woman Born*, pp. 235-6.

²²Meryle Mahrer Kaplan, *Mothers' Images of Motherhood: Case Studies of Twelve Mothers*, Routledge, London, 1992, p. 10.

²³Nancy Chodorow, 'Family Structure and Feminine Personality', in M.Z. Rosaldo & L. Lamphere, (eds), *Woman, Culture, and Society*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1974, pp. 43-66.

herself. The roles were close and interconnected and, for some, the daughter was even seen as a substitute mother.²⁴ Chodorow's solution to the problem of the mother's over-identification with her daughter, was for her to share the parenting responsibilities.

Much of the interest in Chodorow's revelations came about because she offered an explanation for women's lack of autonomy in society. She emphasised Freud's proposition that the mother, in her pre-Oedipal role was, for both boy and girl, the first love 'object'. During the Oedipal conflict, while boys were forced to separate from the mother and turn to their father, girls remained attached; while the mother became 'the other' to the boy, for the girl, she remained the primary influence. The mother's role as the nurturer who was responsible for her family, and by extension, society, was internalised and repeated by the daughter. According to Chodorow, 'girls come to experience themselves as less separate than boys, as having more permeable ego boundaries. Girls come to define themselves more in relation to others'.²⁵ As a result, girls remained dependent and unable to achieve a sense of completeness, which led to a 'tendency in women toward boundary confusion and a lack of sense of separateness from the world'.²⁶

Mindful of her own participation in women's groups, perhaps, Chodorow devoted part of her research to issues of conflict in the mother-daughter relationship. She acknowledged that the daughter wanted to remain close and became hostile when she saw the mother's lack of power. The girl turned to her father, whom she saw as symbolising freedom, culture and society.²⁷ Because he had no strong connection to the daughter in her pre-Oedipal period, the relationship with the father was not sufficiently powerful to be able to break her bond with the mother. The daughter, therefore, did not replace the object of the mother with the father, and defined herself in a triangular relationship.²⁸ The 'turn to the

²⁴Chodorow, *Woman, Culture, and Society*, p. 47.

²⁵Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978a, p. 93.

²⁶Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p. 110.

²⁷Nancy Chodorow, 'Mothering, Object-Relations, and the Female Oedipal Configuration', *Feminist Studies*, volume 4, number 1, February 1978b, pp. 137-58.

²⁸See Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p. 167 and 'Mothering, Object-Relations', p. 151.

father', which Freud saw as a hostile reaction to the mother, had an ambivalence according to Chodorow. While on the one hand, the daughter hated her mother, on the other, she tried to win her love. The girl envied the penis — or more properly, 'the phallus' — as a symbol of power and also as an object that the (heterosexual) mother loved.²⁹ Chodorow's insightful conclusion was that the girl did not give up her love for her mother, in spite of any overt hostility she might show.³⁰

Antagonism between mother and daughter was also considered in recent writing by cultural theorist, Suzanna Danuta Walters. Reflecting on her own loving relationship with her mother, she concluded that psychoanalytic research which was critical of the mother, undermined the benefits offered by the women's solidarity. She pointed out that emphasis on the damaging power of the mother denied her love for the child and tended to position the daughter as a victim with little agency.³¹ Similarly, the feminist writer and teacher, Sara Ruddick, eulogised her relationship with her mother when she wrote, 'With exquisite competence, my mother had created for me a childhood in which I was both held and safely moving, both secure and enabled'.³² Ruddick drew attention to the complexity of mother-daughter relationships, in which good mothers nurtured and comforted their daughters, yet were not over-protective, lest they deprived them of autonomy.

The views which celebrated the bonding of mothers and daughters by seeing it as empowering for both women, were supported by empirical studies. Clinical social worker, Joan Goldberg, for instance, found that mutuality with the mother was a significant factor in the development of 'self-esteem and social adjustment' in the daughter.³³ Similarly, Rosalind Barnett and colleagues found that the daughter's well-being and psychological

²⁹Chodorow, 'Mothering, Object-Relations', p. 148, p. 150.

³⁰See Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, pp. 126-9 and 'Mothering, Object-Relations', p. 151.

³¹Suzanna Danuta Walters, *Lives Together/Worlds Apart: Mothers and Daughters in Popular Culture*. University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 1992.

³²Sara Ruddick, 'New Combinations: Learning from Virginia Woolf' in C. Ascher, L. de Salvo & S. Ruddick, (eds), *Between Women: Biographers, Novelists, Critics, Teachers and Artists Write about Their Work on Women*, Beacon, Boston, 1984, p. 147.

³³Joan E. Goldberg, 'Mutuality in Mother-Daughter Relationships', *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, volume 75, April 1994, pp. 236-42.

health were consistent with a good relationship with her mother. They concluded from their research that a bad mother was rare and even when she did exist, she was not necessarily damaging to her daughter.³⁴ They particularly cited Nancy Friday's *My Mother/My Self*, which found a large audience from its position on the best seller list in the United States in 1977. Friday, although warning against blaming mothers for all ills, somewhat inconsistently, held her mother responsible for her own inhibitions and further, related other women's grievances to mothering deficiencies.³⁵

Finally, in a radical and interesting variation on psychoanalytic theories which warned against close bonding, the long-held vision of women's desire for autonomy and separation was challenged. As Walters pointed out in 1992, psychoanalysis aims at 'separation, individuation, autonomy, [and] differentiation', which are dichotomous pursuits more appropriate to a masculine framework.³⁶ Clinical and health psychologist, Janneke van Mens-Verhulst, also concluded that the aim at autonomy was the result of influence of the male point of view.³⁷ In a recent article, van Mens-Verhulst argued that:

The bond between mothers and daughters is no longer automatically assessed as health threatening because the one and only proof of maturity could be found in autonomy and strong ego boundaries. What counts is the mutual flexibility in boundary management and bilateral capacity to tolerate ambiguities and ambivalences in the relationship.³⁸

With undoubted commonsense, van Mens Verhulst drew attention to the possibility of acceptance of the viewpoints of both mother and daughter and the understanding and love that can continue beyond the inevitable difficulties in a close relationship.

Loving Mothers

³⁴Rosalind C. Barnett, Nazli Kibria, Grace K. Baruch and Joseph H. Pleck, 'Adult Daughter-Parent Relationships and their Associations with Daughters' Subjective Well-Being and Psychological Distress', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, number 53, February 1991, pp. 29-42.

³⁵Nancy Friday, *My Mother/My Self: The Daughter's Search for Identity*, Sixth Impression, Fontana/Collins, 1982, (1977).

³⁶Walters, *Lives Together/Worlds Apart*, p. 158.

³⁷Janneke van Mens-Verhulst, 'Introduction', in J. Mens-Verhulst, K. Schreurs and L. Woertman, (eds), *Daughtering and Mothering: Female Subjectivity Reanalysed*, Routledge, London, 1993, p. xiv.

³⁸Janneke van Mens-Verhulst, 'Reinventing the Mother-Daughter Relationship', *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, volume 49, number 4, Fall 1995, p. 536.

It was, perhaps, to be expected, considering their centrality to domestic life, that mothers and daughters would be found frequently in the narratives of Australian cinema. In films until mid-century, however, although they were often included in the cast, their character development was minimal and the women's association with each other was rarely explored in any depth. Women were cast in supporting roles, their lives seen as secondary to the outdoor activities of the men. Filmmakers used men as the subject of the narrative, which was most often told from their point-of-view. Bushranging, convict escapades and the gold rush were the most common themes of the earliest moving pictures as filmmakers, before the construction of indoor sets, took advantage of rural settings and natural light.³⁹

Concentration on the men, however, allowed a space for women, although it was created out of their absence from the main action. The women's place was the kitchen, where they prepared meals for the men in the family. The mother's nurturing vocation was crucial and she was called on to supply peace, comfort and support for her husband and sons. Her other duty was to care for her daughters; to train them to be pious, modest and honourable, as well as good wives and mothers in her own image. Generally, the mother was middle-aged, her daughter was grown up, and not yet married. The mother took charge of the household chores, and was assisted by her kind and considerate daughter.

In Kenneth Brampton's *Robbery Under Arms* (1920), for example, the mother peels vegetables in the kitchen and her daughter sits sewing contentedly under her watchful eye. In a diametrically opposite existence, her husband and sons ride wildly through the countryside in their attempt to evade the law. The women prepare a meal to celebrate Christmas and when they hear that the men will soon be home, they embrace with joy. Their difference from the men and the solidarity of the women's life together is emphasised by the intertitle, *The women suffered as is their lot*. The goals and attitudes of mother and daughter were indistinguishable and intertwined. They shared their domestic

³⁹See Andrew Pike & Ross Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977: A Guide to Feature Film Production*, Oxford University Press/AFI, Melbourne, 1980.

space and the daughter imitated her mother's behaviour and attitudes with such companionship that conflict between them was unthinkable.

Relations between the mother and daughter in *Robbery Under Arms* were typical of women in early cinema. From 1917 to 1940, in the time between the two world wars, the genial couple could be found in the pastoral comedies of life in the outback, a popular genre with both urban and country filmgoers. The plots of these films were frequently humorous tales about either the Hayseed or Rudd households.⁴⁰ They showed, as noted by Andrew Pike, 'Mum, [as] the figure who provided spiritual strength for the family, as well as the security of a comfortable and homely dwelling'.⁴¹ The daughters were close and loving with their mother. If the mother helped the men in the field, sowing corn or fighting fires, as in Raymond Longford's *On Our Selection* (1920), her daughters were at her side. When she cooked, or cleaned the house, her daughters were always there to help her. The mother's most amicable communication, however, was saved for her oldest daughter. She reprimanded the younger ones, and taught them to behave, but showed real empathy with the one who was of marriageable age.⁴²

The eldest daughter's marriage was a requirement of most film narratives, and its achievement formed a fundamental part of the women's relationship. It was the mother's job to evaluate the suitor and prepare her daughter to be a good wife. Typically, the mother was cast as a middle-aged, homely woman while the daughter was attractive, stylish and in her twenties, a suitable 'love interest' for the main male actor. The mother was constantly alert to making the best of any opportunity for the daughter's marriage. In Longford's 1920 version of *On Our Selection*, when her eldest daughter, Kate, brings a young man to the house, Ma and the other daughters make scones for his afternoon tea.

⁴⁰The first of these was, *Our Friends the Hayseeds* (1917) and the last was *Dad and Dave Come to Town* (1938).

⁴¹Andrew Pike, 'The Past: boom and bust' in S. Murray, (ed.), *The New Australian Cinema*, Thomas Nelson, West Melbourne, 1979, p. 22.

⁴²See *On Our Selection* (1920) and (1932), *Dad and Dave Come to Town* (1938), *The Overlanders* (1946), *Into the Straight* (1949) and *Sons of Matthew* (1949), where the teenage daughters do not enjoy as good a communication with the mother as the adult daughter.

Later, an understanding Ma pulls the naive Dad inside to give Kate some time alone on the porch with her beau. Her daughter's marriage was also uppermost in the mother's mind in Charles Chauvel's *Heritage* (1935). She ceases her baking when the suitor's horse is heard approaching, to adjust her daughter's hair so she will look attractive when he arrives. Tragically, this good mother is shot just a few minutes later. On her deathbed, unmindful of her agony, she extracts a promise from the now-reluctant suitor, to honour his pledge of marriage to her daughter. Mothers were always on the lookout for suitors, and pain and suffering could not deter them.

One early film was unusual in that the mother/daughter relationship was central to the plot, rather than marginal as in the films described above. Lawson Harris's *Sunshine Sally* (1922), incorporated an amazing coincidence in its narrative to reinforce the notion of the connectedness of a mother and daughter. Sally lives with her execrable step-parents who have abducted her as a baby, so that she can support them and their alcoholic habits when she grows up.⁴³ The adult Sally gives them the money that she earns working in shocking conditions in a Chinese laundry. After she is sacked because she stands up for her friend, the mean, grasping, step-parents throw her out of the hovel they all call home. Soon after, by a marvellous stroke of luck, Sally is rescued from the surf by a handsome, wealthy lifesaver, named Basil Stanton.⁴⁴ Basil's step-mother happens to be at the beach and takes the poor sodden Sally home to her mansion. Mrs Stanton takes a liking to her and invites her to return for tea. Sally becomes a substitute for her own daughter who was abducted twenty years before. As one might have predicted, Sally is discovered to be the daughter, long lost and now refund. It is convenient that Basil is not Mrs Stanton's biological son, as he falls in love with Sally and they plan to marry.

⁴³Sally's stereotypical evil step-parents had origins in Victorian melodrama. Sadly, the first and last reel of *Sunshine Sally* are missing and the plot has been constructed from synopses.

⁴⁴This seemed to be a good way to meet a future husband, as it was a device which recurred in Australian feature films, for example in Frank Brittain's *The Set* in 1970 and Ken G. Hall's *Tall Timbers* in 1937. The situation might reflect a national characteristic as Richard White made the point that women's role at the beach was to be decorative which was quite different from their place in the bush. R. White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980*, Tenth Impression, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1992, (1981), p. 155.

In the representation of the relationship of Mrs Stanton to Sally, the film made the point that mothers had maternal instincts about their daughters which were bound by a biological connection. Neither the corrosion of time nor the environment in which the child was raised could dissolve the maternal tie. From the start, Sally's character was shown to be at odds with that of her drunken step-parents. Her 'finer nature' was signalled when her working-class friend offered her a necklace to wear on her outing, but Sally refused because she knew it was cheap. The intertitle draws attention to the *tawdry jewellery* and explains that Sally is sympathetic to her friend's deficiencies. The pronouncement: *It's so terrible to be common*, somewhat condescendingly, sets Sally apart from her friend and infers that she is not a product of this lower-class domain.

Sally's 'fine origins', however, were not apparent from her behaviour at afternoon tea at the Stanton mansion. This was a silver service affair, complete with a uniformed maid. Sally, no doubt imitating the behaviour of her ghastly step-parents, blows on her tea and attempts to drink it from the saucer. While a casual observer might not be impressed by her manners, Mrs Stanton, her real mother, could not be deterred and is ineluctably drawn to her. Leaping with alacrity into her maternal role as pedagogue and adviser, she trains Sally to adopt her own upper-class stylish ways and behaviour. She managed to complete this traditional maternal role, arranging Sally's marriage and thereby ensuring that she takes her rightful name of Stanton. Mrs Stanton's sacrifice to her daughter could scarcely be surpassed: it was the gift of her own (adopted) son, and Sally, who now had a mother to love, could be a model wife.

Over the next few decades, while there were fewer films about mothers and daughters, those that were, followed the traditional loving relationship where the mother instructed the daughter in the skills necessary for becoming a wife and mother.⁴⁵ They supported and reflected biological and sociological theories which identified the cyclical or imitative component of mothering. They showed the women's easy and loving communication, the

⁴⁵See for example, *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1927), *The Sentimental Bloke* (1932), *Splendid Fellows* (1934), *Sons of Matthew* (1949) and *Robbery Under Arms* (1957).

teaching and learning of domestic skills as well as reinforcing the mother's influence on her daughter's marriage.

Hateful Mothers

After almost seventy years of showing the love and connection of mothers to their daughters, there was an extraordinary shift in the relationship. The nasty mother who disliked her daughter began to be depicted in films. Freudian references and symbols were used to explain narratives which highlighted malicious or insensitive mothers and alienated daughters. The counterpart to the hateful mother was not the loving mother of yesteryear, but a woman who was over-involved with the daughter's life and had an unwholesome, suffocating effect. These two polarised versions of motherhood were explained by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English: 'Psychoanalytic theory identified two broad categories of bad mothers—the rejecting mother and the overprotecting mother—mirror images and equally malevolent'.⁴⁶ According to film analyst and critic, Marjorie Rosen, American and British films during the 1940s had replaced the kindly, empathetic mother with the controlling, powerful mother.⁴⁷ However, because the film industry in Australia was virtually non-existent for two decades, perhaps, the transformation was not seen until much later in Australia.

The malevolent mother and innocent daughter could be seen in Simon Wincer's *Snapshot* (1979). Nineteen-year-old Angela, played by Sigrid Thornton and aptly named because of her angelic appearance, is a hairdresser who wants money to travel. She is offered a job as a nude photographic model which she accepts although she knows that her sexually-

⁴⁶Barbara Ehrenreich & Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women*, Anchor/Doubleday, NY, 1978, p. 205.

⁴⁷Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies & the American Dream*, Peter Owen, London, 1973, p. 346, discussed the growing movement against women which situated the mother as malevolent, controlling and selfish. She related this to Philip Wylie's popular book, *Generation of Vipers*, published in 1942. For examples of this type of representation, see US and British films: *Now Voyager* (1942), *Mildred Pierce* (1945), *Vertigo* (1958), *Psycho* (1960), *Inside Daisy Clover* (1965) and *Rachel, Rachel* (1968). Interestingly, a film made in Australia in 1959, *The Siege of Pinchgut*, hinted at the end of the mother-daughter affinity, perhaps because of its strong overseas input. It was made by Ealing Studios, included US actors in the cast and was entered as a British film in the Berlin Film Festival in 1959. See Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p. 299.

repressed mother would be horrified. Celebrating her first cheque, she arrives home to find that the mother has locked her out. Distraught and rejected, Angela is forced to find accommodation in the house owned by her photographer. The mother has only one scene in the film and it is clear from it that she is irredeemably nasty. Coming to Angela's room on the pretext of bringing some clothes to her, the mother is disagreeable and instigates an argument. At this point the psychological subtext of the film becomes apparent. The psychotic mother, who has constantly referred to Angela as ugly and stupid, reveals that she has always preferred the younger daughter. After this revelation, the mother exits the room shouting, 'When things start to go sour don't darken my doorway — ever'. Her cruelty was clearly damaging to Angela's confidence and emotional stability.

Like *Snapshot*, many films made during the 1970s relied on popular Freudian-based theories. One of the first new wave films to be made with government support in an effort to restart the industry, was Brian Kavanagh's *A City's Child*, using funds from the Experimental Film and Television Fund and the Australian Council for the Arts. The film was shown at Film Festivals in 1971 and 1972 and won an award for its 'gentle exploration of a neglected territory—a mind cut off from love'.⁴⁸ This accolade was a reminder of the acceptance of the psychological foundation of the films at that time. *A City's Child* focused on repressed sexuality in its plot about a lonely, inhibited daughter who cared for her demanding, bed-ridden mother. The dreams and fantasies of the daughter were interspersed with real-life situations and sounds and it was not clear where her reality started and ended. It was apparent, however, that her mother's hatred had been the cause of her emotional problems. The father did not appear in the film and the daughter remembered him with affection. On the other hand, the mother was shown as a malevolent creature who made a victim of her passive daughter.

In the film's prologue, the mother is hysterically angry with the daughter because she has brought a small white kitten into the house. Calling her a 'stupid, ungrateful, simpering,

⁴⁸Quoted by Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p. 338 from the Australian Film Awards for 1971.

idiot', she screams 'the agony of bringing you into the world — my only consolation is that your father was disappointed'. Her tirade reaches a peak and she chokes and dies. The mother's bedroom, her prison and site of her sickness and death, is dark and over-furnished. The heavy wooden cupboards, the bedside tables laden with chocolates and pills, the voluminous bedclothes, all serve to draw attention to her obesity and her greed. The organ music with its powerful and portentous chords adds to the claustrophobia and oppressiveness. At her funeral, where her daughter is the solitary mourner, crows, traditional harbingers of doom, shriek and circle.

As the opening credits roll, the music changes to a bright rendition of a song apparently written especially for the film. The contrast with the organ music anticipates a more cheerful life for the daughter, although its message that 'a city's child' might find greener pastures proves ephemeral. The first images work against the bright mood set by the music and show the daughter's gloomy suburban house hidden away behind overgrown trees and bushes. She emerges in a dressing gown and timidly scurries to collect the milk, retreating terrified when she hears a passer-by innocently walking on the footpath.

The daughter, — she is given no name in the film — now alone, acts out her fantasies in an attempt to relieve the suffering and unhappiness she has received from her malevolent mother. She is desperate for someone to love and lacking a real baby, buys a 'Barbie' doll. She makes clothes for it out of an old dress in the same style she wore when she was a child. She creates her life around the doll, taking it with her on a picnic and into the garden. She talks to the doll about her father, remembering him in a loving, and regretful manner, confiding that he was hard to please, distant and stern. Although she reveals in a dream fantasy that her father wanted a son, her memory of him is couched in love and she does not blame him for his indifference to her. She makes the doll a bridal dress and brings a male doll home to be the bridegroom. Her doll couples have a child and she buys a life-size celluloid doll which she cares for lovingly, furnishing a nursery and washing baby clothes.

One day, a man comes to visit her and a sexual relationship develops. In bed with the man, she hears the dolls call her 'a filthy bitch' and a 'disgusting cheap little tart'. When the man discovers the three dolls, she introduces them as her daughter, son-in-law and 'our baby whom we love very much'. Eventually the man leaves her. She is unable to cope with the rejection and she searches for him in the streets, eventually collapsing in despair. At home in her own bed, in a startling announcement, which is confusing for those who have imagined that the affair is a fantasy, a male doctor announces that she is pregnant.

The daughter in *A City's Child* was clearly a misfit in society. She was without friends or relatives and was unable to communicate with the neighbours or shop assistants. The fantasies and voices in her head marked her as a psychotic victim of a mother who showed no sign of love for her child and on the contrary, appeared to despise her. Using the dolls to make sense of her life, the daughter acted out the mother/daughter role that she had been denied. She loved the dolls as if she were trying to make up for the harshness and neglect she had suffered. The ending of the film highlighted the film's use of Freudian theory. The way girls play with dolls had, for Freud, a special significance, and he argued that the daughter, 'could do with the baby everything that her mother used to do with her'.⁴⁹ In a symbolic and terrible scene, the daughter slowly dismembered the doll she has made in her own image.

While the rejecting, hateful mother could be seen in *A City's Child*, her counterpart, the overprotecting mother, was the focus of *The Night the Prowler*⁵⁰ (1979), directed by Jim Sharman. This film of repressed sexuality and fantasy was ambiguous, as it appeared to be a parody of bourgeois anxiety about manners and possessions, yet its overtones of hostility and problems of coming-of-age, made it a serious social comment. Film scholar, Brian McFarlane argued that in 'white-anting' Australian suburban life, it was a vindictive

⁴⁹Freud, 'Femininity', p. 128.

⁵⁰The correct name of this film is *Patrick White's The Night the Prowler*.

satire.⁵¹ However, the director, Jim Sharman spoke of it as a domestic comedy.⁵² Their contradictory responses to the film indicated its complexity and, perhaps, explained the unfavourable reviews that devastated both Patrick White and Jim Sharman who had worked together on the script.

The Night the Prowler was an exploration of the relationships in a family consisting of a mother, Doris, a father, Humphrey and their only child, Felicity. Doris, a caricature of a housewife and mother, is obsessed with cleanliness and over-involved with her daughter. She spends her day dusting the furniture and talking on the telephone to her friend Madge, to whom she reveals intimate details of Felicity's life. The latter, in her late teens, is ungainly and ill-tempered.⁵³ At the start of the film Felicity claims to have been raped by an intruder, although there is something strange about her report and later in the film, it is revealed that she has been lying. Felicity's behaviour is neurotic and becomes increasingly bizarre: she spends her evenings attired in black leather, prowling the neighbourhood, breaking into the homes of her parent's wealthy friends and damaging their possessions. She is unhappy, lonely and desperate. Her eventual salvation comes with her encounter with an old, incontinent, naked man. He reveals:

I never expected anything, never loved anyone, not even myself. I'm nothing, I believe in nothing. Nothing is a noble faith. Nobody can hurt nothing, so you have no reason to be afraid.

She is able to help the old man, whose incontinence has figuratively returned him to infancy. His dying moments transform her life. Although film critic, Anna Dzenis, observed that the film, especially its closing sequence, was difficult to comprehend,⁵⁴ it could be understood in terms of Felicity's relationship to her mother. The old man was

⁵¹Brian McFarlane, 'Patrick White's *The Night the Prowler*', [rev. art.], *Cinema Papers*, number 20, March/April 1979, pp. 301-2.

⁵²Robyn Anderson & Sue Adler, 'Jim Sharman', *Cinema Papers*, number 20, March/April 1979, pp. 268-71, p. 318.

⁵³Kerry Walker, in her late twenties was too old for the part, but both Jim Sharman and Patrick White thought that in all other ways, she was perfect. See David Marr, *Patrick White: A Life*, Vintage, Sydney, 1995.

⁵⁴Anna Dzenis, 'Patrick White's *The Night the Prowler*', [rev. art.], in S. Murray, (ed.), *Australian Film, 1978-1992: A Survey of Theatrical Features*, Oxford University Press/AFC and Cinema Papers, South Melbourne, 1993, p. 46.

someone that Felicity could nurture and assist. He was a nihilist: he demanded nothing of her; he was the opposite of her mother.

Felicity's problems were directly related to her domineering manipulative mother. The appearance of mother and daughter was the first indication of incompatibility between the pair. Doris, with her bouffant, sprayed hair and neatly starched frock was contrasted with Felicity, who was relaxed, plump and unkempt. There were no signs of the loving companionship of earlier women of the cinema, and their encounters were marked with acrimony. In one confrontational scene Felicity declared, 'You make me sick — I'm suffering from the passive nature you forced on me'. While this outburst made it clear that she did not want to imitate her mother's life, Felicity's self-understanding was askew. Her behaviour was the opposite of passive, as she was violent and even criminally destructive for most of the film. Perhaps, the most significant demonstration of the rift between mother and daughter came when Felicity broke off her engagement to a man Doris thought was especially suitable. She did more than simply oppose her mother. She undermined a fundamental function of the cinematic mother to find and approve the daughter's suitor.

The Freudian sub-text of *The Night the Prowler* has been used to represent the mother as damaging to her daughter's mental stability. While the women clashed continually and seemed to have opposing personalities, from another point of view, they were both demanding, aggressive and selfish. Doris was destined to remain so; Felicity's redemption was only possible when she was able to move away from self-centredness, even madness, to a more traditional notion of motherhood with an unselfish, nurturing relationship with the old man.

The Maternal Cycle

One important aspect of theoretical research explained that women continued to mother because they learned to internalise and repeat their mother's behaviour. The maternal cycle that this implied indicated that when daughters received good mothering, they would

become nurturers themselves and inevitably desire to marry and start their own family. Daughters of nurturing mothers imitated mothering skills, shown by the way they acted in society and by the way they treated other members of the family, in particular their own mothers. In this model, the mother and adult daughter roles were almost interchangeable: as the mother cared for her child, so the daughter, in turn, nurtured the mother.

Early films replicated the idea of a maternal cycle, a phenomenon evident in the narrative in F. Stuart-Whyte's *Painted Daughters* (1925). The film was especially salient, as it showed the mother's life spanning a period of about twenty years and her daughter both as a child and an adult. Mary, the mother, is left alone to raise Maryon, her young daughter, when her husband commits suicide after becoming bankrupt. However, *Painted Daughters* is not a tragedy and rather, celebrates city life where Mary lives in a luxurious apartment and drives herself about in a magnificent open roadster. Moreover, she is a dancer on the stage and her living conditions and appearance suggest she is successful and respectable. Maryon grows from an adored child who plays music to comfort her mother, into a responsible and loving adult. The notion of the child following the mother is continued in Maryon's theatrical career. Maternal replication reaches its height in the final scenes of the film, when mother and daughter joyfully make their plans for a double wedding.

Maryon in *Painted Daughters* echoed her mother in both behaviour and name, in a way which was typical of the mother and daughter mutuality of early cinema. During the 1970s, when demanding and unresponsive mothers burst onto the screen, daughters did not repeat maternal behaviour. Breaking the cycle, they reverted to a more traditional maternal role. In *The Night the Prowler*, as we have seen, Felicity's redemption came with her move away from her obsessive mother, to a nurturing motherly role with the old man. A similar, and more startling redemption came for the daughter in the final scene of *A City's Child* when she destroyed her doll/self. By removing the doll's head and its limbs, she showed in a symbolic way, how her mother had mutilated her life, leaving her unable to function in the world, without the ability to reason or act coherently. Interestingly, the

woman next turned to the celluloid doll, which in her fantasy, was her 'much-loved child'. It seemed as though she might dismember it as well, but instead she held it close and rocked it gently. She was playing the role of the traditional, caring mother. Her propensity for nurturing was signalled at the beginning of the film when she caressed the small white kitten, which she kept, despite her intimidating mother's demand for her to get rid of it. Tending to it with love and sacrifice, she saved the best part of the milk for the small creature. She was also shown 'mothering' her unlovable mother by cooking her favourite dinner, giving her medicine and reading to her. The daughter's 'motherly' attributes of love, kindness and selflessness were undoubtedly not learned from her hateful mother.

While in films of the 1970s, daughters had to endure mothers who were unresponsive, suffocating or demanding, the women in the next decade tended to be more loving toward each other. In each of four films, Ken Cameron's *Monkey Grip* (1982), Glenda Hambly's *Fran* (1985), Carl Schultz's *Travelling North* (1987) and Gillian Armstrong's *Hightide* (1987), the relationship was unconventional. None of the mothers had a partner at home to help them in child rearing tasks and they were not particularly involved with their daughters, although each was loving in her own way. These women could be seen as selfish, as they followed their own interests rather than devoting their life to raising their children. They were in some ways, and frequently by their own admission, bad mothers. The daughters on the other hand, displayed remarkable nurturing attributes, particularly towards their mothers. Like images of daughters in the 1970s decade, their maternal behaviour did not result from imitating their own mothers. Perhaps, Barbara Hudson's observation was pertinent to these films. She found that even when girls were badly mothered, 'they express culturally expected aspirations of home and family'.⁵⁵ The representations of traditionally maternal, selfless daughters countermanded, or at least, complicated, theoretical assumptions about a cycle of mothering passed from mother to child.

⁵⁵Barbara Hudson, 'Femininity and Adolescence' in A. McRobbie & M. Nava, (eds), *Gender and Generation*, Macmillan, London, 1984, p. 52.

The daughters in three of these films were at the threshold of their adult lives and those in *Travelling North* were married and had children. The earliest film, Ken Cameron's *Monkey Grip* (1982), produced by Patricia Lovell and based on Helen Garner's novel, examined the relationships of Nora to Javo, her drug-addicted boyfriend and to Gracie, her adolescent daughter. Nora worked on a women's newspaper, had many friends and enjoyed a sexually-free life in cosmopolitan Melbourne. Her private life was frequently at odds with what was best for Gracie, and the daughter survived and considering her youth, was surprisingly self-sufficient. There was no doubt that mother and daughter loved each other, although Nora's pre-occupation with her own life and affairs contradicted the usual, traditional, motherly role.

