The Woman Who Saved The World: Re-Imagining The Female Hero In 1950s Science Fiction Films

A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I propose that an appropriation of the hero narrative is important for feminist criticism, and that it is time to explore a new interpretation of the female hero. In popular as well as classical texts the position of the hero is clearly gendered as male. The narrative space remaining is left to the passive heroine, a female figure who is concerned with romantic rather that heroic outcomes. The acceptance of this critical position can be seen in many works dedicated to science fiction criticism, texts that construct a set of canonical phallocentric readings in which females are rendered invisible, unimportant, or relegated to the role of 'sex interest'. There is no better example of this practice than the science fiction film texts of the 1950s. In these films female characters are seen as marginal, existing to highlight the heroism and heterosexuality of the successful male hero.

In order to arrive at a new understanding of the female hero, we need to develop a viewing practice that sees gendered transgression taking place beyond a binary oppositional nexus. The female hero must challenge the way in which heroic values are traditionally applied to women. To do so, this thesis employs tactical reading practices developed through a feminist post-structuralist framework, informed by both postcolonial and queer theory. While focusing on an in-depth examination of 1950s science fiction films, it draws upon a range of academic works as well as popular cultural texts from cinematic, literary and television sources. In order to focus these analyses, I loosely divide the female heroes being considered into two groups: Housewife Heroes and Lady Scientists. This is not done in order to delineate discrete categories, but to suggest that different kinds of female characters attract their own cluster of issues and embodiments.

This thesis thus offers in-depth discussion of gender, sexuality and colonialism in a number of science fiction films of the 1950s. These include *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *I Married a Monster from Outer Space*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, *It Came from Beneath the Sea*, *Creature from the Black Lagoon* and *Them!* By re-imagining the figure of the female hero, the Lady Scientist and the Housewife Hero become much more than

ABSTRACT *cont.*

the embodiment of sexuality in a male-centred story. These characters allow us to examine transgressive corporeality, and witness technological and physical competencies beyond the purview of the traditional heroine. Once imagined, such characters can take us out of the realm of oppositional binary logic and fracture the Oedipal narrative, turning docile heroines into disruptive, transgressive and dangerous female heroes.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the work herein tendered for examination has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution. I have indicated in the thesis the sources of all information used and have acknowledging the extent to which the work of others has been utilised.

Signed

C. Hawkins

29.3.01

Dated

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My gratitude also goes to Elizabeth Hills for kindly allowing me to quote from her unpublished paper "From 'Figurative Males' to Action Heroines: Reconceptualizing Images of Transgressive Women in Hollywood's New Action Cinema" (1997).

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NOTES ON THE TEXT

In this thesis I quote from a range of films, primarily the science fiction movies of the 1950s. I do so without reference to original scripts. Instead I have transcribed the words used by the actors (and have implied their intonations) as they deliver their lines. By so doing I hope to provide the sense of the spoken word rather than an exact replication of written dialogue. I have used a dash (—) to indicate where dialogue is cut-off or interrupted by overlapping speech, while ellipses are used in there usual sense of standing for omitted words.

A number of the science fiction films of the 1950s have been cut after their original theatrical releases. Some prints have subsequently been restored in whole or part. Hence *The Thing* has two scenes and part of a third missing in the video-taped version generally sold in Australia, although a restored form of the film is also available. Similarly, *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* has been cut and (at least partially) restored. Where I am aware of such differences, I have indicated in the "Films Cited" section at the end of this work which version of the film is being used.

Whenever referring to the various non-human antagonists in the films under consideration, I have used a capital letter. Hence I write of the Creature in *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, and the Pods in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. This not only identifies the individual nature of the fantastic characters with which I deal, but also separates them from any generic use of the same words. My use of the word Ants in *Them!* therefore refers only to the mutated species posited by the film. I have also endeavoured to use the pronoun 'it' when referring to non-human entities rather than accept the gendered categories ascribed to creatures within their various films.

I do not shorten the term 'science fiction' in this text. Whenever 'sci-fi', 'SF' or 'sf' appear these abbreviations are quotations from another source.

NOTES ON THE TEXT *cont.*

Finally, please note that in the course of this work I make reference to around forty science fiction films of the 1950s, and deal with the characters from over thirty in varying degrees of detail. To assist in keeping track of the films and their cast of characters, Tables One and Two (on pages 23-24) list these movies in chronological order, giving the names and a brief description of their leading male and female characters. Those movies mentioned only in passing or without reference to leading characters have not been included in the Tables, but can be found in the Films Cited section at the end of the thesis.

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In Western culture there is a story which has been told over and over again, in innumerable versions, from the earliest times. It is a story about superiority, dominance and success. It tells how white European men are the natural masters of the world because they are strong, brave, skilful, rational and dedicated. It tells how they overcome the dangers of nature, how other 'inferior' races have been subdued by them, and how they spread civilization and order wherever they go. It tells how women are designed to serve them, and how those women who refuse to do so are threats to the natural order and must be controlled.

Margery Hourihan (1997: 1)

"Well I guess I must make you nervous."

Sigourney Weaver as Ripley in *Alien*[3]

Introduction

I'm going to show them . . . a world without rules and controls;
without boundaries—a world where anything is possible.

Neo, *The Matrix* (1999)

The territory of the hero is precarious and contrary. On the soundtrack of the movie *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* (1985), Tina Turner proclaims that "we don't need another hero". What we do need, the soundtrack implies, is to escape from the circus of violent repetition that is the Thunderdome, to find a place beyond the tyrannical performance of heroes. Yet the words of the chorus and the film's narrative do not mesh together quite so neatly, with the song repudiated by the action of the movie. The film infers that, in fact, we *do* need Max the hero: we need him for his edgy madness and his embattled, yet triumphant, white masculinity. Rather than counteract each other, the song and the film feed into the complex and often contradictory identity that is movie-made heroism. As the opening epigraph to this work by Margary Hourihan suggests (1997: 1), the male hero narrative mobilises preexisting discourses of hegemonic masculinity, race and capitalism in order to recreate, to endanger, and then to mythically reinscribe itself. We should therefore not assume that the term "heroine" can be used in the simple substitution of a female body for that of a male. Heroes and heroines attract a distinctive set of assumptions and narrative trajectories. In the case of the heroine, these preconditions generally locate her as less courageous and resourceful than a story's male protagonist(s), as weaker, in need of rescue and masculine succor. It is the prerogative of the cinematic male to become the savior of his world and of his woman, while at the same time vicariously carrying a male audience with him on his fantastic adventures. When female characters are represented in masculinist narratives, the heroine is usually a necessary by-stander, an observer of profound acts carried out by the male hero.

A heroine, therefore, does not fulfil the same narrative function as does her male counterpart, be it within popular culture, folklore or classic Western mythology. As John Lash has observed, "[t]he hero has no exact counterpart in the opposite sex, and heroines who act in the manner of the hero are wild anomalies in world mythology" (1995: 5). In his work on ancient Greece, M. I. Finley seems to put the matter definitively when he states that "'hero' has no feminine gender in the age of heroes" (1977:33). The promotion of heroism thus can be a way in which patriarchy, imperialism and capitalism discursively mask their operation. Some individuals—real or imagined and most commonly male—may be granted status above the ordinary by claiming or being given access to special privilege. Thus returning war veterans can become (willingly or not) war *heroes* based on the promotion and acceptance of individual acts of selflessness or bravery. In the process, the larger political and economic dimensions of armed conflict remain obscured. Sporting success can readily be re-articulated as a form of heroism, a way to claim the victories of "our" team vicariously. Modern-day popular narratives of the hero can be seen to offer similar patriarchal objectives, particularly when they join with ideas of action and adventure. Writing of these issues, Hourihan observes:

> The hero is a man of action and it is in action that he expresses his nature—skill, courage, dominance and determination. He is neither contemplative nor creative. He marches onward, and when he encounters a dragon or a difficulty he deals with it. . . . Action involving an extreme level of skill or great danger is depicted as providing extraordinary fulfilment akin to that of a mystical experience (1997: 96).

When this kind of performative masculinity is linked to imperialism and technological superiority, and placed within the cause-and-effect linearity of the quest narrative, we draw very near to the heart of patriarchal myth-making. Like the masculinist impulse for definition and boundary, the very idea of the hero seems to imply category, hierarchy, individualism and closure. The term "hero" can thus be a problematic one, containing within it a range of

notions ill-at-ease with feminist poststructuralist enquiry. The appropriation of heroes—even female heroes—can become a very risky business for the feminist scholar.

Are all narratives of the hero irredeemably patriarchal? If so, a feminist analysis might rightly repudiate the entire concept of the hero narrative, seeing in it no more than a continual recapitulation of masculinist power phantasies. Certainly the gendered nature of heroines can be found in the explanatory strategies used to describe 1950s science fiction films. In this thesis I use both books of popular science fiction film history (as well as a range of other critical sources) in order to illustrate my discussion. These film histories contain a great deal of the canonical lore of science fiction film, with the authors of such books rendering a general impression of science fiction movies rather than offering detailed analysis. Nevertheless, the manner in which the writers choose to frame and order their material is significant. For instance, in *SF in the Cinema* John Baxter offers a sketch of the leading players in *Tarantula* (1955):

> Leo G. Carroll as a biochemist experimenting with artificial nutrients brings to his role the low-key efficiency that has distinguished most of his work, while John Agar and Mara Corday are smooth enough to make believable a complicated first meeting scene with a touch of Hawksian comedy. Corday [is] sexily pneumatic in white . . . while Nestor Paiva [plays the part of] the baffled sheriff. . . . (1970: 122).

I admit to lingering uncertainty about this account of Stephanie (Steve) Clayton, played by Mara Corday. The writer may be referencing her potential as a sexual partner, derived in turn from Aldous Huxley's "pneumatic" women in *Brave New World* (1955). Whatever its derivation, it is often this pneumatic vision that predetermines the fate of female characters in these genre films. Steve Clayton is also identified by John Brosnan as "the film's standard-issue lady scientist (well, student scientist, to be exact)" (1991: 94). Such a description presumes that the character is indistinguishable from dozens of other standard issue heroines. The female lead is defined in terms of her sexual attributes and possibilities, and it is these

distinctions that delineate her position in the narrative. One paradigm into which such characters fall is that of the "beautiful lady scientist", one which emphasises the "beautiful lady" and ignores the "scientist". Brosnan has also observed that "significantly, many of the scientists in [1950s science fiction] movies were women" (1991: 42), without explanation as to *why* he views this as significant or what the reader should make of such information.

Why should this happen? Why do female characters in 1950s science fiction films seem to encourage a reading that concentrates on their powerlessness or susceptibility to attack by monsters? Is it simply that their depiction is unremittingly sexist or are other forces in operation? Part of the answer may be that these texts are far more disruptive and problematic in terms of gender than allowed for within the canon of science fiction film criticism. There are contemporary parallels with which to exemplify this perception. Pam Cook (1993) comments on the response of male critics to Martin Scorsese's 1992 remake of *Cape Fear*. She notes that this is a brutal film in which several characters are threatened with—or subjected to—assault, rape and/or murder. Six of these victims are male, while four are female. Cook finds popular critical reaction focused on the film's female characters, while appearing to overlook the violence meted out to the males. She writes:

> These male critics seem to be motivated by a desire to exorcise their own feelings of victimisation, to put them where they belong, with the 'weaker sex'. That such defensive action should be necessary suggests that *Cape Fear* indulges in some disturbing gender bending (1993: 133).

Cook proposes that Scorsese positions the audience in a feminised relation to the text, inviting us into the film's world of masochism and suffering. Although seeing the movie as ultimately "feminophobic" (1993: 137), Cook argues that *Cape Fear* enacts a variety of gender-related themes such as cross-dressing and masquerade which make the fate of masculinity a troublesome and uncomfortable proposition for male reviewers. Thus Cook identifies one way in which masculinist film criticism privileges the formation of patriarchal viewing

practices. In the case of canonical critiques of 1950s science fiction movies, these practices are based upon the implicit understanding that the texts offer a limited range of interpretative possibilities. The movies are read as plotting an inescapable narrative destiny for the female lead, characterising her as a victim and/or the sex interest. It is assumed that the desires expressed in the texts are strictly heterosexual, with female bodies being the focus of all visual gratification. The male lead's heroism is rarely seen as compromised or illusory because only the overall outcome is promoted as significant. Female characters are therefore often regarded as unimportant, or as minor distractions to the film's main contest. Such a viewing practice dictates that each ending, no matter what content has gone before, will inevitably valourise homogeneity, heterosexuality and political conservatism. Finally, in return for seeing these films as masculinist political allegories, we are offered the Oedipal resolution as a reward.

Science fiction itself has been (and still is) a predominantly male-directed, male-defined, and male-centred popular literary and media genre. Scott Sanders, writing about literary science fiction, asserts that the genre has traditionally linked femininity to nature rather than to intellect and, in reflecting phallocentric narratives, has depicted males as the interpreters and masters of knowledge (1981: 42). Women, meanwhile, remain that which is irrational, instinctive and mysterious. Sanders quotes from Robert Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* (1966) by way of illustration. One of Heinlein's characters observes that "Women are amazing creatures—sweet, soft, gentle, and far more savage than we are" (1981: 42). The positioning of woman as Other is clearly in evidence here, so much so that one might substitute the word "Martians" for "women" and retain the same sense of difference engendered in this quotation. "She" is an alien, a different kind of being to that of the male subject. Illustrating a similar point of view, John Brosnan (1991: 89) describes a seaside encounter with the monster from *It Came from Beneath the Sea* (1955). In doing so he does

not perceive that the film's male lead may be unequal to his self-conferred task of protector and hero, but instead notes that the female lead screams when she sees the Seabeast. Operating within a patriarchal viewing practice, the uppity heroine will be the one most compromised by any kind of confrontation, be it with the monster/alien or the male hero.

Given this discursive background, how might the individual female reader not only resist but also re-imagine texts that have been constructed and interpreted almost exclusively by and for males? Women need to use a variety of tactical resources in order to read/write themselves into its fabric. The fact that science fiction is important to me helps illustrate the complex nature of the individual woman and the genre. In a further complication, science fiction has itself long been trivialised, so that the female fan/writer finds herself in a relationship with a devalued genre in which women have traditionally played minor roles. There are many significant exceptions to this assertion, but I believe that the genre's address has only coincidentally, perhaps accidentally, been made to me as a female. Women writers and enthusiasts certainly have made their own spaces, such as media fandom and fan textual re-writing, indicating that women can negotiate particular and significant positions for themselves within fan communities.[1] Despite, or perhaps because of, these discontinuities, science fiction is a vehicle *par excellence* for providing women with powerful reading positions, and I hope to support this assertion throughout this thesis. I also believe that the tale of the hero constitutes a powerful storyline for feminism to appropriate, to challenge and to change. This belief is fundamental to the research I present in this thesis. In terms of the hero narrative, Hourihan has noted, "the meaning of a particular version of the story can become unstable. Images which once seemed to embody the traditional dualisms and assert the superiority of European patriarchy may now seem to reveal an opposite reality" (1997: 108). Being a feminist in the world of masculinist discourse has interwoven with my own engagement with science fiction. I am interested in pursuing the question of how disruptions

to patriarchal reading practices may be formed, and how the forces and ideas of science fiction have allowed me to read its (predominantly) masculinist texts subversively. Although the 1950s movies I discuss were not necessarily conceived as radical documents, many offer ample ground upon which to reconstruct gender as well as reveal a wider range of social and cultural issues of their day. I will argue that their female characters, and the narratives they inhabit, provide considerable ground for contestation and exploration. They disrupt the trajectory of the hero myth, injecting it with uncertainty often not resolved at the film's conclusion, and suggest concepts and directions beyond the sexed binary dichotomies of liberal/humanism.

