

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 placed 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.