Issues of motherhood in this film were further complicated by its cast. Alice Garner, the writer's daughter, played Nora's daughter, Gracie, in the film. As Helen Garner's novel was based on her own life,⁵⁶ Alice's daughterly relationship with the writer, Garner, and her 'film mother,' Nora, were therefore somewhat blurred. The line between theatre and real life was challenged by actor Noni Hazlehurst (Nora), who spoke in an interview of the moments while they were making the film, when Alice 'provided me with comfort when nobody else could'. Their mutuality was mirrored in the film narrative where Hazlehurst noted that Nora and Gracie were like two sisters or two friends. Importantly, she recognised that the mother drew support from the daughter.⁵⁷ Film critic, Brian McFarlane was also aware that: 'sometimes [there is] an amusing sense of Gracie's being calmer and older than Nora'.⁵⁸ Not only, therefore, did the mother-daughter roles merge within the film, there was a crossover in the relationship which extended to the actors and filmmakers.

The idea of the 'calmer and older' daughter who coped with her indecisive, often inadequate mother, was continued in *Fran* (1985). Glenda Hambly, the scriptwriter and

⁵⁶Peter Lawrance, 'Monkey Grip', [rev. art.], in Murray, *Australian Film, 1978-1992*, p. 104.

⁵⁷Noni Hazlehurst talks about *Monkey Grip* ...and acting, and films, and the future', in *Filmnews*, volume IV, number 10, October 1982, pp. 10-11.

⁵⁸Brian McFarlane, 'Words and Images: *Monkey Grip*', *Cinema Papers*, number 44-5, April 1984, p. 21.

director of the film, was working for the West Australian Department of Community Welfare on a documentary about a new child welfare scheme. The scheme did not eventuate, however, and Hambly used the material to develop a script for a feature film which became *Fran*.⁵⁹ Hambly's commitment to the exploration of issues of child welfare was evident in the film, which provided a moving story of mother-daughter attachment between Fran and her elder daughter, Lisa.

Fran, a working class mother who lives in a house in the Perth suburbs, is struggling to support her three children, when her most recent husband leaves after a violent argument. Lisa, is about twelve, Tom, about ten and Cynthia, about seven years old. Fran is a well-meaning, and incompetent mother, whose daughter, though too young for the task, takes on the nurturing role. Lisa attends to the family washing when she comes home from school and makes dinner while Fran watches television and plays with the younger children. When Tom does not want to eat his cooked meal, it is Lisa who remonstrates with him while Fran sidesteps her responsibilities in order to keep the peace. Later, when Fran, in a drunken rage has tried to hit Cynthia, Lisa takes charge, comforts her sister and prepares a cup of coffee to calm her mother.

Her desire for a male companion serves to compromise Fran's love for her children and she complains that they restrict her lifestyle. Eventually, she leaves them in the house alone one night, while she drinks in a local bar. Taking advantage of a kind neighbour who cares for the children for several days, Fran moves in with a man she has recently met. When she decides to have a holiday with him, she abandons the children to a reluctant foster-sister, intending to be away a few days, and not returning for several weeks. Eventually, and, perhaps, inevitably, the children are taken from their mother and placed in an institution.

⁵⁹Murray, *Australian Film, 1978-1992*, p. 170.

Despite her sometimes horrifying neglect of the children, Fran was not an unsympathetic character. She explained her behaviour in her reminiscences of her appalling childhood. She revealed that she has spent much of her life in an institution as her mother was an alcoholic and her father who had left when she was young, was replaced by numerous 'uncles'. Although not openly stated, it was probable that Fran was a victim of sexual abuse. She relentlessly imitated aspects of her mother's lifestyle: she drank to excess, the children's' fathers all had left, she invited men home to fulfil her sexual desire and the children were placed in an institution.

In making the point that Fran was repeating her mother's mistakes, the narrative implied that in the maternal cyclical pattern, Lisa could also adopt Fran's habits and neuroses. The film's documentary base, perhaps, helped critic, Paul Byrnes to remark that the realism of the film left the viewer powerless and depressed.⁶⁰ His conclusion may have been appropriate in earlier films and in theories which hypothesised that the daughter internalised her mother's attitudes and sexual behaviour.⁶¹ Representations of the ambivalence of mother-daughter relations in films of the 1980s, however, could be understood from newer feminist writing which indicated a more autonomous role for the daughter. At the end of the film, Fran is hysterical and depressed as she has lost her children, her lover and her friend and neighbour. It is, however, far from certain that Lisa will follow the same course. She has been portrayed as having many advantages over her mother. Besides her ability to care for Fran and her siblings, she is clever and at the top of her class. The film pointedly depicts her as conscientious about her education and eager to keep up with her schoolwork. Lisa is not like the ebullient, impulsive, impractical, Fran and is a sensitive, intelligent and quiet child, who understands her mother's actions with compassion. The social worker from the institution has shown he is sensitive and aware of her needs. There is a strong, though not explicit indication in the film, that she will not repeat her mother's intemperate behaviour.

⁶⁰Paul Byrnes 'Fran', [rev. art.], *Cinema Papers*, number 55, January 1986, p. 62.

⁶¹See Boyd, 'Mothers and Daughters', pp. 291-301.

The third film, *Travelling North* is unusual because the protagonist, Frances, is in her fifties and her children, Helen and Sophie, have their own families. Frances loves the recently-retired Frank and they plan to move north together, away from the cold of Melbourne to the sun of tropical Cairns.⁶² Helen and Sophie, although adults, have not resolved their differences with their mother. Helen calls Frances 'irresponsible' and makes it clear that in her desire to move north, she is avoiding her grandmotherly duties. Most of the blame and acrimony, however, comes from what the daughters see as the mother's neglect of them when they were infants. It is revealed that Frances left her family to follow her own interests when the girls were quite small.⁶³ Frances admits to some mistakes: she says she did not love Helen enough and she regrets preventing Sophie from attending university. She remarks, 'you were both pains in the arse, but I shouldn't have left you with my brother'. Now about to leave them again, Frances does not capitulate, in spite of her daughters' pleas and is determined to enjoy as many years as possible with Frank.

Helen and Sophie are unhappy women, and while Frances's deficiencies in mothering may have left them insecure, they have become devoted and traditional mothers. In failing to mould their lives on Frances, they subvert ideas of mother-repeating behaviour. Despite their condemnation of their mother, they are constantly trying to care for her. Sophie discusses her future with compassion and Helen periodically sends her money. Additionally, in another role-reversal, Frances turns to her daughters when she is distressed that her relationship with Frank had reached an impasse.⁶⁴ Far from the traditional, sacrificing mother, Frances, even according to her own assessment, has put her own interests before those of her children. The daughters, on the other hand, while

⁶²This was an aspiration which was common to the four films: the desire to 'get away' mostly figured as a yearning for 'up north'. Perhaps this was a metaphor for the release from child rearing that most mothers desired at one time or another.

⁶³It is difficult to understand the underlying point of this scene. It seems impossible to believe that Frances, now in her fifties, could be criticised by her middle-aged daughters for wanting to go away with Frank, because she had left them in their childhood. Perhaps, its purpose was to draw attention to the daughters' present unhappiness.

⁶⁴When Frank became ill Frances had to look after him, although she displayed her antipathy for the nurturing role and left him to return to Melbourne and the daughters.

expressing extreme dissatisfaction with their marriages, remain within them with the stereotypical rationale of making a home for their children.

The fourth film of the decade to represent the relationship between a reluctant mother and a nurturing daughter was *Hightide* (1987). Produced by Sandra Levy and written by Laura Jones, the director, Gillian Armstrong wrote the script after the birth of her daughter and saw this film as her 'return to cinema as a working mother'.⁶⁵ The producer and scriptwriter had originally intended it to be a story of a male surfer, drifting from town to town, although Armstrong decided that it would be more interesting to have a female in the part.⁶⁶ This last-minute change in protagonist probably accounts for the unfamiliarity of the mother's actions in the film, in particular, her confused feelings about her reunion with her daughter. This, like the other three films, challenged the maternal cycle, and additionally, *Hightide* appeared at first to subvert the strong bond of mother and daughter. Armstrong's film moved away from the mother's usual representation and initiated a different way of thinking about motherhood.⁶⁷

Lilli is a singer in a city-based rock band which is booked for a performance in a small New South Wales coastal town. Ally is a young girl who lives an idyllic, though disciplined life, in a caravan park in the town, with her grandmother, Bet. The opening of the film establishes the disparity in their lives. Lilli's introduction is frenetic, noisy and uncontrolled as she races her car in a masculine parody, at high speed along the highway. By contrast, Ally is first seen floating quietly and calmly in an 'amniotic' pool beside the sea.⁶⁸ Lilli's car breaks down and by chance, she moves into the caravan park to await its repair. When she sees Bet with Ally, she realises that Ally must be the child that she had

⁶⁵Anna Grieve, 'Gillian Armstrong Returns to Eden', *Cinema Papers*, number 63, May 1987, p. 33.

⁶⁶Helen Barlow '*Hightide*', [rev. art.], in Murray, *Australian Film, 1978-1992*, p. 221.

⁶⁷The difficulty of representing a women's point-of-view was clear from the paternalistic review of *Hightide* by film historian John Baxter, who, disparagingly, summed up the film as a woman faced with crucial career choice. He asked why Armstrong would concern herself with such a person - a singer who thought that a Bob Dylan song 'is a pinnacle of wisdom'. John Baxter, '*Hightide*', [rev. art.], *Cinema Papers*, number 65, September 1987, p. 45.

⁶⁸Lucy Fischer noted the contrasting themes in *Hightide* of Lilli's theatrical career and Ally's association with nature in an 'amniotic' ocean. L. Fischer, *Cinematernity, Film, Motherhood, Genre*, Princeton University Press, NJ, 1996, p. 221.

abandoned twelve years earlier, when her husband, Ally's father, had died. Their first face-to-face meeting reverses their traditional roles. Lilli is drunk after losing her singing job, and is unable to find her way in the park. The responsible and caring Ally, guides her to her caravan.

At first Lilli is reluctant to risk her carefree existence, although gradually, she becomes drawn into a relationship with her long-lost daughter. In a pivotal scene of awakening, Lilli discovers Ally shaving her legs for the first time. She watches entranced, crouching unseen in the shower block, fascinated by this symbolic act of her daughter's coming-of-age. The orchestral music that accompanies this scene underlines the idea that Lilli, despite her intentions, has become emotionally involved. The experience for the daughter is similarly enigmatic. Ally finally asks: 'Are you my mother?' Although Lilli denies it, strangely, evoking some mysterious arcane bonding of mother to daughter, Ally knows the truth. Later, they discuss their relationship in an emotional scene which was unscripted. Ally is quite clear and unequivocal about her love for her mother, she says: 'Do you love me? I love you'.

When her car is repaired, Lilli, prepares to leave the caravan park to resume her itinerant life. Her maternal feelings are still unresolved.⁶⁹ Ally embraces her and impulsively Lilli asks: 'Do you want to come with me?' Ally is delighted. They leave together, although we are not sure that Lilli will be up to the demands of caring for a teenager. After they have driven only a few miles Lilli stops to get petrol, perhaps, to give herself time to think. She contemplates Ally through a window, significantly standing outside on the bitumen road of the service station. Ally in the domestic, warm interior world of the cafe, sits waiting passively for her mother, unaware of the turning point in her life that this scene indicates. Lilli is about to drive off and abandon her daughter. Had she done so, the myth of the sacrificing, available, mother would have been overturned and a particularly strong aspect

⁶⁹Lilli's dilemma could have been solved if she were to decide to live with, or near, Bet and Ally. Given the strain on Bet and Lilli's relationship so far in the film, this very practical solution would probably have been an impossibility.

of the cycle of mother-daughter connection, broken. She relents, however, and they leave together, perhaps, in affirmation of the mystical bonds that are supposed to unite all mothers and daughters. By bringing the mother back to her traditional role, the filmmakers undermined their own creative and, perhaps, courageous viewpoint.⁷⁰

Nora, Fran, Frances and Lilli were limited in their maternal feelings. Their daughters did not repeat their behaviour and furthermore, were depicted as caring and nurturing. Not all unresponsive mothers in films, however, produced nurturing daughters. The contrast can be seen, for example in Gillian Armstrong's film of Miles Franklin's novel, *My Brilliant Career* (1979). Sybilla's mother has several children who, because of her poverty, are more a problem than a joy. She displays no hint of motherliness and is cold and hard with Sybilla, sending her away to become a servant. Although eager to avoid imitating her mother, Sybilla displays a similar lack of caring. She meets and deliberately entrances Harry, the most eligible bachelor in the district. Treating him in a rather cavalier fashion, she will not consent to marry him despite his entreaties, as the idea of being a wife and mother is an anathema to her. In her film, Armstrong has depicted a feminist challenge to motherhood and as the title suggests, Sybilla believes that marriage means submission and the end of her freedom to be a writer.

Another film in which the daughter had the same reaction to her suitor as Sybilla in *My Brilliant Career*, was the very different, *The Fringe Dwellers* (1986), directed by Bruce Beresford. Unlike Sybilla's mother, Trilby's mother was a sacrificing, traditional nurturer. *The Fringe Dwellers* was not well-received. It was criticised by Tim Rowse for having no social realism and no sense of politics.⁷¹ Kathy Bail argued that the family's Aboriginality was ignored and differences of colour were given only marginal consideration.⁷² Most criticism of the film tended to object to the stereotypical presentation of the Aboriginal

⁷⁰The consequences of abandoning Ally might have been too difficult to contemplate. Lucy Fischer, for instance, in her analysis of the film called it 'the ultimate female taboo after infanticide'. Fischer, *Cinamaternity*, p. 225.

⁷¹Tim Rowse, 'Black Heroines White Directors', *Filmnews*, volume 16, number 6, November 1986, p. 11.

⁷²Kathy Bail, 'Fringe Benefits', [rev. art.], *Cinema Papers* number 58, July 1986, pp. 14-17.

men, who were seen as the cause of the economic problems of the family. The focus of the film was more properly seen as the relationship of the mother, Mollie to her elder daughter, Trilby. Mollie is loving and does her best to care for her family and despite her lack of money she is happy as the matriarch of her extended family. Trilby has a boyfriend and eventually becomes pregnant, although will not marry the father as she does not want to repeat her mother's life. Finally, after losing the baby, she packs a suitcase and goes away to enjoy what she sees as a more autonomous existence, leaving a sad but kind and understanding mother.

Bonding: Autonomy or Dependence

One particular theoretical position on the mother and daughter relationship suggested that the daughter's autonomy would be limited if she were close to her mother. In this model, the daughter saw herself in relation to others rather than as a separate and self-reliant person. This situation was represented in many early films, where young women imitated the lives of their mothers; their attributes were related to domestic life as they sacrificed their own wishes for the needs of others. The daughters did not have the confidence or capacity to deal with problems which arose when their lives deviated in some way from the mother's example. As a consequence, they were devastated if their mothers were not ready to assist them. These films represented the bonding of mother to daughter which was typical of nineteenth century writing. The daughters displayed the lack of ability to act independently that Chodorow and others like her have proposed.

Two loving, and dependent daughters can be found in Raymond Longford's *The Woman Suffers* (1918). Both became pregnant outside marriage. The first, Joan, is a dutiful daughter who helps her mother in the house. An innocent, she is easily seduced by the wily Ralph. When she realises she is going to have his baby, she has no way of dealing with her condition and throws herself into the river. Her mother, in anguish, sits by her dead daughter and weeps. In the city, in another family, Ralph's sister, Marjory, is seduced by Joan's step-brother, Philip, in an act of revenge. Marjory is also a dutiful daughter and

may have met the same fate as Joan, had her step-mother, Marion, not intercepted a letter she had written to Philip. Although she is disappointed and reacts with tears and anger when she realises Marjory's condition, Marion regains her caring and loving attitude. During the pregnancy, Marjory is taken gravely ill and according to the intertitles *her life hangs in the balance*. Marion confronts the seducer, Philip, who has deliberately brought the family to ruin.⁷³ He relents, hires a clergyman and marries Marjory at her bedside. Marjory's recovery is immediate. In the tradition of good mothers at the time, Marion has been able to bring about the daughter's marriage and resolve her problems. Marjory's life is transformed from shame and despair into the happiness of married life with her baby.

Although the film was commenting on the broad social stigma of unwed motherhood, on a personal level, both Joan and Marjory were unable to survive when they were confronted with the realisation that their lives were about to move away from the pattern established by their mothers. They had been raised in their mother's image, with a singular path towards housewifely and mothering skills. Their mothers were sober and respectable women and it was unthinkable to have daughters who would fail to live up to their own standards. At the time, pregnancy outside marriage could be seen as opposite to everything for which the mothers stood. Although Joan's suicide note explained that she chose to die rather than to bring shame to her family, the problems her death brought, would of course be many times worse. I would argue that it was not the public 'shame', but her failure to repeat her mother's circumspect behaviour that caused her unbounded grief. Marjory would have had a similar fate, had her mother not intervened and found her a husband, thus bringing her back to the straight and narrow path of decency.

The love and respect for their mother of daughters like Joan and Marjory, were shown to limit their own independence, making them unable to accommodate variations in their own lives. In other films, the daughter was close to her mother, yet was able to lead a different and independent existence. Perhaps, the best example of this phenomenon can be

⁷³This is a marvellously melodramatic film with a multitude of cross-family intrigue: Philip, for instance turns out to be Marion's long-lost son.

seen in the six Rudd family films,⁷⁴ which ranged from the Raymond Longford version of *On Our Selection* in 1920, to Ken G. Hall's *Dad Rudd M.P.*, in 1940. In a formula common to all the films, the oldest daughter returned to her rural family after time spent away in the city. She was always a sophisticated young woman who spoke well and was educated and stylish, in contrast to her gauche younger sisters. While the portrayal of an enviable, confident daughter in each film remained the same, her name was changed and the character became in turn, Kate, Nell, Jill, Betty and Ann.

In the first Rudd film, Ma Rudd is impressed with Kate's clothes, although not in awe of her, as she commands her to ride to a neighbouring farm to borrow flour. The 1932 Kate is profoundly grateful for the difference in her life from her mother's, and declares, 'You and Dad gave me a chance to get an education'. She is more confident than the earlier Kate and later warns, 'Don't tell me what to do — I'm a free agent'. Despite this, her relationship with her mother is loving and close, as they work happily together, preparing the table together under a tree at the Picnic Races. Ma looks tired and Kate, kindly, tells her to 'sit down and rest'. Jill, in *Dad and Dave Come to Town* (1938), is, perhaps, the most independent of these older daughters, as she manages the city dress shop Dad has inherited. Her famous admonition to the unscrupulous previous manager, 'Don't call me girlie'⁷⁵ became something of a catchcry in the 1970s women's liberation movement.

The independent daughter was increasingly common during the 1930s, when, despite her kindness and bonding with her mother, she began to have other capabilities outside the home. She was, for instance, adept mechanically, being able to drive the new family car or pilot an aeroplane.⁷⁶ In Hollywood and British cinema, as Andrea Walsh has pointed out, a 'thematic evolution' after World War Two, saw the emergence of a creative, independent

⁷⁴These are the two Raymond Longford productions, *On Our Selection* (1920) and *Rudds New Selection* (1921) and four from Ken G. Hall: *On Our Selection* (1932), *Grandad Rudd* (1935), *Dad and Dave Come to Town* (1938) and *Dad Rudd, M.P.*, (1940).

⁷⁵*Don't Call Me Girlie* was directed in 1985 by Stewart Young and Andrée Wright. A documentary, it told of the strength and resourcefulness of women in the Australian film industry, particularly, Lottie Lyell, Shirley Anne Richards and Charlotte Francis, and their work until World War Two.

⁷⁶See for example, *Splendid Fellows* (1934), *Heritage* (1935) and *Thoroughbred* (1936).

daughter who did not always need her mother by her side.⁷⁷ This description could be applied to the exceptional, confident daughters who made an appearance in pre-war Australian films.

In these films, mothers and daughters had mutually nurturing relationships, although the daughters were clearly in charge of their own lives. It should be pointed out, however, that the daughters were all married at the end of the film, almost as though that were the point of their appearance. Their close bonding with their mother had not resulted in their loss of autonomy, although the significance of the genre of the films should not be overlooked. The 'eldest daughter role' was used to create the love interest in the film and the filmmakers cast a beautiful young actress whose function was to attract an eligible young bachelor. Despite her protestations of independence, her purpose in the story ensured that she must marry at the end of the film. Throughout, she was strong and outspoken, although there was a possibility that this would change on marriage. Whether her fate was to re-create her mother's domestic life, or to make a new and different existence, was not clear.

Apart from the educated Rudd daughters there was another group of strong young women in early Australian cinema. These daughters of the outback were superb horse riders, managed properties and were active in rural life.⁷⁸ They had, however, one common peculiarity: they were all motherless.⁷⁹ Their amazing skills of strength and courage were associated with their fathers, as they were known as 'the squatters' daughters', often presented as stereotypical Australian girls.⁸⁰ These women had no mothers with whom to bond and grew to be independent and strong females. In some ways their representation

⁷⁷Andrea S. Walsh cited films for example, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1945), *I Remember Mama* (1948) and *Little Women* (1949) in A.S. Walsh, *Women's Film and Female Experience: 1940-1950*, Praeger, NY/London, 1984, p. 103.

⁷⁸See Pike & Ross Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, who noted twelve films from 1900 to 1936 which featured 'the squatter's daughter'.

⁷⁹Andrée Wright made the point that they were 'motherless, sisterless and also lacked female confidantes of their own age'. A. Wright, *Brilliant Careers: Women in Australian Cinema*, Pan, Sydney, 1986, p. 97.

⁸⁰ See for instance, *The Squatter's Daughter* (1910) and (1933), *A Girl of the Bush* (1921), *Silks and Saddles* (1921) and *Tall Timbers* (1937) where the strong daughters were motherless.

could be seen to support notions which held that daughters without close bonds to their mothers grew up independent and autonomous. Additionally, they provided perhaps, an early example of the father taking responsibility for child care that Chodorow and others have later espoused. The role model for these powerful women was always a male figure.⁸¹

From the beginning of the 1970s, the mother/daughter role provided the dramatic focus of many film narratives.⁸² The representations were usually from the daughter's point-of-view and told of a damaging and volatile relationship.⁸³ The lack of bonding in these films did not result in the daughter's freedom and strength as in the squatter's daughter films and, rather, told of her inhibited and crippled life. The daughters in *Snapshot*, *A City's Child* and *The Night the Prowler* have been discussed above, in the analysis of the hateful mother.

The 1980s brought a shift in which the dominating mother features of the previous decade were replaced with compassionate portrayals of the mother's relationship with her daughter. The films focused on the mother's life outside her traditional domestic space, and importantly, the narratives were often from her point-of-view. While mothers confronted issues that went beyond domesticity and encompassed ideas such as the environment and problems in the workforce, there was an odd twist in terms of autonomy and self-expression. Mothers stood up to restrictive husbands and moved into a life of single parenting. They also took their place in the public sphere, holding down jobs as well as rearing their daughters. On the other hand, their life was not shown as secure and

⁸¹Gail Finney noted that it was common in nineteenth century fiction for motherless girls to grow to be strong-willed and independent. G. Finney, *Women in Modern Drama: Freud, Feminism and European Theater at the Turn of the Century*, Cornell University Press, NY, 1989, p. 107.

⁸²There were few before this time. Exceptions were *The Woman Suffers* (1918), *Sunshine Sally* (1922), *Painted Daughters* (1925), *The Adorable Outcast* (1928), *A Son is Born* (1946), *Wherever She Goes* (1951) and *Jedda* (1955).

⁸³See for instance, *Snapshot* (1979), *A City's Child* (1972) and *Patrick White's The Night the Prowler* (1979).

confident. Mothers were often confused, dissatisfied and introspective. Curiously — considering their youth — the daughters appeared to have more life-coping skills.⁸⁴

The competent daughters of the decade have been discussed above in relation to the mother as a role-model. The daughters in *Monkey Grip*, *Fran*, *Travelling North* and *Hightide* were all self-confident and outspoken in regard to their own needs and aspirations. An additional episode in *Monkey Grip* serves to illustrate the strength of the daughter, who typically, functioned with confidence in spite of her closeness to her mother. The daughter's superior ability to deal with life is shown in parallel scenes in the film. When Gracie's young boyfriend, Raimondo, reacts to her birthday gift in a hurtful manner, Gracie copes with it without fuss. On the other hand, the life of her mother, Nora, is complicated by her lover's insensitive behaviour and constant rejection. Continually anxious, Nora is unable either to end the relationship or to arrange it to her satisfaction. Eventually, in a scene which draws attention to the role-reversal common in this decade, Nora seeks her young daughter's advice about her relationship. Gracie explains, 'Well, it's because he's a junkie. That's why he's so strange and won't talk. You should be nicer to him and leave him alone'. She continues to comfort her mother saying, 'Cheer up Mum, you'll get over it, remember when I loved Raimondo'. Conspicuously emphasising her transformation to the mother role, Gracie is knitting during this exchange.⁸⁵ This scene is presented in a matter-of-fact manner yet it is remarkable, considering Gracie is only ten years old. It adds to the role so far created for Gracie, who has coped with Nora's neglect of her traditional maternal role throughout the film.

Postscript on Flexibility and Tolerance

A more multi-faceted approach which reflected recent less polarised theories of motherhood was represented in a single film at the end of the decade. It is worth returning

⁸⁴Examples of this type of mother-daughter relationship, apart from those reviewed above, can be found in *The Coca-Cola Kid* (1985), *The Fringe Dwellers* (1986), *Jenny Kissed Me* (1986) and *Australian Dream* (1987).

⁸⁵This was a stereotypical occupation of the mother whenever she was required to sit down. Disturbingly, perhaps, it seemed to occur in most films.

to it as it provides one of the most thoughtful investigations of a family. An unusual and intelligent film, Martha Ansara's *The Pursuit of Happiness* (1988), was set in Perth.⁸⁶ On the one hand it was a tale of a suburban family, and on the other, it was a documentary which exposed the evils of nuclear weapons. It was unsettling for some because of its combination of genres and indeed, has been criticised for its pedantic approach.⁸⁷ The film, however, cleverly used the internal conflicts of the family as a counterpoint to the public tensions about a visiting American warship and Perth's hosting of the America's Cup.

The mother, Anna, besides contemplating her association with her daughter, is reviewing her life as she approaches middle-age. Her husband, John, has just started his own business and wants Anna to assist him by entertaining his associates. Their daughter, Mandy, is fifteen years old and a political radical. The relational tension is reflected in the news of the day. John's reverence for capitalism is aligned to the extravagant yacht race and Mandy's very public anger is played out against the visit of *US Enterprise*. Their polarity places the mother at the centre of the storm.

Anna reaches a watershed where she acknowledges that her child rearing responsibilities are finished. Her daughter is grown up and wants to make her own decisions. Although Mandy has been 'the centre of her life for fifteen years', Anna realises that she no longer needs, or is able, to be responsible for her daughter. The prospect of moving away from her role as mother, prompts her to re-evaluate her life as John's wife. The tensions from the upheaval form the focus of the film. Anna and Mandy are very close, yet the women freely argue about issues which are important to both. Although the conflict is heated, it does no harm to the love each feels for the other. Significantly, in an indication of mutual respect, Anna accepts Mandy's point-of-view, and acknowledges that 'her way doesn't have to be mine'. Anna finally makes a stand against what she evaluates as John's

⁸⁶See chapter 3 for an analysis of the good mother aspect of the film.

⁸⁷Reviewer, Anna Gul, calls it a 'didactic piece of mixed-genre cinema', *The Pursuit of Happiness*, [rev. art.], in Murray, *Australian Film, 1978-1992*, p. 255.

unethical business practices, and in contrast to her conflict with Mandy, they are unable to be reconciled. The impasse she reaches with John serves to highlight the special relationship of mother and daughter. John will not accept her criticism of his business activities and continues to insist that she entertain his associates. She has to leave him to prove her point. Mother and daughter, on the other hand, acknowledge each other's differences and in the final scene are happily together.

The Pursuit of Happiness was significant in the investigation of the mother's relationship with her daughter in films, because it offered an alternative to the need for separation and autonomy. It looked instead to acceptance of the differences between the women, to empowerment through flexibility and tolerance. In a radical departure from many previous film narratives, it explored both mother's and daughter's need for self-expression. While the daughter was a teenager who was about to leave the parental home, this was not a coming-of-age film, but one of a mother's transition to an acceptance of change and decision about her own life. The film celebrated the connection and closeness of mother and daughter and the importance of their unique relationship without giving either woman the power to make a victim of the other. Additionally, the film used the family as a metaphor of Australia. As the women were able to mature and find their own way in life away from the patriarchal capitalist husband/father, so the filmmaker hoped that Australia would be able to move away from the influence of the nuclear-powered capitalism of the United States.

Conclusion

The diversity of the research on the association of the mother to her daughter provided a way to understand the complexities of the relationship as depicted in feature films. Biological, social-training and cognitive role-learning theories tended to argue that the women's relationship was close. They assumed that for the most part the mother was loving, or at least, had the daughter's best interest at heart. Psychoanalytic theorists, on the other hand, frequently found the mother responsible for irreparable damage to her

daughter. Feminist research used a plurality of approaches. Its conclusions were equally varied, as some described closeness and bonding, while others argued that the mother's power restricted the daughter's own self-reliance by preventing her from separating and seeing herself as an individual. Other feminists have recently questioned the necessity for autonomy as a goal, seeing flexibility and understanding as being healthier objectives.

Taking into account the whole period from 1900-1988, most films depicted the mother and daughter in a close relationship,⁸⁸ even if it was often peripheral to the narrative. The images followed empirical research and indicated, perhaps, real life experiences of the closeness of mothers and daughters rather than theories which looked for and found problems in the union. In early films, particularly, the pair exhibited a mutuality and commonality which meant that they were almost inseparable. The mother passed on her maternal skills to the daughter, prepared her for marriage and usually found her a suitable partner. On occasions, there was even an indication of a special mystical bond which united them. The expressions of love and companionship between the women in these films had its origins in nineteenth-century literature, and can be understood in relation to biological, social role training and cultural theories.

Exceptions to the loving mother/daughter relationship came almost exclusively during the 1970s with the onset of the popularity of a Freudian subtext in films. The typical 1970s film mother was suffocating, insensitive or malevolent. Whatever her depiction, at the base she was a selfish woman who lacked maternal feelings and skills. These films, seen from the daughter's point-of-view, portrayed the mother's influence on her daughter's life as profound and emotionally damaging. The representations of this aspect of the mother/daughter relationship were analysed employing those psychoanalytic and feminist opinions which challenged bonding theories and blamed the mother for the daughter's problems.

⁸⁸They are the opposite of the 'mother as a pest' which is common to recent cinema. It occurs in a typical scene in films where the daughter returns to her home. On her answer-phone there is usually a message from her mother, which the daughter greets with a grimace. This is normalised: her response is understood and the audience is meant to sympathise with her.

Questions of why women mother and undertake nurturing responsibilities more often than men, have been contemplated by many theorists from disparate fields. Many suggested that daughters internalised and repeated their mother's behaviour and manners. Theories which underpinned the role-model approach invested maternal behaviour with an ahistorical quality which insisted that a nurturing mother produces a nurturing daughter. The maternal cycle in films, to a certain extent, contradicted this approach, as the role-model paradigm was evident only in early films. It was, perhaps, surprising that in later films, daughters with non-nurturing mothers were not represented as imitating their mother's indifference or malice, and frequently found reward and redemption by moving to a traditional nurturing role.⁸⁹ Daughters almost without exception were caring and loving, although they did not learn their maternal skills by imitating their mother.⁹⁰ The films, perhaps, presented a point-of-view which indicated societal influence or more likely, the presence of an inevitable, unchanging, maternal instinct.