In this thesis I therefore offer a range of interpretative practices by which to discern and discuss the female hero. Such characters in 1950s science fiction films also offer an important perspective from which to consider issues of female spectatorship and the construction of the cinematic female subject. The films remain enticingly ambivalent texts which undermine many stereotypical values and conservative mores, particularly those related to gender. Feminist theorists have sought to show how American cinema has given preeminence to a masculinised vision of powerless women, while male characters and filmmakers represent power and control the action of the film. Nevertheless, I will argue that the depiction of certain characters that I have called female heroes provide significant room for negotiation of gender and power relations. A feminist evaluation of 1950s science fiction films is necessary in order to re-imagine the nature of their female heroes and the function of the texts themselves. Their female characters are usually overlooked as merely hapless heroines, reflecting a more general pattern of female representation in film and popular culture. While feminist writers, fans and critics offer insights into these processes of resistance and tactical reading, I believe that the films of the 1950s are significant texts which have largely, and erroneously, been ignored by feminist endeavour.

If the science fictional females of the era present transgressive female characters, so too the texts they populate are diverse and unpredictable. The cinema of the 1950s generally problematised masculinity, and this can also be found in the science fiction movies of that era. The leading males in *Fiend Without a Face* (1957) and *It Came from Outer Space* (1953) are far from successfully macho heroes. The leading man who struggles with his masculine identity does not necessarily present us with a radical storyline and, as I illustrate in Chapters One and Three, is the very essence of the traditional hero quest. Yet I will suggest that when these difficulties are linked to the alterity and power of the female hero—as in *Them!* (1954) and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951)—alternative forms of female embodiment have the opportunity to emerge. While the love stories found in these narratives tend to be heterosexual and monogamous, movies such as *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957) and *It Came from Beneath the Sea* challenge these themes by offering fantastic alternatives to bourgeois marriage. Romance is often seen as a mere sub-plot to stories of adventure, yet films such as in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1958) reveal that gender relations lay at the heart, rather than at the periphery, of the text. While overtly heterosexual in content, 1950s science fiction movies also present us with homoerotic themes and imagery, with *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), *Conquest of Space* (1955) and *The Atomic Submarine* (1959) providing fascinating examples. These texts also challenge the closure of the hero narrative, with *Them!* (1954), *Earth vs. The Flying Saucers* (1956), *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953) and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* all forecasting (in their different ways) an obscure and unpredictable destiny for humanity.

Despite the potential of their female heroes, 1950s science fiction films can simply be thought of as masculinised tales of adventure featuring that kind of plucky American female Jeanine Basinger finds in women's films, "trying to establish a place for herself, demanding equality"

(1993: 24). Such cinematic females "trouble" men in a systematic and controllable way, and therefore might be dismissed as feisty, male-centred characterisations. This critical position draws on (for instance) Howard Hawkes' well-known *penchant* for tough "boyish" female stars such as Katharine Hepburn and Lauren Bacall.[2] Moreover, Judith Newton observes that in Hollywood the promising female hero's story can be "diluted by the introduction of a love plot . . . 'getting the man too' has been a standard qualification of female independence in women's fiction and women's movies since the 1930s" (1990: 84). Yet, in the (predominantly male-directed) science fiction films of the 1950s, getting one's man and having a career seems to have had distinctive historical significance. Glenna Matthews notes that in 1950s U.S.A., the "career woman was a well-identified threat to the social order, but so, too was the housewife who had insufficiently purged herself of her unfeminine traits" (1987: 210-211). Normal women were expected to be non-threatening, stay-at-home types, and Matthews finds "the career woman syndrome" (as dubbed by *Life* magazine in 1956) was blamed for the unhappiness experienced by many newly married women. This neatly bound the working woman to the unhappy housewife, with the unwomanly pursuit of career at the basis for cultural discontent. It is indeed interesting that the Housewife Hero and the Lady Scientist are the two kinds of female hero characterisations I discern in 1950s science fiction movies. These coincide with the troublesome groups identified by Matthews, those figures of crucial social concern in the post-war years.

In order to explore the female hero in 1950s science fiction films, the following work is divided into four parts. Part One, "Woman Without a Face", contemplates the sexed nature of the hero narrative and of the phallocentric nature of popular film. Before envisaging subversive and transformative cinematic females it is important to understand in more detail how patriarchal discourses gender the hero, as well as how and why heroic narratives can be seen to exclude women. In *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (1984), Teresa de

Lauretis examines the characters of Medusa and the Sphinx in order to elaborate the problem of female representation within mythology and feminist theory. These legendary females exemplify those who "have survived inscribed in hero narratives, in someone else's story, not their own . . . [as figures] through which the hero and his story move to their destination and to accomplish meaning" (1984: 109). In Chapter One, "The Incredible Missing Woman", I consider the ramifications of the exclusions de Lauretis identifies by examining some popular concepts of the hero and asking how these are manifest in commentaries on 1950s science fiction films. I also situate popular works on the hero, such as those of Joseph Campbell (1988a, 1988b), into a gendered environment. The chapter concludes by placing the hero narrative into a feminist setting using the work of de Lauretis and her discussion on the construction of cinematic desire. In so doing I also pose a number of critical problems which must be born in mind while considering the possibility of a disruptive female hero in popular film.

Chapter Two, "Gaze of the Non-Phallic Monster", offers an overview feminist film criticism, and how it has distinguished and addressed the phallocentrism of narrative and Hollywood-style cinema. While acknowledging that this form of moviemaking has given preeminence to a masculinised vision of powerless women, the conceptual tools provided by mainly psychoanalytical feminist film theorists are themselves based upon taken-for-granted liberal/humanist dichotomies. While masculinist filmmakers (and the male characters they create) control the narrative, just as surely some forms of feminist film criticism seem to preclude the idea of a successfully transgressive heroic female characterisation. As well as considering the power of the gaze, in this chapter I also discuss the issue of the cinematic female voice in popular film, and in so doing call upon the critical analyses of Laura Mulvey (1989, 1990), Linda Williams (1984), Carol Clover (1992), and Kaja Silverman (1988, 1990).

Both Chapters One and Two serve as background from which to explore the fascinating possibilities of gender and sexuality in 1950s science fiction movies.

In Part Two, "Alien Redirection", I explore the kinds of reading practices are necessary in order to construct a feminist redirection of the heroic narrative. While addressing the place of gender in narrative, de Lauretis asks that we consider the traditional story of Oedipus and the sexed trajectory of narrative itself. In commenting on the course of events told in the Oedipus tale, de Lauretis remarks: "It may well be . . . that the story has to be told differently" (1984: 156-157). She notes that any number of chance interventions or events might occur in the course of the journey onto which Oedipus is thrust. Any of these imagined changes could allow us to redirect the narrative, opening the way to alternative concepts of the hero. What would happen, de Lauretis asks (1984: 153), if Oedipus (the male hero) was to arrive at his narrative destination only to find that Alice (the feminine subject, the heroine) "didn't live there anymore?" What would it mean if the Oedipal trajectory was abandoned—or at least undermined—by the heroine herself? De Lauretis believes that feminism needs "to enact the contradiction of female desire, and of women as social subjects, in the terms of narrative" (1984: 156). The ability to formulate such an alien redirection, to question, analyse and re-imagine the nature of gender and narrative, are challenging tasks for feminist scholarship.[3]

In order to ground such a challenge, Chapter Three, "Attack of the Little Men", looks at the depiction of indecisive or flawed masculinity in the 1950s. I ask whether male cinematic heroes are as unproblematically masculine and successful as they are thought to be by liberial/humanist analysis and some forms of feminist film theory. Do the difficulties of an ineffectual male allow for the emergence of female heroes? The 1950s was a complex era in terms of its presentation of gender and perhaps the blemished male hero in science fiction films of the decade might leave enough cinematic space for his female counterpart. Yet if

masculinity is the goal, is the *struggle* for manhood more important than the depiction of the occasional less-than-macho male? It may be that the contradictions and complexities of masculine identity can be exposed without displacing the discourses within which they are constructed. In order to discuss these possibilities, I examine a number of films with particular emphasis on *Die Hard* (1988) and *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, and draw mainly on critical works by Fred Pfeil (1995), Yvonne Tasker (1993) and Leon Hunt (1993).

In the next chapter, "*Her! Her!* The Spectacular Female Subject", I investigate gender representation in science fiction films and detail how we might perceive and examine subversive female characters. What alternative stories to be told using the female hero, and how can she redirect female subjectivity? In addressing these and related issues I focus on the character of Ripley in *Alien* (1979), as well as a range of female characters from the 1950s as well as films from contemporary action cinema. A discussion of critical work by Elizabeth Hills (1997), Ros Jennings (1987), Rebecca Bell-Metereau (1985), Tasker (1993) and Marleen Barr (1991) supports this chapter. The cinematic themes and concerns thus identified can inform a feminist reading of science fiction films from the 1950s. Throughout this discussion I seek to identify the female hero as one who eludes, confronts, or endeavours to escape from, the oppositional binaries of gendered identity.

Part Three, "The Housewife Hero: She Walks Among Us", begins my detailed examination of the 1950s science fiction texts by looking at three films in which emerges the unusual figure of the Housewife Hero. Characters such as Marge Farrell (*I Married a Monster from Outer Space*), Helen Benson (*The Day the Earth Stood Still*), Ellen Fields (*It Came from Outer Space*), Helene Delambre (*The Fly*, 1958), and Becky Driscoll (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*) are all presented as ordinary women caught up by a science fiction narrative in ways both intriguing and revealing. Such commonplace women are not immediately

identified as powerful. While strictly speaking these characters are not all housewives, the worlds created by these films do not grant them any distinctive standing or professional rank. Helen Benson and Ellen Fields have paid employment, but we see little or no evidence of these occupations. When Ellen helps to investigate an alien sighting she does so under the threat of losing her teaching position, while we may infer that Helen's meagre secretarial job barely provides enough for herself and her son. Yet it is Helen Benson, the secretary and widowed mother, who can learn to become a hero. In the popular movies of the 1950s we would normally expect such female characters to be identified in familial terms: as the wife, the mother or the girlfriend. Becky Driscoll, for instance, returns to her home town after failing as a wife, reverting firstly to her role as daughter and later to that of girlfriend to the leading male. As if to emphasise personal relationships over public status, Housewife Heroes tend to be found in movies featuring a range of other traditional female characters. These roles vary from the relatives, friends or acquaintances of the main characters, to a variety of other domestic or sexualised occupations. *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* exemplifies this well: during the film we are introduced to Marge Farrell's female friends as well as to a prostitute and two women at a bar looking for male company. Although these lesser or non-heroic characters generally occupy minor roles in the narrative, they augment both the sense of the domestic every day world, and as well as the sexualised territory into which the female hero must venture.[4]

By calling the Housewife Hero "ordinary" I wish to build a picture of a female character who, at least at the beginning of a film, has an unexceptional relationship to femininity and domesticity. If these characters become heroes it is because they call upon a range of resources and use these to challenge the monsters of a male-centred narrative. In fact, the very ordinariness of such characters suggests that they are disempowered by the world in which they live until remarkable circumstances test their heroic potential. Therefore by

placing the terms Housewife and Hero together I seek to disassemble the implicit dichotomous relationship between the domestic sphere of the heroine and the public world of the hero. I also want to invoke the disruption wrought when non-domestic realms are infiltrated by transgressive females. By offering the Housewife Hero as a descriptor I am not endeavouring to show that she is the antithesis of the Lady Scientist. I do not propose an opposition between professionalism, science, expertise and knowledge on the one hand, and domesticity, chaos, incompetence and ignorance on the other. Rather I suggest that ordinary women who become heroes in science fiction of the 1950s can be discussed in relation to a number of factors. They have the ability to act, to transform, and to be more than simply an "element of plot-space" described by de Lauretis (1984: 119). Housewife Heroes are not themselves obstacles *to* any heroic male, but must overcome the boundaries placed before them by patriarchal males (both human and alien). They challenge the assurance of the Oedipal resolution by opposing or disrupting the male-centred narrative. The movies in which Housewife Heroes emerge often extend their sense of disruption to the non-human creatures they depict, suggesting that monsters and humans are neither separate nor immutable, nor locked within the boundaries of sexed identity. Thus the alien Bill in *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* can show that monsters themselves may evolve, discovering new forms of self-awareness and emotion. Becky Driscoll can be viewed either as a weak woman who becomes a monster, or as a human who finds a different territory beyond binary oppositions, someone who slips beyond masculine reality. The sexually ambiguous Klaatu is labelled an invading monster by some characters in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, yet he is revealed to the audience as a mortal being who is both benign and powerful.

In Chapter Five, "Evasion of the Body Snatchers", I examine the elusive heroism of Housewife Hero Becky Driscol in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers.* In so doing I take to

Nancy Steffen-Fluhr's (1984) analysis of the film as my central critical source. This movie is usually read as a male-centred narrative telling the story of an embattled hero struggling with other-worldly invaders. It is also largely understood as a political allegory of the 1950s, an articulate indictment of post-war invasion paranoia. In line with Steffen-Fluhr, I examine the film from a gendered perspective and situate its love-story as the central theme of the film. I then seek to describe Becky as a transformative character whose re-gendered female body allows us to re-imagine the nature of heroism and of gender itself.

Chapter Six, "I Married a Misogynist from Outer Space", considers the remarkable female hero Marge Farrell from *I Married a Monster from Outer Space.* Marge's confrontations with her alien husband allow us to consider the issue of gendered colonisation by a patriachal invasion force. The film also exposes an array of problems inherent in post-war bourgeois marriage and sexual relations. In particular, this Housewife Hero remains a character whose feminised presence and ability to "look" with impunity offers the opportunity to re-appraise the gendered nature of the gaze in popular film. In this chapter I draw on the critical perspectives of Homi Bhabha (1992), Harry Benshoff (1997) and Linda Williams (1984).

The final Housewife Hero I discuss in detail is Helen Benson from *The Day the Earth Stood Still.* Chapter Seven, "Farewell to the Master('s Gaze)", follows the adventures of both Helen and the alien Klaatu. Helen begins her screen life as a particularly domesticated woman, raising her son alone after the death of her husband. This movie charts the ways she changes into a hero, culminating in her repudiation of her boyfriend and her confrontation with the Gort the killer robot. I examine this encounter with Gort in some detail, asserting that it offers not a timorous heroine, but a female hero who single-handedly saves the world. In this chapter I use the work of Peter Biskind (1983) and Mark Jancovich (1996) to inform my discussion.

In Part Four, "Lady Scientists Strike Back", I ask whether Brosnan's "standard-issue lady scientist" (1991: 94) can conquer the imperatives of phallocentric narrative. Can such characters transgress the terms of gendered binary oppositions, and denounce patriarchal assumptions about the nature of femininity? In this part of the discussion I will present readings of several films in which a central female character offers just such distinctive opportunities. I also seek to appropriate the term Lady Scientist, moving it from a pejorative and somewhat facetious description to one of transgressive power and knowledge. The films to be discussed show female heroes embodying a range of technical skills, as well as physical and intellectual resources. These Lady Scientists confront a variety of strange creatures, as well as racism, patriarchy and the potential for their own visual entrapment. Rather than floundering as a passive heroine, the Lady Scientist allows us to mobilise the pleasures of interrogation and disruption, and to re-imagine the capabilities of the female hero. It is also worth noting that characters such as Carol Marvin (*Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*) and Nikki Nicholson (*The Thing*, 1951) illustrate that in these films women do not have to possess a formal qualification to expertly utilise scientific insight. More important than their formal status is their ability to offer the pleasurable sight of disruptive females of power and knowledge.

