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 Dalgleish, the disgruntled wife of a large outback property owner in Donald Crombie's The Irishman (1978).
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.
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.
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.\(^\text{13}\)

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'.\(^\text{14}\) 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.\(^\text{15}\) 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

\(^\text{13}\)Australian 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.


riding, the outdoor type'. 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.

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17 These 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.
psychological situation placed her close to nature.\textsuperscript{20} Although this belief in the paradigm of man/culture opposed to woman/nature is not unproblematic,\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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'.\textsuperscript{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'.\textsuperscript{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.

\begin{enumerate}
\item Sherry B. Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?', in \textit{Woman, Culture and Society}, p. 72.
\item Lynne 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, \textit{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.], \textit{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.
\end{enumerate}
'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'. Similarly, Meaghan Morris argued that the myth was seductive because of its reversible meanings; the bush can be either attractive or repulsive. 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'. Tulloch described a recurrent scene in bush films that incorporated a male horserider, sheep or cattle and trees in the vast Australian countrysides. In this quintessential bush location, man was figured as the subject or culture, as he gazed on the object, represented by nature. 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. 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

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28 This 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).
male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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'.\textsuperscript{32}

Nowhere in Chauvel's body of work was the metaphorical place of women in the bush more discernible than in his film, \textit{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

\textsuperscript{30}Mulvey, \textit{Visual and Other Pleasures}, p. 19.
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'. 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'. Shortly after, Shane reveals his love for her and the inevitable consequence is that they will marry.

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', 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

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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'. 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, Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper called it a 'commercial and critical landmark in Australian cinema'. 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

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38 For 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.
true. P.P. McGuinness in his review of the film, remarked that ‘the school actually seems to exist’. 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’, 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.

*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’. 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’. 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. Adding to Morris's theory, one of the teachers, Miss McCraw, described the

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40 P.P. McGuinness, 'Peter Weir’s Hauntingly Beautiful Film Makes the Film World Sit Up', in *An Australian Film Reader*, p. 189.
43 Dermody & Jacka, *The Screening of Australia*, p. 107
44 Green, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, p. xvii.
45 Morris, '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. 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'. 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.
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

\(^{47}\)See chapters 1 and 5 for more detailed analyses of Chodorow's thesis.


\(^{51}\)I 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'.\(^{55}\)

\(^{53}\)Annette Kuhn quoted by Sneja Gunew, 'What Does Woman Mean?: Reading, Writing and
\(^{54}\)Adrian Martin, 'Fantasy' in *The New Australian Cinema*, p. 97.
\(^{55}\)Green, *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 Wright 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. 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. 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'. 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'. 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

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59 Wright, 1993, p. 89.
60 Tom 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', 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'. 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. 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

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61 Wright, 'Metaphors of Femininity and Australian Landscape', p. 89.
62 Wright, 'Metaphors of Femininity and Australian Landscape', p. 90.
63 O'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

64 Wright, '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. 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'. 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, 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'. 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'.

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

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65 Dermody 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.
67 Wright, 'Metaphors of Femininity and Australian Landscape', p. 89.
69 Turner, 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.\textsuperscript{70} The American film critic, Lynda Bundtzen, remarked on the darker side of the mother in her review of the James Cameron film, \textit{Aliens}. She noted the construction of nature as a powerful, evil mother 'a womb-tomb that threatens to engulf everyone'.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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


\textsuperscript{71}Lynda K. Bundtzen, 'Monstrous Mothers: Medusa, Grendel, and now Alien', \textit{Film Quarterly}, volume XL, number 3, Spring 1987, p. 17.

morality and wisdom' and the second—the 'horror of being lost'. Additionally, as Gibson pointed out, because the culture had failed to subdue nature, the destructive force of the land was frequently recognised. 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. 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'. 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'.

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

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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.
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.
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*, 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

\[81\] The 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{83} Instead, perhaps, it indicated the anxiety felt at this time when the ties to England were being questioned.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{82}Cunningham, *Featuring Australia*, p. 106.
\textsuperscript{84}Morrison'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*, 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

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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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{89} Lucy Frost, in her book \textit{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.\textsuperscript{90} Women were responsible for caring for the family and

\textsuperscript{86}See 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, \textit{Silks and Saddles} (1921), \textit{The Moth of Moonbi} (1926), \textit{Greenhide} (1926), \textit{The Silence of Dean Maitland} (1934), \textit{The Shiralee} (1957), \textit{Sunday Too Far Away} (1975) and \textit{Crocodile Dundee} (1986).

\textsuperscript{87}The 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), \textit{Australian Screen}, Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria, 1989, pp. 28-52.

\textsuperscript{88}Grimshaw, 'Man's Own Country', pp. 182-209.


\textsuperscript{90}Lucy Frost, \textit{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'.

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'. 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, 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).

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91 Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath & Marian Quartly, Creating a Nation, McPhee Gribble/Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria, 1994, p. 121.
93 See 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. 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.

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95 The 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. 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'. 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

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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.