Finally, some theories postulated that daughters were too close to their mothers for them to effect the separation which would allow them autonomy and the ability to perform with confidence in their adult life. Theories that advocated separation and individuation implied that independent daughters could not be close to their mothers. Or, from another perspective, that daughters who were close to their mothers were unable to act on their own behalf. The representation of the daughter's lack of independence because of her closeness to her mother, appeared to be determined by historical context. In early films, the especially close relationships of the women was shown to limit the daughter's ability to act on her own accord. By the 1930s however, most daughters were represented as more educated and outspoken than their mothers, a trend that continued until the 1970s. In the hostile relationships which were a feature of the 1970s decade, the mother's insensitivity

⁸⁹One very important Australian film, *My Brilliant Career*, broke this pattern. Sybilla's mother was unresponsive and unkind and Sybilla, unlike other daughters, who turned out loving and nurturing, was violently opposed to motherhood.

⁹⁰There was contradiction in Bruce Beresford's *The Fringe Dwellers* (1986) where the daughter of a loving, traditional mother declined motherhood, possibly murdering her baby daughter.

or malice toward her daughter was represented as responsible for her inability to function in society. During the 1980s, the relationship was again represented as close and although the mother was often unsure and dissatisfied, the daughters were outspoken and independent. With a refreshing new outlook, one film, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, rather than representing the daughter as more or less autonomous than her mother, depicted the women as loving and self-confident.

chapter 6

motherhood and sexuality: madonna or whore?

By introducing one's wife to overly intense pleasures one risks giving her lessons she will put to bad use and which one will regret having taught her.¹

In 1935, the Hollywood star Helen Twelvetrees, was contracted to appear in Ken G. Hall's *Thoroughbred* and the producers used her arrival in Sydney to publicise the film. At the time, Twelvetrees had a baby, although she was directed to conceal that information from the five thousand people who came to welcome her.² In the film, Twelvetrees plays Joan, a young motherless Canadian woman who finds romance within the horseracing domain of her Australian foster mother. The plot depends on the rivalry of two eligible bachelors for Joan's attention. By denying the existence of her real-life child, Twelvetrees complied with the conventions which governed images of motherhood. A baby in her arms at the welcome gathering presumably would have shattered Twelvetrees' allure for the filmgoing public and reduced the credibility of the narrative.³

Images of motherhood in western society have most often ignored maternal sexuality, notwithstanding the sleight of hand that this entails. Anne Summers in *Damned Whores and God's Police* noted:

It is conveniently forgotten that married women must have sexual intercourse in order to reproduce: a general Australian puritanism has managed to convince itself that mothers are not sexual creatures and female sexuality is either denied or relegated entirely to the Damned Whore stereotype.⁴

¹Michel Foucault quoting Plutarch, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality Volume 3*, Translated by Robert Hurley, Penguin, London, 1986, (1984), p. 177.

²Andrée Wright, *Brilliant Careers: Women in Australian Cinema*, Pan, Sydney, 1986, p. 69.

³Despite the publicists attempt to present Twelvetrees as a virtuous woman, she was involved in a scandal during the making of *Thoroughbred*, which revealed her desire and desirability. She had a torrid affair with the male star. Andrée Wright noted that Twelvetrees' husband, on finding the pair together in her dressing room, pulled a gun on the lover, threatening to kill him. Wright, *Brilliant Careers*, p. 69.

⁴Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police: The Colonization of Women in Australia*, Allen Lane, Ringwood, Victoria, 1975, p. 153.

Australian sociologist, Betsy Wearing, has also written about the expectation that a woman's sexuality was subsumed by her mothering role.⁵ The disparity between the mother's sexual life and idealised images of motherhood raises the question of how the sexual aspect of her life was represented on screen. This chapter examines those Australian feature films in which the mother has been depicted as a sexual being, and those where her lack of sexuality has had a particular effect on the narrative. As a foundation for the research, the first section, before introducing the films, traces ways in which commentators and historians have theorized female sexuality within marriage.

The second section considers films made before the Second World War. Most films in this period ended with the marriage of the young female, or focused on the family life of a middle-aged mother. In the first analysis, a single film, *The Sentimental Bloke*, affords a rare opportunity to examine the depiction of the sexual life of a young woman in the context of courtship, marriage and motherhood. Next, one of the most popular films of early Australian cinema, *On Our Selection*, was made in the 1920s and remade in the 1930s. The two films offer the chance to compare maternal sexuality in both, and to ask if historical changes to the maternal role between the two decades could explain differences in maternal representation. Other films in the period are presented to show that the behaviour of the evil, promiscuous vamp highlighted expectations about her opposite, the chaste mother. Finally, the father in some pre-war films has a relationship with his adult daughter which more properly might be shown to his wife. The last part of this section examines the rather fraught issue of sexual rivalry between the mother and her daughter.

After the Second World War, perhaps, because of more freedom in censorship and society, films began to represent maternal sexuality differently from the period before. Younger, attractive and desirable mothers appeared in films. The third section of this chapter considers the depiction of the mother's sexuality in a number of films in terms of her behaviour and appearance. First, those films made after the war are scrutinised for changes

⁵Betsy Wearing, *Gender: The Pain and Pleasure of Difference*, Longman, Melbourne, 1996, p. 137.

in the mother's appearance and behaviour. The next part analyses the films in the 1970s, to determine how the films in the decade related the capacity to mother with expressions of female sexuality. A single film, *Caddie* is given more attention, because its protagonist is a rare figure in Australian cinema: a young, attractive and sexually-active mother. In the 1980s, the mother's sexuality was explicitly shown for the first time. The final part of this section considers four films and asks how the mother's sexuality is depicted, what assumptions are made about her morality and how it affects her family and her own happiness.

Finally, a fourth part of the chapter evaluates the portrayal of unwed mothers in films both before and after World War Two. The figure of the single mother challenged the notion that before marriage a woman was pure and virginal. The pregnancy was a visible rebuttal of that assumption. Only when safely married, could the woman resume her respectable persona, as within marriage, her motherhood was no longer seen as a problem. The shame that unwed mothers incurred in society was modified during the 1980s, in part, perhaps, as a result of different attitudes towards the sexuality of young women. In films, the unwed woman has traditionally been the object of scorn. Her transformation in real life gives rise to questions about the ways in which her image has been represented on screen.

Theories of Maternal Sexuality

Sigmund Freud argued that the mother's sexuality, and in particular, her relationship with her child, formed a fundamental part of her existence. He proposed, further, that the prototype of all adult sexual activity was the mother with a child at her breast.⁶ In Freud's eyes, the baby in this scene of perfect harmony was male, as he emphasised that the mother's love for her son was her most completely satisfying relationship.⁷ As Lisa Appignanesi and John Forrester remarked, Freud replaced the Virgin Mary with the figure

⁶Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity', *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Norton, NY, 1963, (c.1935), p. 133.

⁷Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, Penguin, 1977, p. 145.

of Jocasta, who enjoyed an erotic, reciprocated relationship with her son, Oedipus, and became the mother of his children.⁸

Freud's radical views were antithetical to the male organised power structure of society that Simone de Beauvoir theorised in *The Second Sex*. Using a psychoanalytic premise, she explained the cultural abhorrence of the sexual connection of mother and child as man's disgust at his infantile desire of his mother. In order to reject the memory, he transformed her into something chaste and pure. In another, more philosophical argument, Beauvoir contended that patriarchy relied on the doctrine of man's immortality, and to reinforce that ideology, found it necessary to deny the carnality of the mother.⁹ Defining motherhood by sexuality was not a new concept. Ann Kaplan, from her research of the maternal role in nineteenth century theatre and novels, concluded that the sexual mother was always considered evil.¹⁰ Adrienne Rich believed that throughout western culture, there were two concurrent ideas about women. One strand claimed that the mother was 'beneficent, sacred, pure, asexual, nourishing' and the other suggested the opposite, that the female body was a 'source of moral and physical contamination'.¹¹

The subjugation of the mother's sexuality was promoted by ubiquitous images of the Virgin Mary.¹² According to Rich, exaltation of the figure of Madonna and child encouraged both the mother's alienation from her body and her sexual passivity.¹³ The vision was so pervasive that many women were embarrassed by the evidence of the sexuality and motherhood that their pregnant bodies implied.¹⁴ Philosopher, Iris Young

⁸Lisa Appignanesi and John Forrester, *Freud's Women*, Virago London, 1993, p. 5.

⁹Simone de Beauvoir quoted by Linda M.G. Zerilli, 'A Process without a Subject: Simone de Beauvoir and Julia Kristeva on Maternity', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, volume 18, number 1, Autumn 1992, p. 129.

¹⁰E. Ann Kaplan, 'Mothering, Feminism and Representation: The Maternal in Melodrama and the Woman's Film 1910-40' in C. Gledhill, (ed.), *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and Woman's Film*, BFI, London, 1987, p. 117.

¹¹Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Virago, London, 1981, (1976), p. 34.

¹²The image was used effectively in *Caddie*, discussed later in the chapter.

¹³Rich, *Of Woman Born*, pp. 182-4.

¹⁴See Rich, *Of Woman Born*, p. 164, and Susan Contratto Weisskopf, 'Maternal Sexuality and Asexual Motherhood', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, volume 5, number 4, Summer 1980, p. 775.

believed that the archetypal image of the asexual mother exemplified by the Virgin Mary has been sustained by our culture because it provided an example of perfect love. For Young, the possibility of the self-sacrificing mother, who was able to love her child without concern for her own desires, was fundamental to the perpetuation of patriarchal society and the most important reason for the endurance of the image.¹⁵

Apart from idealised images of the Virgin Mary, women's sexuality was controlled by the institution of marriage. Debbie Taylor showed that the two immutable rules of marriage were fidelity and inheritance.¹⁶ The good wife and mother, according to Shulamith Firestone, was an asexual woman, her sexuality denied in order to ensure faithfulness to her husband and the paternity of the offspring.¹⁷ The figure of the unwed mother challenged these guidelines and explained in part why she was frequently stigmatised.¹⁸ She was outside marriage, which as sociologist, Judith Laws, concluded, was a vital constituent of social control.¹⁹ Additionally, the unwed mother posed a threat to the family unit by undermining patrilineal power sustained through the male line of inheritance. Without a father, as Virginia Wright Wexman pointed out, it was possible that the mother could control 'the disposition of future generations'.²⁰ In this light the unwed mother was an intolerable figure within the confines of ordered society.

Apart from the threat to male domination, a woman who was pregnant without marriage, reinforced her own sexuality while impugning the image of the asexual and virtuous mother. An additional ambiguity in the position was noted by Selma Sevenhuijsen who

¹⁵Iris M. Young, 'Breasted Experience', *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1990, p. 198.

¹⁶Debbie Taylor, 'Women: An analysis', in D. Taylor (ed.), *Women: A World Report*, Methuen, London 1985, pp. 54-5.

¹⁷Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, Paladin, London, 1972, (1971), p. 195.

¹⁸John Bowlby, in his often cited and reprinted work, *Child Care and Growth of Love*, addressed the problem of socially unaccepted illegitimate children whose unwed parents deprived them of a normal life. Labelling the unmarried mother as 'neurotic', or 'chronically maladjusted or defective', Bowlby castigated her 'for what she has so irresponsibly produced'. J. Bowlby, *Child Care and the Growth of Love*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1974, (1953), p. 114, p. 121.

¹⁹Judith Long Laws, *The Second X: Sex Role and Social Role*, Elsevier, NY, 1979, p. 205.

²⁰Virginia Wright Wexman, 'Suffering and Suffrage: Birth, the Female Body, and Women's Choices' in D.W. Griffith's *Way Down East*, *The Velvet Light Trap*, number 29, Spring 1992, p. 59.

argued that unmarried mothers were thought of as 'seductive women' who entrapped the unsuspecting male and made claims on him.²¹ On the other hand, Martine Spensky has observed that in the early part of the century, until after World War Two, men, because of their superior sophistication, were often blamed for a girl's pregnancy. In this case, unwed mothers were portrayed as innocents, their naivety a mark of their youth.²² The unwed mother could not succeed in either case. Either as a seductress or an innocent, she had transgressed the rules of a male-dominated culture.

Images of motherhood in society did not acknowledge the mother's desire or desirability. In the most common depictions, once they were married, women, inevitably aligned with motherhood, were considered sexually unavailable. The myth of the asexuality of motherhood has been challenged in the light of women's actual experience. That motherhood did not preclude women's sexual enjoyment was demonstrated in the popular, and often reprinted, *Woman's Experience of Sex* by Sheila Kitzinger.²³ Rigmor Berg, moreover, wrote that motherhood improved the woman's sex life, arguing that the presence of the baby frequently caused her to feel closer to her partner.²⁴ As well, Niles Newton advised that Masters and Johnson, in their 1966 study, found that mothers were not disinterested in sex, and were possibly more sexually responsive than women without children.²⁵

Maternal Sexuality in an Historical Context

²¹Selma Sevenhuijsen, 'Mothers as citizens: Feminism, evolutionary theory and the reform of Dutch family law 1870-1910', in C. Smart, (ed.), *Regulating Womanhood: Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood and Sexuality*, Routledge, London, 1992, p. 169.

²²Martine Spensky, 'Producers of legitimacy: Homes for unmarried mothers in the 1950s', in C. Smart, (ed.), *Regulating Womanhood*, p. 106.

²³Sheila Kitzinger, *Woman's Experience of Sex*, Penguin, London, 1985, (1983), pp. 219-24. See also Foreword, p. 6.

²⁴Rigmor Berg, 'Sexuality: Why do women come off second best?' in N. Grieve and A. Burns, (eds), *Australian Women New Feminist Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1990, (1986), p. 156.

²⁵Niles Newton, 'Interrelationships between Sexual Responsiveness, Birth and Breast Feeding', in J. Zubin and J. Money, (eds), *Contemporary Sexual Behavior: Critical Issues in the 1970s*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1973, p. 93.

Theoretical writings have explained why images of maternal sexuality were rare, while empirical evidence has suggested that sexuality and motherhood were not mutually exclusive. Michel Foucault has asserted:

Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to an historical construct'.²⁶

Foucault's writing broadened the analysis further when he drew attention to the historical changes throughout society in the twentieth century which have transformed repressive 'Victorian attitudes', encouraging more open discussions and representations. Access to reliable contraception, differences in standards of living, exigencies of wartime, and developments such as women's movements have altered the expression of the mother's sexuality.

The decades of the twenties and thirties were notable in their contrasting conditions and concomitant effect on family life. For instance, in the 1920s, many women enjoyed a degree of economic and sexual independence. Gail Reekie has noted 'increasingly visible freedom in women's personal, social and political lives...particularly from the 1920s'.²⁷ Most obvious, perhaps, was the change to their clothing where shortened skirts and more body-defining dresses displayed their figure in sexually provocative ways.²⁸ While Elizabeth Janeway has referred to this time as the era of the 'emancipated woman',²⁹ historian, Marilyn Lake, warned against mistaking the 'gloss of modernity' for widespread affluence.³⁰ The freedom implied by the jazz age was limited in Australia, although as

²⁶Michel Foucault *History of Sexuality 1, 2, 3* translated by Robert Hurley, 1979, quoted by Irene Walton, *Sexuality and Motherhood*, Books for Midwives Press, Cheshire, England, 1994, p. 4.

²⁷Gail Reekie, 'Decently Dressed?: Sexualised consumerism and the working woman's wardrobe 1918-1923', in R. White and P. Russell, (eds), *Memories and Dreams: Reflections on Twentieth-Century Australia: Pastiche II*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1997, p. 98.

²⁸Virginia Wright Wexman, noted the 'modish dress' of the 1920s, Wexman, 'Suffering and Suffrage', p. 54. Additionally, see Australian editions of journals such as *Mabs Fashions*, Australian Edition, November 1928.

²⁹Elizabeth Janeway, *Between Myth and Morning: Women Awakening*, William Morrow, NY, 1974, p. 22.

³⁰Marilyn Lake, 'Depression Dreaming', in P. Grimshaw, M. Lake, A. McGrath and M. Quartly, *Creating a Nation*, McPhee Gribble/Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria, 1994, p. 239.

sociologist, Kerreen Reiger, observed, the 1920s was notable for the recognition of sex for pleasure and not purely procreation.³¹

Fears about the cost of an additional child in the family limited sexual pleasure for many married women during the downturn in the economy in the next decade.³² While contraception was available during the 1920s and the first birth control clinic appeared in Australia in 1931,³³ the methods were frequently unreliable. Reiger reported that the low birth rate during the Depression was the result of abstinence from sex, whereby the men often slept by themselves on the verandah.³⁴ It was a period of conflicting emotions for mothers. A new, modern image of sexuality and allure was promoted by advertisements and attractive female movie stars. On the other hand, as historian, Jane Lewis has concluded from her study of families at the time, the fear of pregnancy made enjoyment of sex impossible for many married women.³⁵

From the end of the 1930s, femininity, the pinnacle of which previously was perceived to be motherhood, began to be conceptualised in a different manner. In her essay on female desire during World War Two, Lake pointed out that the visit of over one million American servicemen had the effect of sexualising Australia. Women's popularity with the romance-hungry men and the idea of 'living for the day', encouraged female desire for a more pleasurable lifestyle.³⁶ Lake proposed that there was a 'new understanding of femininity', whereby women wanted a glamorous and youthful appearance in order to be sexually alluring for their husbands. By highlighting women's subjectivity, Lake avoided treating women as victims and pawns of patriarchy. Her conclusions about women's sexuality challenged the accounts of passive women who were forced to move after the

³¹Kerreen Reiger, *The Disenchantment of the Home: Modernizing the Australian Family 1890-1940*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985, p. 122.

³²Kerreen Reiger, *Family Economy*, McPhee Gribble, Ringwood, Victoria, 1991, pp. 16-7.

³³Reiger, *The Disenchantment of the Home*, p. 123.

³⁴Reiger, *Family Economy*, p. 17.

³⁵Jane Lewis, 'Motherhood Issues in the Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries' in K. Arnup, A. Lévesque and R. R. Pierson, (eds), *Delivering Motherhood: Maternal Ideologies and Practices in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Routledge, London, 1990, pp. 1-19. See particularly pp. 10-11.

³⁶Marilyn Lake, 'Female desires: The meaning of World War II', in *Memories and Dreams*, p. 119.

war from the workforce to the suburbs. She emphasised that many women did not see the move as a retreat or surrender, but as an exciting opportunity for their sexual pleasure and fulfilment.³⁷

The acknowledgment of the mother's sexuality in the post-war period was augmented by the proliferation of findings from sexologists. Pre-eminent in foregrounding issues of female desire which had previously been almost ignored, was A.C. Kinsey's study of the sexuality of eight thousand American women.³⁸ Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, was also influential. She discussed the sex drive of middle-class educated women in American suburbs during the 1950s and concluded, probably to the surprise of at least the male half the population, that the women's sexual desire was greater than their husbands.³⁹

Within the Australian 'oppressive suburban respectability' of the 1950s, described by social historian, Christine Wallace,⁴⁰ the mother's desire was incorporated into her acquisition of material possessions. The push to increase consumerism within the rapidly improving economy of the post-war period, led, as Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle observed, to an 'eroticisation of every day life' which included what they termed, 'an erotic investment in commodities'.⁴¹ The sexual mother came to be seen as a manipulating woman. As Janeway pointed out, 'Embedded in our cultural consciousness is the sad and crippling idea that women use sex as a weapon...sex is a tool to be used for domination, or security or some kind of egoistic end'.⁴²

³⁷Lake located the change in the structure of femininity from the 1930s, where she described advertisements and Hollywood films as instrumental in exhorting women to be glamorous and sexually desirable. Lake, 'Female desires: The meaning of World War II', pp. 117-34.

³⁸A.C. Kinsey, W.B. Pomeroy, C.E. Martin and P.H. Gebhard, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female*, W.B. Saunders, Philadelphia, 1953.

³⁹Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1972, (1963), p. 233.

⁴⁰Christine Wallace, *Greer: Untamed Shrew*, Macmillan, Sydney, 1997, p. 326.

⁴¹Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle 'The Making of the Australian Family' in A. Burns, G. Bottomley & P. Jools (eds), *The Family in the Modern World: Australian Perspectives*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1983, p. 96.

⁴²Janeway, *Between Myth and Morning*, p. 218.

In 1961, the release of a reliable contraceptive pill, although not used by all women, played an important part in women's sexual independence.⁴³ Finally, women were free to participate in sex if they chose to do so, without the fear of an unwanted pregnancy. Jean Renvoizé remarked that the ability to manage their own fertility was a vital factor in women's empowerment which in turn gave impetus to the rise of the women's movement.⁴⁴ Examining patriarchal attitudes in society, Eva Figes, concluded that when women discovered the orgasm and could control their pregnancies, the sexual double standard existing between men and women was doomed.⁴⁵ Ann Kaplan argued that women's sexual desires which were not predicated on their desire to have children, aroused the fear in some men that female sexuality was 'dangerously unleashed'.⁴⁶ By the 1970s, women's sexual freedom had undermined the *status quo* of the family structure and instigated a wave of insecurity with conservative members of the community.

The situation for women changed somewhat in the 1980s, when they had gained more confidence in the workforce and were coping with as Kaplan termed it 'sex, work and motherhood'.⁴⁷ As well as growing independence for married women, the position of the unwed mother had altered, and her pregnancy was no longer seen as necessarily shameful. Mira Crouch and Lenore Manderson pointed out that single motherhood in the 1980s had become acceptable, and many women were choosing to have children without marriage, or even without a partner at hand.⁴⁸

Maternal Sexuality in Films to the Second World War

⁴³It should not be overlooked that use of the contraceptive pill was banned by the Catholic Church, or that the drug caused health problems in some women.

⁴⁴Jean Renvoizé, *Going Solo: Single Mothers by Choice*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1985, p. 5. See also Sol Encel, Norman MacKenzie & Margaret Tebbutt, *Women and Society: An Australian Study*, Malaby, London, 1975, p. 19.

⁴⁵Eva Figes, *Patriarchal Attitudes: Women in Society*, Panther, London, 1972, (1970), p. 92.

⁴⁶E. Ann Kaplan, 'Sex, Work and Motherhood: The Impossible Triangle', *The Journal of Sex Research*, volume 27, Number 3, August 1990b, p. 412.

⁴⁷Kaplan, 'Sex, Work and Motherhood', pp. 409-25.

⁴⁸Mira Crouch & Lenore Manderson, *New Motherhood: Cultural and Personal Transitions in the 1980s*, Gordon & Breach, Yverdon, Switzerland, 1993, p. 5.

Until almost mid-century, the mother was cast in Australian films as a middle-aged, companionable woman whose main concern was home and children. She had a grown-up daughter — played by a desirable young starlet — who provided the love interest in the story. Female sexuality in films in these days was invested either in the young woman or the despicable figure of the vamp. The latter, a sexually insatiable woman, was the opposite of the good mother. Inextricably bound to asexual motherhood, passive, wholesome mothers were not considered desirable or desiring.

The attractive adult daughter of early films underwent a profound transformation on marriage and the birth of a child. The shift could be seen in Raymond Longford's film, *The Sentimental Bloke* (1919). Longford's partner, Lottie Lyell, played Doreen, a young woman who was the Bloke's girlfriend and later his wife and mother of their child. Film historian, John Tulloch noted the difference between the publicity photographs of the star and her representation on screen. Pointing out that the advertisements for the film used an intentionally seductive photograph of Lyell, Tulloch argued that furs were used to frame her face to convey 'inaccessibly desirable sexuality'. He compared this to a photographic still of a scene at the end of the film, in which Doreen stands in an orchard with the Bloke and their child. The furs have been replaced by a gingham dress and she holds her baby at arms' length, looking at him. The contrast between the filmed gaze and the seductive publicity shot in which Doreen looked outward to entice a prospective audience was enlightening. According to Tulloch: 'opulence inviting possession was replaced by the simplicity of an achieved relationship'.⁴⁹ Using the juxtaposition of these two crucial images one may draw a conclusion which centres on the disparity between representations of sexuality and motherhood. The *pièce de résistance* in the final shot was Doreen's sun hat which provided a halo around her head, inviting a connection with the 'Madonna and child' of Italian Renaissance paintings.⁵⁰ The Bloke, who throughout has pursued her with

⁴⁹John Tulloch, *Legends on the Screen: The Australian Narrative Cinema 1919-1929*, Currency/AFI, Sydney, 1981, pp. 43-4.

⁵⁰See for example, H.W. Janson, *History of Art*, Third Edition, Thames & Hudson, London, 1986, (1962), especially p. 417, p. 459 and colour plate 67.

lust and vigour, now looks with sublime happiness at Doreen, transformed into his desexualised wife, the mother of his son.

Doreen's metamorphosis explained the strictures place on Helen Twelvetrees' motherhood in the 1935 publicity of *Thoroughbred*.⁵¹ In early films, young unmarried women were depicted as alluring, and the sexuality of mothers was not a consideration. The mother figure fitted the paradigm of the virtuous self-sacrificing good woman, whose prime responsibility was her family. One film, however, perhaps influenced by the different experience of mothers in 1920s society, broke the tradition and revealed an underlying sexuality in the maternal role. This was *On Our Selection*, made by Raymond Longford in 1920 and adapted from the Steele Rudd yarns about the rural adventures of Dad and Dave. As the film was remade by Ken G. Hall in 1932, comparison between the 1920 and the 1932 version was instructive for discerning changes in the representation of maternal sexuality.

The 1920 version of *On Our Selection* was more openly sexual than the following remake. The narrative was filled with allusions to engagements, weddings, suitors and courtship in the bucolic setting of a working farm. The closeness of the Rudd marriage is shown when the big and bosomy Mrs Rudd is often seen affectionately patting Dad Rudd, showing her love for him. The first scenes of the film are auspicious. The family members are asleep in two rooms of their bark hut, the mother and daughters in a bed in one room, and the father and sons in another. Even conservative audiences in the 1920s may have found humour in the separation of parents with so many offspring.

Hall's 1932 film, made at the height of the Depression, was a slapstick comedy relying on unsophisticated rural clowning in its attempt to win audiences. Mrs Rudd, much given to malapropisms, is a pinched, dour woman, perennially tired and inevitably seen wearing a long dowdy dress and cap. She was, perhaps, an unkind caricature of a Depression mother

⁵¹See the start of the chapter for description of her arrival in Sydney.

unable to nurture her family. Unlike the earlier Mrs Rudd, she is never physically close to Dad Rudd, and even when she is about to touch him, she draws back, as though afraid to start something that she may not be able to control.

Comparisons between the films reveal several scenes which are common to both. In the 1920 film, Mrs Rudd shows that she is more attuned to worldly affairs than her naive husband, when she calls him into the house to leave the daughter and her suitor some privacy for their courting. In the comparable scene in the later film, it is Dad who calls Mrs Rudd into the house for the same purpose. Even more significant, however, is the catalyst that each director uses for breaking the drought, an important incident occurring in both films. In the 1920 production, the mother's sexuality is linked to the welcome rain. She comforts Dad, who is worried about the farm surviving drought, and very soon afterward, a new baby appears. The birth heralds the rain and symbolically reinforces the idea that from Mum and Dad's physical union comes happiness and fertility. Importantly, although there is comparable drought-breaking rain in the 1932 film, there is no celebratory birth and no suggestion that the mother's fecundity might be connected to saving the farm.

The sexualised mother in Longford's *On Our Selection* was unusual. A more typical screen mother could be found in an early melodrama, Franklyn Barrett's, *The Breaking of the Drought* (1920). The story concerns the rural family of Jo and Ma Galloway and their adult children, Gilbert and Marjorie. Gilbert is a doctor in the city who becomes involved with a wicked woman, the vamp, Olive. Marjorie lives with her parents on their large drought-ridden property in the outback. As the intertitle announces, she is *A Flower of the Bush who is Very Truth her Father's Daughter*. The film constantly draws attention to her sexuality: she is attractive and her fecundity is obvious from the introduction as she gathered flowers in the garden:

It was Marjorie's special delight to tend her garden which seemed out of place in this drought stricken area. There was plenty of water in the wells — it is rain that is wanted.

Her association with the image of a well was significant, as according to Virginia Wright Wexman, the well has often been related to women's ability to give birth.⁵²

Film historian Andrée Wright, has posited that the vamp, Olive, is set in opposition to Marjorie, whom Wright sees as pure and virginal.⁵³ While the adult unmarried daughter in some films could be viewed in this light, in *The Breaking of the Drought*, Marjorie's aura of sexuality precludes this reading. It is more appropriate to see Olive as the counterpart to the figure of Ma Galloway. The female actors who play the mother and the vamp are similar in age and stature, though opposite in character. Ma Galloway is described as 'a true-hearted woman of the outback'. Her relationship with her husband is not sexual, although they are companionable and Jo refers to her affectionately as 'old girl'. In contrast, the vamp Olive is a woman of the city, in a low-cut dress and — as a sure signal of her licentiousness, — smokes cigarettes. Olive's carnal nature is revealed at the time of her introduction to Gilbert. The portrayal of their meeting is quite astounding. One of Gilbert's friends, a wicked gambler and pimp, Varsey, introduces Gilbert to Olive, and with a leer heavily laden with lust, purposefully leaves them alone. Olive, announced by the intertitle as *a woman of pleasure with a past*, starts her entrapment by offering Gilbert a cigarette and lighting hers from his while all the time, leaning close and staring provocatively into his eyes. Their kiss is long and suggestive and as Tulloch has noted, 'the smoke bursts forth like semen'.⁵⁴

The mother and the vamp are rivals for Gilbert's affection. Money is a device used to substantiate the difference between the two women. Ma Galloway has just come into an inheritance which she plans to use to save the farm.⁵⁵ Olive, who has seduced Gilbert to

⁵²Wexman, 'Suffering and Suffrage', p. 59.

⁵³Wright, *Brilliant Careers*, p. 9.

⁵⁴Tulloch, *Legends on the Screen*, p. 360.

⁵⁵Ma Galloway in the film is a passive figure, without power. Her inheritance gives her the power to help her family. Comparison with the play written by Arthur Shirley, on which the film is based is revealing. It is the father's money that Gilbert embezzles, so that in the play, the mother's powerless role continues and she may not be seen as the opposite of the vamp. See Margaret Williams, *Australia on the Popular Stage: An Historical Entertainment in Six Acts*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1983, p. 205.

obtain money, craves it selfishly to buy jewellery and furs for her own adornment. Her greed is so great that she manipulates Gilbert to steal his mother's inheritance. When Ma Galloway finds out that her beloved son has taken her money, she is distraught. Lifelessly sitting in a chair in the front yard of the home, she is unable to move or communicate with her family. She is only restored when Gilbert returns and is forgiven. She springs from her seat and embraces him. There is a grim finality to the tale which underlines the opposition of mother to vamp. Shortly before Ma Galloway returns to life, Olive, in a melodramatic turn in the plot, is dispatched, murdered by her evil pimp. The asexual mother has been rewarded, the sexual woman, punished.