In contemporary science fiction films it is still unusual to find female heroes who represent science, knowledge and culture. Such rare figures offer the opportunity to expose and subvert the opposition of man/non-man by virtue of their complex affinity with so-called masculine qualities. While many recent movies do offer a range of female characters who are either scientists or other professionals, such roles do not necessarily address themselves to transgressive gender outcomes. For example, *Lost In Space* (1998), based on the 1960s television series of the same name, provides an up-dated portrayal of the Robinson women,

strengthening their personalities and emphasising their scientific roles. Yet while we are offered the enhanced roles of *Prof.* Maureen and *Dr.* Judy Robinson, the film slips inexorably into an Oedipal black hole, becoming a 1990s re-articulation of the "family values" fundamental to the original television series. Lynn Spigel believes that the U.S. television in the 1960s depicts outer space "as a place that the white middle-class family could claim as their own" (1991: 205). In this way the unfamiliar can be supplanted with traditional familial values and become a proper place for bourgeois colonisation. One might add, at least where the latest *Lost In Space* is concerned, that it also becomes the perfect place for the continuance of patriarchal privilege and the reinforcement of gender cliché. Meanwhile, *Jurassic Park* (1993) and *The Lost World* (1997) proffer the roles of professional paleontologists Dr. Ellie Sattler and Dr. Sarah Harding. These characters take part in their respective films' adventures, and defend their participation through repartee with their male colleagues. Yet neither female character disrupts or challenges the narrative and it is possible to read them as up-dated versions of an old-fashioned plucky heroine. Thus Cynthia Freeland's discussion of *Jurassic Park* sees Ellie Sattler as a traditional (albeit well-educated) heroine (1996: 209-211), while Marina Warner suggests that it is the "cunning, voracious [and] nippy" female velociraptors which offer the most fertile material through which to consider the film's engagement with gender (1994: 2). One recent film to offer a different kind of relationship between femininity and science is *Contact* (1997). Its leading character, Dr. Eleanor (Ellie) Arroway, represents an unusual synthesis of woman, science and culture. Ellie's scientific expertise is emphasised throughout the film and is an integral part of her character's motivation and growth. Her goals, experiences, and veracity are all challenged by patriarchal authority. Ellie's obstacle on her quest for extraterrestrial intelligence is a male bureaucracy that initially claims her work as its own, and then covers-up her results to suit its purposes. There is even the complication of a romance with Palmer Joss (the male love-interest). While compulsory heterosexuality is usually employed to curtail female heroism, in

this film Palmer adopts the (usually feminised) role of empathetic and supportive partner, urging Ellie to acknowledge the importance of both science and faith in her heroic quest. Ellie is a Lady Scientist whose knowledge and understanding is enhanced, not revoked, by her transformative journey through the worm-hole. Such characters help re-write the nature of the female hero, and it is these I seek in the science fiction movies of the 1950s.

In the first chapter of this section, "She Conquered the Oedipal Narrative", I discuss the achievements of a consummate Lady Scientist, Dr. Lesley Joyce from *It Came from Beneath the Sea*. By drawing on the work of Lorraine Code (1991, 1995) and her discussions on the gendered politics of knowledge, I will suggest that Lesley helps reveal and transgresses some of the sexed presumptions attached to "knowing". I refer also to the analysis of mimicry and masquerade made by Diana Fuss in *Identification Papers* (1995), and examine how mimicry offers a way to theorise some actions of the Lady Scientist as gender parody rather than as capitulation to traditional femininity. Mimicry can allow us to see which acts are perpetrated by the heroine, rather than upon her. Importantly, Lesley Joyce challenges traditionally sexed binary oppositional relationships and the inevitability of a successful Oedipal outcome for the film's male heroes.

In Chapter Nine, "White Woman in a Black Lagoon", I discuss *Creature from the Black Lagoon*. This film confronts the notion that 1950s science fiction films deal only with the worries of the Cold War while ignoring racism, the other great American social issue to rise to social prominence in that decade. My reading of *Creature from the Black Lagoon* sees Kay and the Creature embodying the intersection of gender and race in a patriarchal postcolonial society. The movie is also imbued with homosociality, rendering it a taut and fascinating vehicle in which to seek the Lady Scientist. In particular I look in detail at Kay's famous plunge into the Black Lagoon in an effort to re-imagine her character beyond the sexist

imperatives of the gaze. I refer mainly to the critical analyses of James Snead (1994), Harry Benshoff (1997) and Mark Jancovich (1996) in this discussion.

Finally in Chapter Ten, "Queen of the Ants", we met Lady Scientist Pat Medford from *Them!*. Pat is unique in this group of 1950s characters because the antagonists she confronts are feminised terrors. In order to examine the narrative in which she is found, I therefore offer parallel analyses of *Them!* and *Aliens* (1986). Both films present female heroes engaging with the problem of explicitly feminised opponents. Accordingly, I draw on Barbara Creed's use of the monstrous feminine (1993, 1995) and Julia Kriseva's concept of the abject in *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection* (1982) when exploring these texts. I will suggest that rather than being confounded by the gender of the obstacle, the female hero reveals and redirects the trajectory of the Oedipal narrative itself.

It is interesting to note that the three 1950s Lady Scientists I discuss here in detail are each accompanied on their adventures by a pair of male characters: Lesley Joyce chases the Seabeast with Pete Mathews and John Carter; Kay Lawrence ventures into the Black Lagoon with Mark Williams and David Reed; while Pat Medford tracks the giant Ants aided by Ben Peterson and Bob Graham. Rather than representing a romantic "eternal triangle" this linking of three leading characters can also prove disruptive, revealing the workings of heterosexuality, gender and the Oedipal narrative. These texts can offer an entirely different range of reading positions for the female viewer, a way to move beyond the fatal confinements of the heroine and into an entirely more dangerous and pleasurable territory.

In writing a thesis about science fiction and cinema, there are some inevitable questions to be addressed. What constitutes a science fiction film? What makes the movies of the 1950s a discrete category worthy of critical attention? I do not wish to offer explicit answers to these

questions, nor attempt to pin-point the nature of science fiction in general. To try to do so would itself be an enormous undertaking, and am I not convinced that it would add significantly to a view of the films examined in this work. Science fiction has long struggled to define itself, primarily as a form of literature. One internet site alone has 52 definitions of literary science fiction provided by a range of authors and critics.[5] It may be just as informative to abide by Damon Knight's well-known declaration: "Science fiction is what I point to when I say 'science fiction'". It is my own decision to call the texts with which I deal "science fiction" films. This is not done to infer any concept of purity or to distinguish them from horror or any other generic form. As Vivian Sobchack notes, many science fiction movies (particularly of the 1950s) cannot be fixed securely into any one genre, with films such as *The Thing*, *Them!* and *Creature form the Black Lagoon* being hybrid texts (1997: 55). *Fiend Without a Face*, for instance, links scenes set in a graveyard crypt at midnight with ones of atomic technology. All the movies I thus dub "1950s science fiction movies" have been viewed through my own eyes as texts involving a complex interaction of themes and historical specificity. They are a contrary assemblage. Heavily influenced by post-war skepticism on the abuse of power and science, they continually rely on the mechanisms of authority (especially the military) to rout their monsters. They are deeply patriotic yet worried about the wrongful use of technology by Us (the nuclear-capable U.S.A.) as well as Them (an outside menace most often generalised as communist). They set up monsters and aliens as threats to the symbolic order, yet these creatures often arise from within the workings of that very order. They value the Everyman, the decent thinking (male) citizen, yet often distrust his ability to think beyond his own needs or aggrandisement. They ostensibly rely on his masculinity to save the day, but are forever undermining his patriarchal assurance and displacing his success in transgressive ways. They offer endings without conclusions, and conclusions without ending. They interrogate the problems of place and the fragility of humanity. They go into, escape from, or otherwise explore the Earth as a boundary, a threat

and a home. One of the most significant themes in 1950s science fiction movies is that of the permeability of technological and bodily boundaries, with alien and human chafing at the edges of physicality. The ambiguous relations between females and males and alien beings problematise the whole notion of boundary and rigid category, while struggling to reinscribe just such borders. And time and again they foreground gender and sexuality, presenting exceptional yet sexy female leads who act in ways so unexpected that they are largely unseeable within a patriarchal field of vision.

While the following discussion focus almost entirely on cinematic female heroes, the opportunity to re-examine such representations is not restricted to the movies. Many television series offer the potential for heroic female characters. Susan Ivanova and Delenn (*Babylon 5*), Dana Scully (*The X Files*), Xena and Gabrielle (*Xena: Warrior Princess*), Tasha Yar (*Star Trek: The Next Generation*), Kira Nerys (*Star Trek: Deep Space 9*), and Kathryn Janeway (*Star Trek: Voyager*) are some characters pertinent to a discussion on the complexities of depicting female heroism in popular culture. For instance, the ability to read *Xena: Warrior Princess* as primarily a lesbian narrative, disruptive of both the male-centred hero quest and heterosexism, would itself make a fascinating diversion. Just as fruitful would be a critique of Meaghan Morris's less-than-heroic picture of Dana Scully. With what seems to be an acceptance of female narrative inferiority, Morris sees Scully as "the bimbo figure" of the series rather than an authoritative presence or one half of an effective team (1996: 17). I offer no detailed examinations of these characters here: not because they are unimportant, but because television brings with it specific reading practices, its own history and narrative trajectories.[6] It would also significantly increase the scope of this discussion to give these characters the consideration they deserve.

While doing research for this thesis, I found a description of female heroes from what seemed to me to be an unlikely source. In *No End to Her: Soap Opera and the Female Subject* (1992) Martha Nochimson writes about early radio soap-opera heroines such as Mary Noble in Mary Noble, Backstage Wife (broadcast between 1935 and 1959). Nochimson observes:

> The soap opera heroine's story persistently undermined the belief that this is a man's world by presenting us with heroes who were neither as effective nor as aware as the heroines. In violating the conventions her audience was subject to, the early female soap opera subject was a fantasy in a double sense. First, she defied the ordinary patriarchal assumptions about woman's place: she was neither an object securely under male control nor dangerous. Second, she did not seem to need to fight for her right to deviate from the way the audience knew most women were forced to behave. She was a euphoric fantasy, the incarnation of the powerful female subject... [She embodied] the excitement of a female freedom that was never revoked by either a hero or a plot (1992: 47).

Although referring to a completely different set of texts, this statement is the best summation I can find for my own perceptions of female heroes in 1950s science fiction films. Their narratives and characteristics are not the same as those of male heroes, and they exist in gendered territories where masculinity can be at once endangered and destructive. Neither obstacles nor *femme fatales*, these cinematic females offer powerful fantasies and eloquent articulations of a different kind of heroic embodiment. In the chapters to follow I explore the outlandish realms in which the fugitive female hero in 1950s science fiction films can be re-imagined and enjoyed.

Year	Film	Character(s) Name	Description
1951	The Day the Earth Stood Still	Helen Benson	Secretary, widowed mother
	The Thing (from Another World)	Nikki Nicholson	Assistant to scientist
1952	When Worlds Collide	Joyce Hedron	Scientist
1953	The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms	Lee Hunter	Paleontologist
	Invaders from Mars	Patricia Blake	MD/psychologist
	It Came from Outer Space	Ellen Fields	School teacher
	Phantom from Space	Barbara Randall	Scientist/assistant
1954	Creature from the Black Lagoon	Kay Lawrence	Marine biologist
	Devil Girl from Mars	Nyah	Alien invader
	Them!	Pat Medford	Entomologist
	The War of the Worlds	Sylvia van Buren	College teacher
1955	It Came from Beneath the Sea	Lesley Joyce	Marine Biologist
	Tarantula	Steve (Stephanie) Clayton	Biologist/graduate researcher
	This Island Earth	Ruth Adams	Atomic scientist
1956	The Creature Walks Among Us	Marcia Barton	Wife of scientist
	Earth vs. the Flying Saucers	Carol Marvin	Assistant to scientist/husband
	Forbidden Planet	Altaira (or Alta)	Daughter of scientist
	Invasion of the Body Snatchers	Becky Driscoll	Divorcée
	It Conquered the World	Clare Anderson	Wife of scientist
	The Mole People	Adad	Servant
1957	Fiend Without a Face	Barbara Grisselle	Assistant to scientist
	The Giant Claw	Sally Caldwell	Mathematican/systems analyist
	The Incredible Shrinking Man	Louise Carey; Clarice	Housewife; circus performer
	The Night the World Exploded	Hutch (Laura) Hutchinson	Geophysicist
1958	I Married a Monster from Outer Space	Marge Farrell	Housewife
	It! The Terror from Beyond Space	Ann Anderson	Geologist
	The Fly	Helene Delambre	Wife of scientist
1960	Twelve to the Moon	Hideko Murata	Astrophysicist
	The Wasp Woman	Janice Starlin	Cosmetics entrepreneur

TABLE 1: Main female characters in cited 1950s science fiction films (films alphabetically by year).

Year	Film	Character(s) Name	Description
1951	The Day the Earth Stood Still	Klaatu; Tom Stevens	Extraterrestial; jealous lover
	The Thing (from Another World)	Pat Hendry	Airforce captain
1952	When Worlds Collide	Dave Randall	Pilot
1953	The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms	Tom Nesbitt	Atomic scientist
	It Came from Outer Space	John Putnam	Amateur astronomer/writer
	Phantom from Space	Lt. Hazen; Lt. Bowers	Law enforcement officials
1954	Creature from the Black Lagoon	David Reed; Mark Williams	Marine biologists
	Them!	Ben Peterson; Bob Graham	Police officer; FBI agent
	The War of the Worlds	Clayton Forrester	Scientist
1955	Conquest of Space	Barney Merritt	Captain on space-station
	It Came from Beneath the Sea	Pete Mathews; John Carter	Navy commander; marine biologist
	Tarantula	Doc (Matt) Hastings	M.D.
	This Island Earth	Cal Meacham	Atomic scientist
1956	The Creature Walks Among Us	Thomas Morgan	Scientist
	Earth vs. the Flying Saucers	Russell Marvin	Rocket scientist
	Forbidden Planet	John J. Adams	Commander of spacecraft
	Invasion of the Body Snatchers	Miles Bennell	M.D.
	The Mole People	Roger Bentley; Jud Bellamin	Archeologists
1957	Fiend Without a Face	Jeff Cummings	Airforce major
	The Incredible Shrinking Man	Robert Scott Carey	Account executive
	The Night the World Exploded	Dave Conway	Geophysicist
	20 Million Miles to Earth	Robert Calder	Spaceship commander/army colonel
1958	The Blob	Steve Andrews	High school student
	I Married a Monster from Outer Space	'Bill Farrell'	Alien invader
	It! The Terror from Beyond Space	Edward Curruthers	Spaceship commander/ colonel
1959	The Atomic Submarine	Reef (Richard) Holloway; Carl Nielson	Naval officer; scientist

TABLE 2: Main male characters in cited 1950s science fiction films (films alphabetically by year).