Ma Galloway is a good mother, a passive woman who is without sexual allure. Reading against the grain of *The Breaking of the Drought*, shows that the daughter appropriates the mother's sexual role with her husband. The twenty-year-old Marjorie is strangely close to her father. While sitting on his knee, she denies any desire to move to the city, exclaiming according to the intertitle: *My place is here with you*. As she has a suitor whom she is about to marry, the reassurances to her father are odd. The father-daughter relationship takes a further disquieting slant when Jo, who is depressed at losing the farm, is comforted by his daughter, while Ma Galloway passively looks on. The coquettish manner Marjorie uses with her father reinforces the idea that she has taken over her mother's sexual role.

The next Franklyn Barrett feature, *Know Thy Child* (1921) has been lost, although its synopsis indicated that the theme of father-daughter incest was used to titillate the contemporary audience.⁵⁶ A young woman is abandoned by her suitor and is forced to raise her daughter, Eileen, alone in a country town. Heartbroken, she eventually dies and Eileen, as a young woman, moves to the city to find work. Her employer, although he is married, falls in love with her. The film takes a salacious turn, as the employer is found to be the man who deserted Eileen's mother over twenty years before. Eileen is his biological

⁵⁶For a synopsis of the film see Andrew Pike & Ross Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977: A Guide to Feature Film Production*, Oxford University Press/AFI, Melbourne, 1980, pp. 144-5 and Tulloch, *Legends on the Screen*, pp. 141-2.

daughter. It is, perhaps, surprising that the film was accepted by the New South Wales censors as: 'free from objectionable matter'.⁵⁷ The publicity which accompanied the film clearly placed the daughter as a sexual woman who had tried to seduce the man away from his worthy wife. It stated: 'Visualise a man, happily married and enjoying the goods of life. Then into his Eden comes Eve to cool his affection for his wife—to take his love from her. And Eve was—HIS OWN DAUGHTER!' ⁵⁸

Appropriation of the mother's sexuality by the daughter was also a theme in Ken G. Hall's *Mr. Chedworth Steps Out* (1939). In this film, Mrs Chedworth is a social-climber who has alienated her husband by constantly berating him about their lack of money and social position. It would be difficult to imagine a sexual relationship between this mis-matched pair. In the bedroom, Mrs Chedworth, the antithesis of allure, pointedly rubs cold cream on her face, her head adorned with unattractive rollers. For comfort, Mr Chedworth turns to Susie, his teenage daughter, forming a relationship which, on one level, can be viewed as crypto-incest. The situation is established at the start of the film when Mr Chedworth bids a cold and remote goodbye to his wife as he sets off for the office. Mrs Chedworth ignores him, but Susie pouts seductively and calls him back, 'Daddy you forgot!' He returns to kiss her.

Mr Chedworth's relationship with his young daughter deepens and she becomes his confidante. He reveals that he has been dismissed from work and that he has discovered a cache of money. Father and daughter meet frequently in the garden shed, where their closeness is signified by their embraces. There is a marked sexual overtone to their association even if it was not the conscious intention of the director. Ken Hall has noted, that the 'daughter/father relationship...never failed to move me as it did audiences'.⁵⁹ Despite this, a scene at the end of the film reinforces a sexual reading of the film,

⁵⁷Quoted in Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p. 144. For details of censorship of other 1920s films, see listings under the individual film title in the same volume.

⁵⁸Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p. 144 quoting the *Sun*, 9 October 1921

⁵⁹Noted by Andrée Wright in a letter to her from Ken Hall, 15 September 1983, Wright, *Brilliant Careers*, p. 88, n. 40.

confirming a suspicion of the daughter's sexuality and her standing in for the mother's deficiencies. At a meeting, Mr Chedworth tells his new partners that he must shortly leave as he has 'an appointment with a lady'. There follows some teasing from the men, who assume that he is involved in a romance. In fact, the 'lady' he has promised to meet is Susie. The misunderstanding serves to further emphasise his sexual relationship with his daughter, which in a somewhat sinister way has displaced the sexuality of the mother.

Maternal Sexuality in Films after the Second World War

Post-war films began to reflect women's interest in glamour and to acknowledge their sexuality. The mother's allure, however, was not presented as an expression of her own desire and often was aimed at tantalising her husband. In Hollywood films of the 1950s, women, to obtain what they wanted, teased ingenuous males in a provocative manner.⁶⁰ A similar situation where the mother used sex to manipulate her husband occurred in Australian cinema in T.O. McCreadie's *Into the Straight* (1949). In this film, the Curzons run a large, successful horse stud. Laura Curzon, played by the glamorous Muriel Steinbeck is the mother of two daughters and a son. The younger daughter who has a minor role, is a teenager and her sister, an adult, is crippled in a fall from a horse early in the film. Sam, the son, is a reprisal of the character of Gilbert, from the 1920 film *The Breaking of the Drought*. Sam has left home to study medicine at a university in the city where he has indulged in a profligate life and has gambling debts that he is unable to pay. In a continuation of his mimesis, Gilbert, Sam resorts to stealing from his family. As in the earlier film, the son's improvidence is associated with his relationship with a vamp, in this case, Zara, a nightclub singer in the city. Zara, wants to ingratiate herself into Sam's wealthy family. Her portrayal is in keeping with Janet Staiger's research of the vamp in early American cinema. According to Staiger, after the Second World War, instead of a monstrous female, the vamp became merely a social-climbing gold digger.⁶¹ The mother, Laura, is not posed as the opposite of Zara the vamp, because both use the same sexual

⁶⁰For example, see Howard Hawks's *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), Jean Negulesco's *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953) and Richard Sale's *Gentlemen Marry Brunettes* (1955).

⁶¹Janet Staiger, *Bad Women: Regulating Sexuality in Early American Cinema*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1995, p. 180.

techniques to get what they want. In this way, the mother and the vamp, through their sexuality, share the same position.

Whilst the sons in these films of 1920 and 1949 had much in common, their mothers are not even remotely connected. Laura Curzon is beautiful, intelligent and confident. Her sexual relationship with her husband is signalled at the beginning of the film by their companionable conversation and their walking together arm in arm. Laura has considerable powers of persuasion over her husband. In a scene in the bedroom, Laura, wearing a glamorous nightgown, is listening to Curzon gargling in the adjacent bathroom. It is astounding, considering the compliant and supportive wives in previous films, that Laura is so irritated by her husband's ablutions. She screws up her face, imitating him, and whispers 'you sound like a hippo with adenoids', denying her words when he overhears her. Curzon tells her that Sam has asked again for money to pay a gambling debt, and that he has decided not to help him. Laura is clearly on her son's side and protests. Impatiently, Curzon tells her to 'stay out of it'. Having established by the irritation earlier that she is not feeling amorous, Laura appears to change her mind and asks Curzon to kiss her goodnight. She adjusts her nightgown provocatively with the inference, within the constriction of censorship rules of the 1940s, that she is offering sex. Pretending to support his resolve to deny Sam the money, she manipulates Curzon to give it to him, naively thinking that he has come to the conclusion of his own accord.

Laura's sexuality does not make her a bad woman or a bad wife, although it tends to position her as a poor mother. Probably as a reflection of post-war mothers in society, Laura is more of a companion to her husband than a mother to her children. Her elder daughter, June, for example, becomes an invalid after a fall from a horse. Laura seems unconcerned and June is attended to by employed nurses. Preening in a mirror while visiting her bedridden daughter, Laura is more interested in her own appearance than her daughter's distress. In addition, the daughter's recovery is effected not by her mother, but by the kindly ministrations of the man she has come to love. June's attempts to walk after

months in a wheelchair fail when she is encouraged by her mother. She is able to achieve a few miraculous steps only when she turns to her suitor. This is a vital scene as it is only a very deficient screen mother who is not able to inspire her offspring.

Into the Straight was unusual in its presentation of a wife and mother who was young, glamorous and sexually active. Laura's desire was somewhat compromised, however, as it was linked, not with an expression of her own sexual pleasure, but with her powers of manipulation. Marge, the mother in Leslie Norman's *The Shiralee* (1957), is Laura's opposite in outward respectability, although there are similarities in her manipulative behaviour. Marge lives in a ramshackle rented flat in the city with her small daughter, Buster. While her husband is away in the country seeking work, Marge, dressed provocatively in a negligee, entertains a lover. Buster sleeps nearby, her presence a reminder that Marge is neither a good wife nor a good mother. Later Marge confesses that, although she does not love her boyfriend, he helps her to pay the bills. The inference, common to both films, was that the women used their sexuality to get what they wanted.

By the 1970s, many women were enjoying the sexual liberation that the contraceptive pill allowed. Male filmmakers, clearly uncomfortable with images of the mother's sexuality, failed to depict it as a normal part of their life. As Annette Kuhn asserted, the second wave of feminism brought a backlash against women and 'the threat posed by the liberated woman was actually contained in films'.⁶² Film historian Molly Haskell noted 'a social code' in films which denied the mother's sexual desire, while showing compassion for their husband's sexual proclivities.⁶³ The custom that Haskell identified could be found in Tim Burstall's semi-autobiographical *2000 Weeks* (1969). It offered a salutary example of male insecurity about marriage. Executed from the husband's point-of-view, the film featured an unending quest for a solution to his wife's promiscuity. Probably, it echoed the disquiet that many men were feeling in the sexually liberated 1970s.

⁶²Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema*, Pandora, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1990, (1982), p. 135.

⁶³Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, Penguin, NY, 1975, (1974), p. 160.

2000 Weeks details a modern marriage through the eyes of the husband, Will, who, like the filmmaker, is experiencing a crisis of identity.⁶⁴ The opening scene establishes his sexual relationship with a young woman, Jacky. The next location reveals that Will has a wife, Sarah, and two young children. While Sarah is slim, long-haired and attractive and is frequently shown dressing, undressing and showering, she appears to have no sexual life with Will. Instead, they have long and meaningful discussions about their marriage from which, it becomes clear that Sarah condones Will's adultery. The film is permeated with Will's monologues about his despair and confusion and the reason is revealed in a startling dénouement. Will's affair with Jacky is in retaliation for Sarah's earlier sexual dalliance. It is notable that in the film which features many explicit and passionate sex scenes of Will and Jacky, that Sarah's adultery is shown so weakly. Perhaps, the director could not confront the images, as rather than passionate sexuality, her affair is depicted by a long-shot of a tepid embrace between the lovers. Even so, the structure of the narrative places Sarah's adultery as the cause of the marital difficulties of the marriage and passes over Will's affair as understandable revenge.

Sarah's portrayal was typical of films of the 1970s, in which a woman with sexual desire was a bad wife and mother. In film marriages, only the asexual mother was depicted as a contented woman with a happy family life.⁶⁵ Because the strength of the women's movement was a threat to masculinity, or, perhaps, because of community anxiety about changes to the family, films depicted the mother's sexuality as reprehensible, a violation of family values. Her sexual desire, unacceptable as a normal part of the mother's life, often signalled that she was a promiscuous, unhappy woman and above all, a bad mother. In Frank Brittain's *The Set* (1970), for example, a young woman finds her nymphomaniac mother in bed with her boyfriend. Similarly, in Tim Burstall's *The Child* segment of the film, *Libido* (1973), the mother's sexual passion takes her away from caring for her son.

⁶⁴For more information on the filmmaker's insecurity see Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, pp. 316-7.

⁶⁵In the misogynist *Petersen*, examined in chapter 3, the mother enjoyed sex with her husband, but he was having an extra-marital affair and she was shown as dimwitted and gullible.

Her neglect is responsible for the child's neurosis. Acting out the hatred he feels for his mother's lovers, the son murders his nanny's boyfriend. In another version of anxiety about the mother's sexuality, Don Chaffey's *The Fourth Wish* (1976), shows that the mother's profligate life stands in the way of her dying son's last wish. Although the son begs her to come home, she is repelled by the suburbs where the child lives with his father, and prefers the excitement of her nightlife in city bars. Perhaps most repugnant of all is Ken Hannam's *Summerfield* (1977), in which the mother is shown in a passionate sexual relationship with her own brother, while their child sleeps in an adjoining room.

A single film in the decade appeared to challenge the assumption that a sexually active woman was a bad mother. Donald Crombie's *Caddie* (1976) was based on the life of a young woman in the years from 1925 to 1932. It was an unusual film, as its protagonist had two children, yet was young and desirable. The many aspects of Caddie's life which related directly to her sexuality and to motherhood, made this an interesting film to analyse more closely. As it was co-produced and adapted for the screen by Joan Long, a strong and prominent woman in the film industry, it might have avoided male anxiety about women's sexuality prevalent at the time. It depicted Caddie's finding love, while at the same time, nurturing her two children in an exemplary manner. The film failed ultimately, however, to subvert prevailing representations, as the sexual aspect of Caddie's affair became part of the narrative only when the children were away from her care.

The film opens with a wistful Caddie, played by the beautiful Helen Morse, visibly entrapped within her home. She is framed by a window, through which she stares unhappily. Outside, in contrast, a group of men and women plays tennis in the sunshine. Laboriously long camera pan-shots of brick walls underline her jail-like existence. She is reflecting on the infidelity of her husband, who is having an affair with her friend, Esther. That night, after a fight in which her husband beats her, Caddie decides to leave her middle-class home. Accompanied by her burdensome, but loved two small children, she struggles to find a place to live. Her purity is contrasted, first with her licentious friend,

Esther, who has betrayed her, and secondly with an aggressive, foul-mouthed whore, that she meets in the first dreary, boarding house room that she is forced to rent. Caddie finds work and is the ideal self-sacrificing mother, often going without food to provide for her children.

The image of Caddie as the virtuous mother reaches its peak in scenes at a hospital where she has taken her baby daughter who is suffering from diphtheria. Cradling her son in her arms, Caddie waits in despair, as she has been told that her little daughter is dying. The camera's long shot of Caddie and her son have a religious intensity of Michelangelo's *pietà*. A close-up uses the camera to linger on her anguished face until she glances upwards to a stained glass window of the Virgin and child. The camera cuts to the identical *pietà* position which began the scene, then moves to a mid-shot over Caddie's shoulder. We see a nurse arrive through a door in the background and approach with a comforting cup of tea. As the camera does not reveal a face, she appears headless, which has the effect of sustaining the mysterious, religious aura. She tells Caddie that her daughter's operation has been successful. The implicit message of the scene is that, like the Virgin Mary, the power of the pure mother is unlimited, and her child will surely recover.

When her daughter is well enough to be left with a baby sitter, Caddie works as a barmaid, an occupation which traditionally places women as the object of sexual attention. She is forced to endure the leering of drunk and offensive men. The publican tells her to shorten her skirts; her colleagues urge her to smile more in order to inveigle larger tips from the customers. Clearly, in her working life, no-one believes that this young and attractive woman is also a mother. This is underlined when Ted, a would-be suitor, thinks she is referring to her parents when she talks about her family. Her motherhood precludes the possibility of a relationship with Ted, who is the popular Australian male prototype of a rugged beer-drinking larrikin, played by Jack Thompson. Perhaps an association which is able to acknowledge her pleasure and desire as well as her motherhood, is only possible

with a man with a more sensitive nature. She meets Peter, a romantic European who is a quiet, dark man, remote from the usual customers of the hotel.

Caddie goes out with Peter socially and tells him about her children. His reaction of delight is an amusing contrast to Ted. Both romance and motherhood should now be possible. The sexual aspect of their relationship, however, does not take place while the children are in Caddie's care. After her previous hardships, it is an inappropriate time for her to leave her children when she has a wealthy suitor who loves them all. Pleading poverty, however, she places the children in Church homes. For the first time in the film, Caddie's children are not with her. It is from this moment that she is depicted in a passionate sexual relationship. Her affair progresses until Peter learns that his father is ill and he is forced to fly to Greece. Without Peter, Caddie brings the children home, even though it is now the height of the Depression and she is without a job or a benefactor. A letter arrives to tell her she will never be reunited with Peter, and she, distraught, collapses onto the bed. Her despair is only relieved when the children come and kiss her tearful face and tumble over her prostrate body. Her transfiguration occurs before our eyes: her beatific smile suggests that she has been restored to the revered position of the virgin mother. She confirms her happiness at the discovery that this is the real purpose of her life. The film which might have been subversive in a representation of the mother's sexuality, in the end, has become simply another version of the standard theme of the virtuous and chaste mother. Should Caddie have been depicted as having a sexual life with the man she loved, while at the same time caring for her children, the film might have broken away from both the good asexual mother figures and the reprehensible bad sexual mother figures depicted in films of the 1970s.

In the next decade, typically, the sexual mother was shown as dissatisfied with her husband and her sexuality was depicted only outside the confines of the nuclear family: her sexual partner was neither her husband nor the father of her child.⁶⁶ Her behaviour was

⁶⁶For example, Jacki McKimmie's *Australian Dream*, (1987), was a comedy about a wife's fantasy of sex with a rock star. The film was analysed in chapter 3 in connection with her role as a 'good mother'. Also see

depicted as immoral and in many ways her sexuality was described similarly to the screen mothers of the previous decade. Most Australian films showed the mother's sexuality as aberrant and failed to incorporate it as a natural part of her life, although a notable exception could be found in *Emoh Ruo* directed by Denny Lawrence. In this film, released in 1985, husband and wife are sexually active good parents and are together at the end of the film, despite confronting enormous economic problems.⁶⁷

Emoh Ruo was a rare film and a more common example of the decade could be found in Paul Cox's *My First Wife* (1984). It was doubly interesting as an exposition of a family in the 1980s, because its narrative parallels a difficult time in the director's life. As David Stratton, has disclosed, this was Cox's most personal film, based on the break-up of his own marriage and made when he was on the verge of suicide.⁶⁸ Cox has always been an engaging and idiosyncratic director, who has achieved some degree of professional success, despite the lack of box-office appeal of his films.⁶⁹ His work has included soul-searching interpretations of his own family.⁷⁰ Born in Holland, Cox appears to have little sympathy for the larrikin Australian male. Over the years he has cultivated a specially chosen circle of friends, who also form an acting pool for his work.⁷¹ In his films, he has regularly confronted issues of death, aging, madness and sexuality and has a passion for classical music which he has used to great effect.

Despite its title, *My First Wife* is not about a wife, and describes instead, the paranoia and eventual mental breakdown of a husband. The protagonist, John, is a middle-class, middle-aged man, who broadcasts a late night radio programme devoted to classical music. His

1980s films, *Monkey Grip*, *Bliss*, *The Coca-Cola Kid*, *Fran*, *The Still Point*, *Hightide*, *Travelling North*, *Boulevard of Broken Dreams* and other films examined in more detail below.

⁶⁷ For a more detailed analysis of *Emoh Ruo*, see chapter 3.

⁶⁸ David Stratton, *The Avocado Plantation: Boom and Bust in the Australian Film Industry*, Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 1990, pp. 99-100.

⁶⁹ Brian McFarlane suggested that Cox was 'well on the way to becoming the cult director of the new Australian Cinema'. B. McFarlane, *Australian Cinema 1970-1985*, William Heinemann, Richmond, Victoria, 1987, p. 114.

⁷⁰ *A Journey with Paul Cox*, directed by Gerrit Messiaen and Robert Visser, 1996/7, outlined in the 44th Sydney Film Festival program, 6-20 June 1997, p. 71.

⁷¹ These included, Wendy Hughes, Norman Kaye, Julia Blake, Tony Llewellyn-Jones, John Hargreaves, Chris Hayward and Gosia Dobrowolska.

wife, Helen, played by Wendy Hughes, is introduced by way of a passionate scene in bed with her lover, a startling example of relaxed censorship in the 1980s. Although she has an involving job, a comfortable home, a beautiful daughter and a loving husband, Helen is dissatisfied with her life. She wants a divorce, though gives no reason, and as Susan Dermody noted, her desires do not inspire sympathy.⁷² The audience is left with the inevitable feeling that Helen is irresponsible and insensitive. Her sexual freedom is not seen as inspiring or liberating, but casts her as a promiscuous and unhappy woman. The adultery is depicted as pointless as Helen reveals that the man means nothing to her. Perhaps a hint of her pleasure would have changed the dynamics of the narrative and given a reason for her behaviour. As it is, there appears no reason for her to ruin the marriage so casually.

Helen was shown to be an immoral person and a poor wife, although a loving mother. In most films of the 1980s, the mother, perhaps, surprisingly managed to retain her good mother status, though this was not the case in Brian Trenchard-Smith's melodramatic *Jenny Kissed Me* (1986). Carol, the mother in this film, had to change her lifestyle to gain the good mother accolade. From the opening scene, Carol's sexual nature is shown to be in conflict with the care of her daughter. Ten-year-old Jenny is ill and complains to her mother about a stomach ache. Carol pays no attention to her daughter and instead, wants to have sex with her partner, Lindsay, — not the child's father — when he returns from work. The kind and responsible Lindsay, however, cannot be diverted from the paternal responsibilities he has assumed, and takes Jenny to hospital where appendicitis is diagnosed. Lindsay echoes the reliable father who stands in for a deficient wife, and who achieved popularity in American films of the decade.⁷³ In all of them, the errant mothers lacked maternal sensibility.⁷⁴

⁷²Susan Dermody, *The Second Cinema: Australian Feature Film Since 1970 and the Problematic of Australianness*, Power Institute of Fine Arts, Sydney University, Sydney, 1986, p. 273.

⁷³These include *Kramer versus Kramer* (1979), *Author, Author!* (1982) and *Ordinary People* (1980).

⁷⁴The image of Lindsay's devotion to his step-daughter was somewhat tarnished later in the film when his passion to find Jenny reached a risible intensity. He eventually kidnapped her from a home and escaped from police in a wild car chase. Additionally, the title of the film raised doubts about the relationship and Carol at one point accused him of 'unnatural' feelings for her daughter.

Carol's sexuality continues to be depicted as a problem and when Lindsay is away she seduces her neighbour. Emphasising her maternal inadequacy, a violent storm erupts, putting Jenny, who is asleep next door, in danger. When Lindsay arrives home to discover Carol's infidelity and her neglect of Jenny, there is a violent argument. Eventually Carol leaves Lindsay, and with Jenny, moves in with a woman friend in the city. Unable to find work, she becomes a prostitute, providing a further link between her sexuality and promiscuity. Hating her mother, whom she describes as 'a tart', Jenny runs away, is found by the police and placed in a state-run home. Lindsay abducts the girl and reveals that he is dying with a brain tumour. The tragedy of his illness brings about a reconciliation between Lindsay and Carol. They are married in hospital only minutes before Lindsay's death. The newly-married Carol has a change of heart. She tells Jenny, 'I'm sorry, it's all my fault, I didn't know how to be a mother'. Jenny, who has always been antagonistic toward her mother, replies simply, 'I love you Mummy'. Carol and Jenny move back happily to the country where Carol returns to her job at the check-out counter in a supermarket. Her sexually provocative image has gone and she stands at the register in a neat, high-necked dress, suitably covered with an apron. She has achieved respectability, eschewed her sexual desire and been transformed into a good mother.

Carol's marriage was a significant factor in renunciation of her sexuality and eventual redemption. In Tim Burstall's *Duet for Four* (1982), marriage was also crucial to the mother's happiness. Barbara and Ray live together with three children from Barbara's previous marriage. She is a seductive woman, witnessed in an early scene in which she instigates sex with Ray as she reclines naked in bed. Bored with domesticity, Barbara has outside interests which change from studying for a degree at university, to working in the market place, a decision she makes without consulting Ray. Here at last was a film which allowed the possibility of a woman to be successful in a range of areas. Barbara exhibited sexual desire, had been offered a responsible and worthwhile job and had three children.

As Ann Kaplan argued in her essay, titled *Sex, Work and Motherhood*, women were rarely depicted in films as being fulfilled in all three.⁷⁵

The introductory scene of Barbara's life is informative. She is within her home, though significantly, not in the kitchen, sitting comfortably in a lounge chair, concentrating on a book which she is studying for a university assignment. Surrounding her with bedlam, her two young sons are arguing loudly while her teenage daughter plays noisy rock music. Ray walks in after a hard day at the office and he takes charge, sorting out the boys' quarrel and turning off the music. This scene provides, perhaps, the quintessential filmic representation of Nancy Chodorow's schema of mother's emancipation through the father's involvement.⁷⁶ Barbara reveals, however, that she is not happy with a lifestyle which appears so fortunate. Her problem is revealed in an outburst, which significantly takes place in the kitchen, and in which she tells Ray that she wants them to get married. When Ray finally agrees, the narrative ends. The film was no more liberating for maternal sexuality than *Jenny Kissed Me*, for in marriage there was the likelihood, bearing in mind the outcome portrayed in previous narratives, that Barbara's sexuality once legitimated would be contained.

Phillip Noyce's *Echoes of Paradise* (1988) confronts the mother's sexuality in terms of issues of adultery, independence, good mothering and divorce. Its resolution, unlike the previous three films of the decade, manages to avoid depicting the mother as an immoral woman. It does this, however, at the cost of her independence, in its traditional emphasis on the benefits of marriage. In the film, a wealthy family lives in a beautifully appointed suburban home. There are three children, two girls and a boy and a husband, George, a politician, who is powerful and publicly respected. His wife, Maria, is beautiful and intelligent. She is grieving for her father who has died recently. Devastated when she learns about George's affair with his secretary, Maria decides to take a break in Thailand

⁷⁵Kaplan, 'Sex, Work and Motherhood', pp. 409-25.

⁷⁶Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978a.

from the family. There she meets and has a passionate affair with an exotic Balinese dancer. Raka is a soul-mate who understands her in a way that her husband does not. She telephones home to talk to the children. When George asks her to return, she tells him: 'I miss you but must find myself'. Finally, she decides to return home, although not to George, as she discloses to a new friend, but 'back to my children'. The ending of the film contradicts the suggestion of divorce. She walks in on the family at breakfast and the children greet her enthusiastically. She glances at George and says enigmatically, and, perhaps even apologetically, 'I lost my Dad then I lost you'. Her words indicate that the marriage will continue.

In *Echoes in Paradise* Maria, understandably upset by her husband's infidelity and her father's death, decided to reassess her life. The film depicted a mother enjoying her sexuality, while at the same time maintaining her position as a good mother. Maria's behaviour was not represented as promiscuous for a number of reasons. Her relationship with Raka was spiritual as well as sexual; her affair was in retaliation to George's shallow dalliance with his secretary; and, perhaps most importantly, she came back to her rightful place as a mother to the children. Although the film plays with the idea of a mother 'taking her life into her own hands' and finding sexual gratification, it capitulates in the end to a conventional resolution.

The Unwed Mother in Films

If marriage provided the mechanism for the control of the mother's sexuality, the pregnant, unwed woman was a potential source of disruption in patriarchal society. Her representation in films over several decades sheds a revealing light on attitudes towards motherhood and female sexuality. The films revealed a double standard in the community, as although the women were depicted as naive ingenuous virgins who were seduced by cunning men, their pregnancy was shameful and they were blamed as though they were at fault. The poster for Raymond Longford's *The Woman Suffers* (1918), illustrated the point:

Lost! Her good name gone—her respect of herself—the respect of others—the love of a man she had trusted too much!
 Gone because she was a woman! Because her brother had ruined another girl—and that girl's brother had wreaked his vengeance upon her!
 An eye for an eye, life for life, honor⁷⁷ for honor!
 The Woman Suffers—while the man goes free!⁷⁸

The fact that 'she was a woman' was used to explain the narrative of the film. Superficially it sympathised with her, while at the same time, admitting and somehow sanctioning her shame.

In *The Woman Suffers*, Joan Stockdale, 'the little bush girl' is courted by Ralph Manton, during a visit to her parents' country property. His promise to return and make her his 'little wife' thrills the naive Joan and leads her to succumb to his insistent sexual advances. Joan is reminiscent of the heroine in D.W. Griffith's *Way Down East* (1920), who, as Lucy Fischer has noted, needed to believe they would marry before she would consent to a sexual relationship.⁷⁹ Joan and Ralph's romance is indicated by a joyful chase and caresses in private by the river. The result was disastrous, for in early cinema, a stolen kiss inevitably meant pregnancy. The distraught Joan waits by the gate for her man to return and, although there is no actual mention of the impending birth, her predicament is clear. Sadly, after three months Joan realises that there will be no marriage, and seeing no alternative, she throws herself into the river.

The 1918 film, which could not overtly show their sexual relationship, used the metaphor of water to signify sexual intention. Fischer in her study of silent melodrama in the cinema has noted the allegorical importance of the association of femininity and water.⁸⁰ As well, Elizabeth Grosz has suggested that water was the most 'amniotic' of elements and the most

⁷⁷The poster uses the US spelling, which is perhaps a reflection of the pervasive Hollywood movies at the time.

⁷⁸The poster is reproduced in Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p. 103.

⁷⁹Lucy Fischer, *Cinematernity: Film, Motherhood, Genre*, Princeton University Press, NJ, 1996, p. 60.

⁸⁰Fischer, *Cinematernity*, pp. 63-8.

primordial and 'feminine'.⁸¹ In this regard, a beautiful exchange by the protagonists in Brazilian author, Paulo Coelho's *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* is illuminating:

Why is water the symbol of the feminine face of God?
I don't know. But She normally chooses that medium to manifest Herself. Maybe because She is the source of life; we are generated in water, and for nine months we live in it. Water is the symbol of the power of woman, the power that no man—no matter how enlightened or perfect he may be—can capture.⁸²

The metaphor was appropriate and recurrent in *The Woman Suffers*. The seducer Ralph is initially forced to stop at the Stockdale property because his car had been blocked by the flood waters covering the road. In attempting to drive from the country to the city, he was, metaphorically in Australian cinema, crossing from a site of virginity and purity, to one of seduction and sexuality. The swirling water, significantly with a rural genesis, rendered the road to the city unpassable for his vehicle. The result was disaster, and the metaphor is a grim link with Joan's death in the watery womb of the swollen river.

The Woman Suffers is doubly interesting because its narrative contains two 'fallen' women. The difference in their treatment is enlightening and points to the way films tend to normalise marriage. The sequence so far related serves as a prologue to the film which explains the later events. Joan's brother, Philip, suffering from the loss of his beloved sister, plans his revenge through the seduction of Ralph's sister, Marjory, a young woman of a similar age and demeanour as Joan. Perhaps, because she has spent some time in the city, Marjory is not so vulnerable, at least, unlike Joan, she is not constantly referred to as 'the little bush girl'. Philip, cold-heartedly courting Marjory takes her on a picnic to the wilds of the Blue Mountains. Conveniently for Philip, a cave allows them to shelter from a fierce storm, during which he seduces Marjory. Nearby is a torrential waterfall, again evoking the water imagery which was so potent in Joan's seduction. Marjory predictably, perhaps, finds that she is pregnant and attempts unsuccessfully to contact Philip. She writes him pleading letters explaining, through the intertitle, that: *she trembles to let her*

⁸¹Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989, p. 169.

⁸²Paulo Coelho, *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*, translated by Alan R. Clarke, Harper Collins, Sydney, 1996, p. 68.

parents know of her predicament. Her mother intercepts a note and at first is angry with her wayward daughter. Eventually she comes round and not only stands by Marjory, but effects a miraculous reunion between her daughter and Philip. The achievement of the marriage is crucial: Philip's suitability as a husband is never mentioned.

Andrée Wright has observed that Marjory Manton was 'the only non-virginal heroine in the whole history of Australian silent film who lives happily ever after'.⁸³ Wright was incorrect in claiming that Marjory was the only one,⁸⁴ although her point that happiness for mothers on the Australian screen came only with legal marriage was insightful. If there was no marriage, the 'non-virginal' woman was punished, or excised from the narrative. Both options were found in *The Woman Suffers*. Joan, with no possibility of marrying Ralph, committed suicide, while Marjory could presumably anticipate a happy and respectable life with husband and baby son.⁸⁵

The priority of marriage and the irrelevance of the suitor's character was never more evident than in a film made in 1921 by Charles Villiers and Kate Howarde. *'Possum Paddock*, of which only forty minutes remains, begins with a protracted scene of attempted rape. In an old shed on an outback property, we see a young terrified woman, Nancy, struggling to fight off the sexual attack of Fred. She cowers in the corner and at the very moment when it seems that her strength has given out and she can no longer resist her attacker, she is saved by the arrival of her fiancé, Hugh Bracken. The villain, no match for Hugh, is soon overcome. In a surprising move, at least for contemporary audiences, Fred is allowed to go free on the condition that he 'does the right thing by Maggie Masters'. The mystery is solved in a scene of the next day, in which a tearful young female, Maggie, receives Fred's proposal of marriage. Her gloom is lifted, she is overjoyed and cries, 'I'm the happiest girl in the world'.

⁸³ Wright, *Brilliant Careers*, p. 10

⁸⁴See for example *Circumstance*, *'Possum Paddock*, and *The Adorable Outcast*

⁸⁵For the significance of the son born to this woman, see chapter 4 in the context of birth and motherhood.

By piecing together the fragments of this film, it appeared that the sexually insatiable Fred, was responsible for Maggie's pregnancy prior to his assault on Nancy. Although allowing the lengthy and voyeuristic rape to be shown, the censors insisted that a scene be removed from the film.⁸⁶ It showed a young woman fantasising about throwing her baby in the river.⁸⁷ Probably, we can conclude that the desperate unwed mother-to-be was Maggie before she was saved by Fred's offer of marriage. According to the norms of morality portrayed at the time, Fred's rapacious sexual nature was irrelevant and the most important outcome was that the pregnant Maggie was to marry.

The acceptability of marriage can be found in Lawson Harris's *Circumstance* (1921). The eleven minutes remaining of this recently-discovered film depict the life of a young woman, Hazel. She is being cared for by a 'sex psychologist' after she has had to foster out an illegitimate son with whom she keeps in contact. We learn from the intertitles that her little boy is ill and asking for her and that: *Hazel's maternal love carries her quickly to her son's bedside*. According to customary depictions of mothers in Australian film narratives, in order for Hazel to be considered attractive to her lover, she must be depicted as returning, as far as possible, to the position she occupied before the birth of her son. In *Circumstance* this is achieved by her child's being placed in a foster home. The same conventions that dictated that Caddie's children had to be taken from her and placed in institutions before her love affair could develop, could be found in Hazel's treatment, fifty years earlier. Hazel's happiness is achieved with the licence of fortuitous coincidences which are often invoked in early cinema. The boy's father, Hazel's former lover, visits his cousin, the sex psychologist. Seeing Hazel as a desirable young woman — not the mother of his child — he falls in love and asks her to marry him. Only at the altar does he learn that she was the girl he seduced 'in the wilder days of his youth'.⁸⁸

⁸⁶Concern about the nation's falling birth rate probably was responsible for the prohibition of the scenes of infanticide.

⁸⁷Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p. 137.

⁸⁸Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p. 148.

Hazel was a decent woman and a good, if disadvantaged mother. She had been led astray by a male in the course of his sowing the wild oats of youth. We see the ambiguity in the advertisement for the film:

His position: a reckless man about town...
 Just imagine her's[sic]: a destitute outcast fighting bravely to live in happiness—and held down by society's barrier—and the scornful glances of such men as he.
Circumstance—A drama—not of the bush—or its outlaws—but of society and one of its outcasts who lives to prove that even the worst of her sex—may love
 "There's so much good in the worst of us,
 And so much bad in the best of us".⁸⁹

In this patronising resumé, Hazel was placed in the group styled 'the worst of us' and named as a destitute and scorned woman. The film and the publicity for it sent the message that on the one hand, the young mother was a good woman, but on the other, she was a social outcast until she was married.

A similar theme occurred in a film made over sixty years later. George Miller's *Cool Change* (1986), featured a young woman, Jo, who is attempting to rear her son without a father. She does not fit in with the people in the small town and is somewhat of an outsider, her small son a constant reminder of her difference. In this case, as in *Circumstance*, the father is initially unaware that it is his child although, after rekindling his love for the mother, he eventually asks her to marry him. In the later film, the conventions no longer required the child's banishment for the father to fall in love with Jo. Probably, as Crouch and Manderson have suggested, unwed motherhood had become more acceptable by the 1980s.⁹⁰ The community standards of the day may have changed sufficiently so that a woman with a child could be sexually desirable, however, it was still necessary for her to marry to find happiness.⁹¹ Even though the man had deserted her some

⁸⁹*Everyone's* 26 July 1923, p. 20, quoted by Tulloch, *Legends on the Screen*, p. 113.

⁹⁰Crouch & Manderson, *New Motherhood*, p. 5.

⁹¹Typically, marriage was a requirement for mothers in Australian film. In *Newsfront* (1978), *Weekend of Shadows* (1978) and *The More Things Change...* (1986), the man must 'do the right thing' by his lover, and redemption and happiness in each film, came with marriage. Where there is no marriage, as in *Freedom* (1982) and *The Fringe Dwellers* (1986), the result was disaster for both mother and child.

years earlier, the legal marriage was a requisite and achieved the same outcome — the woman's respectability and acceptance by the townsfolk— as it had in the earlier film.

The change in the representation of the unwed mother from the 'naive young woman' to the 'worldly seducer' in Ken G. Hall's *The Silence of Dean Maitland* (1934), did not alter her options. It merely served to exacerbate her punishment and accelerate the removal of her sexual allure. The depiction of Alma can be seen as the personification of the 'vagina with teeth' that Marjorie Rosen described as typical of pre-war cinematic representation of sexual women.⁹² In the context of religious morality prevalent at the time, the man she seduced, the sexually naive Reverend Maitland, made her even more reprehensible. She was a vamp, a truly licentious woman who was blamed for destroying Maitland, who in turn, was too weak to withstand her charms.

A long-shot at the start of the film shows Alma running naked on the beach and cuts to a mid-shot of her getting changed. Despite the towel draped around her, there is a flash of naked breast. If the audience had not yet received the message that this was a wanton woman, the next shot makes it perfectly clear. To emphasise the eroticism of the scene, the village pervert spies on her from the cliff. After Alma's seduction of Maitland, Alma's pregnancy becomes common knowledge and the only person to sympathise with her is a young crippled woman, who like Alma is also a social outcast. Alma's position is now in dramatic opposition to the sexually-desirable persona established at the beginning of the film. It is significant that her seductiveness was signalled by a flash of breast, which in motherhood has a completely different cultural meaning. Her breasts have been desexualised by pregnancy and she is no longer an object of desire. Edwin Schur indicated, in analysing the options available to females in American cinema, the possibilities for reducing the stigma of pregnancy were limited to leaving town or seeking an abortion.⁹³

⁹²Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies & the American Dream*, Peter Owen, London, 1973, p. 109.

⁹³Edwin M. Schur, *Labelling Women Deviant: Gender, Stigma, and Social Control*, Random House, NY, 1984, p. 87.

There can be no marriage with the respectable Reverend Maitland and the ostracised Alma leaves the village.

Conclusion

The chaste and pure mother was common in early Australian films although there were a few in the 1920s that broke away from the stereotype and depicted the mother's sexuality. Changes in society were probably responsible for those representations that challenged the conventional mother image. The 1920s films, for instance, indicated some freedom for women in their portrayal of fashionable shortened skirts and lowered necklines.⁹⁴ Mothers were shown to be physically companionable with their husbands, though as censorship was strict, their sexuality was more hinted at than overtly displayed. In the 1930s, idealised and traditional images of the virtuous mother dominated the narrative. They paralleled the strictures that economic hardships placed on desires of real Australian mothers as they struggled to make ends meet.

In most pre-war films, female sexuality resided either with lascivious vamps or young unmarried women. Both types were portrayed as the opposite of the asexual, passive mother. The vamp was punished for her sins and the young woman's allure ended on marriage and the birth of a child. Before the event, when the daughter lived in her parents' home, she frequently had an oddly close relationship with her father. The daughter's behaviour was so openly flirtatious, and the mother such a restrained and moral figure, that in many ways the daughter appropriated the mother's sexual role in the family.

After the Second World War, films, in keeping with growing affluence and consumerism, often promoted women's beauty and glamour. The modern young woman was portrayed as an attractive partner for her husband. Those films which moved away from depictions of traditional maternal chastity, depicted a manipulating and much younger woman, modishly dressed, whose trophies from her sexual game were the luxuries she desired. Her children

⁹⁴Compare for example the clothing and sexual independence of the women in F. Stuart-Whytes' *Painted Daughters* (1925) with films of the 1930s.

took second place in her life and the relationship with her husband was deemed more rewarding. It was not important that she be seen as a good mother and she had more in common with the vamp or, considering her overwhelming desire for material possessions, the whore.

Perhaps, the greatest change to motherhood and sexuality came after the introduction of reliable contraception in the 1960s. Control of fertility and increased strength in the workplace empowered women. The changes to the family exacerbated the anxiety of conservative elements in the community. This had a counterpart on screen, and while women's sexuality was recognised in the 1970s, sexually active females were often presented as profligate. They were, moreover, frequently depicted as bad mothers. Even in films produced by females, the mother needed to be wholesome and asexual if she were to represent stability, contentment and maternal competence.

The relaxation of censorship laws during the 1980s was effective in changing maternal sexuality in films by allowing the explicit representations of women's sexual desire. Where previously, images of sexual mothers were infrequent, in this decade, the desire of some mothers was explicitly and even pruriently depicted. At the same time, female sexual liaisons rarely involved their legal partners and the mother's infidelity was seen as immoral unless she returned to the confines of her often unsatisfactory marriage. Her sexuality, however, was generally not a factor in her capacity to mother. She remained caring and devoted to the children while maintaining her animosity toward her partner. Marriages of companionship and longevity were rarely depicted and while mothers were close to their children, they cared little for their husbands.

The unwed mother disrupted patriarchal conventions because she was apparently free of male control and in a position of power as the originator of new life. As well, she upset ideas about the virtuous state of women before marriage. On the Australian screen, if there was no marriage, the shame forced the woman to suicide or to leave the community. The

desirability of marriage was so strongly endorsed, that the proposed husband's character was not a consideration. Whether he was vengeful, a rapist, a philanderer or just unreliable, his willingness to 'make her an honest woman' was paramount. Pregnancy outside marriage was no longer shameful in many parts of the community during the 1980s, although this liberalisation did not find its way to the screen. Even in recent films, unwed mothers were only able to find happiness and contentment within a legal marriage.

chapter 7

the place for mothers in films of the bush

*There's nothing here for a wife except submission. My only purpose is to produce heirs for all this. Sometimes I feel just like another of his brood mares.*¹

The bush has become the mainstay of our mythology and, according to Ross Gibson, has defined the nation and offered 'the most enduring aspect of Australian experience'.² A common description of an Australian, for example, depicted a figure who was tough, strong and tanned, a man of the land, a battler, a bit of a larrikin and someone, as Russel Ward has noted, who 'above all, will stick to his mates'.³ At the foundation of this stereotype was a nation which was rural, physically challenging and unequivocally male.⁴ The bush was proposed as a place for men, where they could realise their masculine desires, pit themselves against a formidable opponent and find pleasure in their male companions. Unlike the palimpsest of England, the Australian landscape provided the pioneers something unwritten and new. Myths of the bush were used as a method of finding a new Australian identity away from the limitations of English society. Gibson observed that while an autochthonous society might be inclined to rely on gods to explain its origins, a colonial society tended to use more 'secular myths'. The white settlers used 'essentialist myths of the land' Gibson argued, to find a place for themselves which was separate from the Old World.⁵ The physical labour required in the harsh conditions meant that a 'machismo' environment flourished and mateship and brute strength came to be prized.⁶ The aura of masculinity was exaggerated because

¹Mrs Dagleish, the disgruntled wife of a large outback property owner in Donald Crombie's *The Irishman* (1978).

²Ross Gibson, 'Formative Landscapes', in S. Murray, (ed.), *Australian Cinema*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1994, p. 52.

³Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, Second Edition, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1965, (1958), p. 2.

⁴The absence of women in depictions of life in the bush can be partially explained by conditions in the early days of white settlement. The activities of men predominated, as seventy-five per cent of the rural population was male. See L.J. Aspin, *The Family: An Australian Focus*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1987, (1982), p. 33.

⁵Gibson, 'Formative Landscapes', p. 52.

⁶Patricia Grimshaw, 'Man's Own Country: Women in Colonial Australian History', in N. Grieve & A. Burns, (eds), *Australian Women: New feminist Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1986, pp. 182-209.

many men, leaving the 'Mother Country' to strike out on their own in a new land, moved far from the genteel influences of their mothers and the female domain. The lack of these womenfolk's civilising guidance added another factor to the masculine dominance in the Australian environment. Men, as the most conspicuous workers of the land, assumed the role of the 'typical' Australians.⁷

There have been recent, contrary views put by some historians. Marilyn Lake has asserted that the 'independent free-wheeling bushman...as Australian cultural hero' was a nineteenth century concept and by 1920, the culture had become 'feminized'.⁸ Jill Roe has suggested the Australian 'type' was a beautiful independent girl.⁹ Richard White has maintained that after the Second World War, Australians began to change the way they viewed themselves. He argued that in the 1950s, home, motor vehicle and white good ownership increased, the Australian way of life was seen as suburban and the role of women became central to the new identity.¹⁰ As well, the bush was not particularly attractive to the multitude of immigrants to Australia who looked to the towns and suburbs for 'dignity and prosperity'.¹¹ In spite of these propositions, mythology which honoured the bush heroes of the outback continued to claim the imagination. Men's activities were credited with the reason for Australia's difference as a nation and the 1980s ideal, as social historian, Ann Curthoys, asserted, remained the 'free, unencumbered, yet convivial lifestyle of the itinerant outback white single male'.¹²

⁷The masculine nature of the colony was intensified, as Ross Gibson pointed out, because white settlers often treated Aboriginal women cruelly, and as their brutal and domineering behaviour spread to female convicts, all women in the New Land were affected and in some way belittled and demeaned. R. Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise: Changing Literary Perceptions of Australia*, Sirius, (A&R) Australia, 1984, pp. 192-3.

⁸Marilyn Lake, 'The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context', *Historical Studies*, 86, May 1986, p. 122.

⁹For an argument for the young woman as a national image, see Jill Roe, 'What Has Nationalism Offered Australian Women?', in N. Grieve & A. Burns, (eds), *Australian Women: Contemporary Feminist Thought*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, pp. 29-39.

¹⁰Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1992, (1981), pp. 164-5.

¹¹See Janet McCalman's discussion of working-class immigrants, 'Class and respectability in a working-class suburb: Richmond, Victoria before the Great War', in R. White & P. Russell, (eds), *Memories and Dreams: Reflections on Twentieth-Century Australia, Pastiche II*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1997, pp. 21-37.

¹²Ann Curthoys, 'Australian Feminism since 1970', in N. Grieve & A. Burns, (eds), *Australian Women: Contemporary Feminist Thought*, p. 27.

It was no wonder, considering their preoccupation with investigation, representation and consolidation of the national identity, that films set in the outback have made up the most significant genre in Australian feature films. In a way, they helped establish the movie industry by providing the subject for almost all film narratives for at least the first two decades of film production. There have been films produced about the bush in every decade and they have proved to be consistently popular. Even supposedly sophisticated recent audiences, far removed from the early pioneering days, have appreciated films set in a bush landscape. For instance, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *The Man from Snowy River*, both broke and held box office figures for many years.¹³

Bush films retained their popularity because they have reinforced the mythology of what it meant to be an Australian, providing images of what made us different, and of how we functioned both as a group and individually. According to Susan Dermody, 'The Australian film industry is a major, potent, international, conspicuous base upon which national identity is seen substantially to rest'.¹⁴ Images of man and the land, as film historian Graeme Turner suggested, have pervaded Australian literature, art and film, and perpetuated masculine ideologies and myths of society.¹⁵ The problem with this approach in the cinema, has been that it allowed no place for women. Although the title of a film might have indicated that it had a female focus, the films were from a male point-of-view. This was apparent in *The Squatter's Daughter* (1933) and substantiated by the director, Ken Hall's remark, 'If I had thought about an [Australian] image, it would have emerged in *The Squatter's Daughter* - the young *man* of the bush, hard

¹³Australian Film Commission in *AFC News*, number 144, December 1995, pp. 6-7. *The Man from Snowy River* was placed number four in a list of top-grossing Australian films at the Australian box-office from 1966 to 1995. It came after *Crocodile Dundee*, *Crocodile Dundee II* and *Strictly Ballroom*. It is difficult to compare this to box office figures of 1975 when *Picnic* was released, but in 1995, *Picnic* was placed at number seventeen, had sold well overseas and had wide critical acclaim. See Andrew Pike & Ross Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977: A Guide to Feature Film Production*, Oxford University Press/AFI, Melbourne, 1980, p. 368.

¹⁴Susan Dermody, *The Second Cinema: Australian Feature Film Since 1970 and the Problematic of Australianness*, Power Institute of Fine Arts, Sydney University, Sydney, 1986, p. 36.

¹⁵Graeme Turner, *National Fictions: Literature, Film, and the Construction of Australian Narrative*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1986, p. 33-5.

riding, the outdoor type'.¹⁶ The common protagonist of the Australian bush film was the pioneering male who attempted to overpower the wild or barren bush and secure his place within the landscape.

Women did have a place in the bush, however, and how they make sense of their lives in late twentieth-century Australia, to a certain extent, depends on the legacy of bush legends. The images of identity have coalesced in representations on the screen and perpetuated, recycled and reinforced inequitable notions of the male as a suitable icon for the entire population. It is crucial to see how women can become part of these popular images and in particular to find a place for the mother in the films. While lip service is paid to the mother as the backbone of the pioneering family, her position is not made clear in films which tend to concentrate on the larrikin Australian bushman.

This chapter attempts to discover and explain the place of mothers in Australian bush films. The investigation is presented in two parts. The first section shows that the belief in the nature/culture dichotomy has underpinned the images of man as the dominant source of action and woman as the 'other' on whom the action is played out. It argues that the mother has a metaphorical presence in the landscape where she is used as a basic and necessary part of the film's structure, a device by which the man is able to exhibit courage and desire in his attempt to tame the wilderness. The differing moods of this metaphorical mother are identified and explained, in particular, the kind mother who is nurturing, protective and wise; and the phallic vengeful mother who brings drought and bushfire or even mystically absorbs her victims. Significantly, the longest and most detailed analysis in this section is reserved for two films which have no mother in the cast, yet depend entirely on the concept of the metaphorical mother to make narrative sense.¹⁷

¹⁶Philip Taylor, 'Ken G. Hall: Interview', *Cinema Papers*, number 1, January 1974, p. 77. (my emphasis).

¹⁷These films are *The Man from Snowy River* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.

In their attempt to tell a bush story, filmmakers, not surprisingly considering the omnipresent male hero, downplayed the part of the mother. This had the crucial effect of bolstering the already privileged male role, signifying his work as important while trivialising hers.¹⁸ The second part of the chapter analyses the representations of the actual experience of the mother in bush films. This section records and laments their frequent absence. It argues that when the mother is included, she is expected to put up with hardships without complaint and to retain her love and commitment to a family for whom she is frequently nothing more than a drudge. The few mothers who manage to escape from the domestic realm are noted, although it is pointed out that they also conform to a pattern of passive endurance. This so-called attribute is attached specifically to the mother, as before marriage, it is argued, there were spirited women of the outback who took their place with the men, controlled and managed properties and were appropriately rewarded. Images of the accepting, domesticated mother have provided a foundation for the tradition of mothering in much the same way that the images of the strong bush hero have informed the role of the male in society.

The Metaphorical Mother of the Bush

In myths of the land, man is aligned with culture, and his job is to cultivate and control nature, which is identified as female. The tradition is not peculiarly Australian, and is a long-held belief of western society. Social anthropologist, Michelle Rosaldo, explained that while men were seen to be involved in man-made systems or 'culture', women were associated with 'nature' which encompassed life-cycles, the biology of 'grubby' birth and death, and feeding infants.¹⁹ Likewise, anthropologist, Sherry Ortner, designated culture, which she defined as 'human consciousness or...systems of thought and technology' the province of men. Ortner considered that women's physical, social and

¹⁸See Chapter 4, for a discussion of the scene in *Sons of Matthew* where mis-en-scène, music and editing combine to place the wife's labour in giving birth in a secondary position to the man's labour in rescuing his horses.

¹⁹Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, 'Woman, Culture, and Society: A Theoretical Overview', in M.Z. Rosaldo & L. Lamphere, (eds), *Woman, Culture and Society*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1974, pp. 30-1.

psychological situation placed her close to nature.²⁰ Although this belief in the paradigm of man/culture opposed to woman/nature is not unproblematic,²¹ it has widespread, even hegemonic acceptance and provides a way of understanding where the mother can be found in bush films. The mother's association with nature can be seen as a way of fitting her into the Australian bush folklore; a way of giving her a position and language in the society. As Kay Schaffer suggested, 'In the relationship of the Australian character to the bush, her [woman's] presence is registered through metaphors of landscape'. Schaffer searched for images of woman in Australian life and found her not as an 'actual figure', but in ideas of the land.²²

Recognising women through their association with nature and the land placed them in the position of 'the other'. The man was thought of as the subject, while the woman was seen as his 'object'. The woman/land became as Carolyn Merchant observed, a commodity to be manipulated and used as a resource. She noted the recurrent idea of nature as both mother and bride, whose function was to 'comfort, nurture, and provide for the well-being of the male'.²³ Marilyn Lake remarked that the Australian bush was often interpreted as a 'feminine "other"', imagined as the body of a woman that must be possessed and ravished, as a cruel vengeful mother, or an unyielding mistress against which man has to prove himself.²⁴ The seductive power of the land became an appealing metaphor for the colony. Ross Gibson, for instance, asserted that the 'unknowable heartland' of Australia placed a type of erotic veil over the landscape,

²⁰Sherry B. Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?', in *Woman, Culture and Society*, p. 72.

²¹Lynne Segal pointed out that the forces of nature seen sometimes as 'brutal, ravaging and indifferent to individual life and survival' seemed closer to male activities, while 'cultured, tamed, domestic, civilised' images were closer to female attributes. She concluded that nature was neither male nor female. L. Segal, *Is the Future Female?: Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism*, Virago, London, 1994, (1987), p. 7. Additionally, Susan Dermody argued that the woman/nature alliance had the potential to circumscribe women's 'rational, creative and administrative' abilities. Susan Dermody, 'Journey Among Women', [rev. art.], *Cinema Papers*, number 14, October 1977, pp. 173-4. While there is much truth in these views, there is a perception in society that women are aligned to nature. It is that perception that films incorporate, even managing to include the strength and power of nature as part of the phallic mother's actions.

²²Kay Schaffer, *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England, 1988, p. 22.

²³Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, Harper, San Francisco, 1983, pp. 8-9.

²⁴Marilyn Lake, 'Affirmations of Difference', in P. Grimshaw, M. Lake, A. McGrath & M. Quartly, *Creating a Nation*, McPhee Gribble/Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria, 1994, p. 298.

'causing Australians to project their definitive desires on to it. Even as white culture attempts to ravage the land, the land seems perversely to seduce the culture'.²⁵ Similarly, Meaghan Morris argued that the myth was seductive because of its reversible meanings; the bush can be either attractive or repulsive.²⁶ In these assessments, the land, and by her metaphorical association, the woman, either as virgin waiting-to-be-tamed or nurturing or vengeful mother, was structured in relation to the dominant male.

John Tulloch provided what could be seen as the definitive summation of the subject: 'It is because he is in control of nature that he is, in the Australian cultural domain, a man'.²⁷ Tulloch described a recurrent scene in bush films that incorporated a male horserider, sheep or cattle and trees in the vast Australian countryside. In this quintessential bush location, man was figured as the subject or culture, as he gazed on the object, represented by nature.²⁸ He was culture because he was set to enter, change and cultivate the land. Nature was his other, and this position was taken by woman. The men gazed at 'their' land in very much the same way that they did at 'their' women.

The idea of the man as the subject and the woman as the object in films has been explained by the film theorist, Laura Mulvey. In her influential work in the 1970s on the ways of seeing in cinema and the importance and ownership of 'the gaze', she argued that there were several possible positions from which to view a film. Mulvey pointed out that the three 'looks' which explain film viewing were firstly, the camera as it records the scene, secondly, the characters observing each other and thirdly, the audience as it watches the film.²⁹ In all cases, she identified the male as 'bearer of the look' and the female as the 'looked at object'. According to Mulvey, 'The determining

²⁵Ross Gibson, 'Camera Natura: Landscape in Australian feature films', in J. Frow & M. Morris, (eds), *Australian Cultural Studies: A Reader*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1993, p. 220.

²⁶Meaghan Morris, 'Two types of photography criticism located in relation to Lynn Silverman's series', *Art and Text*, 6, 1982, pp. 61-73, see also Schaffer, *Women and the Bush*, p. 61.

²⁷John Tulloch, *Australian Cinema: Industry, Narrative and Meaning*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1982, p. 11.

²⁸This scene occurs for example, in Raymond Longford's *The Woman Suffers* (1918), Franklyn Barrett's *The Breaking of the Drought* (1920) and *A Girl of the Bush* (1921) and John K. Wells's *Silks and Saddles* (1921).

²⁹Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1989, p. 25.

male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly'.³⁰ Mulvey's assessment of camera positions and viewpoints were relevant for Australian rural films, which commonly were directed by men and told stories of male adventures and experience. The cinematic direction and point-of-view of these films served to strengthen the dominant male/subservient female position.

One of the most influential pioneer filmmakers was Charles Chauvel, who, possibly, more than any other Australian director found a metaphorical place for women within his bush films. Chauvel's passion for the Australian landscape originated from his idyllic early years with his mother, father and four siblings on a property in southeastern Queensland.³¹ His successful and enduring relationship with the actor, Elsa Sylvaney, his wife and filmmaking partner for more than thirty years, perhaps, contributed the 'woman's influence' in his narratives despite the limitations imposed by his focus on images of the typical Australian bushman. Chauvel's heroes were uncompromisingly male and were derived from traditional notions which celebrated the superiority of the 'man-on-the-land', yet, as Stuart Cunningham noted, his use of land as spectacle linked it to a 'discourse on women'.³²

Nowhere in Chauvel's body of work was the metaphorical place of women in the bush more discernible than in his film, *Sons of Matthew* (1949). The film is a saga which begins with the poor Irish settler, Matthew O'Riordan and his wife, Jane, trying to make a living from the inhospitable Australian outback. The family is completed with the birth of four sons and two daughters. Chauvel had little interest in the lives of the daughters, as the film centres on Matthew's difficulties and his grown-up sons' attempts to develop their own space on the inaccessible Lamington Plateau. The final scene of the film shows a dinner with the vast O'Riordan family which now includes the

³⁰Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, p. 19.

³¹Susanne Chauvel Carlsson, *Charles and Elsa Chauvel: Movie Pioneers*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, Queensland, 1989, p. 19.

³²Stuart Cunningham, *Featuring Australia: The Cinema of Charles Chauvel*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1991, p. 48.

grandchildren of Matthew and Jane. Alas, Matthew has died, although Jane is present and recapitulates the successes and trials of the family while offering words of wisdom from her position as matriarch of the family.

A feminised landscape was apparent from the introduction of *The Sons of Matthew*, where a male narrator informed us that this was a family saga which was set in 'mysterious valleys'. The imagery brings to mind Randolph Stow's novel *Tourmaline*, where a character reminisced, 'he told me of a gate leading into darkness, which was both a valley and a woman, the source and sap of life, the temple of revaluation'.³³ The connection of women and the earth occurred frequently throughout the film, often with astonishingly candid dialogue. Shane O'Riordan, the first-born son, a strong bushman and farmer, declares for example, 'Women and the earth, I've always thought they're much the same, only the earth is more exciting'.

The woman that Shane has most in mind is Cathy, who lives on a neighbouring property and according to the narrator in the film 'has the spell of the land on her'. Cathy is wild and untamed, which is vividly pointed out in her reckless, though skilful horseriding. For Shane, she is like the virgin jungle on the high Lamington plateau which he wants to tame and incorporate into the family estate. Clearly, his expectations for the land echo his desire for Cathy when he reveals, 'I've always wanted land like that, there's something good about cutting into a place no man's been before'. Throughout the film, the figure of Cathy is linked with the landscape. She is aligned with nature when she swims naked in a waterhole on Shane's beloved property and the camera lingers on her desirable body in the lush tropical surroundings. Bruce Molloy suggested of this scene that her nakedness was a symbol of 'her discarding of cultural conventions and her full merging with nature'.³⁴ Shortly after, Shane reveals his love for her and the inevitable consequence is that they will marry.

³³Randolph Stow, *Tourmaline*, Macdonald, London, 1963, p. 187.

³⁴Bruce Molloy, *Before the Interval: Australian Mythology as Feature Films, 1930-1960*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland, 1990, p. 121.

Brothers, Shane and Barney, are rivals for Cathy's affection. Although there has been an expectation that Barney and Cathy will marry since the days that they played together as children, it is Shane who eventually triumphs. He claims Cathy as his wife, in the same fierce way that he lays claim to the land. Shane is unquestionably the leader of the team of brothers in their efforts to control the wild plateau. His temperament is displayed from the earliest part of the film, when he is a young lad of about fourteen and Cathy, about two years old, is staying in the Riordan home. Shane is bathing the baby and having trouble because she is splashing and slippery. He tells his mother 'She's like an eel, she'll need a firm hand!' Shane's mother, Jane O'Riordan, prophetically replies 'Well maybe she'll get it when she grows up and marries'. Shane's words are echoed much later when Cathy, now a young woman, rides her spirited horse at breakneck speed towards the homestead and jumps the property fence. His feelings about women have not changed as he mutters 'She needs putting over someone's knee'. The firm hand that Shane intends to use to control Cathy is clearly the method he uses in his cultivation of the land. Of all the brothers, it is Shane who labours with single-minded devotion, while Barney complains about the hard work and escapes periodically to flirt with the local girls. Shane does not need to leave the property to find love. He observes that the new acreage is 'like a beautiful woman, lovely to look at, but tough to handle'. His 'vision of the mastery of the jungle',³⁵ as Cunningham described it, is identical to the way he imagines his relationship with Cathy.