Part 1

Woman Without a Face

"Kay? Where's Kay?"

Mark Williams to male companions
Creature from the Black Lagoon (1954)

Chapter One - The Incredible Missing Woman

In *The Female Hero in American and British Literature* (1981), Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope examine the gendered nature of heroes in a range of works written about myth and drama, noting that the influential books of Lord Raglan, Dorothy Norman and Joseph Campbell have almost exclusively situated heroism as a male quality (1981: vii). Lord Raglan, dealing with the origins of ritual and myth, saw the figure of a heroic sacrificial king as the basis of all mythico-religious structure. Joseph Frontenrose discusses the way in which Raglan envisaged such an ur-myth beginning with a real king, ritually killed as a sacrifice of renewal, with the process later becoming symbolised in various forms (1998: 429). While Frontenrose finds historical grounds on which to object to Raglan, it is important to recognise that both the imagining and the proffering of a male body as a symbol of renewal takes place within a patriarchal setting, one in which the civilised, heroic male has become the carrier of power and transcendence. Of the group of writers mentioned by Pearson and Pope, Joseph Campbell is arguable the best-known.[1] In fact one motivation for my present enquiry is based on Campbell's idea of recognising the heroic as a significant cultural symbol.

Campbell drew on mythology and Jungian perspectives to illustrate what he saw as a universal journey which a person must undertake in order to *become* a hero. In the televised series *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth* (1988a) Campbell discusses the cultural significance and characteristics of the hero. To summarise briefly, Campbell describes the way in which different cultures tell stories of individuals who seek out (or are thrust upon) a quest or journey. The quest for the Holy Grail is an obvious example from Western cultural mythology, wherein only the noblest and purest of Knights can seek the spiritual path which

the Grail is said to represent (Campbell 1988b: 195-196). Once launched upon his journey, the individual must turn away from the everyday realm (that which is known) and accept the uncertainties laying ahead. He will encounter wondrous and fearful beasts, or other trials, all of which must be either overcome or endured. Overpowering a beast is a metaphor for "slaying the dragon" of the status quo (to use Campbell's term). This defiance of convention is something that only the hero can achieve, and its function is to reveal the orthodoxies inherent in the hero's own culture. The hero therefore has the potential of turning restrictive myths and practices into sources of wisdom. In undertaking such a task, the hero casts away the "self", the individual ego, learning to act on a higher level and for the greater good. By losing the self, a person gains a new perspective on a larger world. He then must return to normal life bringing back the message of this new knowledge. Thus the basic elements of the hero's journey entail a physical deed (the quest or journey or problem), a spiritual awakening (brought about by the trials of the hero), and an outcome (the knowledge freely given to others). J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1968) fits perfectly into this pattern of heroic enlightenment, as do the Biblical stories of the birth, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.

In re-telling these heroic stories Campbell remains a firmly entrenched patriarch, making no acknowledgment that masculinity is the unspoken subject of the hero narrative. For instance, during his interviews with Moyers (1988a), Campbell makes several references to the original *Star Wars* trilogy. Campbell clearly admires these stories for their exciting re-telling of the hero's classic quest, and mentions four leading *Star Wars* characters in connection with their mythic and heroic potential: he speaks of Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, Obi-Wan Kanobi and Darth Vader. Princess Leia, however, is never mentioned. She is not considered as a hero, a rebel leader, or an adventurer. Nor is it an accident that the original *Star Wars* saga is told predominantly from the perspective of Luke Skywalker rather than from that of his sister Leia.

The male hero is equated with the search for individual identity; the female is not. When I view the first three *Star Wars* films I find in Princess Leia a character strong enough to seek her hidden identity, to pursue the Jedi way under Yoda's instruction, and to battle the Evil Emperor by rejecting the dark side of the Force. She could: but, disappointingly, she does not. As Joanna Russ has observed, "[c]ulture is male. . . . And patriarchies imagine or picture themselves from the male point of view" (1995: 81). The omission of Leia from Campbell's account tends to corroborate Pearson and Pope's belief that female heroes can be rendered virtually invisible by discourses of exclusion. Quoting from their own earlier collaborative work (1976), Pearson and Pope re-assert that "[p]atriarchal society views women essentially as supporting characters in the drama of life. Men change the world, and women help them" (1981: vii).[2]

Despite Campbell's exclusion of Leia from a discussion of the hero in *Star Wars*, his interest in the original films is pertinent for these texts illustrate one of the primary myths of the hero quest: that of the son who searches for his father. Discussed by Pearson and Pope (1981: 177), this myth describes a fledgling male hero who seeks his father only to find his own inner self. This particular patriarchal storyline can give the appearance of stretching in an unbroken line from Telemachus to the Skywalker clan. The hero must first dissociate from the mother or a maternal environment before beginning the quest. His initiation into the adult male world will only be complete when he has sought and found his own father. Telemachus goes in search of Odysseus after rejecting maternal values, seeking his patriarchal identity. The hero's wife or mother can be seen as a symbol of the world over which the hero will govern as patriarch. The hero develops his father's positive qualities (autonomy, self-control, independence), and will finally replace the father in the world. Thus Luke Skywalker searches for and appeals to the good within Darth Vader in order to delineate the good within himself. *Star Wars Episode 1: The Phantom Menace* (1999) develops the heroic story-arc even further.

The *Star Wars* universe now takes up the tale of Anakin, and promises to place *his* journey into the spotlight. Anakin's striving for heroic personhood, and his inevitable struggle with the Dark Side in his Vader identity, may well out-shine the adventures of Luke. Yet this change in emphasis seems only to support the primacy of the male-centred quest, casting the father (instead of the son) into the new spotlight.

Campbell does not completely reject the notion of female heroism, but ties it firmly to biology. While retelling legends that he classes as universal symbolic stories of human striving, in *The Power of Myth* Campbell mentions the experience of birth. He declares that this is the first heroic journey embarked upon, both by the person newly-born and by the mother delivering that new life:

> MOYERS: Then heroes are not all men?
> CAMPBELL: Oh no. The male usually has a more conspicuous role, just because of the conditions of life. He is out in the world, and the woman is at home. But among the Aztecs, for example . . . the heaven for warriors killed in battle was the same for mothers who died in childbirth. Giving birth is definitely a heroic deed, in that it is the giving of oneself to the life of another (1988b: 125).

Celebrating the "mother as hero" is a deceptively seductive image, but also an essentialist one. The mother can be a hero at home, in private. Yet suppression of the self through motherhood is *not* the same as transcendence of the self through enlightenment. Due to "the conditions of life", however, this is the lot of women who would be heroes.[3] By relating and interpreting the quest as a male-centred narrative, Campbell all but excludes the possibility of finding a female hero, one who would challenge the fundamental gendering of culture. Moreover, we should not simply accept Campbell's articulation of the heroic story as one which is culturally transformative (1988a). In referring to the work of Jean-Pierre Vernant and myth-making, Marie-Florine Bruneau offers a very different view. She maintains that "a myth tells a story which at once justifies the status quo and veils its foundation, its very origin" (1992: 28).

Thus by re-producing cultural conditions, Bruneau's view is that myths encourage the reinstatement of patriarchal symbolism.

De Lauretis notes the importance of the work of Vladimir Propp to a discussion of the hero in popular culture (1984: 113-116). Working in the 1920s, Propp's examination of folktales lead to his observation that these cultural narratives mark areas of contestation, contradiction and transition. He maintained that that the folk tradition has always been unstable and variable; or to use Marina Warner's description, such tales are "motley, mongrel [and] volatile" (1994: 87). For example, Propp's work emphasises the importance of the princess in hero quest tales, finding that such characters represent "dynastic succession, the transfer of power from one ruler to another" (1984: 113). Thus the role of the princess varies according to the form of succession current when the tale was originally constructed, be it matrilineal, patrilineal, or transition between these two. In a matrilineal tradition the princess may set her suitor/hero a task. He must then successfully fulfil this labour in order to prove his fitness both as husband and as potential ascendant of the throne. *She* will bestow this power if she finds him acceptable.

This Proppian analysis provides a way to illustrate two important issues if we are to seek an enunciation of the female hero. Firstly, it allows us to see that the hero quest changes according to its cultural circumstances. It is not an immutable narrative. Of equal importance, however, is the understanding that stories such as the original *Star Wars* films are over-laden with patriarchal and patrilineal themes despite their portrayal of a brave female character. While one might argue that it is Leia who first sets in motion the events of the saga (as in a matrilineal storyline), the remainder of the tale is steeped in the pursuits of the hero/brother/prince searching for his birth-right (in the patriarchal tradition). While it is interesting that succession is embodied not through Luke but through Leia, who accepts Han

as a suitable partner, this only serves to contain her by both blood succession and romance. Erica Sheen believes that an important part of the *Star Wars* subtext involves such patriarchal messages of male agency and female restriction. Writing in the context of the post-World War Two Hollywood film industry, Sheen notes:

> *Star Wars* and its subsequent sequels must have been very comforting films for postwar fathers, offering the children a vindication of the concept of heroic male agency and in recognizably postwar terms: the contrasting but complementary roles of the adolescent idealist Luke Skywalker, striving to retrieve the legacy of his father's identity, and the freebooting, opportunistic 'mercenary' Han Solo come together to form a masculine analysis of significant social action which also has as its mission the containment—via hidden family ties with the one and romantic love for the other—of the initially politically and emotionally independent Leia (1991: 146).

Sheen's view highlights an important reading of these films. It is interesting that love and family will restrain a female character, making it possible to argue that Luke and Han find truth and glory, while Leia finds Luke and Han.[4]

Despite evidence that the hero quest is a malleable story, Campbell (drawing on a Jungian background) interprets it as a perennial theme that describes a fundamental evolutionary drive within all peoples and societies across time (1988a). An alternative position is offered by Patricia Duncker when she observes:

> [M]yths are culturally specific. They legitimate power structures, endorse and justify existing social arrangements. They explain politics through symbols and metaphors. They offer truth, spiced with eternity (1992: 133).

The persistence of hero myths does not imply that their cultural meaning remains constant nor do they necessarily expose the patriarchal status quo. It should also be remembered that the hero quest is not inevitably a radical storyline, despite Campbell's assertion that it is confronting and challenging (1988a). For example, Peter Biskind sees *The Return of the Jedi* (1983) as a post-Vietnam/pro-Vietcong drama, where the plucky little Ewoks are stand-ins for Third World peoples shrugging off the yoke of U.S. imperialism (1990: 113-114). Yet the

same film may be offering a politically conservative story, one where the heroic forest-dwellers become common folk overcoming the evil might of the communistic Empire. Similarly, *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (1982), has been interpreted by Tom Lalli in light of the rise of Khomeini in Iran (1994: 197ff). Rather than being simply a tale of the search for truth and heroic identity, this film can be seen to cast Khan in the role of the Ayatollah and the heroic Kirk as an aging "Reaganesque" warrior (1994: 198). The movie can thus be read as a text justifying both militarism and the U.S.'s role as an international "peace-keeper" in the Middle East. Thomas Byers also sees it as a story in which conformity is constructed as good and non-conformity is linked to political extremism (1990: 46).[5]

What might this discussion mean in terms of seeking a female hero and finding a place for her in 1950s science fiction films? My aim here is to provide a general interpretative framework for popular evaluations of heroism, and to suggest some ways in which the hero narrative is perceived and re-affirmed as a male-centred story. Pearson and Pope find that the female as hero is readily overlooked in patriarchal critical interpretations, which construct the heroic as Not-Female (1981). It is certainly easy to accommodate female characters in 1950s science fiction movies as the objective or prize of the male hero. This taps into a prevailing discourse which overlooks or accommodates female representation in literature and popular culture, a discourse which Anne Cranny-Francis sees as perpetuating the elision of the female subject (1992: 160-169).

The female lead in 1950s science fiction films can be minimised as well as overlooked.[6] John Baxter does this in describing the opening scenes of *It Came from Outer Space* (1953), where he mentions that the film's hero, John Putnam, observes a space ship crashing into the desert. Baxter omits to mention that Ellen Fields, the female lead, also sees this event and that both characters embark on an investigation of their sighting. A similar accommodation is made for

Dr. Ruth Adams in *This Island Earth* (1955). Peter Nicholls' *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* describes how "[t]he scientist, with his girl-friend (who is also a scientist, and is still a typical 1950s science fiction film heroine), is taken to the Metalunans' home world in their huge flying saucer" (1979: 601). In this case the names of both leading characters are omitted, yet it is the female scientist who is contained within an unspecified "typical" role, while the male Cal Meacham is the subject of the description. John Brosnan also avoids naming Nikki Nicholson when he discusses *The Thing*, choosing instead to write that "the 'love interest' is handled with a certain amount of wit and style, its clichés made painless by an unusually talented director and writer" (1978: 87). Phil Hardy's *Aurum Film Encyclopedia* observes that Nikki's crucial idea of cooking the film's homicidal extraterrestrial intruder is "charming, if unscientific" (1984: 132), failing to identify it as the only concept to stand between the humans and destruction. Elsewhere Dennis Saleh re-names the female lead in *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, referring to her as "Katy" not as Kay (1979: 127; 129).[7]

When describing the characters in *When Worlds Collide* (1952), Saleh offers another example of the male-centred perspective. He writes approvingly of the film's traditional male hero Dave Randall (played by actor Richard Derr). Saleh describes Dave as a "lady's man", detailing how the pilot precariously kisses an unnamed woman while trying to land an aircraft, and later flirts with a flight attendant. Saleh comments on Randall's pursuit of the female lead:

> From their first meeting, [Randall] is after Hedron's daughter, Joyce. . . . In his best scene, Randall flirts with Joyce under the eyes of her other suitor, M.D. Tony Drake. Derr is a cross between Danny Kaye and Alec Guinness and a delight. . . . Derr positively sparkles when he coos Randall's pet name for Joyce, "Stargazer." Barbara Rush as Joyce plays a standard sci-fi role. One of the few ways women got into the films at all was by being scientists; they also had to be tough, come what threats. Hendron's daughter assists his work and enlists the young women on the project, described as "all fine technicians" (1979: 55).

Saleh has every right to be fond of particular fictional characters, and to enjoy the light-hearted role of the would-be seducer Dave Randall. Yet the writer's tone undergoes a change when he mentions the character of Joyce Hendron. She is a "standard" heroine, and would not be there at all except that she has the temerity to be a scientist. She is, however, tough and helpful. Through the use of inverted commas one is left with little doubt of Saleh's thoughts on the female technicians. Using comparable logic, one might suggest that Dave has a place in the story simply because he flies an aircraft. Dr. Hendron enlists him to pilot the escaping spaceship based on Joyce's affection for the flyer, not because Randall possesses any unique skills.

The problems of exclusion or diminution of female characters is revealed in Brosnan's plot description of *Them!* (1954):

> After a series of mysterious incidents the police and the FBI, in the guise of Ben Peterson (James Whitmore) and Robert Graham (James Arness—the 'thing' in *The Thing*), are called in to investigate and, with the help of a scientist, Dr. Medford (Edmund Gwen), and inevitably, his attractive daughter (Joan Weldon), they locate a huge underground nest containing the giant ants" (1978: 96-7).