There was a further analogy in the film which emphasised the idea of the woman's association with the land by its introduction of the idea of the 'earth mother'. The plateau was almost impossible to farm because the brothers, with Shane as the leader, could not get access to it. The pathway to it was blocked by tropical growth and its lofty position ensured its remoteness. Like the land, for most of the film, Cathy was inaccessible to Shane, because she was to be married to his brother. Shane's union with Cathy could

³⁵Cunningham, *Featuring Australia*, p. 154.

only be consummated when he has tamed the wilderness. It was not until the exact point in the film where he was able to complete the work on the road to the plains and bring in his cattle, that he informed her 'You're going to be my wife and bear my sons, because that's the way it's meant to be'. In Shane's eyes, this was the 'natural' order. The land he has managed finally to cultivate will be fruitful and yield a bountiful harvest, and so will his wife.

Not all films were as confrontational and didactic as Chauvel's *Sons of Matthew*, although the image of the bush as a nurturing mother persisted in many. Director, Ray Lawrence, working on Peter Carey's novel, used the idea in *Bliss* (1985). While he lives in the city, the protagonist, Harry Joy, suffers almost unceasingly. He has a heart attack, an 'out-of-body experience,' horrific nightmares, a bout of insanity and is committed to an asylum. His wife is openly unfaithful to him with his business partner and his children appear to neither like nor respect him. His life, in short, is a disaster. At first he finds some sort of happiness with Honey Barbara who has come to the city to work as a prostitute. Although Harry loves Honey Barbara, their relationship fails within the city, which is seen in this film as sordid, barren and corrupt. When Honey Barbara leaves Harry to return to her home in the rainforest, it appears as though his life is ended.

In an epilogue, however, Harry finds his redemption. This section of the film contrasts with the previous cartoon-like scenes of horror which have described Harry's incredible life. Leaving the city enables his catharsis. He drives away from the traffic and stress and when he finally reaches the countryside, in an act of renunciation, he abandons his flamboyant Jaguar motor vehicle, the symbol of city capitalism and greed. After walking through a landscape of burnt bush and images reminiscent of Hell, he comes to a kind of paradise: a tropical rainforest. Honey Barbara's maternal, nourishing presence pervades this space. Outside this area, she is a fallen woman living a degenerate life. Within the forest she is its opposite: the source of regeneration. Harry is reborn and responds by willingly and wholeheartedly entering into the cycle of nature. At first,

Honey Barbara will have nothing to do with him despite his earnest entreaties and avowals of love. He decides to prove his true affinity with nature and so begins to grow and care for special trees which will enable her bees to produce magnificent honey. After eight years of his daily devotion to the plants, they are ready and his gift to Honey Barbara re-establishes their love. Their reunion is fruitful and he is able to tell his remarkable life story to their adult daughter.

The metaphorical nurturing mother of the bush was also evident in bushranging films, which made up the most popular genre of early cinema. The exploits of the bushrangers were a novelty for the new cinema audiences, with their simple and naive narratives of horseriding, shoot-outs, burning sheds and mailcoach holdups. The films included Charles Tait's *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906), John Gavin's *Thunderbolt* (1910) and Alfred Rolfe's *Captain Midnight, the Bush King* (1911). Unfortunately, many of the early films have been lost or are in fragments and there remain only the synopses, or occasionally a script of the proceedings. From these traces, however, it can be deduced that both the landscape and the mother were a prominent part of the films. Their roles in the narrative were synonymous. A bushranger commonly had a choice of two places to hide from the police when capture was imminent. The first port of call was his mother's home, and the second, the bush. While neither proved ultimately successful in protecting the outlaw — censorship of the day required retribution — each was seen as a potentially safe area. The outlaw did not turn to his father, who was frequently also in trouble with the law, and retreated to his mother's familiar space after which he could always, at least initially, find a cave, a metaphorical womb, within the landscape to conceal himself.³⁶

While bushranging films lost their appeal in later decades, a film made in 1978 depicted an outlaw's attempt to escape from police. This film, however, moved away from the

³⁶The film *Robbery Under Arms*, made first in 1907, and remade in 1920 and 1957 offered good examples of this. The first film was lost, but the second and third created a space in the bush wilderness, where Captain Starlight and his associates retreated periodically. It was only when they came out of this enveloping womb-like area, that they were captured or shot.

idea of the bush as nurturing mother. The protagonist in Fred Schepisi's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* did not have a mother to protect him and had only the bush as a place to hide. The discovery by Jimmie of a sacred Aboriginal site which had been vandalised by whites was vital to the story. The scene provided a metaphorical representation of his life so far and the futility of his plan to leave his Aboriginal heritage for an uncompromising and unwelcoming white society. The half-caste Jimmie has no place to go. The bush has power and grandeur and it becomes clear that he will not get out of it alive. Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka drew attention to the masculinisation of the landscape when they described it as 'close to patronising fetishism'.³⁷ The land was an overpowering and potent figure and its wide, open vistas had none of the comforting and secret dark caves and scrubby bush, where an outlaw could find concealment and safety. The masculine landscape was an unusual gendering in Australian feature films. Perhaps, the explanation could be found in the origin of a legend which had relentlessly excluded Aborigines from their land. The bush as a white mother was an inappropriate metaphor for the protection of an Aboriginal man.

The symbolic mother of the bush was both a nurturing and powerful force in Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975) who welcomed some intruders, and rejected others. *Picnic* was a milestone in Australian feature films and though not unanimously acclaimed,³⁸ Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper called it a 'commercial and critical landmark in Australian cinema'.³⁹ Without the atmosphere which indicated that the film was reporting an actual event, it might have been dismissed as heavy-handed and condescending: its aspirations of mystery could have been perceived as an arrogant attempt to confuse. The film's strongest incentive to be taken seriously was the claim, originating in the novel by Joan Lindsay on which the film was based, that the story was

³⁷Susan Dermody & Elizabeth Jacka, *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a National Cinema*, Volume Two, Currency, Sydney, 1988, p. 119.

³⁸For instance, Ian Hunter, remarked 'The film is bloody awful, and how critics have been able to praise it as an Australian art work (whatever that is) I simply cannot understand', I. Hunter, 'Corsetway to Heaven: Looking Back to *Hanging Rock*', in A. Moran & T. O'Regan, (eds), *An Australian Film Reader*, Currency, Sydney, 1985, p. 191.

³⁹Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, pp. 367-8.

true. P.P. McGuinness in his review of the film, remarked that 'the school actually seems to exist'.⁴⁰ The filmmakers attempted to establish credibility from the first frame, which gave information as though from a press release that, on St. Valentine's Day, 14th February 1900, three school children and one of their teachers vanished without trace at Hanging Rock, near Mount Macedon in the State of Victoria. While the introduction indicated that the film was a true account, the ambience of mystery undermined the realism. Haunting emotive music complemented strange imagery: watches inexplicably stopped at noon and a nightmare foretold death. Miranda, whose 'ethereal loveliness' Meaghan Morris described as the 'pinnacle of desirability',⁴¹ transformed into a swan several times. As well, the film had a dreamlike dimension, a feat achieved by the cinematographer, Russell Boyd's use of dyed wedding veil material across the lens.⁴²

Picnic is a difficult film from which to draw unequivocal conclusions, as the filmmakers have allowed its narrative to weave and twist to perpetuate its mystery and strangeness. Dermody and Jacka appeared to believe that the film wandered 'without narrative purpose...into a maze of inexplicability of its own making, coming to rest when finally defeated'.⁴³ Although a character in the film observed 'There's gotta be a solution', the arcane narrative confused most explanations of the women's disappearance. Perhaps, the film achieved what the scriptwriter, Cliff Green, set out to do. He commented that the film can be read on all levels. According to Green, 'The great power of the story lies in its ability to unlock your own ghosts'.⁴⁴ As a result, there were many ways to interpret the film and some subverted the 'mother as the bush' metaphor, indicating a male predator as an explanation. Meaghan Morris, for example, proposed that nature was gendered masculine in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, because of the 'phallic' nature of the Rock.⁴⁵ Adding to Morris's theory, one of the teachers, Miss McCraw, described the

⁴⁰P.P. McGuinness, 'Peter Weir's Hauntingly Beautiful Film Makes the Film World Sit Up', in *An Australian Film Reader*, p. 189.

⁴¹Meaghan Morris, 'Personal Relationships and Sexuality', in S. Murray, (ed.), *The New Australian Cinema*, Thomas Nelson, West Melbourne, 1981, (1980), p. 143.

⁴²Cliff Green, *Picnic at Hanging Rock: A Film*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1975, p. xxi.

⁴³Dermody & Jacka, *The Screening of Australia*, p. 107

⁴⁴Green, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, p. xvii.

⁴⁵Morris, 'Personal Relationships and Sexuality', p. 145.

Rock's origins in the phallic term of 'forced up from deep down below'. Perhaps, the disappearance with the girls of the odd, masculinised, Miss McCraw, warned of madness and child abuse. A further more pedestrian explanation came from one of the townsfolk in the film, who believed that the a criminal from a distant area was responsible. Another possible solution to the riddle of the film alluded to ritual sacrifice, as both the rescued girl and the potential suitor were found with identical wounds across their brows. The most popular interpretation, however, held that the bush 'absorbed' the women. This was a reasonable deduction, although it was a facile explanation and demonstrably inaccurate as we shall now see.

These claims were influenced by the many 'red herrings' contained in the narrative, and did not explain the film successfully. They failed to account for the multitude of maternal images of the Rock permeating the film, which offer, in my reading, the most persuasive answer to the puzzle. Mr Hussey, the coach driver, sets the mood before the Rock even comes into view. He refers pointedly to it as 'she' and his reverence about its timeless nature is reminiscent of the way he might discuss a dependable and steadfast mother. Green's script notes confirm the maternal body analogy in his references to the deep, slit-like, narrow crevices through which the girls later weave their way.⁴⁶ As they climb Hanging Rock, the girls suddenly begin to talk poignantly about their mothers, bringing maternal images to the warm, womb-like environment which they are entering. They discuss their absent friend Sara, who, significantly, has been kept at the school by the headmistress, Mrs Appleyard. Sara is, perhaps, not an appropriate visitor to Hanging Rock as she has no mother.

Miranda and her friends' failure to return from the Rock was explained by film critic, Sandra Hall, as their 'being swallowed up by the land' as a result of what is 'sinister in nature'.⁴⁷ This view, however, is contradicted by the girl's joyful climb and their willing entry into the final cleft. As Robin Wright noted,

⁴⁶Green, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, p. 26.

⁴⁷Sandra Hall, *Critical Business: The New Australian Cinema in Review*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1985, p. 3, p.

Far from Hanging Rock attacking and destroying the girls, they willingly answer the call to reject the repressive rules of civilisation and accept a symbiotic reunion with, and absorption into, the powerful generating force of the land.⁴⁸

In this, Wright alluded to the girls' transition to adulthood as the most lucid explanation of the film. Jessica Benjamin has pointed out that the child, in the early Oedipal conflict, came to dread the mother and rejected her in favour of the father until 'cultural hegemony takes over'.⁴⁹ The influence of society here is crucial to the argument. With many young women, the stage of bitter disharmony with their mother ends after adolescence when they move to return to the position of closeness they enjoyed at the beginning of their life. Nancy Chodorow explored this cyclical aspect of the girl's relationship with her mother which became the foundation of her maternal role. Chodorow noted the girl's tendency to return to her mother to find, 'safe and familiar refuge against her father's frustrating and frightening aspects'.⁵⁰ Her influential thesis rested on the way the girl imitated her mother's role.⁵¹ *Picnic at Hanging Rock* reflected this important stage in the girl's move back to her mother.⁵²

Miranda, who is given a prophetic, intuitive aura in the film, has understood the girls' mission on the Rock from the outset. She is aware that they will not disappear forever and informs her favourite French teacher that they will only be away for a short time. Earlier, at the college, she acknowledges that a segment of her life is coming to a close

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⁴⁸Robin Wright, 'Metaphors of Femininity and Australian Landscape: Two *New Wave* Films' in J. Benson, K. Berryman & W. Levy (eds), *Screening the Past: The Sixth Australian History and Film Conference Papers*, Melbourne, 1993, p. 90.

⁴⁹Jessica Benjamin, 'The Omnipotent Mother', in D. Bassin, M. Honey & M.M. Kaplan (eds), *Representations of Motherhood*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1994, p. 132.

⁵⁰Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 1978a, p. 129.

⁵¹See chapters 1 and 5 for more detailed analyses of Chodorow's thesis.

⁵²I pondered on the significance of the scene at Appleyard College, where Mrs Appleyard criticised Sara's romantic poems and insisted — unsuccessfully — that she learn one of Mrs Heman's poems instead. Felicia Dorothea Hemans was a nineteenth century poet of note but not fame, who in the poem chosen by Mrs Appleyard, *Evening Prayer at a Girl's School*, extolled the inherited capability and virtue of women's ability to sacrifice. In my reading of this often frustratingly convoluted film, Mrs Appleyard's function was to reinforce the idea of the end of schoolgirl romantic attachments in favour of the women's true role in life: maintaining her mother's sacrifice and service. Seen in this light, Mrs Heman's poem was an appropriate text.

as she tells her room-mate, Sara, who writes romantic love poems to her 'You must learn to love someone else — I won't be here much longer'. At the same time, she invites Sara to her property in Queensland to meet her 'sweet funny family'. Miranda's comforting words to her French teacher and her poignant talk with Sara are not contradictory. She knows that she is not going to die, although understands that she will shortly begin her adult life. Her romanticised adolescent girl-love for Sara is almost ended. This is made extraordinarily graphic in the film as Miranda takes a knife and stabs the heart of the St Valentine's cake. The cake in this instance is not a symbol of adult romance, and belongs to the school-girl world of Valentine's Day cards and poems that the girls have been passionately sighing over before leaving for the picnic. Miranda is ready to turn to her mother: to become like her; to find a partner, marry and have children.

Though the absorption into the Rock/mother is not permanent, the girls' disappearance clearly stands for a momentous and extraordinary passage in their life. There is a depth of feeling about the Rock which is exemplified by Annette Kuhn's words on representations of women as 'eternal, mythical and unchanging'⁵³ Irma confirms that the Rock has 'been waiting a million years, just for us'. This indicates, as film scholar, Adrian Martin acknowledged, that their 'disappearance is predestined'.⁵⁴ It is aligned to a specific period in the life of the girls, depicted strongly when a prescient Miranda declares, 'Everything begins and ends at exactly the right time and place'. The girls' entry into the Rock marks their turning away from the attraction of the father and towards a return to the bosom of the mother. They leave the school, which is figured as a masculine, rational, place of cultivation where they learn mathematics and Latin and are subject to the strict regime of Mrs Appleyard, to enter the feminine, emotional world of nature and birth. Green's script notes are validatory. 'The monolith, rising up ahead. A single outcrop of pock-marked stone, a monstrous egg perched above a precipitous drop to the plain'.⁵⁵

⁵³Annette Kuhn quoted by Sneja Gunew, 'What Does Woman Mean?: Reading, Writing and Reproduction' *Hecate: A Woman's Interdisciplinary Journal*, volume ix, number 182, 1983, p. 111.

⁵⁴Adrian Martin, 'Fantasy' in *The New Australian Cinema*, p. 97.

⁵⁵Green, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, p. 29.

The fate of the others on the Rock substantiates this reading. Edith climbs with the girls, although she is younger, different and not yet ready to give up her adolescent ways. She is a 'cry-baby' and her moods swing from happiness to gloom. She is still weighted with 'puppy fat', which is so much a contrast to the sylph-like older girls she accompanies. Her stormy period of adolescence and 'mother-hatred' is not finished. Another corroboration can be found in the character of Michael, the Englishman who has seen and instantly fallen in love with Miranda. Distraught by her disappearance and frantic to find her, he follows her path on the Rock. Michael is a man, however, and may not return to the mother. He must separate and find his own path. The entry to the 'dark vaginal tunnel' and 'womb-like space' described by Wright⁵⁶ is barred to him. Only half-alive after his struggle to be united with Miranda, he stumbles back down the Rock, to his proper place in civilisation.⁵⁷ Irma also is rejected, so, perhaps, she is not ready to give up her education and cultured life and assume the domestic life of her mother.⁵⁸ The other significant character, the mathematics mistress, Miss McCraw, disappears with the girls. Oddly, we are not shown her climb on to the Rock, although Edith tells the search party that she passed her teacher as she ran from the Rock in terror. The disappearance of Miss McCraw is an enigma. Perhaps, she is the older aunt figure, who is needed to facilitate the girls' entry into adulthood. On the other hand, her surrender to the Rock may mark a momentous change in her life. Her earlier pointed and wistful, admiring glances at the beautiful French teacher indicated a dissatisfaction with her 'masculine' pursuits of trigonometry and, perhaps, a desire, even at her mature age, to reunite with the female world of her mother.

⁵⁶Wright, 'Metaphors of Femininity and Australian Landscape', p. 90.

⁵⁷There is additional confirmation of Michael's role in Miranda's life. After the girls' disappearance, he speaks enigmatically of 'going away north — to Queensland'. This suggests that he will be united with Miranda on her family's property. In his plan, he will propose marriage and they will begin their life together.

⁵⁸She is perhaps inclined toward the men's world of business. While climbing the rock with her friends, she tells them 'Papa made a million out of a mine once'. Additionally, Meaghan Morris noted 'The sensual and already worldly charms of the dark-haired Irma (Jane Vallis) are of a higher order [to that of the lower class handyman and maid at the school]'. Morris, 'Personal Relationships and Sexuality', p. 143.

George Miller's *The Man from Snowy River* (1982) also rested on the figure of the metaphorical mother, although there were no mysterious intellectual aspirations in the film. Perhaps, this was the reason for its harsh critical reception and contrasting public acclamation at the box office. It was based on the famous bush ballad by Banjo Paterson and told the story of Jim Craig, a young motherless man who lived with his father in the high country of Victoria. Although 'actual' mothers have no role in *The Man from Snowy River*, the mother-as-the-landscape was established from the introduction.

It is night time and the moonlight and eerie sounds of wild animals add to the strangeness, emotion and 'femaleness' of the scene. Womb-like, the darkness envelops a small primitive hut, its ordered, rectangular windows in contrast to the feminine arc of the moon. Inside the hut, two men discuss the accounts and the lack of money, as men typically do. Jim's father, Henry, ruefully points out that they will have to leave the high country and get a job on the plains. The cold, unattractive setting of their room lacks a woman's touch and contrasts with the wildness and passion of the hut's external world. Their dinner, significantly described as an inexpert male effort, is interrupted by noises from the bush. Outside, the pounding of horses' feet adds to the emotional atmosphere. The men discover that their mare has been excited by a herd of wild horses which is led by a great black stallion. Jim stops his father from shooting the horse and tells him he has a plan to capture him and use the wild herd for breeding. Jim thinks that only a 'crafty mountain man' would be capable of achieving this almost impossible aim. Enigmatically, the father replies that he has his mother's way about him. Perhaps, he means that Jim shares his mother's affinity with the mountain, although there is no telling reply and scrolling titles indicate that this scene is the prologue of the film.

The main section of the film opens with Jim and his father sawing a huge tree to make a holding compound to entrap the stallion and his mares. They look at each other slyly as though they are colluding in some private male game. They represent culture as they cut into the forest, nature, the woman. The bush, however, in this instance, is treacherous

and surprisingly and suddenly, Henry Craig is killed by a falling tree trunk. It is left to the now orphaned Jim to take his place and run the property.

The beginning of his ritualised entry to manhood is played out on a clearing high-up in magnificent mountain country where Jim contemplates his parents' graves. In a curious, almost biblically prophetic scene, six men on horseback sweep up the ridge to confront him. The low camera angles lend a feeling of potency and power to the men on horseback. Like the voice of God, their leader shouts at Jim that he has not yet earned the right to live in the high country; that he must go away and prove himself a man. It has already been established in the narrative that Jim's mother is present in the landscape and a clear echo of the man's loud voice is her ratification of the challenge. The magnificent six swirl away on their horses. The group lacks only Clancy of the Overflow, who, as an almost Christ-like figure in the film, might have been with them.

The time has come, as Wright observed, that 'the boy child must separate from his mountain mother in order to become a man and return and take possession of the land'.⁵⁹ Jim accepts the challenge and leaves the high country. He rides down to the plains and stops to contemplate his new, temporary home. The structures that he gazes at are not of the bush, and are of civilisation and society. Tom O'Regan described the contrast as, 'the civilised lowlands and the "natural" highlands of the mountains'.⁶⁰ On the plains, the houses are huge and neat; the grass mown. The soundtrack augments the scene and pastoral music and pan flutes accompany the vision. Here, in a high-ceilinged, heavily furnished room, the beautiful Jessica plays the piano. She takes afternoon tea with her aunt and uses the finest china. Servants attend to the domestic chores. Presiding over this edifice to male colonisation in the Australian bush, is Harrison, the patriarch. There is a skeleton, however, in Harrison's cupboard. It appears that Jessica's mother, Matilda, had loved both Harrison and his brother, called Spur in the film, although he must have

⁵⁹Wright, 1993, p. 89.

⁶⁰Tom O'Regan, 'The Man from Snowy River and Australian Popular Culture', in Moran & O'Regan, *An Australian Film Reader*, p. 249.

the right to also be called Harrison. In a jealous rage years earlier, Harrison had shot Spur, causing him to lose a leg.

The culture/nature division was exemplified by the two brothers, Harrison and Spur, both played by the American actor, Kirk Douglas. Spur has fled Harrison's cultivated space and returned to nature. He lives in a hut in the mountains and spends his days searching for gold. The mine he has been working for twenty years is mother figure, a 'black hole' in the mountain and a womb-like cavity where he spends his days. He talks to the mine as if it were a woman, admonishing it for keeping gold from him, calling it a 'damned old trollop' and 'nothing but a harlot'. As Wright remarked, salvation comes for Spur by 'mother earth lifting her skirts',⁶¹ and revealing two shiny tracks of gold. The cruel mother who stood in the way of his aim to win both his fortune and Matilda and who has allowed him to work for so long without reward, has at last become the nurturing body and her bountiful veins are revealed.

Although she died before the narrative starts, Matilda was important as a mother figure, not least because she was responsible for beginning the chain of events in the film. She was in some ways 'the mother of the narrative'. Twenty years before the opening of the film, Matilda freed the 'colt from Old Regret', who had taken to the mountains and grown to be the 'crafty' stallion that Jim so desired to capture. Matilda's name, the rousing end to the film which features *Waltzing Matilda* and the song's position in the national identity, led Wright to propose that Matilda was, 'perhaps, the mother of all Australians'.⁶² According to O'Regan, 'The playing of *Waltzing Matilda* as Jim arrived back at his home in the mountains, addressed the audience as Australian'. O'Regan reported that audiences applauded and horns were blown at drive-in theatres in excitement.⁶³ Further, Matilda set Spur and Harrison against each other, declaring she would marry the first to make his fortune. The paths the men chose formed archetypal

⁶¹Wright, 'Metaphors of Femininity and Australian Landscape', p. 89.

⁶²Wright, 'Metaphors of Femininity and Australian Landscape', p. 90.

⁶³O'Regan, *The Man from Snowy River and Australian Popular Culture*, pp. 250.

Australian male pursuits. Harrison went to make his fortune in gambling, Spur—to dig for gold.

There were many scenes in the film which identified the mother in the landscape, none, perhaps, more than those with the significantly motherless, Jessica. She experienced the landscape as a bifurcated pre-Oedipal mother who is furious one moment and nurturing the next. Her own mother, Matilda, died in childbirth and Jessica has reached a stage in her life where she is curious to find out more about her. A turning-point in the film marked Jessica's separation from her family and beginning of her adult life. After a violent argument with her father, Jessica rides off, away from her station home into the high country to find Jim. Here, the maternal body in the form of the wet, misty land encapsulates her and threatens to absorb her. The weather worsens and in a severe storm, a frightened Jessica falls from her horse and finds herself on a precipice, high above the plains, yet below the safety of the ridge. Freezing and wind-blown, Jessica is in danger of imminent death until Jim rescues her. She recognises the mountain's duality, and tells Jim, 'one minute it's like paradise, the next it's trying to kill you'. What she, perhaps, does not realise yet, is that the mountain-mother, like all good mothers, is only punishing her to help her. By creating the dangerous situation for Jessica, in the traditional manner, she has brought her a suitor.

While Jessica experienced the mother in the landscape as a pre-Oedipal figure, Jim's relation to the land re-enacted the Oedipal conflict. Before he was allowed to take over the Craig property in the high country, he had to 'earn the right'. By the end of the film, after he had triumphed over tasks which placed him in conflict with the mountain, Jim was accepted as the rightful owner of the property. As Wright observed, the mountains 'create' men, so 'the mountains and the mother are one and the same'.⁶⁴ The Oedipal triangle was made up of Jim, his father and the mountain, his symbolic mother. Although he was not blamed for his father's death, in fact Jim *was* responsible, as it was

⁶⁴Wright, 'Metaphors of Femininity and Australian Landscape', p. 89.

his negligence that allowed the huge crushing tree trunk which killed his father, to fall out of control.⁶⁵ His attention had been diverted from his work by the stallion which had come to claim their mare. Attempting to explicate the symbolism of the film, Dermody and Jacka declared, 'The strongest link is between, horses, mountains and sexuality'.⁶⁶ In Oedipal terms, Jim killed his father and turned to his mother, figured as the landscape, home of the wild creatures.

In rescuing Jessica, the 'hard' man Jim, as Wright described him,⁶⁷ has turned away from the mountain mother towards a heterosexual union and a resolution of his Oedipal conflict. The two lovers cling to each other on the now dry high plateau. Jessica is warm and comfortable and she tells Jim, 'it's so peaceful here it's like we're the only two people on earth'. Jim holds Jessica and they kiss. There is a dissolve to a high shot and the lens pulls back from the close-up to an ultra-long-shot. The music swells and the two tiny figures are dwarfed by the landscape. As Schaffer noted of another film, it appears that they are viewed from above 'from the imagined position of an all-powerful mother'.⁶⁸ Ideas of a maternal presence are difficult to overlook as it seems that the omnipotent mother has typically, been instrumental in arranging a suitable partner for her child. Turner recognised the part played by the metaphorical mother when he observed, 'its enormous vistas of the high country dwarfing human affairs even as it takes Jim and Jessica to its craggy bosom'.⁶⁹

In the films so far, we have seen the metaphorical mother in the landscape as a nurturer, a shelterer, a path to adulthood and an omnipotent, though kindly presence. Hints of her power and wrath were discernible in *The Man from Snowy River*, although she could be more forceful than any of these films has acknowledged. In symbolic representations of

⁶⁵Dermody and Jacka also hold Jim indirectly responsible for his father's death, but the reason they offer is that earlier, in the prologue, he would not allow his father to kill the stallion, Dermody & Jacka, *The Screening of Australia*, p. 182.

⁶⁶Dermody & Jacka, *The Screening of Australia*, p. 183.

⁶⁷Wright, 'Metaphors of Femininity and Australian Landscape', p. 89.

⁶⁸Schaffer, *Women and the Bush*, p. 55.

⁶⁹Turner, *National Fictions*, p. 50.

the 'land as mother', the bush could be both active and controlling. Val Plumwood, for example, in her writing on Gaia, the Earth mother, maintained that nature, as the nurturing mother, was a potent force as the source of life. Psychologist, Janet Sayers, noted that the 'phallic mother' who appears in myths, religion and stories was associated with nature and the earth and was frequently the cause of famine and droughts.⁷⁰ The American film critic, Lynda Bundtzen, remarked on the darker side of the mother in her review of the James Cameron film, *Aliens*. She noted the construction of nature as a powerful, evil mother 'a womb-tomb that threatens to engulf everyone'.⁷¹ These insights removed the image of 'the mother from a passive beneficent position. They proposed that the maternal presence, often thought of as acquiescent and nourishing, could also be vengeful or dominating.

The 'good' and the 'bad' mother of the bush can be understood from Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic account. Klein recognised the pre-Oedipal mother as a primary love object with power of life and death over her child. She illustrated the conflicting emotions the child felt about the mother, by using the metaphor of the 'good and bad breast'. Klein posited that while the mother nurtured the infant she was 'good', although when she withdrew, as during the weaning process, she threatened the infant's life and became the 'bad' mother.⁷² The child retained these powerful ambivalent feelings about its mother. The analogy of the good and bad mother could be projected onto metaphors of the bush, where the nurturing mother earth allowed growth which sustained life, and the vengeful mother earth threatened destruction with droughts, floods and fire.

While some films idealised the land as the good mother and the source of life, the nurturing mother of the bush was not always appropriate. Tulloch described the recurrence of two alternative images of the Australian bush, the first—a 'source of

⁷⁰Janet Sayers, *Sexual Contradictions: Psychology, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism*, Tavistock, London, 1986, p. 59.

⁷¹Lynda K. Bundtzen, 'Monstrous Mothers: Medusa, Grendel, and now Alien', *Film Quarterly*, volume XL, number 3, Spring 1987, p. 17.

⁷²Melanie Klein, *Narrative of a Child Analysis: The Conduct of the Psycho-Analysis of Children as Seen in the Treatment of a Ten-year-old Boy*, Virago, London, 1989, (1961), p. 146, n.1.

morality and wisdom' and the second—the 'horror of being lost'.⁷³ Additionally, as Gibson pointed out, because the culture had failed to subdue nature, the destructive force of the land was frequently recognised.⁷⁴ It could be harsh and exacting, it housed poisonous creatures whose bite could kill, its rivers could flood and drown, its trees could fall and crush and its droughts could starve the farm out of existence. In hard times, the land came to be thought of as the bad mother who failed to nurture her children. Crises such as drought often necessitated leaving the land, a situation which prevailed in the 1920 Franklyn Barrett film, *The Breaking of the Drought*, when a prolonged national dry spell ruined Jo Galloway's farm. This precipitated what Tulloch described as an Oedipal conflict, as Jo had to move from the land to the city, in psychoanalytic imagery, from the mother to the father.⁷⁵ Galloway leaves his property reluctantly, and is able to find a job in the city and make enough money to keep his family. In the mythology of bush films, the pastoralist's leaving his land was never unproblematic and it was as traumatic as his separation from his pre-Oedipal mother.

Another side to the fearful mother of the bush can be detected in the mythology of the mother who might consume her child. Schaffer proposed that, 'The fear that the land might come to *absorb* its inhabitants is a common feature within the discourse on the Australian tradition'.⁷⁶ Tales of being lost in the bush and the terror associated with the possibility of mysteriously disappearing were linked by Schaffer to the stories of the early explorers and reports of their being 'swallowed up by the landscape'.⁷⁷

In *The Woman Suffers* (1918) directed by Raymond Longford and available in almost complete form, Marion is forced to flee with her young son from the brutality of a drunken husband. Leaving her home, the site of the masculine threat, the intertitle tells

⁷³John Tulloch, was discussing Beaumont Smith's *The Hayseeds*, (1933), Tulloch, *Australian Cinema*, p. 179.

⁷⁴Gibson, 'Formative Landscapes', p. 50.

⁷⁵Tulloch, *Australian Cinema*, p. 121.

⁷⁶Kay Schaffer, 'Landscape Representation and Australian National Identity', *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies*, volume 4, number 2, May 1987, pp. 47-60 and see also Chapter 3 of Schaffer, *Women and the Bush*, pp. 52-76, especially pp. 52-3.

⁷⁷Schaffer, *Women and the Bush*, p. 52.

us she *staggers towards the cover of the bush*, which, typically, she believes will provide safe shelter. Initially the bush is established as nurturer and protector, although like the pre-Oedipal mother figure, it can be transformed into its opposite. Mother and son, according to the title, *roam the bush all night* and eventually they fall, exhausted. The next morning, Marion is found unconscious and taken by her rescuers to a nearby property. When she wakes, she is told — and accepts the information with sorrow, and without surprise — that her son cannot be found. There was no trace of the boy and there appeared no alternative except to assume that he has been absorbed by the bush.

The scene worked in the narrative because the legend surrounding the fearful and devouring landscape was both accepted and widely understood. The viewer soon learned, although the information was kept from Marion for more than twenty years, that there was a more prosaic explanation. Her son, a tiny boy of about two years old, had wandered away from his mother during the night of their escape, and was picked up by neighbours from *Kooringa* Station. Sadly, communications were not as efficient then as later in the century, and Marion was ignorant of his subsequent adoption by the new family or that he came to be 'loved by all'.

In a later film, a musical farce, *The Hayseeds* (1933), a young woman from the city, Mary Townleigh, decides to go walking through the bush in search of wildflowers. She has been told by the pastoralist — the primary hayseed — that the bush has all the flora and fauna found in the Garden of Eden, although he warns her that it also contains the snake. Mary walks until she is lost and falls exhausted to the ground, in much the same manner as had Marion in *The Woman Suffers* some fifteen years earlier. The families are distraught and despite the pleasant weather and Mary's apparent good health, search parties are dispatched. The almost unable-to-be spoken threat is that Mary will disappear; that the phallic mother will absorb and destroy her. However, this is a Beaumont Smith comedy and as a happy ending must ensue, the vengeful mother is inappropriate. Mary is found by John Manners who lives nearby in an idyllic bush hut,

complete with campfire and white cockatoo. He serenades the young woman, bandages her ankle and the next morning restores her to her family. In this film a benevolent bush/mother has not only saved the child, but in time-honoured tradition, has found her a suitor.

A much later film reflected the troubling and astonishing way that society still relied on the absorbing mother of the bush. The film was a record of a real occurrence and attempted a rational explanation of a child's disappearance in the face of the unfounded hysteria that surrounded the event. Fred Schepisi's *Evil Angels* (1988), told the story of the baby, Azaria Chamberlain, who was taken by a dingo from a tent where she lay sleeping, in the camping ground at Uluru one summer's night. Although the baby's body was never found, her mother, Lindy, was charged with her murder. No motive could be established and when challenges to the justice of the trial were mounted and additional evidence discovered, she was exonerated.

Schepisi was perturbed at the behaviour of the many Australians who thought Lindy guilty of murder and called for her blood. He set out in his film to present what he saw as the truth of her innocence and the guilt of the media and the people who condemned her.⁷⁸ Schaffer, likewise, puzzled over how people could be so sure that the mother was guilty of murdering her baby, when there was no evidence to convict her. Schaffer saw a link between the outpourings of frustration and venom and a deep-seated 'consciousness of what it means to be Australian'. The baby's disappearance into the bush stimulated the association of Lindy, the bad, vengeful mother who could murder her innocent child, to their primal fears of the power and strength of mother nature.⁷⁹ The fantasy surrounding the case was also evident from the writing of Felicity Collins, who titled her review of the film, 'Bad mother lost child to hungry wolf'.⁸⁰ Perhaps, if Azaria's father, Michael,

⁷⁸Scott Murray, 'Fred Schepisi, Pushing the Boundaries': a career interview', *Cinema Papers*, number 80, August 1990, pp. 28-42.

⁷⁹Schaffer, *Women and the Bush*, pp. 64-5.

⁸⁰Felicity Collins, 'Bad mother lost child to hungry wolf', *Cinema Papers*, number 71, January 1989, p. 56.

instead of Lindy, had put Azaria to bed on the night the baby was taken by a dingo, such hostility might not have been aroused and the charge of murder might never have been laid. Schepisi did not, however, investigate this observation on the nation's psyche, and his film, while designed to reflect the Australian landscape, did not involve questions of motherhood, and was similar to the many tales of racism, violence and bigotry which have come out of films of America's deep south.

A different and less threatening metaphorical mother, peculiar to Australian films, perhaps, came with the notion of England as the Mother Country. This was an idea which was part of the early colonisation and was prevalent at least until the 1980s, when pluralism was seen as a better and more appropriate option. Many films alluded to England as a revered older mother while Australia, as the new land, was expected to be productive and was placed in the virgin or 'soon-to-be-mother' role. This linking of the two lands with maternal associations could be seen with the repeated use of Edward Elgar's musical homage to his English homeland, *Land of Hope and Glory*,⁸¹ which was used to underscore many scenes of an Australian landscape and gumtrees.

One of Chauvel's early films, *Heritage* (1935) for example, contained references to both England and Australia in its narrative, and used different mother images in each case. *Heritage*, a major cinematic undertaking, told the story of the Australian colony from 1788 to 1935. In Sydney, at the beginning of the film, the pioneers spoke of the land as they did of the women, as an object for pleasure, something desirable which was waiting to be 'selected' or claimed. When the 'wife ship' arrives on the Sydney docks from England, the men fight each other for the right to choose a particular woman to be their wife and mother of their children. Standing in the crowd of men waiting expectantly at the wharf, the protagonist, Jim Morrison, shouts, 'Look at that girl, she's mine!' Later, with Shorty, his partner, he is discussing his aspirations to marry and settle down 'I've been hearing about real country — virgin country'. Shorty replies with what

⁸¹The second line is 'Mother of the free'.

Cunningham refers to as 'a tasteless joke', that the land on the other side of the Blue Mountains cannot be virgin country because all the women have children.⁸² The association of land and motherhood was continued throughout the film. Chauvel highlighted the importance of the new colony's expeditions and there were many exhortations, most frequently from William Charles Wentworth, for the men to 'pierce the wilderness' and cultivate the land.

Heritage began by aligning the Australian bush with virgin/soon-to-be-mother images and concluded by incorporating England as revered older mother into the analogy. Near the end of the film, in 1935, the pastoralist, Frank Morrison, a descendant of the pioneer Jim, lobbies Parliament for some assistance for his own and his neighbours' land in the Northern Territory. Morrison's speech is passionate. With the assistance of *Land of Hope and Glory*, he announces that Australia had her birth in the suffering of great men and women. He emphasises that Australians are '*one* people' and that 'the bonds that bind us to the Empire should be bonds of steel'. As other commentators, like William Routt, have pointed out, the speech made no sense at all in Morrison's quest for concessions for the Northern Territory.⁸³ Instead, perhaps, it indicated the anxiety felt at this time when the ties to England were being questioned.⁸⁴ It was not too fanciful to relate this anxiety to that of the child who was about to leave its mother. The maternal figure was England and Morrison, while conceding that he must start his adulthood in the new land, made a case for maintaining old family ties. He went to the capital to claim 'favours' for his land and future family in the Northern Territory, by talking about 'conquering great forests' and producing 'rich crops from cursed soil,' and appeared to lose heart when he realised that this meant leaving the motherland. Instead of appealing to the government to grant funds for the land, he switched mid-speech and proclaimed

⁸²Cunningham, *Featuring Australia*, p. 106.

⁸³William Routt, 'On the Expression of Colonialism in Early Australian Film: Charles Chauvel and Naive Cinema' in Moran & O'Regan, *An Australian Film Reader*, pp. 58-9.

⁸⁴Morrison's speech was put into political context by Bruce Molloy, *Before the Interval: Australian Mythology as Feature Films, 1930-1960*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland, 1990, p. 113, and Cunningham, 1991, p. 107.

his allegiance to England. In this film, the man's loyalty to his biological mother ended up greater than to his adopted one.

A strong connection of the Australian bush to the image of the Mother Country could also be found in Ken G. Hall's *It Isn't Done* (1937). An Australian farmer, Hubert Blaydon, finds that he has inherited a title and annuity in England. He travels there with his wife and adult daughter, intending to take up residence on the estate. His rough 'bush' manners, however, are not acceptable in the snobbish English upper-class society and he decides to return home. In a typical egalitarian mood, he discusses his decision with his English butler. To the strains of the ubiquitous *Land of Hope and Glory*,⁸⁵ Blaydon, with the rebuff from the aristocrats on his mind, tells the butler, 'You made England great'. He continues his passionate speech with a eulogy to hearth and home, calling it the 'Fairest child of the motherland — Australia — God's country'. While the execution of Blaydon's beliefs was a little confused in the film — his speech focused on the greatness of England, whilst he was rushing to leave it for another place — the substance of Australian colonial settlement reverberated through the narrative. England was represented as the mother and the outback of Australia became the place where her sons were offered opportunities for adventure and a place for their own family.

The Mother's Experience in the Bush

The second section of this chapter considers the representation of the mother's actual experience of living in the bush. Most depictions of the land appeared to privilege the male figure, leaving the woman's place, when she had one, as one of secondary importance. While the metaphorical mother could be found in different forms in most bush films, the actual mother was a peripheral character and often, not there at all. The phenomenon of motherless daughters in Australian films has been discussed in terms of the women's strength and independence. Some of these daughters lamented their

⁸⁵*Land of Hope and Glory* was used again by Ken G. Hall in *Dad Rudd M.P.*, (1940) to underline Dad's maiden speech in Parliament, when he called for Australians to 'let the blood of true nationalism to run fast in your veins'.

mother's death, although in many Australian films of the bush, the mother appeared to be so unimportant that she was not even mentioned.⁸⁶ Even when there was a mother in the cast, she was frequently outside the main focus of the film, uncomplainingly pottering around the house attending to domestic chores, such as preparing meals and washing. Film narratives of the bush were often limited by stereotypical representations of mothers in subservient positions: as passive, nurturing souls who supported men in what was seen as masculine quests to tame the wilderness.

Many of the bush films were about early settlement and those set contemporaneously, followed the 'man on the land' ideas inspired by tales of challenges faced by the colonisers.⁸⁷ Although women in the outback in the early days of the colony were living in a decidedly masculine society, they were not sedentary as the films might indicate and were active in shaping the society in areas of child socialisation, temperance, reproduction and contraception.⁸⁸ Letters written by women at the time recalled their actual pioneering experience and have shown that they worked with men, labouring not only within the domestic sphere, but outside, on the land.⁸⁹ Lucy Frost, in her book *No Place for a Nervous Lady*, for example, discovered correspondence from one woman who was eight months pregnant. This pioneer was a 'first rate dairy woman' whose activities included curing meat, making butter and cheese, fattening the calves and pigs as well as baking and washing.⁹⁰ Women were responsible for caring for the family and

⁸⁶See chapter 5 for more details of the squatter's daughter, a familiar character in Australian films. The father's presence, but mother's unexplained absence occurs in many films, for instance, *Silks and Saddles* (1921), *The Moth of Moonbi* (1926), *Greenhide* (1926), *The Silence of Dean Maitland* (1934), *The Shiralee* (1957), *Sunday Too Far Away* (1975) and *Crocodile Dundee* (1986).

⁸⁷The act of colonisation was aggressively masculine and many of the men came to tame and conquer the wilderness. According to William Routt, the motivation for the colonisers in their move from their home to the new land was 'a desire for power'. W.D. Routt, 'The Fairest Child of the Motherland: Colonialism and Family in Films of the 1920s and 1930s', in A. Moran & T. O'Regan, (eds), *Australian Screen*, Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria, 1989, pp. 28-52.

⁸⁸Grimshaw, 'Man's Own Country', pp. 182-209.

⁸⁹See for example, 'Women in Australia: Pioneers', Sol Encel, Norman MacKenzie & Margaret Tebbutt, *Women and Society: An Australian Study*, Malaby, London, 1975, pp. 23-39.

⁹⁰Lucy Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady: Voices from the Australian Bush*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland, 1995 (1984), p. 120.

in this capacity, according to Grimshaw, they 'underwrote the economic transformation of colonial Australia'.⁹¹

Despite the many females involved in the pioneering experience, there appeared to be no place for women; no language which allowed for their contribution. In one sense, Manning Clark recognised the contradiction when he suggested that although the bush was described by men as 'no place for a woman', the mother was frequently a vital part of bush life, taking what Clark described as a 'central position in the family'.⁹² Clark wrote of the woman in the bush in a supportive role, coming 'into her own' when the man became 'unsteady' and 'erratic'. While his description of the man's behaviour may have been far too charitable,⁹³ he identified an anomaly. Women, 'the fairer sex', the venerated mothers, the 'little ladies' were meant to be weak and dependent on the stronger, tougher males. In this paradigm, the bush was 'no place for a woman'. Yet, as Clark made clear, women 'came into their own' in the bush. Not only did they survive, many were able to achieve a degree of authority within the home, while at the same time enduring minimal social and economic power and lack of recognition for the work they were forced to perform.

Faced with traditional stereotypes which lauded the bushman as the cultural hero, filmmakers were probably confused at where the woman's place, particularly the mother's, was to be. Their reliance on androcentric bush legends in their narratives reinforced gendered structures of the man as subject/culture and the woman as object/nature. This position was supported by the male subject cinematic gaze as the imperative of film narrative. The ambivalence was reflected in Shane and Matthew O'Riordan's post-prandial discussion in Chauvel's film, *Sons of Matthew*, (1949).

⁹¹Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath & Marian Quartly, *Creating a Nation*, McPhee Gribble/Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria, 1994, p. 121.

⁹²Manning Clark quoted by Schaffer, *Women and the Bush*, p. 71, see also C.M.H. Clark, *A History of Australia III, The Beginning of an Australian Civilization 1824-1851*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, 1973, p. 272.

⁹³See Barbara Baynton's short stories eg *The Chosen Vessel* and *A Dreamer*, S. Krimmer and A. Lawson, (eds), *Barbara Baynton*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, Queensland, 1980, pp. 11-26; pp. 81-8.

Matthew and his son Shane are talking about their project to conquer the wild Lamington Plateau and make a home there. Shane warns, 'It'll be no place for a woman'. Matthew stoically takes a pull on his pipe and replies, 'I've never known a place that wasn't for a woman, — they make the place'.

The idea of women 'making the place' was interesting in bush films which were always seen from a male perspective. Perhaps, it was no wonder that women 'made the place', as their place revolved around taking care of the family in dreadful conditions and performing tasks which were unsung and unpraised. When the mother was given a role in films apart from her housewifely duties, she accepted hardships in an uncomplaining way which indicated her stoicism, while at the same time, trivialised her contribution. Ultimately, it appeared, she was there 'to stand by her man'. There were few examples in film which compare with the subversion of Barbara Baynton's stories which described the misery and callousness that most women in the bush were forced to endure.⁹⁴

In Raymond Longford's *On Our Selection* (1920), Ma Rudd sows the seed and strips corn at the side of her husband and children as well as finding time for her domestic duties. In Harry Watt's *The Overlanders* (1946), the mother takes charge of the camp and feeds all the workers, dropping everything to take an injured rider to hospital hundreds of miles away. 'We'll be okay', she assures her husband cheerily as she moves off into the wilderness. In Ralph Smart's *Bitter Springs* (1950), the mother accepts the destruction of her new house without complaint and later stands stoically, with rifle ready beside the men, to ward off angry Aborigines. In Fred Zinneman's *The Sundowners* (1960), the mother is staunchly agreeable despite her husband's huge gambling loss of the money she has carefully saved for a house which she hopes will end their itinerant lifestyle. The ideological message in all these films was that although bush life was demanding, the mother would always be resolute and uncomplaining.

⁹⁴See Frost, *No Place for a Nervous Lady*, p.1.

There is a poignant, though subtle, recognition of a woman's silent understanding of hardship in Raymond Longford's *The Pioneers*, of which, unfortunately, only a tantalising six-minute section of the prologue remains. The material is marked and almost obliterated by the aging and disintegration of the nitrate film, although it shows a man and a woman travelling through the bush in a horse and cart. Donald and Mary are pioneers: the bush dwarfs them, enormous trees surround and contain them. The environment is primitive, wild and impenetrable. Donald sees a challenge because he wants to own his own piece of earth. Mary sees hardship in a strange and lonely land. Her countenance gives a hint of the problems that she knows her bush life might bring.

A typical, more detailed portrait of the mother in the bush could be found in Donald Crombie's *The Irishman* (1978). While the film essentially was concerned with men's business — the eponymous father's failure to accept that the days of the horse-drawn timber wagons were over, and the coming-of-age drama of his two sons, there was also a part for the long-suffering mother. Jenny Doolan puts up with hardships that were probably synonymous with the lives of pioneering women. She works constantly and although she suffers with a bad back, she uncomplainingly does the washing for her male family in the copper in the back yard. She endures her husband's absence from home and his gambling, drinking and fighting when he returns. While the design of the film is brighter than the images evoked by Henry Lawson's *The Drover's Wife*, comparisons are inescapable.⁹⁵ Jenny's passive acceptance of Paddy's beating when he comes home in a drunken rage served to belittle her and undermine her strength in the family. As well, Paddy is played by the handsome charismatic actor, Michael Craig, who somehow escapes vilification. Jenny, played ably by Robyn Nevin, although with her usual remoteness and lack-of-humour, creates a less sympathetic character. Her devotion to her brutal, irresponsible husband can be seen as demeaning and inappropriate, considering his insensitive treatment of her.

⁹⁵The film, for instance, was visually beautiful, nowhere more than in the scenes involving the draughthorse team that was Paddy Doolan's pride and joy. Additionally, a light note was introduced in the character of Paddy's mother (played by Tui Bow) who was hilariously odd. A feisty old woman and a prodigious swearer, she died far too early in the film — in the backyard, rounding up the chooks.

While the mother's work was sometimes acknowledged, though usually trivialised in these bush films, the younger unmarried woman fared a little better. Typical was the eponymous heroine of *The Squatter's Daughter*, Joan Enderby, who successfully managed a huge sheep station after the death of her father. Her 'place' is secure as she is clearly more capable than Clive Sherrington, her neighbour. She is able to resist his advances to win her hand in his quest to combine their two properties. The farm prospers under Joan's management. The turning point comes with a spectacular bushfire and Joan is caught in the conflagration and is about to perish. A sad end to the film is averted, however, by her timely rescue by her overseer, Wayne, who is not the penniless drifter he first appears, but the rightful owner of the land that Sherrington has falsely claimed. Joan agrees to marry Wayne, and willingly hands over managerial responsibility to him. She would not have had time to do much anyway, as Wayne intimates that she will be busy providing 'some young chaps' to help him around the farm.

Although she was a capable farm manager who was congratulated on her abilities and who reaped the rewards in her wealthy and autonomous lifestyle, Joan's authority was ultimately altered by her impending motherhood. Her path through the narrative was closely aligned to that of the land. At first, like the land, she took the virgin waiting-to-be-tamed role. Mother Nature interceded in the form of a horrific and terrifying bushfire which altered her relationship with Wayne and provided a husband for her and thus, a 'proper' resolution to the story. Joan moved towards motherhood and relinquished her control of the farming business. The upheaval of the bushfire instigated the merging of the two properties and from the male point-of-view, augured well for a productive future with the land, as well as from the union of the protagonists.

Conclusion

Bush films typically included the young woman who was expected to be as desirable and inviting as the land, and who was required to assume a different role on marriage. When the man chose his wife as he chose his land, his expectation was that their roles were to be synchronous. Both the land and the woman were objectified: they were meant to provide for and nurture the family. In most bush films, the man attended to the cultivation of the property, the growing of the grain, the mending of the fences and so on. The wife was restricted to preparing meals and performing chores within the domestic space. The main focus of the film was the man's activity, which effectively denied, or at least trivialised, the work of the mother on the property. This premise was at the heart of the images which reflected the absence of women in notions of bush life, which at the same time, reinforced masculine notions of the indispensable bush hero.

Australian films of the bush reflected the male's place in the national identity and consequently reinforced the subordinate place of the female. The predominance of the focus on the early days of the colony, considered at least prior to the 1990s to be a marvellous and founding experience, can be explained as a quest to search for roots. To this end, masculinity and belligerence have been celebrated. In American films the land was romanticised; its scenes were panoramic and beautiful, even dry gulches and tumbling tumbleweed towns had appeal. The women in the American westerns were given glamorous and meaningful roles, they were often as sexual and inviting as the landscape. As Gibson argued, however, Australian stories presented the land as a formidable opponent.⁹⁶ The beauty of our land was recognised, although it was touched with something deeply fearful, perhaps, it was as Turner observed, 'tough and dangerous' and 'impossible to conquer'.⁹⁷ Wives and mothers were rarely acknowledged for their contributions, and more readily found their place metaphorically. Australian films were filled with examples of the 'no place for a woman/place of women' ambiguities.

⁹⁶Gibson, 'Formative Landscapes', p. 50.

⁹⁷Turner, *National Fictions*, p. 118.

The mother's place in the bush film is worthy of investigation, simply because of the importance of bush mythology in Australian legends and the acceptance of 'the man as the cultural hero' which underscores them. This chapter has attempted to challenge the dominant position of men in the films by investigating the place of mothers, both in a metaphorical position in the landscape and within their rural households. The mythology used to underpin film narratives has turned out to be crucial. Without the idea of the virgin-waiting-to-be-tamed, without the idea of the bush as nurturing mother, without the fear of the bush as vengeful mother of retribution, films would certainly have offered a different representation of the settlement of Australia. Quite possibly, in a more feminised environment, the male urge to overpower and dominate would not have forged ahead so destructively and arrogantly in a way with which we, in the late twentieth century are having to grapple.⁹⁸

⁹⁸Marilyn Lake made a similar point. She commented that feminist writings have connected the misogyny in Australian culture with the rape of the land. Lake, 'Affirmations of Difference', pp. 297-314.

chapter 8

conclusion

*She 'ad three clothes-pegs in 'er mouth,
an' washin' on 'er arm —¹*

This intertitle, from the 1920 Raymond Longford film, *Ginger Mick*, the sequel to *The Sentimental Bloke*, perfectly describes the mother of early films. One of the scores of missing Australian feature films, *Ginger Mick* carried on the tale of Doreen's life with her husband, the Bloke, and their baby son, who is born at the close of the earlier film.² The words of the intertitle in *Ginger Mick* are accompanied on screen by a line drawing in order to make the meaning quite clear. In the foreground is a large, round, wooden tub. A washboard is perched on the shelf behind it, close to a bottle of Lysol. The figure of the hard-working mother is in the background near a clothesline, where enormous sheets blow in the wind, dwarfing her. Bent almost double over her washing basket, she labours beside a long prop which rests on the ground, ready for her to lift the heavy line into the wind. The film has been lost and we really have no idea who the woman was supposed to be, although the drawing invites speculation. Could she possibly be the lovely, desirable Doreen, the apple of the Bloke's eye, now a housewife and drudge? Perhaps, on the other hand, it is just a generic sketch of motherhood. Either way, the words and the drawing illustrate the stereotypical mother of the early days of cinema, who was constantly occupied with the family's washing.³ The activity is a visual metaphor for her diligence, her uncomplaining care of the family and her regard for cleanliness.

The Good Mother

¹Intertitle reprinted by John Tulloch, *Legends on the Screen: The Australian Narrative Cinema 1919-1929*, Currency/AFI, Sydney, 1981, p. 97, from the National Film Archive.

²For a synopsis see Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977: A Guide to Feature Film Production*, Oxford University Press/AFI, Melbourne, 1980, p. 129.

³It was not limited only to the early days, as it was used as a sign for good mothering as recently as the 1980s, in films like *Cool Change*, *Hightide* and *The More Things Change...*

Images of the good mother provided the mainstay of family films in each decade from 1900 to 1988, except during the 1970s, which has been shown for various reasons to be an aberration in the trajectory of the Australian film. The mother's devotion to her children was depicted in early years by her embraces, particularly those with her son, which, often quite oddly, were more exuberant than decorous.⁴ She was a matronly woman with adult children, although in later decades, younger mothers with younger children filled the maternal role. Motherhood was tantamount to sacrifice and although only one film mother gave up her own food and water for the sake of her family, the inference was that any good mother would have done so, should it be required. The *raison d'être* of motherhood was illustrated by her perpetual preparation of meals and unending cleaning. These activities were the symbols of her primary concern which was the nurture of her family.

Unselfish to a fault, the mother in films appeared to have no desires which were more important than the family's well-being. With few interests outside her domestic duties, she found fulfilment in life through the experiences of others. Even if she had felt deprived or disconsolate that she was always left out of the action which went on around her, there was no space for her to voice her dissatisfaction. However, although the film mother rarely took part in the exciting activities which were the focus of the narrative, she was never idle. So as not to be shown unoccupied, in any precious moments away from household chores, she could be seen industriously knitting or sewing. Unlike other members of her family, she never read the newspaper, or enjoyed a book. Truly 'tied to the house', she did not even venture into public areas such as the markets or to the riverside to do the washing, as in the cinema of other countries. Even in the few films which told of families travelling in the outback, the mother was the camp cook, connected by some invisible cord to her camp oven and fire. No wonder that she was always available to the children, as most often she could be found within the home, in

⁴See for example Ma Galloway with her son Gilbert in Franklyn Barrett's *The Breaking of the Drought* (1920) and Ellen Kelly with Ned in Tony Richardson's *Ned Kelly* (1970).

the kitchen preparing food, in the backyard hanging out the washing, or somewhere within the house, folding clothes, sewing or ironing.

Not all the films, of course, had all these elements. Some highlighted alternatives to the mother's performance because of their great acting, inspired direction or female contribution to the filmmaking process. These maverick films, however, emphasised in their difference, the taken-for-granted aspect that was part of mothering roles in other films. A typical example of what was considered normal behaviour can be found in *Bushfire Moon*, a film made in 1987 by George Miller. It shows a rural family returning from town to find a bushfire burning out of control, close to the homestead. The father orders his wife and teenaged daughter to go inside. He takes his eight-year-old son off with him to put out the blaze. The wife retreats to indoor safety, shuts the windows and takes out her needlework, apparently not disconcerted that her small son was considered a more able person in an emergency. Others also did not find the husband's behaviour unusual, as critic, Suzanne Brown, in a review of the film, noted that the film was 'natural and believable'.⁵

Cinema does not offer an ineluctable recipe for life and the audience is not a passive recipient of its message, though the manner in which mothers have been portrayed is important. While the opportunity to reject, negotiate or accept the representation of the perfect mother in films is undeniably available, many of the women in the audience would have found the representations depressing and difficult to connect with. Their confidence may have been undermined by the on-screen depictions and they may have been puzzled or irritated by the difference in their own experience. In the films, although the families were often beset with problems, the mother acted in an exemplary manner, effectively denying her emotional reaction in the face of difficulties. Those mothers in the audience that were unable to reconcile the image with their own experience, perhaps, should have been assured that 'there are no perfect mothers on this earth', as

⁵Suzanne Brown, '*Bushfire Moon*', [rev. art.], in S. Murray, (ed.), *Australian Film 1978-1992: A Survey of Theatrical Features*, Oxford University Press/AFC and Cinema Papers, South Melbourne, 1993, p. 213.

psychologist, Jane Swigart observed.⁶ Hopefully, they understood that perfect motherhood, based on 'sacrifice and altruistic surrender', was unachievable, as sociologist, Jessie Bernard, indicated.⁷ If, however, they accepted the 'natural' role of the good mother as she was represented in most films, as one who instinctively knew what was best for the child, who never became angry and was content to subordinate her own life for others, they could possibly begin to feel their own skills were inadequate.

As Ann Phoenix and Anne Woollett wrote, 'what is widely accepted as "good mothering" by "good mothers" is socially constructed and has political implications and consequences'.⁸ The introduction of malevolent or bad mothers in films of the 1970s had a surprising and certainly unintentional bonus for women. These film mothers were so much worse than most mothers could imagine, that by comparison, some women might have felt that they were doing quite well within their own families. Perhaps, the spectator mothers saw a way to change expectations about maternal duties in their own families, as these images offered an alternative to the normative portrayal of the perfect mother. On the other hand, the mothers in these films might not have offered much solace, as their actions were so far from most mother's experience. They were often too bad to be a reflection of society and hopefully, they did not influence mothers to malevolent behaviour. Rather, they resulted in part from the anxiety about the changes to the family structure in that particular decade. The importance of the depiction of non-traditional mothering was contained in the Freudian subtext of the films, which pointed to mothers as responsible for children's problems. While few in the audience would have accepted the depictions of the mothers' behaviour as realistic, the harm they did to their children could not be so easily forgotten or disregarded.

⁶Jane Swigart, *The Myth of the Bad Mother: The Emotional Realities of Mothering*, Doubleday, NY, 1991, p. 7.

⁷Jessie Bernard, *The Future of Motherhood*, Dial Press, NY, 1974, p. 13.

⁸Ann Phoenix and Anne Woollett, 'Motherhood: Social Construction, Politics and Psychology', in A. Phoenix, A. Woollett and E. Lloyd, (eds), *Motherhood: Meanings, Practices and Ideologies*, Sage, London, 1991, p. 25.

From the 1980s, while the inadequate mother still appeared in some films, her representation was more capable of varying interpretations and the narrative allowed her a redemption of sorts. The issue of the mother moving from the domestic to the public sphere, and the subsequent elevation of her social power and economic independence, had an influence on her role in films. Many mothers in the new films were well-meaning and more interesting characters, who worked outside the home and had relationships with people other than the family. For the first time since the 1920s, a significant number of mothers became the actual subject of the film narrative. The perfect self-sacrificing mother and inattentive or malevolent mother were replaced by a less extreme character. The guidelines for mothering had changed and mothers were depicted as good, nurturing individuals, who were not as devoted — or demonic — as in earlier decades.

While her portrayal was certainly more sympathetic in the 1980s, the mother's involvement outside the home was not celebrated. Apparent independence was not a sign of happiness or stability. The situation was exacerbated by the relative youth of her offspring. While in earlier decades, the mother's main concern was with her adult daughter and the requirement to make her a suitable wife and mother and find her a suitor, the 1980s mother in films had a teenager on her hands. This added a dramatic note to the mother's life which meant that she had to incorporate her own new-found interests with the care of her child. The mother's dissatisfaction with life was a remarkable trademark of films of the decade. Her discontent was articulated, not as a *cri de coeur* for assistance. It was, perhaps, more a kind of warning to women not to attempt to stray too far from their traditional domestic pathway.⁹

Birth

⁹This hegemonic pattern was supported by the representation of daughters who were both nurturing and contented, unlike their mothers. See conclusions about the mother/daughter relationship, this chapter, below.