The unnamed "attractive daughter" is Dr. Patricia Medford who, along with the film's two male heroes, descends into the earth to battle the alien menace. In this film, Pat is established as a significant and powerful figure through a number of devices. For instance, in one scene she stands with the Capitol building behind her while lecturing a group of high-ranking male officials in Washington D.C. She is knowledgeable and, as the construction of this image of federal authority implies, her erudition gives her power in a male world. Yet in Brosnan's reading she is at best a marginal figure. It is just as revealing to consider that the male heroes in *Them!* can be granted a status far greater than their textual achievements. Douglas Menville and R. Reginald claim that it is police officer Ben Peterson (acting on his own) who makes the connection between the presence of formic acid and giant ants (1977: 97). Hardy's

Aurum Film Encyclopedia narrates a version of this film in which the alternate male lead, F.B.I. agent Bob Graham, "investigates and discovers that atomic tests in the desert have produced a giant species of ant" (1984: 148). Both views omit the involvement of other characters in the story and do not grant an active role to Pat Medford.

This position can also be found when commentators review *It Came from Beneath the Sea* (1955) and its leading character Dr. Lesley Joyce. For example, Kim Newman writes:

> Kenneth Tobey [wants to] get Faith Domergue to give up the laboratory for the kitchen. Which shouldn't be too hard, since all she does while the boys are discussing the giant octopus that threatens San Francisco is to make coffee and look beautiful (2000: 84).

While falling within the beautiful Lady Scientist paradigm, Lesley does not make coffee for anyone and seems never to take a back-seat during tactical discussions. A coffee-making role is present in *The Thing*, however, with Nikki Nicholson using this as a ploy for entering into the deliberations of Pat Hendry and his staff, and Newman's comments seem to conflate the female leads in these two films. We may equally claim that *It Came from Beneath the Sea* amply emphasises Lesley's role as a scientist. Yet Saleh merely comments that Lesley "is an unusually present sex interest in the movie, veering between the two [leading] men at first, and then falling for the Navy commander" (1979:139). Even Thomas Doherty's more contemporary article on the heroic and gender-bending capabilities of Ripley from the *Alien* films does not extend a "universe of unsettling possibilities" (1996: 181) to female characters in 1950s science fiction. Doherty writes:

> Two of the stock characters in science fiction cinema—the pilot and the scientific expert—were male-only employment opportunities whose demands for vehicular skill and abstract reasoning disqualified the maladroit and hysterical female from command authority.
>
> Barred from full admission to the upper echelons of the space crew, women entered as novelty and decoration, sometimes even filling the role of scientific expert in an erotically charged white-coated and horn-rimmed-glasses way. . . . [T]he space bimbo filled out a tight-fitting uniform to distract and entice (1996: 194).

The female of the 1950s and 1960s will ultimately betray herself, Doherty contends, because she succumbs to technical ineptitude, a lack of reason, and the need for masculine succour. In such portrayals she falls victim to her biology, her essential womanliness overcoming all transgressive opportunities. According to Doherty, the fruits of disruption would not be harvested until the arrival of Lt. Ripley at the end of the 1970s. Until the depiction of this more contemporary figure, female characters on the screen might best be understood as object and prize, their actions rarely reflecting bravery or heroism.

Even critics who adopt an in-depth approach to 1950s science fiction films tend to reflect the patriarchal pattern of male heroism. For example, in *Them or Us: Archetypal Interpretations of Fifties Alien Invasion Films* (1987) Patrick Lucanio bases his appraisal of 1950s films on Jungian psychology, using it to examine the mythic concepts of the hero, contest, death and rebirth in a range of science fiction films.[8] In this work Lucanio seeks to identify positive roles for females in science fiction movies, while at the same time endorsing the main male character as the centre of an interpretative strategy. Using this Jungian framework, Lucanio interprets attacking monsters and aliens as positive elements of the human psyche rather than representing an eruption of repressed desires (as would a Freudian analysis). For instance, in *It Came from Outer Space* we find a flying saucer (a mandala, a symbol of wholeness) from beyond the Earth (the unconscious), which brings beings (archetypes) to this planet (the conscious mind). Once arrived, the hero (the ego/self) interacts with these beings to produce a harmonious ending (Jungian individuation). Therefore, posits Lucanio, the monster/alien is really a positive sign representing an awareness of both good and evil, leading ultimately to moral decision-making on the part of the individual (1987: 64). Lucanio parallels the quest of the film's hero with that of the ordinary person's search for individuation. While the science fiction hero might illustrate the growth of the psyche, showing the inexorable evolution of a

complete human being in the Jungian sense, it is only the male who progresses on this symbolic quest to find his true self (1987: 84).

In an important assertion Lucanio states that "the alien invasion genre is profoundly patriarchal, and its appeal is especially to young boys" (1987: 86). This statement is perhaps more suggestive of a masculinist position than any essential characteristic of the texts themselves. If science fiction movies do appeal to young boys, and to the adult men they will become, it is because patriarchal reading practices allow them to be read primarily as stories of male triumph. For, if one follows Lucanio's male-centred description, the female in these movies cannot be a hero or ever achieve heroic individuation. Lucanio positions the leading female only as a help-mate on the quest of the scientist/hero. Moreover she *must* remain a heroine to fulfill her purpose in the text. For example, commenting on *Fiend Without a Face* (1957), Lucanio asserts:

> Major Cummings as hero functions as the self archetype and Barbara Grisselle, with respect to her role as Cummings's girl friend and Walgate's secretary, functions as the soul-image, the anima. Professor Walgate is best understood in terms of the ego. . . . (1987: 95).

In *Fiend* Barbara becomes the link between the scientist and the male hero. As the elderly scientist weakens, Lucanio sees the part played by the heroine as increasing in importance because she acts as a conduit between the ego and the awakening self. This crucial role does *not*, however, reveal the potential blossoming of the female hero but points only to growth within the leading male. From Lucanio's vantage point the "self"/hero is masculine and the paradigms used to explain the world are also male.

The task of discerning heroic female figures in 1950s science fiction films is a daunting one. Female characters can be excluded by the very nature of the supposedly unchangeable, unifying, and masculinist hero narrative. When patriarchal terms are used to explain the

presence of females in a range of narratives, these females are read as minor or secondary participants in a tale of male advernture. It proves difficult to disrupt the patriarchal imperative of the hero myth using Lucanio's framework. The female-as-hero is as absent from his analysis as she is from the perspective of many other film commentators and critics. This omission (or subordination) of female characters denies the wealth of possibilities such figures bring to a reading of a text. The elimination of female heroes can be made to seem reasonable and rational, due to the "circumstances of life", to use Campbell's expression (1988b: 125), rather than being based upon a discourse of exclusion. In such an environment the female hero is either rendered invisible or her role and its implications diminished. She becomes a woman without a face, a mere cipher in the struggle of the male hero.

Throughout her discussions of desire and narrative in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (1984), de Lauretis illustrates just such difficulties encountered when feminists try to theorise gender using only the terms offered by patriarchy. The work of Jurij Lotman informs an important part of her polemic on the gendered nature of the hero quest (1984: 116-121). Lotman moves away from Propp's multi-tiered approach to mythical narratives based on complex character-functions, and instead offers the concept of an endlessly repeated bi-polar process: that of moving into and out of an enclosed space. Lotman proposes that the space of enclosure (the symbolic womb) represents the feminine which the male must traverse. Therefore the male becomes the hero, the one who travels through difficult, alien territory, while the female is the space of (as well as the barrier to) this journey. Using Lotman's analysis, de Lauretis suggests that the "mythical-textual mechanics" of the hero myth means that "the hero must be male, regardless of the gender of the text-image, because the obstacle, whatever its personification, is morphologically female" (1984: 118-119). She admits that this is a startling point from which to argue. It means that we must view sexual difference—and not, for instance, issues of life and death—as the fundamental oppositional binary of

cultural myth-making. Furthermore, de Lauretis maintains that the mythological subject of the hero:

> is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of difference. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life, to death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter (1984: 119).

The male-hero-human, female-obstacle-boundary-space division de Lauretis discusses (1984: 121) can be construed as a considerable problem in light of my endeavour to seek the female hero. Theoretically such a heroic revelation is impossible for "she" is bound to be a heroine, encased in passivity and bound by/to the materiality of the landscape traversed by the male hero. Hélène Cixous invokes similar difficulties when writing of Little Red Riding Hood, a female character who "does what women should never do, travels through her own forest. She allows herself the forbidden . . . and pays dearly for it" (1981: 44; ellipses in original). According to Cixous, the female/heroine in this folktale cannot escape her narrative destiny, and she labels Little Red Riding Hood's ill-considered foray into the woods as a trip into the space "between two houses, between two beds" (1981: 44). The female character's destiny is passivity, and the metaphors of feminine immobility are embedded at the heart of mythology.

Female heroism can also be contained by substituting other stories for the narrative of the hero. Pearson and Pope offer four myths of femininity (gleaned from their survey of British and American fiction) that destroy or imprison female characters. These myths, those of sex difference, virginity, romantic love and maternal self-sacrifice, all "conspire to leave the potential hero content with being a heroine only—that is, a secondary, supporting character in a man's story" (1981: 18). Given the sexed nature of the hero's story it is therefore not surprising that many commentators describe 1950s science fiction film characters such as Lesley Joyce from *It Came from Beneath the Sea* in relation to these feminine myths. Romantic love becomes a fitting substitute for heroism. Instead of the hero's quest, these

characters are thrust onto the "love quest", one that largely overwhelms other storylines concerning women and their representation in popular culture. The original *Star Trek* series provides many examples of women in romantic supportive roles, particularly the character of Nurse Christine Chapel. As her character unfolds (primarily in the episode "What Are Little Girls Made Of?") we learn that Chapel has chosen to give up a promising career in scientific research to become a nurse aboard a Starship. This enables her to comb the galaxy for her lost love, Dr. Korby. Having found and then lost Korby again in the above mentioned episode, Chapel falls in love with the unemotional Mr. Spock for the rest of the series. Such acts of romantic selflessness did not appeal to me as a young viewer and I could not see this woman, caught in the indifference of one-sided romances, as other than a supporter to the leading male characters. Chapel becomes snared within the paradigm of "woman as love interest" and her story (at least as presented on the screen) confines her to a feminine ground against which the masculine heroic journey takes place.

Yet romantic love is no real substitute for heroism for, as Pearson and Pope maintain, the romance myth promises fulfillment and freedom, but may lead only to a form of imprisonment (1981: 40). They observe that when the romantic myth collapses it is the woman who has failed; either she has not chosen the right man or she has not transformed her "frog" into a prince. Restrictive feminine discourses become a way to substitute love and nurturing for a heroic story, and the "love quest" can over-write the role of a female hero in narrative. Both "woman the love interest" and "man the hero" constitute major reading practices. Males affect outcomes, while females affect *romantic* outcomes. Writing of romance in commercial cinema, Lucy Fischer observes:

> In their portrayal of love . . . diegetic forms have not been neutral; they have plotted the romantic quest along the lines of sexual difference, for desire does not exist in the abstract but attaches to the subject, either male or female. Here it is important that the clichéd summary of a love story is the phrase "boy meets girl," revealing the male bias at its core (1990: 163).

Thus it is possible, for example, to view *Love Story* (1970) as primarily a film about patriarchal relations. Rather than being romantic drama, this movie offers a young male struggling with his father for adult autonomy, to which end the film sacrifices its female lead. Similarly *Don Juan DeMarco* (1995) purports to be about heterosexual love, but is more fundamentally concerned with the exploration of masculine identity. A tale of love becomes a way to inject the power structures of patriarchy into a narrative, of textually "mapping" sexual difference (Fischer, 1990: 164).

As if the task of finding a female hero is not already problematic enough, de Lauretis sees yet another level of difficulty. A further extrapolation of Lotman's two-tiered model of narrative means that the feminine is actually excluded from the entire mythological drama (1984: 121). If we accept that narrative is overwhelmingly structured in and by phallocentrism, "woman" is in danger of becoming that which is "non-male". Using this prescription in relation to the quest, de Lauretis offers us the fundamental nature of the heroic narrative: it tells the story of the *human* who undergoes a hero's journey to become a *man*, and "endlessly reconstructs" only these two characters (1984: 121). The crucial battle for masculine identity takes place without reference to the feminine, upon a ground gendered only by the abstraction of "non-male". Thus when she speculates on the untold histories of such mythological silhouettes as Medusa and the Sphinx, de Lauretis proposes that they represent female-centred narratives excised from mythology (1984: 109). She argues that neither ancient myth nor modern "psychotechnologies" allow us to answer or pose questions about these characters. The power of the Sphinx and Medusa has been reconstituted as a "threat to man's vision": they have become enigmas, inviting/luring the (male) gaze of Oedipus and of Perseus, and as such are "the obstacles man encounters on the path of life, on his way to manhood, wisdom, and power; they must be slain or defeated so that he can go forward to fulfill his destiny—and his

story" (1984: 110). Thus narratives of the hero rest upon sexual difference, and tell stories about the male hero as their mythical subject.

Given the gendered nature of this terrain (and contrary to Campbell's optimistic ahistorical reading of hero myths) it is significant that there are some "dragons" on the male journey of sexual difference which *cannot* be slain. This problem is illustrated by de Lauretis using the Oedipus story (1984: 119). The heroic status of the young Oedipus is confirmed when he defeats the Sphinx. He has slain his "dragon" (his female obstacle) and moved beyond ordinary humanity by his superior knowledge and performance. He then, however, goes on to strike at the institutional heart of phallocentrism. The ruler, the father, and the father's property (his wife) are non-negotiable features of patriarchy and Oedipus must pay for his ignorance of the laws of sexual difference. The hero must learn that there are boundaries within which the quest and the entire male-directed narrative can take place. Further articulating this link between the narrative subject and sexual difference, de Lauretis observes:

> The business of the mythical subject is the construction of differences; but as the cyclical mechanism continues to work through narrative—integrating occurrences and excess, modeling fictional characters (heroes and villains, mothers and fathers, sons and lovers) on the mythical places of subject and obstacle, and projecting those spatial positions into the temporal development of plot—narrative itself takes over the function of the mythical subject. The work of narrative, then, is a mapping of differences, and specifically, first and foremost, of sexual difference in each text (1984: 120-121).

By engaging in this kind of argument, de Lauretis allows us to see its inexorable phallocentric logic. For example, there are objections to be raised to Lotman's proposition that mythology links only the female with the obstacle. De Lauretis mentions the Minotaur, seeing in it the bestial side of man, the unnatural union of human with animal (1984: 109-110). This is a boundary which the hero, as the representative of mankind, must conquer. It is possible to see the Minotaur's labyrinth in feminised terms (seemingly non-rational, interiorised), while the beast itself can become a female symbol (chaotic rather than cultured). The Minotaur might

equally represent an excessively potent uncivilized (pre-civil) man linked in a homosocial bond to civil mankind.[9] Warner also discusses this wild man tradition in myth, tracing it historically to Enkidu, companion of the Sumarian Gilgamesh. Rather than necessarily acting as obstacle, Warner interprets the wild man as a nostalgically masculine figure, embodying the mythical "innocence of mankind, symbolised by his oneness with nature" (1994: 55). Yet, whether these stories look nostalgically or suspiciously at uncivilised masculinity, they inevitably lead us back to the ground of phallocentrism, to a place where "he" remains the undisputed subject of mythic narrative.