A surprising revelation about Australian films came from the investigation into the context of births and their effect on the mothers within the diegesis. The birth was significant in the story, even when the child was not the subject of further narrative interest. The expectation for men to prefer sons and for women with sons to be envied, was found to underpin films in a pervasive and, perhaps, previously unexamined manner. It was discovered that the narrative incorporated certain assumptions about the sex of the neonate. If the child were a boy, the mother's lifestyle improved and she found happiness, if a girl, the mother was more or less doomed.

The importance of this aspect of Australian film narratives is not negated by the acknowledgment that the decision by the filmmaker was probably subconscious. The point remained that most likely it was deemed more appropriate, given other circumstances of the plot, to make the choice of either baby girl or boy. When the child was destined in the script for a good life with loving parents, a boy was chosen, when gloom was predicted, the child was inevitably a girl. That the choice did follow a pattern, yet was seemingly inconsequential, was its most important aspect. The acceptance of images that show from birth, the association of good fortune with sons and its opposite with daughters, is a crucial concern in identifying the underlying sexist premise.

While some theorists have insisted that the girl's maternal caring nature is instinctive, others have argued, in my opinion more persuasively, that it is learned behaviour. Images in society can be an important influence on the way we think about differences between men and women. Those which relate to birth are most crucial because of their significance as a starting point in acceptance of male's superior status. In the late twentieth century, Australian society has attempted to ensure equality in the child's early influences. This can be seen in the way many parents try to offer their daughters opportunities previously denied them and in changes to education and children's literature by encouraging girls, for example, in mathematics and science. Perhaps, in the

light of an even earlier cultural influence, films might be re-ordered in a more equitable way. It is to be hoped that 'Congratulations it's a girl' could be meaningful and not signify merely a comic catchcry in films of the future.

Mothers and Daughters

Perhaps, the mother's most fully outlined relationship on screen was her connection to her daughter. In films of the early decades, the mother was a vital part of the daughter's life, providing companionship as well as guidance. Her main role was to find a suitor for her daughter and to prepare her for marriage. The women loved each other and conflict between them was unthinkable. It was not until films of the 1970s, and the introduction of Freudian sub-texts in films, that the association between the women soured. This was precisely the time that motherhood was being questioned by daughters in the women's movement, some of whom blamed, or at least reproached their mothers for female subordination in society. Representations of the relationship changed again in the 1980s, when a few women moved into feature film production and become mothers themselves. Possibly as a consequence, although women's contribution to films was still minimal, the relationship was depicted in a more ambivalent manner, the mother's position was more kindly evaluated and across the generations the women were once again close. In an interesting departure from previous representations, although the daughter had often been shown as more educated and technically advanced than her mother, the youthful daughter of the 1980s was frequently more emotionally stable and wise.

Throughout the century, daughters on screen were generally compassionate and kind, despite the mothering they received. The maternal cycle was apparent in early cinema, as devoted mothers appeared to be passing on their maternal skills. In later decades, mothers were often inept and offered a poor maternal role-model for the girl. All the same, daughters of bad mothers frequently were shown to be caring and selfless. Even, in the 1970s, when the bad mother was portrayed as psychologically damaging, her daughter's capacity to mother was not impaired. In depicting daughters as inevitably

nurturing and devoted, the films supported the notion of an instinctive mothering skill or, perhaps, one learned in the society. In effect, they denied a maternal cycle wherein the daughter's mothering was dependent on the girl's own mother.

Theoretical discourses which encompassed sociology, psychoanalysis and feminism have provided the foundation of much knowledge of the mother/daughter relationship. The most influential and salient research, perhaps, came from Nancy Chodorow, who related women's subordination in society to their bonding with their mother and subsequent imitation of her behaviour. She maintained that the closeness of the daughter to her mother resulted in her difficulty in separation which subsequently hindered her autonomy. Chodorow argued that the solution to the women's dilemma was for the father to share in parenting.¹⁰ Her plan received widespread interest and acceptance as it was meant to undermine patriarchal strength and open the way to a more egalitarian society. While only one of the films portrayed Chodorow's recommendation for shared parenting,¹¹ there was a sense that some fathers in later films, were interested in their child's welfare. This could, perhaps, have been motivated by the change in the structure of the family, as their interest was manifested as a claim for custody for the child.¹² The representation in no way reflected the men's undertaking of traditional maternal roles of nurturing, sacrifice and selflessness that had been expected of women in films over the decades.¹³

Because Chodorow's work focused on the mother/daughter relationship and was such a cornerstone in making sense of the way women mother and why they mother, it was

¹⁰Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978a.

¹¹See chapter 6 for an analysis of Tim Burstall's *Duet for Four* (1982).

¹²There were custody battles fought by the fathers in *Cathy's Child*, *My First Wife*, *Jenny Kissed Me* and *Short Changed*.

¹³Two films of the 1920s, *The Dingo* and *The Dinkum Bloke*, which can be analysed from the synopses, told of a father's sacrifice so that his daughter could have a better life. Recent films where the father took over maternal duties from the mother were not construed as sharing, but indicated her ineptitude. See for example, *Petersen*, *Duet for Four* and *Jenny Kissed Me*. The only recent film where the father brought up the child, was the father of a dying boy in *The Fourth Wish*. In this film also, the wife was depicted as uncaring and inadequate. *The More Things Change...* depicted a role-reversal father, but he was inadequate to the task.

interesting to see how the maternal bonding she described fitted into the particular cultural images found in Australian feature films. The films, which at least on some level reflected society, followed the Chodorow model in the early years. The closeness and easy communication of the pair were structured as inevitable and in some films a special, spiritual bond was hinted. Just as Chodorow had proposed, though, girls in early films were shown to be dependent and unable to cope with the situation when their lives did not mirror the mother's example. The example of bonding as a reason for restricted autonomy, however, was turned around in films in later decades, when although the women were close, daughters were depicted as emotionally secure and independent. Representations of these strong daughters worked against Chodorow's theories. Significantly, they subverted the notion of powerful mothers who had the capacity to ruin children's lives. They allowed the mother her own space away from the family without appearing to harm her daughter forever. They also, by showing her self-confidence, removed the daughter from a 'victim' role.

Sexuality

The representation of the mother's sexuality in films, to a large extent, depended on historical and cultural changes in society. Prior to World War Two, film censorship limited displays of sexual activity and the mother was more a nurturing angel than a passionate woman. A few films, however, mainly in the 1920s, hinted at a sexual relationship of husband and wife, while those in the 1930s, perhaps, in a reflection of the hardship of the Depression economy, depicted the mother as an asexual creature. After the War, the mother's sexuality became confused with desire for possessions and she instigated sex for some ulterior motive. She was seen to be glamorous and desirable, though her own desire was distanced from carnality and closer to an appetite for possessions. It was as though the filmmakers transformed the mother's corporeal desire into something with which they could more easily contend. In the 1970s the woman's sexuality was at last recognised, although most images were of a mother who was either repressed or a nymphomaniac. In representing the mother's sexuality as aberrant, male

filmmakers may have been reflecting the fear and uncertainty in society about changes in the family caused by women's demands for equality. Even in the 1980s, the mother's sexuality was rarely 'normalised' or portrayed within her marriage. If her desire was recognised at all, it was more often seen as deviant, out of control and damaging to the family. The 1980s was supposed to be the decade of the superwoman, who according to Gloria Steinem, dressed for success, raised perfect children, cooked gourmet meals and had multiple orgasms.¹⁴ Her image was not found in films where the combination of motherhood, work and sexuality signalled disharmony.

Although there were fluctuations in the depictions of the mother's sexuality, there was a presupposition that remained constant in the films over the decades. This was an ideological position about the institution of marriage, which insisted, in a taken-for-granted way, that a woman should be married to have sex. Sexuality outside marriage was a signal for unhappiness and despair. This was most apparent in portrayals of unwed mothers who only found contentment when they were able to marry. At the same time and revealing an amazing, insupportable contradiction, once the woman married, her sexuality within marriage was rarely represented. The paradox was, perhaps, particularly obvious in the 1980s, when explicit sexuality was commonplace on screen.

In films, as in other media, the object of desire for the male protagonist was typically a young, glamorous, unmarried, and childless woman. Her capture and marriage was the aim of the narrative. Films often ended in scenes of a marriage and explicit references or subtle hints of the requirement of children to complete the union. In situations when the narrative opened on an established family, the mother, a good woman, was depicted as pure and virtuous. Sexuality in the family in these films rested with the daughter. Where the mother's sexual desire was shown, it was depicted as the cause of marital dissolution and until the 1980s, her desire was a cinematic signal that she was a bad mother. Apart from a few exceptional examples, films rarely portrayed the mother as a sexual being

¹⁴ Gloria Steinem, *Moving Beyond Words*, Simon & Schuster, NY, 1994, p. 155.

within the structure of her natural family life. In the main, Australian feature films showed that in a cinematic fairytale transformation, the mother's desire and desirability was sacrificed at the altar. From the moment of this much celebrated occasion where she was led by the patriarch of her birth family to the patriarch of her adopted one, she was depicted as assuming the mantle of the good, chaste, asexual mother.

The Mother in the Bush

The search for the mother in bush films, perhaps, the most significant genre in Australian feature film production, was revealing. Investigation found her metaphoric presence within the landscape to be stronger and more meaningful than her actual presence in the narrative. Her physical representation was largely trivialised or ignored, and in its place, the land, which formed a major part of bush films, was used to provide a substantial impetus for the men's activities. Men explored, conquered, tamed, overpowered, used, dominated, looked for and expected nurturance from the land. It in turn was structured as barren, virgin, fertile, inviting, beautiful or impenetrable. Men's relationship to the land was echoed perfectly in their relationship to women.

The mother's presence in the landscape in bush films provided more than just a way to find a place for her in representations of early colonial life. Her metaphorical presence was a vital and revealing insight into a system which was at the foundation of the Australian culture. The landscapes were feminised and the intruders were depicted as aggressive and not peaceful, separatist and not communal, essentialist and not welcoming. Colonial settlement, at the heart of the masculine identity even in the late twentieth century, was represented in this model as an invasive, aggressive and damaging operation.

Summary

Australian feature films followed the Hollywood classical narrative style, which aimed at realism, however, problematical and tied to subjectivity and history that term can be.¹⁵ The films worked, not like German Expressionist cinema for example, with its distorted viewpoints, but as realistic representations. Films in the main attempted to follow a logical cause and effect pattern which was constructed on a beginning, middle and end. While family sagas were rare in Australian films, the narrative trajectory at least allowed the possibility of determining if the mother was punished or rewarded for her mothering capabilities and if her children benefited or were disadvantaged.

My research examined representations on screen to determine how motherhood was depicted in a medium that reflects and influences human behaviour in Australian society. It used an eclectic framework which considered psychoanalytic, sociological and feminist research to explicate the mother's role on the Australian screen. The mother's experience was placed in historical context, with reference to constraints such as economic hardship and war, and the benefits of affluence and technological inventions. Ultimately, the findings demonstrated that there was no coherent, unambivalent continuum of representation of motherhood in Australian feature films. Each decade followed a pattern which indicated that the maternal role was constructed as a matter of expediency. The investigation found that rather than the mother's role being securely fixed, the images were governed by the economic or political necessities of the time, perhaps reflecting state requirements, community opinions or an amalgamation of these in the individual anxieties and beliefs of the mostly-male filmmakers.

Overall, there was no evidence of overt ideological interference in the manner in which motherhood was represented in films. It could be argued that national concern in the early years of the century about the falling population was translated into screen presentations which exhorted mothers to be clean and care for their infants. Undoubtedly

¹⁵David Bordwell & Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, Third Edition, McGraw-Hill, NY, 1990, (1979), pp. 54-88.

the reward in the films for mothers who followed this path had the effect of reinforcing the government agenda. It would have been counterproductive to the narrative, however, bearing in mind her usual meagre role, to show her as other than nurturing. More obvious rhetoric, for instance, the pressure to sacrifice sons to war, was left to the documentary films and the attempt to incorporate such pressure into one feature film was greeted with derision.¹⁶ The depictions of the maternal role in Australian feature films usually were more subtle: they reinforced the 'natural' order in a hegemonic manner.

While the media's stereotypical representations of women in television and print frequently have been challenged, the nuances of the portrayal of motherhood on the Australian screen have, more often, been overlooked. Perhaps, this results from the pervasive, and as the study has shown, mistaken idea of the immutability of representations of the maternal role. My research challenges this belief when it points out the way the images of motherhood have fluctuated in accord with various influences. Additionally, the research calls into question the 'taken-for-granted' representations of the role. For instance, it notes depictions of the good, selfless and devoted mother, who, in spite of often unendurable circumstances, is accepting and passive. Concentrating on the importance of the moment of birth, it reveals that the superiority of males is reinforced on screen from the child's earliest moments. The mother's relationship to her daughter, which in some cases is the most enduring and crucial of her life, is found frequently in films to be distorted into one of conflict or cloying dependence. It is argued that traditional depictions of the mother as virtuous and chaste serve to suppress her own sexual desires and needs. Finally, it observes that against the evidence of historical record, in films of the bush, the mother is nowhere to be seen. Her absence permits and legitimates aggressive images of the subjection of women and of the landscape.

¹⁶The film was T.O. McCreddie's *Always Another Dawn*, (1947). See chapter 3 for review.

It is appropriate to evaluate the findings and implications of the research in terms of its psychoanalytic, sociological and feminist framework. Pointing out the limitations of representations of mothers on screen has the potential to increase women's self-awareness. In a social sense, it may broaden women's understanding of their own capabilities and provide a means to examine their maternal lifestyle and contribution to the family and community. Finally, feminists may use the conclusions to challenge previously unquestioned cinematic concepts of men's superiority in society.

filmography

part one: Australian feature films

- A City's Child* 1972 Director: Brian Kavanagh
- A Girl of the Bush* 1921 Director: Franklyn Barrett
- A Maori Maid's Love* 1916 Director: Raymond Longford
- A Son is Born* 1946 Director: Eric Porter
- A Street to Die* 1985 Director: Bill Bennett
- A Tale of the Australian Bush* 1911 Director: Gaston Mervale
- Age of Consent* 1969 Director: Michael Powell
- Alvin Purple* 1973 Director: Tim Burstall
- Always Another Dawn* 1947 Director: T.O. McCreddie
- Annie's Coming Out* 1984 Director: Gil Brealey
- Around the Boree Log* 1925 Director: Phil K. Walsh
- Around the World in 80 Ways* 1988 Director: Stephen MacLean
- Australian Dream* 1987 Director: Jacki McKimmie
- Belinda* 1988 Director: Pamela Gibbons
- Ben Hall and his Gang* 1911 Director: John Gavin
- Between Wars* 1974 Director: Michael Thornhill
- Bitter Springs* 1950 Director: Ralph Smart
- Bliss* 1985 Director: Ray Lawrence
- Blood Money* 1980 Director: Chris Fitchett
- Blue Fin* 1978 Director: Carl Schultz
- Blue Fire Lady* 1977 Director: Ross Dimsey
- Bonjour Balwyn* 1971 Director: Nigel Buesst
- Boulevard of Broken Dreams* 1988 Director: Pino Amenta
- Break of Day* 1976 Director: Ken Hannam
- Breaker Morant* 1980 Director: Bruce Beresford
- Buddies* 1983 Director: Arch Nicholson

Bush Christmas 1947 Director: Ralph Smart
Bush Christmas 1983 Director: Henri Safran
Bushfire Moon 1987 Director: George Miller
Cactus 1986 Director: Paul Cox
Caddie 1976 Director: Donald Crombie
Captain Midnight, the Bush King 1911 Director: Alfred Rolfe
Cathy's Child 1979 Director: Don Crombie
Circumstance 1922 Director: Lawson Harris
Color Me Dead 1970 Director: Eddie Davis
Cool Change 1986 Director: George Miller
Country Town 1971 Director: Peter Maxwell
Crocodile Dundee 1986 Director: Peter Faiman
Crocodile Dundee II 1988 Director: John Cornell
Cupid Camouflaged 1918 Director: Alfred Rolfe
Dad and Dave Come to Town 1938 Director: Ken G. Hall
Dad Rudd, M.P. 1940 Director: Ken G. Hall
Dawn! 1979 Director: Ken Hannam
Demonstrator 1971 Director: Warwick Freeman
Dimboola 1979 Director: John Duigan
Don's Party 1976 Director: Bruce Beresford
Double Deal 1983 Director: Brian Kavanagh
Duet For Four 1982 Director: Tim Burstall
Dusty 1983 Director: John Richardson
East Lynne 1922 Director: Charles Hardy
Echoes of Paradise 1988 Director: Phillip Noyce
Emma's War 1988 Clytie Jessop
Emoh Ruo 1985 Director: Denny Lawrence
Evil Angels 1988 Director: Fred Schepisi
F.J. Holden 1977 Director: Michael Thornhill

Fast Talking 1984 Director: Ken Cameron
Fatty Finn 1980 Director: Maurice Murphy
Fighting Back 1983 Director: Michael Caulfield
For Love Alone 1986 Director: Stephen Wallace
For the Term of His Natural Life 1927 Director: Norman Dawn
Fortress 1986 Director: Arch Nicholson
Forty Thousand Horsemen 1940 Director: Charles Chauvel
Fran 1985 Director: Glenda Hambly
Freedom 1982 Director: Scott Hicks
Frenchman's Farm 1987 Director: Ron Way
Gallipoli 1981 Director: Peter Weir
Gentle Strangers 1972 Director: Cecil Holmes
Ginger Meggs 1982 Director: Jonathon Dawson
Ginger Mick 1920 Director: Raymond Longford
Going Sane 1987 Director: Michael Robertson
Gone to the Dogs 1939 Director: Ken G. Hall
Grandad Rudd 1935 Director: Ken G. Hall
Greenhide 1926 Director: Charles Chauvel
Hard Knocks 1980 Director: Don McLennan
Harlequin 1980 Director: Simon Wincer
Harvest Gold 1945 Director: Mervyn Murphy
Heritage 1935 Director: Charles Chauvel
Hightide 1987 Director: Gillian Armstrong
Hills of Hate 1926 Director: Raymond Longford
His Convict Bride 1918 Director: John Gavin
Hostage: The Christine Maresch Story 1983 Director: Frank Shields
How Willingly You Sing 1975 Director: Garry Patterson
Hullo Marmaduke 1924 Director: Beaumont Smith
In Search of Anna 1979 Director: Esben Storm

In the Wake of the Bounty 1933 Director: Charles Chauvel
Inn of the Damned 1975 Director: Terry Bourke
Inside Looking Out 1977 Director: Paul Cox
Into the Straight 1949 Director: T.O. McCreadie
It Isn't Done 1937 Director: Ken G. Hall
Jack and Jill: a postscript 1970 Drs: Phillip Adams, Brian Robinson
Jedda 1955 Director: Charles Chauvel
Jenny Kissed Me 1986 Director: Brian Trenchard-Smith
Jewelled Nights 1925 Directors: Louise Lovely, Wilton Welch
Journey Out of Darkness 1967 Director: James Trainor
Just Out of Reach 1979 Director: Linda Blagg
Just Peggy 1918 Director: J.A. Lipman
Know Thy Child 1921 Director: Franklyn Barrett
Kostas 1979 Director: Paul Cox
Let the Balloon Go 1976 Director: Oliver Howes
Libido 1973 Directors: J.B. Murray, T. Burstall, F. Schepisi, D. Baker
Little Boy Lost 1978 Director: Terry Bourke
Lonely Hearts 1982 Director: Paul Cox
Lost in the Bush 1973 Director: Peter Dodds
Mad Max 1979 Director: George Miller
Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome 1985 Drs: G. Miller and G. Ogilvie
Malcolm 1986 Director: Nadia Tass
Man of Flowers 1983 Director: Paul Cox
Manganinnie 1980 Director: John Honey
Mated in the Wilds 1921 Director: P.J. Ramster
...Maybe This Time 1980 Director: Chris McGill
Melvin, Son of Alvin 1984 Director: John Eastway
Molly 1983 Director: Ned Lander
Monkey Grip 1982 Director: Ken Cameron

Mouth to Mouth 1978 Director: John Duigan
Moving On 1974 Director: Richard Mason
Moving Out 1983 Director: Michael Pattinson
Mr Chedworth Steps Out 1939 Director: Ken G. Hall
My Brilliant Career 1979 Director: Gillian Armstrong
My First Wife 1984 Director: Paul Cox
Ned Kelly 1970 Director: Tony Richardson
Newsfront 1978 Director: Phillip Noyce
Nickel Queen 1971 Director: John McCallum
Nightmares 1980 Director: John Lamond
"Norman Loves Rose" 1982 Director: Henri Safran
On Our Selection 1920 Director: Raymond Longford
On Our Selection 1932 Director: Ken G. Hall
One Night Stand 1984 Director: John Duigan
Orphan of the Wilderness 1936 Director: Ken G. Hall
Our Friends the Hayseeds 1917 Director: Beaumont Smith
Pacific Banana 1981 Director: John D. Lamond
Painted Daughters 1925 Director: F. Stuart Whyte
Palm Beach 1980 Director: Albie Thoms
Patrick White's The Night The Prowler 1979 Director: Jim Sharman
Peter Kenna's The Umbrella Woman 1987 Director: Ken Cameron
Petersen 1974 Director: Tim Burstall
Phar Lap 1983 Director: Simon Wincer
Picnic at Hanging Rock 1975 Director: Peter Weir
Playing Beatie Bow 1986 Director: Donald Crombie
'Possum, Paddock 1921 Directors: Charles Villiers & Kate Howarde
Prehistoric Hayseeds 1923 Director: Beaumont Smith
Puberty Blues 1981 Director: Bruce Beresford
Pure S 1975 Director: Bert Deling

Queensland 1976 Director: John Ruane
Racing Luck 1941 Director: Rupert Kathner
Rangle River 1936 Director: Clarence Badger
Rats of Tobruk 1944 Director: Charles Chauvel
Ride a Wild Pony 1975 Director: Don Chaffey
Rikky and Pete 1988 Director: Nadia Tass
Robbery Under Arms 1907 Director: Charles MacMahon
Robbery Under Arms 1920 Director: Kenneth Brampton
Robbery Under Arms 1957 Director: Jack Lee
Robbery Under Arms 1985 Director: D. Crombie and K. Hannam
Rudds New Selection 1921 Director: Raymond Longford
Satan in Sydney 1918 Director: Beaumont Smith
Seven Little Australians 1939 Director: Arthur Greville Collins
Shame 1988 Director: Steve Jodrell
Shirley Thompson versus the Aliens 1972 Director: Jim Sharman
Short Changed 1986 Director: George Ogilvie
Sidecar Racers 1975 Director: Earl Bellamy
Silks and Saddles 1921 Director: John K. Wells
Silver City 1984 Director: Sophie Turkiewicz
Smiley 1956 Director: Anthony Kimmins
Smiley Gets a Gun 1958 Director: Anthony Kimmins
Snapshot 1979 Director: Simon Wincer
Sons of Matthew 1949 Director: Charles Chauvel
Splendid Fellows 1934 Director: Beaumont Smith
Stanley: Every Home Should Have One 1984 Director: Esben Storm
Star Struck 1982 Director: Gillian Armstrong
Stork 1971 Director: Tim Burstall
Storm Boy 1976 Director: Henri Safran
Street Hero 1984 Director: Michael Pattinson

Strictly Ballroom 1992 Director: Baz Luhrmann
Strike Me Lucky 1934 Director: Ken G. Hall
Summer of the Seventeenth Doll 1959 Director: Leslie Norman
Summerfield 1977 Director: Ken Hannam
Sunday Too Far Away 1975 Director: Ken Hannam
Sunshine Sally 1922 Director: Lawson Harris
Surrender in Paradise 1976 Director: Peter Cox
Tall Timber 1926 Director: Dunstan Webb
Tall Timbers 1937 Director: Ken G. Hall
The Adorable Outcast 1928 Director: Norman Dawn
The Adventures of Barry McKenzie 1972 Director: Bruce Beresford
The Bells 1911 Director: W.J. Lincoln
The Best of Friends 1982 Director: Michael Robertson
The Breaking of the Drought 1920 Director: Franklyn Barrett
The Burgomeister 1935 Director: Harry Southwell
The Bushwhackers 1925 Director: Raymond Longford
The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith 1978 Director: Fred Schepisi
The Cheaters 1930 Director: Paulette McDonagh
The Coca-Cola Kid 1985 Director: Dusan Makavejev
The Colleen Bawn 1911 Director: Gaston Mervale
The Coolangatta Gold 1984 Director: Igor Auzins
The Crisis 1913 Director: W.J. Lincoln
The Devil's Playground 1976 Director: Fred Schepisi
The Dingo 1923 Director: Kenneth Brampton
The Dinkum Bloke 1923 Director: Raymond Longford
The Everlasting Secret Family 1988 Michael Thornhill
The Far Paradise 1928 Director: Paulette McDonagh
The Fatal Wedding 1911 Director: Raymond Longford
The Fourth Wish 1976 Director: Don Chaffey

The Fringe Dwellers 1986 Director: Bruce Beresford
The Getting of Wisdom 1977 Director: Bruce Beresford
The Golden Cage 1975 Director: Ayten Kuyululu
The Hayseeds 1933 Director: Beaumont Smith
The Hayseeds Come to Town 1917 Director: Beaumont Smith
The Hayseeds' Back-blocks Show 1917 Director: Beaumont Smith
The Hayseeds' Melbourne Cup 1918 Director: Beaumont Smith
The Irishman 1978 Director: Donald Crombie
The Kangaroo Kid 1950 Director: Lesley Selander
The Kelly Gang 1920 Director: Harry Southwell
The Kid Stakes 1927 Director: Tal Ordell
The Last Wave 1977 Director: Peter Weir
The Life Story of John Lee 1912 Director: Robert Scott
The Life's Romance of Adam Lindsay Gordon 1916 D: W.J. Lincoln
The Lighthorsemen 1987 Director: Simon Wincer
The Lost Islands 1975 Director: Bill Hughes
The Man From Snowy River 1982 Director: George Miller
The Man from Snowy River II 1988 Director: Geoff Burrowes
The Man They Could Not Hang 1934 Director: Raymond Longford
The More Things Change... 1986 Director: Robyn Nevin
The Moth of Moonbi 1926 Director: Charles Chauvel
The Overlanders 1946 Director: Harry Watt
The Phantom Stockman 1953 Director: Lee Robinson
The Pioneers 1916 Director: Franklyn Barrett
The Pioneers 1926 Director: Raymond Longford
The Pursuit of Happiness 1988 Director: Martha Ansara.
The Rats of Tobruk 1944 Director: Charles Chauvel
The Sentimental Bloke 1919 Director: Raymond Longford
The Sentimental Bloke 1932 Director: F.W. Thring

The Set 1970 Director: Frank Brittain

The Shiralee 1957 Director: Leslie Norman

The Siege of Pinchgut 1959 Director: Harry Watt

The Silence of Dean Maitland 1934 Director: Ken G. Hall

The Squatter's Daughter 1933 Director: Ken G. Hall

The Still Point 1985 Director: Barbara Boyd-Anderson

The Story of the Kelly Gang 1906 Director: Charles Tait

The Sundowners 1960 Director: Fred Zinnemann

The Tale of Ruby Rose 1988 Director: Roger Scholes

The Tide of Death 1912 Director: Raymond Longford

The Waybacks 1918 Director: Arthur W. Sterry

The Wild Duck 1984 Director: Henri Safran

The Woman Suffers 1918 Director: Raymond Longford

The Year My Voice Broke 1987 Director: John Duigan

They're a Weird Mob 1966 Director: Michael Powell

Thoroughbred 1936 Director: Ken G. Hall

Those Terrible Twins 1925 Director: J.E. Ward

Those Who Love 1926 Directors: P.J. Ramster, Paulette McDonagh

Three To Go 1971 Drs: Peter Weir, Brian Hannant, Oliver Howes

Thunderbolt 1910 Director: John Gavin

Tim 1979 Director: Michael Pate

To Market, To Market 1987 Director: Virginia Rouse

Townies and Hayseeds 1923 Director: Beaumont Smith

Travelling North 1987 Director: Carl Schultz

Trooper O'Brien 1928 Director: John Gavin

Two Minutes Silence 1933 Director: Paulette McDonagh

2000 Weeks 1969 Director: Tim Burstall

Unfinished Business 1986 Director: Bob Ellis

Wake in Fright 1971 Director: Ted Kotcheff

Walkabout 1971 Director: Nicholas Roeg

Warming Up 1985 Director: Bruce Best

We of the Never Never 1982 Director: Igor Auzins

Weekend of Shadows 1978 Director: Tom Jeffrey

What Happened to Jean 1918 Director: Herbert Walsh

When the Kellys Rode 1934 Director: Harry Southwell

When the Kellys Were Out 1923 Director: Harry Southwell

Wherever She Goes 1951 Director: Michael S. Gordon

You Can't See 'Round Corners 1969 Director: David Cahill

Young Einstein 1988 Director: Yahoo Serious

part two: Australian short films

As a Matter of Fact—A Film About Abortion 1979 Directors: Feminist Film
Workers

Bingo, Bridesmaid and Braces 1988 Director: Gillian Armstrong

Don't Call Me Girlie 1985 Directors: Stewart Young, Andrée Wright

14's Good, 18's Better 1981 Director: Gillian Armstrong

Icon 1995 Director: Di Cousins

Maidens 1978 Director: Jeni Thornley

Smokes and Lollies 1976 Director: Gillian Armstrong

The Singer and the Dancer 1976 Director: Gillian Armstrong

They Reckon a Woman's World's Just It and a Bit 1977 Director: Meg Stewart

part three: foreign films

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn 1945 Director: Elia Kazan

Author, Author! 1982 Director: Arthur Hiller

Baby Boom 1987 Director: Charles Shyer

Daughter-Rite 1978 Director Michelle Citron

Frances 1982 Director: Graeme Clifford

Gentlemen Marry Brunettes 1955 Director: Richard Sale
Gentlemen Prefer Blondes 1953 Director: Howard Hawks
How to Marry a Millionaire 1953 Director: Jean Negulesco
I Remember Mama 1948 Director: George Stevens
Inside Daisy Clover 1965 Director: Robert Mulligan
Joyce at 34 1973 Director: Joyce Chopra
Kramer versus Kramer 1979 Director: Robert Benton
Little Women 1949 Director: Mervyn LeRoy
Marnie 1964 Director: Alfred Hitchcock
Mildred Pierce 1945 Director: Michael Curtiz
Mommie Dearest 1981 Director: Frank Perry
Now Voyager 1942 Director: Irving Rapper
Ordinary People 1980 Director: Robert Redford
Psycho 1960 Director: Alfred Hitchcock
Rachel, Rachel 1968 Director: Paul Newman
Raising Arizona 1987 Director: Joel Coen
Riddles of the Sphinx 1976 Directors: Laura Mulvey, Peter Wollen
Rosemary's Baby 1968 Director: Roman Polanski
Stella Dallas 1937 Director: King Vidor
The Good Mother 1988 Director: Leonard Nimoy
The Hand that Rocks the Cradle 1991 Director: Curtis Hanson
The Secret beyond the Door 1948 Director: Fritz Lang
Vertigo 1958 Director: Alfred Hitchcock
Way Down East 1920 Director: D.W. Griffith

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