There are few independent, powerful or successful mythical female figures upon whom we may call as heroic exemplars, no rivals for the likes of Gilgamesh, Oedipus or Perseus. Barbara Smith (1992) offers a possible reason by retelling a version of the mythical Medusa's story. Smith explains that in classical times a number of tales featuring this character may be found, including one in which

> Medusa was a Libyan princess, daughter of the marine deities Phorkos and Keto. When her father died, she became queen (the meaning of her name), and she would go hunting and led her people in battle. The most famous occasion was when a man named Perseus led an army against her from the Peloponnese. Medusa was treacherously murdered at night, and Perseus was so taken with her beauty that he cut off her head so he might show it in Greece (1992: 71).

This Medusa is not a hideous Gorgon, but a warrior queen, an unmarried mother (having born a child to Poseidon), and a defender of her people. Smith remarks that, like Athena, such a figure is one of gender ambiguity in which meet the roles of woman and man (1992: 92). Little wonder that in this rendition of her tale Medusa is so thoroughly dispatched, reduced to only a posthumous attraction. She is circumscibed by death, the ultimate form of feminine passivity. Thus the heroic equation is gendered heavily towards the male as both establisher and upholder of the laws of patriarchal succession and of power.[10]

To this dictum of narrative and law/meaning, de Lauretis adds a further element, that of desire:

> My question then, how did Medusa feel looking at herself being slain and pinned up on screens, walls, billboards, and other shields of masculine identity, is really a political question that bears directly upon the issues of cinematic identification and spectatorship: the relation of sexual subjectivity to ideology in the representation of sexual difference and desire, the positions available to women in film, the conditions of vision and meaning production, for women (1984: 136).

Who can tell what desires might be enacted through mythological stories told on behalf of Medusa and the Sphinx? We cannot reliably answer because their patriarchal parables and desires are those that we have inherited from history. Woman is both a representation and an object within the Oedipal logic of narrative. Thus de Lauretis observes that the cinema poster (the cinema's self-promoted likeness) offers "not just an *image of woman* but the image of her narrative position, the *narrative image* of woman" (1984 140, original italics).

Certainly the film posters of 1950 science fiction films almost inevitably depict more sexy (and sexist) images than do the movies they advertise. Some show scantily clad female bodies and imply that a monster has ravaged these women in a way that does not occur on the screen. Welsh Everman illustrates this with a posed still from *It! The Terror From Beyond Space* (1958). The female lead Ann Anderson is shown seemingly in the act of being carried away, awkwardly thrown backwards over the creature's shoulder so that her breasts are at the same level as the alien's face, on view to both It and the spectator (1995: 124). This scene does not appear in the film itself (although several male characters are carried off and dispatched by It). Posters for both *Tarantula* (1955) and *Them!* portray screaming females with torn dresses, their bodies caught in the mandibles of the attacking beasts. Others show females being menaced in some other form, cowering, or being protected in the arms of the male star. Cranny-Francis discusses a titillating advertising poster for *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) featuring a scantily dressed Helen Benson being threatened by a rampaging Gort,

another image that does not appear in the movie (1992: 241-243). Cranny-Francis observes that such representations work to validate patriarchal readings, even when the text being advertised offers more complex or ambiguous messages. It is certainly reasonable to assume that it is not the desires of female characters/spectators that are being enacted by such images. If these are suggestive of "the interlocking of visual and narrative registers effected by the cinema apparatus of the look" described by de Lauretis (1984: 140), then it seems that female heroes should not to be sought in these texts at all.

Despite the theoretical difficulties involved in seeking a female hero in narrative, we should not imply that mythological stories cannot be (or have never been) re-told to suit female purposes and desires. Quoting from Muriel Rukeyser, de Lauretis deploys a re-embodied Oedipus story at the end of her chapter on "Desire in Narrative" to good effect. After many years as a blind wanderer, Oedipus finally stumbles across the Sphinx and asks her why he was unable to identify his own mother. The Sphinx blames him, replying:

> "When I asked, What walks on four legs on the morning, two at noon, and three in the afternoon, you answered, Man. You didn't say anything about woman." "When you say Man," said Oedipus, "you include woman too. Everyone knows that." She said, "That's what you think" (1984: 157).

Warner also stipulates that there are no ur-texts for such stories and that all re-tellings are just as much a viable part of a mythology as those versions accepted within a patriarchal canon.[11]

By calling upon mythological stories de Lauretis is able to raise a number of questions relating to the hero's place in narrative, popular cinema and patriarchal culture. In so doing she argues that feminist film theorists, and feminist theorists in general, must struggle to find a way of conceptualising that which exists outside "the dialectic logic of opposition, as all hegemonic discourses seem to be in Western culture" (1984: 58). She suggests that we need to think in terms of interactions and mutualities rather than oppositions. To see woman as merely image,

whether negative or positive, "is to deny women the status of subjects both on the screen and in the cinema" (1984: 58). Even when theorists point out that woman has been excluded from textual representation, this can simply reinscrobe an oppositional binary tension of inclusion/exclusion. Like de Lauretis, Judith Halberstam too contends that this kind of critical position must be resisted. Halberstam claims that queer associations of body and gender will fail to emerge when the traditional binaries of masculine/feminine are taken as the only basis for analysis. Nor will alternative stories that resist oppositional categories ever be told (1995: 157-158). If we therefore accept that the hero narrative circumscribes gender within patriarchal boundaries, there will be no movement except for the continual re-articulation of old appearances. By way of example, Pearson and Pope note that in masculinist literary tradition female characters who display the necessary "independent selfhood" required of the hero have been presented as evil, unnatural, unhealthy and in bad taste; hence the infamous "bitches" inhabiting the writings of Hemingway, Mailer and Lawrence (1981: 6). In a similar vein, Cranny-Francis suggests that the original *Star Trek* series had a particularly restrictive approach to independent women, enclosing them within a set of recognisably prescribed characteristics. She notes that where "strong, assertive female characters appear, they are almost invariably represented as evil and/or emotionally unstable" (1985: 280).[12] One of the most clear-cut examples can be found in the character of Dr. Janice Lester from "Turnabout Intruder" (the last episode in the original *Star Trek* series). A multiple murderer, the deceitful and deranged Dr. Janice plots to take over Jim Kirk's body and thus achieve her life-long ambition to be a Starship captain.[13] While such characterisations point to the problems of representing the feminine, they do little to de-throne the transcendent masculinist hero.

The task of discerning heroic female figures in 1950s science fiction films is a daunting one. Not only is the concept of a female hero impeded by the very nature of the supposedly unchangeable, unified and masculinist hero narrative, she will always be a secondary

participant when patriarchal terms are used to assess the texts in which she might be found. The work of Lucanio (1987), for example, provides an opportunity to see the process of exclusion take place in a systematic manner, as part of an overall interpretative strategy centred upon the masculine subject. Referring to this same problem de Lauretis comments that feminists have been "caught in the logical trap set up by [this] paradox", struggling to define "woman" with reference to "man" (1984: 161). Feminine positions are usually described through silence, closeness to nature, body, and sexuality, while defiant females tend to be portrayed as injurious or aberrant. Either way, the female is held in a binary opposition to masculinity, demarcating and accentuating the universality of the male subject. This thinking can be seen in the work of some popular science fiction film commentators when, under the banner of non-sexist analysis, they seek to assure readers that women in 1950s science fiction films are indeed—as they long suspected—merely sex objects and relegated to the level of love-interest. This approach serves to reiterate the terms of negation and oppression, and to condense the meaning and importance of women characters and woman viewers.

How then may feminist criticism go about understanding the place of female characters in popular genre cinema? Do theoretical tools exist that allow us to discern female heroes in the science fiction films of the 1950s? In the following chapter, entitled "Gaze of the Non-Phallic Monster" I discuss some of the main theoretical insights of psychoanalytical feminist film criticism. I also point to several conceptual difficulties within psychoanalysis. These constitute theoretical dilemmas that diminish the possibility of ever seeing female heroism in movies (and more generally in popular culture).

Chapter Two - Gaze of the Non-Phallic Monster

In *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* Teresa de Lauretis wonders how Medusa felt before being slain by Perseus, and so poses an important question for feminism on the nature of femininity and spectatorship (1984: 134-136). Women can know the death of the self-image, the sufferings of the "good" woman, the punishments of the "bad", and the dubious rewards of the compliant, all reflected in the impenetrable shield of the male hero. Protected from monsters by man-made armour, he can appear to be unassailable. In quoting Shoshana Felman, de Lauretis (1984: 111) illuminates part of the underlying problem. Writing about psychoanalytical theory, Felman observes that women are the objects of its discourse; are that which is enunciated, spoken of, and they become the question to which science/knowledge seeks an answer. Femininity is therefore a riddle which de Lauretis likens to the question posed to Oedipus by the Sphinx. The answer supplied by Oedipus becomes that which is known within patriarchal discourse, while the Sphinx is traditionally said to die after her own monstrous part has been played-out. Asking us to consider this outcome (1984: 135), de Lauretis poses a question: do women spectators ignore (sleep through) their own symbolic deaths, only to be satisfied (awakened) at that climactic screen moment, the final kiss? Such consideration leads her to further question the way in which "narrative cinema in particular must be aimed, like desire, towards seducing women into femininity" (1984: 137).

It is at this point that I would like to take up de Lauretis' challenge to feminist inquiry and, with reference to 1950s science fiction films, consider "the positions available to women in film, the conditions of vision and meaning production, for women" (1984: 136). Is it possible to elude both the feminine burdens of the heroine and her imagined evil Other-self, the obstacle/monster who haunts the path of the male hero? Can she look and speak for herself?

By so doing, what desires can she articulate? In this chapter I wish to form a theoretical platform within psychoanalysis from which to consider these questions of female subjectivity in relation to film and our ability to perceive a cinematic female hero. In exploring these issues I will draw primarily on the work of Carol Clover (1992), Laura Mulvey (1989, 1990), Kaja Silverman (1988, 1990) and Linda Williams (1984b).

In order to situate the female hero within psychoanalytical feminist film theory it is helpful to turn first to Mulvey and her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1989). Mulvey's work has had a far-reaching influence on feminist theory, for she argues that "phallocentrism in all its manifestations . . . depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to its world" (1989: 14). Mulvey identifies film practices that continually deny the female any ability to drive the action, to effectively speak or look. As a result of this phallocentrism, the female exists in or as a block to the narrative destination of that idealised self, the male protagonist. On the screen, however, it is the "man [who] controls the film fantasy and also emerges as the representative of power" (1989: 20). Classic Hollywood films use a number of devices to enforce these sexed zones. Women who deviate from femininity in traditional Hollywood movies may be denounced or embarrassed by their lack of feminine skills (*Woman of the Year*, 1942), or a bad situation may arise because a woman has opted out of passive femininity (*Mildred Pierce*, 1945). Even a feisty, "screwball" heroine can be tamed in the process of getting her man (*The Philadelphia Story*, 1940).[1] Phallocentrism provides the dominant narrative from which to articulate these storylines. Mulvey also stipulates that no matter how "self-conscious and ironic Hollywood managed to be, it always restricted itself to a formal *mise en scène* reflecting the dominant ideological concepts of the cinema" (1990: 15). Thus Mulvey maintains that all depictions of women on the screen are required to limit both the way femininity can be expressed and how women's selfhood can be understood.

As a product of phallocentrism and its gendered binary oppositions, Mulvey contends that film can be examined to reveal how it succumbs to the sexist imperatives of patriarchal culture, how it ties woman "to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning" (1989: 15). To briefly summarise the arguments put forward in "Visual Pleasure", Mulvey maintains that cinematic apparatus functions to (i) devalue the female presence and deprecate the impact of the castration anxiety she embodies by favouring the male, the idealised ego; and (ii) further master the body of the female Other through scopophilia, the power of the male gaze. Within the boundaries of phallocentrism, therefore, the female is able to enter the landscape of the phallic order only in terms of her lack. Mulvey comments:

> Mainstream film neatly combines both spectacle and narrative. . . . The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story-line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation (1989: 19).

Using this analysis, Mulvey is able to effectively argue that cinema is a space of gender politics. While the woman is relegated to the background, it is the male who becomes known as a figure in the landscape, as a point of identification and of knowledge. This is achieved through the mechanisms of the cinema, its cuts, point-of-view shots, and other devices. Mulvey contends that as well as recreating the masculine narratives of phallocentrism, such techniques serve to establish the (re)enunciation of sexual difference as the essential task of cinema (1989: 20-21). The male unconscious deals with its fear of castration by swapping anxiety for fetishisation, and the female body becomes the site upon which this male dilemma is played out. Mulvey argues that this structure is supported by three kinds of gaze, the intradiegetic (the look of male characters within the film), the pro-filmic (the look of the camera), and that of the spectator (presumed to be a male subject position). The woman is a triple-object, contemplated within the diegesis by male characters and from without by the male "eye" of the camera and the spectator.

Mulvey's insights, and the academic discussions they have inspired, are of relevance to science fiction films of the 1950s as well as to more recent genre movies. I am particularly interested in two aspects of Mulvey's analysis in my search for the female hero. These issues involve the pre-eminence of woman as a purely erotic image, and the possibility that female characters can establish their own powerful gaze. Mulvey observes:

> A woman performs within the narrative; the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude . . . [while elsewhere] conventional close-ups of legs (Dietrich, for instance) or a face (Garbo) integrate into the narrative a different mode of eroticism. One part of a fragmented body destroys the Renaissance space, the illusion of depth demanded by the narrative; it gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon, rather than verisimilitude, to the screen (1989: 19-20).

There are several examples in science fiction films of the 1950s where the image of the female lead is "flattened" by close-ups. In *Them!* (1954) we see Pat Medford's legs as she becomes stuck descending an aircraft; in *Fiend Without a Face* (1957), Barbara Grisselle, clad only in a towel, is disturbed after emerging from the shower; Kay Lawrence stands before the camera in her swimsuit before plunging into the waters of the Black Lagoon; and Steve Clayton's white suit "dresses up" the town of Desert Rock in *Tarantula* (1955). Do these images always represent the power of the hero (or the idealised male ego) over the heroine, the defeat of Medusa? Do they articulate only male desires? If so then the fate of the female in mainstream cinema is to *ever* be the heroine, and *never* the hero.

To explore this question, we can turn to Mulvey's second important essay, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by *Duel in the Sun*" (1990). Here Mulvey widens her perspective to include notions of the female spectator and the possibilities offered by a female leading character in melodrama. Mulvey acknowledges the shortcomings of Freud's use of language, noting how a metaphor of the masculine can easily become its literal truth. She notes, for example, that in psychoanalytical terms "the feminine cannot be

conceptualized as different, but rather only as opposition (passivity) in an antinomic sense, or as similarity (the phallic phase)" (1990: 26). Nevertheless, Mulvey does choose to pursue her argument from within the boundaries of that structure, mirroring as it does the traditional narratives of the active hero and passive heroine. This inability to plot the space of difference is not only restrictive, in that it relies on negative terms to describe the transgressive woman, but its stipulations are locked within an eternally self-referential cycle.

Referring to King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946), Mulvey describes how Pearl (the movie's female lead) illustrates the opposing forces of both passive feminine sexuality and a form of aggressive/regressive female "masculinity". The film's two leading males have meaning insofar as they reflect this opposition within Pearl: one man offers passive sexuality and marriage (correct femininity), while the other offers sexual passion (sexual immaturity). The "oscillations in her sexual identity" (1990: 32) ultimately allow Pearl to draw upon her phantasy masculinity and achieve the heroic strength necessary to kill Lewt, the passionate bad-guy. Although Mulvey's focus in "Afterthoughts" is on female characters who resist "normal" femininity, she pursues only *one* kind of representation, "a woman central protagonist . . . unable to achieve a stable sexual identity, torn between the deep blue sea of passive femininity and the devil of regressive masculinity" (1990: 25). Despite arguing for a more malleable sense of gender than she does in "Visual Pleasure" (1989), Mulvey contends that in order to be a hero Pearl must become "male" and be killed. Mulvey sees this outcome as symptomatic of the difficulties of representing women and the feminine within patriarchy. Furthermore, she writes that within popular cinema the female spectator has little choice but to accept either masochism or problematic masculinity:

> Rather than dramatizing the success of masculine identification, Pearl brings out its sadness. Her "tomboy" pleasures, her sexuality, are not accepted by Lewt, except in death. So, too, is the female spectator's phantasy of masculinization at cross-purposes with itself, restless in its transvestite clothes (1990: 35).

It is not with Mulvey's reading of *Duel in the Sun* that my concern rests, but rather with the terms of the discussion. Within this critical psychoanalytical perspective the only way for Pearl to actively intervene in the narrative is become symbolically masculinised. By choosing this path Pearl transgresses the bounds of her sex and dies: not as a hero, but as a fallen woman.

Despite the significance of psychoanalytical theories of the gaze to feminist film theory, I suggest that the camera's attempts at objectification are not always as successful or clearly determinent as is often asserted. Even while accepting that the apparatus of the camera is phallocentric, the images thus created can offer complex and contradictory associations with both on- and off-screen gendered embodiment. Take, for example, the idea of woman as marginalised spectacle. Rather than confine female characters on the screen, the spectacle can mark a point of departure. There is even a sense in which the female heroes I seek exist *because* of their physical depictions, rather than in spite of them. A case in point is the emergence of Pat's legs in *Them!*, which marks the entrance into the story of the Drs. Medford (Pat and her father Harold). It also marks the ground from which the character of Pat will depart, just as Sarah Connor in *The Terminator* (1984) will depart from feminine terrain during the course of her flight with Kyle Reese. Sarah cannot balance her cheque account, and Pat has nice legs, yet neither prevents them from travelling out of the known. Sarah's heroism is fixed when she is able to order the injured Kyle to his feet, is pierced by flying metal, and finally destroys the cyborg assassin. At the film's end Sarah fulfills the promise of the female hero to take back her own image (she purchases a photograph of herself that a small boy has snapped). In the case of Pat Medford, she cannot buy her feminine image, but can repudiate it.

Unlike Sarah, Pat is introduced into the diegesis as a disruptive force. *Them*! begins as a male story in which the local police and the F.B.I. join forces but cannot piece together the cause of several mysterious deaths and acts of vandalism in the lonely New Mexico desert. The Medfords arrive from the Department of Agriculture in Washington and carry with them official authority. At the airport Ben Peterson and Bob Graham greet the elderly Harold Medford when he emerges from the vertical steps beneath a military aircraft. Harold then calls for Pat to follow him, and a woman's voice replies "I'm caught." Female legs, revealed from knee to foot, are all we see of Pat as she endeavours to extricate herself from some impediment. The first sight we have of her is her legs, fashionably slim in their high-heeled shoes. It is certainly possible to read this entrance as a flat point in the male-driven narrative, calling our attention away from the science fiction story that is in the process of unfolding, and to the erotic contemplation of Pat's legs. In context, however, Pat's arrival can become more than self-referential. We can guess two things about Pat at this point: her appearance (from the sight of her legs) and her status (from a telegram stating that the "Drs. Medford" will be arriving). After Pat descends and she and her father walk away, Peterson and Graham comment:

> GRAHAM: I should've had this suit pressed.
> PETERSON: She's quite a doctor, huh?
> GRAHAM: Yeah. If she's the kind that takes care of sick people, I think I'll get a fever real quick.

Pat Medford is not a "normal" doctor, one for whom Bob would be ready to adopt the illusion of illness. Instead, she is a scientist, something unknown. Rather than "seducing women into femininity" (de Lauretis, 1984: 137), Pat's embodiment moves from the feminine outwards. Although she is introduced in a sexualised manner, "caught" by the camera, what follows in the rest of the film moves on from this early visualisation. In fact Pat announces her own entrapment only to walk away from it using her own resources. She is established as an authority figure and is more than an equal in the search for the Ants (she is the first to locate

the giant nest in the desert, for example). Pat is not pinned to her physicality, but establishes herself as a disruptive influence to the male narrative (she will not allow Bob to take over their first foray into a nest). Pat's disruption is more than momentary, and her self-referential "entrapment" and escape serves to mark her transgressive entry into the story.[2]

The example of Pat Medford suggests that rather than existing as a point of lack in a male story, the female hero of 1950s science fiction films can represent a more difficult embodiment. If we accept that such characters are used by the masculine subject as a way to define himself through difference, then it is well to ask what form this difference takes. Pat Medford is intelligent, authoritative, pragmatic and adventurous. She possesses a female body. Her attractive appearance and her position within the diegesis as a holder of legitimate knowledge also problematises Mulvey's contention that woman remains a spectacle because she is forever the bearer of meaning, not its maker (1989: 15). Within *Them!* Pat Medford makes meaning, both as a knowledgeable participant in the adventure and as a marker of transgressive gender relationships. Commenting on the action-movie actor Brigitte Nielson, Yvonne Tasker observes that "Nielson embodies . . . a contradictory set of images of female desirability, a sexualised female image which emphasises physical strength and stature" (1993: 14). The subversive female from 1950s science fiction can link the female image with knowledge rather than physical strength, yet both map a terrain in which the appearance is vital to heroism, not an impediment to it.

Another important issue raised by psychoanalytical feminist film theorists is that of the inquiring gaze. This is particularly important in light of the search for a female hero in science fiction movies of the 1950s. The leading female characters in these movies are often found doing the "looking" for themselves. Pat Medford, Lesley Joyce (*It Came from Beneath the Sea*, 1955) and Lee Hunter (*The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, 1953) all go hunting for their

monsters. Helen Benson (*The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 1951) confronts a robot that kills with a gaze, while Helene Delambre seeks out the human/fly that is her husband (*The Fly*, 1958). Barbara Randall (*Phantom from Space*, 1953), Ruth Adams (*This Island Earth*, 1955), Patricia Blake (*Invaders from Mars*, 1953), Carol Marvin (*Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*, 1956) and Marge Farrell (*I Married a Monster from Outer Space*, 1958) stand their ground to confront alien invaders. Do their acts of looking stand up to closer scrutiny? Can these characters reflect disruptive relationships with the gaze or are they all inevitably defeated by cinema's phallocentric vision? The female may very well look upon her own symbolic death reflected in a male narrative. This issue is important because it is commonly claimed by science fiction film commentaries that women in movies of the 1950s are inevitably (and often unproblematically) pursued, captured, punished, and in other ways victimised for their participation in the narrative.[3] The ability of the female to look for herself, to own an actively enquiring gaze, to interrogate her world and confront its terrors, is a significant concern for the female hero.

"When the Woman Looks" by Linda Williams (1984b) offers an important perspective on the way in which acts of female "looking" are depicted and structured on the screen. In forming her argument Williams discusses the horror cinema of the 1920s and 1930s, and post-1960 *Psycho*-type thrillers. She seeks to articulate the form of punishment meted out to women who look, while distinguishing the potential phallocentric disruption forged between the heroine and the monster she observes. Williams contends that classic horror films allow for inquisitive female characters to look, and in fact, where movies deploy the techniques of classic horror, females *must* look.[4] Horror cinema depends on such visual acts because through them the female gaze "is punished . . . by narrative processes that transform curiosity and desire into masochistic fantasy" (1984b: 85). Williams uses *Nosferatu* (1921) and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925) to exemplify her position. The female protagonists of these

films (Nina and Christine respectively) fall victim to monsters via the women's desire to look (1984b: 86-87). Captured by the Eric the Phantom, for instance, Christine's curiosity compels her to snatch away his mask and look upon his face, only to find herself horrified (punished for her desire) by the sight of his hideous visage.

It is Williams' contention that horror cinema does not chastise the woman simply because she is female: the role of cinematic spectacle passes from heroine to monster, and punishment occurs because the female forges a crucial link between herself and this powerful creature. Williams asserts that the sexual potency of this monster (the vampiric Count Orlok, or Eric the Phantom) is greater than that of the puny, often ineffectual, male hero. The monster's "sex" is different to that of normal masculinity. Hence, like the woman, the monster becomes a freak in phallocentric terms. Rather than reading the monster's body as the "repressed animal sexuality of the civilized male" (1984b: 87), it can be seen as representing *difference*. The monster thus becomes a stand-in for woman-as-spectacle, while at the same time undermining and replacing the masculinity of the erstwhile hero. By focusing on the potency of the monster at the expense of the male lead, Williams sees horror films enacting a threat to masculinity of such puissance that both heroine and monster must be thoroughly defeated in order to re-establish the traditional male-centred narrative. Williams draws on Susan Lurie's re-evaluation of castration anxiety to emphasise that a monster can be powerful in a non-phallic way, just as the mother-figure wields non-phallic power over a male child (1984b: 89-90). Lurie's version of castration anxiety differs from Freud's in that the (male) child's fear is based on a realisation that the mother is *not* mutilated, but rather that she is intact. The mother's difference is therefore perceived as powerful rather than lacking, and thus castration anxiety can be seen as a phantasy in which women are merely perceived as weak or helpless. Williams sees male fears in horror movies to be similar to this kind of dread: "the monster is not so much lacking as he is powerful in a different way" (1984b: 89). The vampire is just

such a representative of non-phallic power, its sexuality being different from masculinity and posing a problem to male authority. Male fear of the mutilated woman can be displaced from heroine onto the monster with its non-phallic ability "to mutilate and transform the vulnerable male" (1984b: 90). The heroine who looks upon this powerful Other-being must, however, also be punished just as the monster itself is sought out and destroyed by avenging males.

The analysis of horror films offered by Williams is an important one. It not only encompasses the presence of a female spectator, but reveals a way to glimpse fantasy texts in the act of destabilising patriarchal structures. The female spectator can observe a masculine world being threatened by difference. She may see, at least in a fantastic presentation, that the realms represented by the film are not unassailable male bastions. Yet all such intimidations, Williams contends, are bound to fail because the patriarchal construction of the narrative with reassert itself. By the end of the tale, masculinity will have vanquished the monsters and reclaimed the heroines.

Williams does not see the patriarchal narrative challenged through the intervention of a transformative female hero, but via the intrusion of a non-phallic monster.[5] In fact, Williams distrusts the very notion of a re-imagined female hero. Siding with Christine Gledhill, Williams considers that trying "to construct heroines as strong and powerful leaves us vulnerable . . . to the charge of male identification" (1984a: 7). The alternative Williams suggest is to interrogate women-directed media where woman are addressed via traditional female identifications. There are a number of difficulties with this contention in terms of a female hero. Chief among them is Williams' idea that women will "speak to one another . . . as mothers, housekeepers, caretakers of all sorts" (1984a: 7). By being unable to imagine a space beyond traditional femininity, it seems that Williams ultimately accepts that sex/gender

is always held within a binary oppositional relationship defined by masculinity, and that strength and power—and their cinematic representation—will remain masculine qualities.

Carol Clover's concept of the Final Girl in slasher movies helps to exemplify just such gendered difficulties, while also offering the potential to disturb the traditional sex roles of popular film. In *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992), Clover tantalisingly identifies possible female heroes, only to snatch them away again through the phallocentric logic of oppositional binaries. Clover configures a Final Girl, the female character who is the last survivor of a homicidal rampage, as a symbolically male hero. This must be considered a contentious claim if we are to explore the existence a *female* hero rather than simply transmogrify masculine traits onto a feminine body. Clover states that her interest in researching the slasher film is based on the issue of "the male viewer's stake in horror spectatorship" (1992: 7). Her central concern, therefore, is to examine how young male viewers, said to be the major segment of the audience for slasher movies, come to identify with the Final Girl and support her struggle to survive. Clover proposes that cross-gender identification as a substantial issue within the ambiguous mix of the slasher film (1992: 62-63). In these texts the central characters embody a movement away from the narrative privileges of the masculine body by offering unfamiliar re-combinations of gender and power. Thus Clover suggests that the (usually) male "slasher" can be seen as feminised, while the Final Girl becomes masculinised. Clover states:

> [T]hese are texts in which the categories masculine and feminine, traditionally embodied in male and female, are collapsed into one and the same character—a character who is anatomically female and one whose point of view the spectator is unambiguously invited, by the usual set of literary-structural and cinematic conventions, to share (1992: 63).

Clover proposes that in slasher films the traditionally masculine characters of "boyfriends, fathers, would-be rescuers" (1992: 63) are ultimately ineffectual and often die in the process of trying to be heroes. This allows concepts such as "victim" and "hero" to be loosened from

their gendered attachments. In addition, the classic narrative pattern in which a male drives the storyline is destabilised within these films. If we then include the way in which the killer finally becomes the film's spectacle while the Final Girl is the viewer, the exerciser of triumphant scopophilic control, then we find great disruptive potential in the heart of the slasher film (1992: 60).

Despite the transgressiveness Clover envisages, she ultimately seems to accept that "masculine" and "feminine" behaviors are binary opposites, and thus does not fully confront the notion of gender ambiguity. In order to make her point about cross-gender identity, Clover adopts a one-sex model and wishes us to see the Final Girl as literally boyish.[6] Such characters are described as smart, watchful and serious, as well as physically and technically competent, all of which are traits usually ascribed to a male hero (1992: 40). Furthermore, the Final Girl is not involved with boyfriends (that is, is not sexually inscribed as feminine) and therefore Clover positions these female characters as masculinised. She maintains that by usurping a male position in the narrative structure, the Final Girl becomes "phallacized" and draws the film to its conclusion: "the plot halts and horror ceases" (1992: 50) at the point at which she is triumphant. By emerging from her trials, and substituting her female body for that of the young male viewer, the Final Girl can be the audience's stand-in on the Oedipal journey through castration anxiety to personhood. The Final Girl can "deliver herself into the adult world" (1992: 49) which is, as Lotman concluded, the underlying heroic narrative: the *human* who undergoes a hero's journey to become a *man* (de Lauretis 1984: 121). By accepting this logic we find, as does Clover, that the narrative must continually express male-identified heroism. "Himself" continues to be the narrative subject.

It is important to question the acceptance of essentialist understandings of gendered behavior. For example, Clover describes Clarice Starling from *The Silence of the Lambs* (1990) as

"masculine in both manner and career, uninterested in sex or men, and dead serious about her career" (1992: 233). She comments that the Final Girl can be identified by "her masculine interests, her inevitable sexual reluctance, her apartness from other girls, sometimes her name. At the level of the cinematic apparatus, her unfemininity is signaled clearly by her exercise of the active investigating gaze normally reserved for males and punished in females" (1992: 48). Dealing with the climactic scenes in slasher movies, Clover observes:

> The decisive moment, as far as the fixing of gender is concerned, lies in what happens next: those who save themselves are male, and those who are saved by others are female. No matter how "feminine" his experiences . . . the traditional hero, if he rises against his adversary and saves himself . . . will be male (1992: 59).

This again confirms Lotman's conclusions concerning the gendered nature of heroism. To once more use de Lauretis' terms, the hero must be male "because the obstacle, whatever its personification, is morphologically female" (1984: 118-119).

Despite Clover's interest in the ambiguity of slasher movies, and her belief that young males are able to read across gender divisions (1992: 5), we are left in a problematic relationship with the Final Girl as hero. For instance, Clover maintains that even the name of the Final Girl augments her masculinisation, and sees that "it is spelled out in her name: Stevie, Marti, Terry, Laurie, Stretch, Will, Joey, Max" (1992: 40). She seems to assume that the privilege of claiming specific names is a male one, and overlooks the point that there are, as Barbara Creed has noted (1993: 127), a number of slasher movies in which the Final Girl does *not* have a "male" name yet she can still act in ways that provoke masculine anxieties.[7] Clover also observes that "female heroes, when they do appear, are masculine in dress and behaviour. . . . A figure does not cry and cower because she is a woman; she is a woman because she cries and cowers" (1992: 13). The mythical subject of the hero narrative must be phallicised and, in being transformed by her ordeal, the Final Girl can no longer be considered female.

Thus Clover accepts that phallocentric film traditions associate femininity exclusively with powerlessness, with the heroine/victim. This perspective allows, even demands, a prescribed view of female characters: Thelma and Louise must both become rape-victims (1992: 233-234) while Ripley is merely the latest Final Girl in a slasher film tradition (1992: 40). As the female character approaches heroic action she becomes masculinised, moving completely away from a female-identified role. While the gendered nature of the hero-as-male is certainly a powerful storyline, in Clover's terms it appears to be a reading that will inevitably survive even being wrapped in a woman's body.

One of the critical issues of Clover's work rests with the ability to perceive female characters having an active role in the narrative process. It is more usual to see such characters existing within the film as bodies or conditions, not as independent agents. There are many psychoanalytically based debates surrounding women and cinema, and illustrate the concerns of critics such as Mulvey (1989) as well as those of de Lauretis (1984). E. Deidre Pribram offers a summary of these issues (1988: 1-5): stemming from psychoanalysis and semiotics, the theories developed by feminist critics in the 1970s and early 1980s:

> [T]heorized that women have been defined in masculine culture as lack and as Other. Woman is not a subject in her own right but the object by which the patriarchal subject can define himself. Mainstream cinema's contradictory/complementary representations of women as either idealized objects of desire or as threatening forces to be 'tamed' . . . reflect the search for male self-definition (1988: 1).

This articulation suggests that, as cinema is male defined, there is no active part in it for women at the level of spectatorship. Pleasure derived from mainstream or Hollywood-style film is therefore to be mistrusted, created out of the objectification and the silence of women.

In what seems a final blow to the idea of a female hero, Williams adds the problem of desire. In making an analysis of *Peeping Tom* (1960), she finds that the only way an independent

female can survive in a thriller movie is to be sexually non-desirous. Empowerment is granted only to woman who do not express their own (hetero)sexual desires. William's position here can be paralleled with Clover's description of the Final Girl as a figure who is not sexually active (1992: 39-41). Following this argument, both *Peeping Tom*'s female lead and Clover's Final Girls survive because they are either virgins, sexually naive, or sexually inactive. A female character can possess a mastering gaze only if her look carries with it no desire. The ability to look, to desire and to master remain the prerogative of the male hero, and the demarcation between hero and heroine is made along sexed lines.

Science fiction films of the 1950s offer interesting examples against which to consider Williams' position on acts of female looking and desire. In subsequent chapters I will discuss a number of these examples in more detail. I mention one particular film here in order to illustrate that acts of female looking in 1950s science fiction movies can be more troublesome than those discussed by Williams. Not only can they decentralise the traditional gendered presumptions of popular narratives, they can also confuse and divert the visual entrapment said to adhere to the woman-as-spectacle. For example, Marge Farrell in *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* is a sexually desirable and desirous woman who looks into the face of her alien husband when his aborted invasions plans cause him to die horribly. Marge not only looks at, but "sees through", this alien double. Although her creature/husband tells her to turn away from these death throes, she continues to stare until he melts away into ooze. Using the framework identified by Williams, we might say that the alien Bill is destroyed much as the classic horror film monster must be thoroughly dispatched. Similarly, we might perceive Marge's look punished by the terror evoked by the alien Bill's end and her misplaced desire to look. Yet this death, taking place before her very eyes, may equally represent the victory of her female gaze over the alien's attempts to enslave her. Rather than viewing her own symbolic entrapment by patriarchy, Marge is freed and rewarded by the return of her own

man. Nor can the alien Bill be positioned as a non-phallic creature. A great deal of the film's concern rests with establishing his human/alien hegemonic masculinity. The adventures of Marge Farrell allow us to replace the terms of traditional femininity with those of heroism as a descriptor of her actions and abilities.[8] Mark Jancovich similarly criticises Clover's work on the Final Girl by arguing that such characters are made powerful not because they are "desexed" or non-desirous, but because they possess heroic qualities such as independence and intelligence (1992: 107-108).

The science fiction films of the 1950s can also challenge the framework of desire used within psychoanalytical feminist film criticism. For instance, Mulvey defines the screen as the site of purely heterosexist objectifications. She observes that mainstream cinema's "determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure" (1989: 19) allowing only an erotic space in which to constitute the feminine. This seems to exclude women from possessing an erotically powerful gaze (and it is implicit here that "desire" equals "erotic desire"). When a heterosexual woman looks at a male hero it is to see an ego-ideal and not to possess him erotically. Nor can a male character be defined by the female gaze. Yet the possibility of the erotic female gaze can be found in science fiction films of the 1950s. For example, in *Phantom from Space* we are offered the story of an invisible alien who is sought by two civilian (male) law-enforcement officials, Lts. Hazen and Bowers. The Phantom takes shelter in a scientific facility in which Barbara Randall works. Barbara might be viewed as a traditionally punished heroine when she is carried off by the invisible creature with whom she has tried to communicate. Trapped on the Earth with no hope of escape, the frightened alien finally succumbs to our atmosphere and becomes visible as he dies. Both Barbara and the female viewer then gaze upon a remarkable spectacle. The alien being the two males have so enthusiastically pursued is shown to be a prone and fully naked robust male (one knee decorously raised for the camera). Williams' analysis might see the female spectator, and

Barbara herself, confronting the containment of the non-phallic monster. It is, however, difficult to see this male body as non-phallic or find Barbara punished for her assault on male privilege. Instead, we can perceive the dead alien as an all-too-human male and propose that the mastering gaze of the female spectator and female heterosexual desire can be determining factors in appropriating this unusual spectacle. Jackie Byars also discusses such eroticisation of the male body, basing her analysis on the film *Picnic* (1956), a movie in wich we find a male protagonist, Hal (William Holden), becoming an erotic focus for female characters *and* the female audience (1991: 171ff).

There are other problems encountered when seeking the female hero within a purely psychoanalytical framework, such as that of Mulvey and Williams. One difficulty is that of theorising a "queer look". All desire is understood to be heterosexual as well as heterosexist. Discussing the ghost film *The Haunting* (1963), Patricia White refers to both the "lesbian specter" and the lesbian spectator as figures which "haunt" feminist film theory, evading and problematising the reliance of theory upon the masculinisation of the viewer (1991: 145-146). Chris Straayer has also noted that the same forces that equate women with passivity also disavow the existence of the "lesbian heroine", a subversive woman who defies the binary oppositions of heterosexism (1994: 344). The omission of a lesbian perspective seems to represent an unwillingness on the part of critical theory to depart from gendered binaries, a disinclination to embrace what Yvonne Tasker dubs the "perverse identifications" offered by popular cinema (1993: 117).

Rather than focusing solely in sexual desire, there are a range of 1950s science fiction films that can disrupt or destabilise patriarchal screen relationships with the feminine. Although these films do not necessarily portray female heroes, they can illustrate how other forms of desire might be portrayed. Vivian Sobchack (1994) finds a range of such disruptive desires

exhibited in the movies *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (1958), *The Wasp Woman* (1960), and *The Leech Woman* (1960). Sobchack views such films as concerned primarily with revenge, as well as the search for youth and beauty. While these latter two longings can be linked with sexuality, Sobchack finds they have more to do with the creation of the "*excessive woman*" (1994: 81, original italics) rather than emerging as a simple consequence of femininity. Nor are such characters constrained through their relation to the gaze. Sobchack sees the females who inhabit these three films representing the male fear of non-reproductive, middle-aged women, yet this does not prevent the texts from becoming "complex allegories" (1994: 86-87) of female identity. Sobchack claims that *The Leech Woman* investigates a range of emotions connected to the aging female body, including those of "fear, humiliation, abjection, shame, power, rage, and guilt" (1994: 87). Moreover, the desires stirred by these "horrible" female characters may be very different to the sexual titillation promised by filmmakers. For example, the advertising copy for *The Wasp Woman* proclaims: "Beautiful Woman by Day . . . Killer Wasp by Night!" The movie does not live up to the sexy innuendo. Instead it offers the story of Janice Starlin, a successful business woman surrounded by unfriendly male staff. While her employees have been thriving for years on Janice's business acumen, they are all too willing to blame a down-turn in company profits on her physical flaws (her aging) alone. Rather than be constrained by the monstrous nature of femininity, a female audience may well cheer the deadly Wasp Woman's revenge on this group of misogynists (and perhaps think it a shame she is killed before taking a few more patronising males with her). The fantasy of retribution may well outweigh the punishment of the female protagonist in such a text.[9]

Another important element of cinema is that of the female voice. Commenting on the use of feminine voices in counter-cinema, Annette Kuhn writes of the feminist concern for language and the need for "a feminist politics of intervention at the levels of language and meaning, which may be regarded as equally applicable to the 'language' of cinema as it is to the written

and spoken word" (1990: 258). Kuhn goes on to consider the possibilities of non-patriarchal language by an analysis of a number of quasi-documentary films made in the 1970s. Her interest is on the deconstructive strategies such films might offer the spectator. Although Kuhn's set of texts are different from those upon which I focus, her concerns for the voice, for language, and for the woman who speaks, are significant ones. Here I do not wish to pursue the idea of the woman's voice in terms of feminist film-makers but rather to investigate film dialogue and the interpretive possibilities found in the voice of the female hero.

Although a great deal of critical femininst concern centres on the female as spectacle, my own fascination with the science fiction movies of the 1950s has always encompassed the words spoken by leading female characters. These utterances seem to go unheard in popular film commentaries and I am interested in the question of how a transgressive voice may also be mobilised by the potential female hero. I now turn, therefore, to the issue of the female voice in cinema, and consider the ways in may be theorised as part of the gendered apparatus of film . Barbara Creed (1987) writes of her attraction to Tarzan movies and offers an important evaluation of the female voice in *Tarzan the Apeman* (1932). Commenting on the famous scene in which Jane begins to teach Tarzan to speak, Creed notes:

> After Jane has taught Tarzan the words, he says 'Jane' and touches her, then touches himself as he says, 'Tarzan'. Why is it that the line has been misquoted and immortalized as a misquote? The answer probably lies in the fact that the phrase, 'Me Tarzan, You Jane' defines Tarzan as the subject of the sentence while Jane is situated as its object, not only of the sentence but also of the naming process. Despite the fact that it is Jane who has taught Tarzan to speak, the phrase, 'Me Tarzan, You Jane' makes it sound as if Tarzan is the one who is in control of the language, the one whose point of view dominates. Sexism is so imbued in our language practices that popular memory, consciously or unconsciously, distorts filmic history in order to perpetuate its own biases (1987 n.p.).

In *Tarzan the Apeman* it is Jane who controls language and who subverts the symbolic order. She is offered to us as the speaking subject. Creed finds this performance in keeping with the film's oppositional stance to patriarchy and post-colonial concepts such as civilisation.

Although Creed acknowledges that "the early thirties constitute a unique moment in the history of Hollywood cinema" (1997 n.p.), the Tarzan films to which she refers offer important examples of the way in which even oppositional words of female characters can be unheard or altered in the popular (masculine) imagination.

Kaja Silverman's analysis of the female voice in mainstream filmmaking is crucial to a feminist understanding of dialogue produced by a phallocentric cinematic appartus (1988, 1990). Silverman cogently argues that in Hollywood-style films visual and linguistic authority is vested in the male subject, so much so that female characters are "associated with unreliable, thwarted, or acquiescent speech" (1990: 309). If not necessarily silenced on the screen, the female is contained by certain forms of speech which Silverman likens to a tape endlessly re-running the sounds of constructed forms of feminine utterance (such as the bitchy, maternal, or enticing woman). An excellent example of this kind of speech can be found in *Now, Voyager* (1942), wherein Charlotte Vale's mother is depicted as an aging harridan who continually harragues her daughter with spiteful matriarchal pronouncements. Silverman observes that when the voice and body are linked by synchronisation, the process that bonds sound with image to give the appearance of simultaneous action, the two facets of sound and vision become co-dependent. That is, "the body [is] read through the voice, and the voice through the body [which] drastically curtails the capacity of each for introducing into the narrative something heterogeneous or disruptive" (1990: 311). The voice therefore becomes a tool for mastering the female body. What *she* says is not reliable or knowledgeable, while what *he* says (either diegetically or extra-diegetically) is spoken from a position of authority. Thus meaning is collapsed rather than expanded.

The issue of the voice in contemporary cinema is taken up by Maggie Humm (1997). Commenting that textual (cinematic) analysis must be linked to the social context within

which a film is read, Humm offers an anecdote from her own teaching experience. In a Women's Studies class Humm presented her students with Bonnie Klein's anti-pornography documentary film *Not a Love Story* (1981), together with an article by Ruby Rich (1990). Rich criticises the film via an analysis of its technique, claiming that the film-maker adopts a male point-of-view and therefore serves to further objectify and discriminate against the women involved in the pornography industry. Humm's students rejected Rich's purely visual critique, finding the film's meaning conveyed through a complex interaction of processes. To locate it only in terms of visual apparatus overlooks the multifaceted relationship of viewer and text. Humm contends that the voice of women in cinema is equally as important as gaze. She observes that this elaboration of the voice in film can mean that the "mechanics of exclusion are more complex than those of visual fetishisation alone and require detailed attention" (1997: 47). Humm offers Pakula's *Klute* (1971) as an example of the way in which its female character, the prostitute Bree Daniels, is both visually and audibly regulated by the film-maker (1997: 49-52).[10] Bree's ability to speak is decreased under the influence of the text's male characters and, as the story progresses, her outspoken sexuality is repressed and effectively silenced.

Had Humm's discussion included the film *Basic Instinct* (1992), we might be able to draw another set of possible observations about the voice of women characters. Separated by two decades, it is interesting that in the more recent film Catherine Tramell's control of words drives the narrative. She not only names herself, adopting the predatory *nom-de-plume* of Catherine Woolf for her crime novels, but re-names Nick Curran as "Nicky" and "Shooter". Catherine plays with words (and with truth), confusing and hindering Nick with the names Oberman and Hoberman. Catherine refuses the police officers' ability to name her deeds, telling Nick and his partner that she was not "dating" a man just killed, but "fucking him". There are, furthermore, connections between the character of Catherine Tramell and Ruby

Rich's article on *Not a Love Story*. Rich quotes a porn actress (1990: 411) who makes a distinction between the sexes by saying that women are "the fucked". In *Basic Instinct* it can be argued that Catherine's male consorts become "the fucked"—not only because they die, but because of the prone position they adopt before being murdered. The issue of race and class raised by Rich in connection to the Klein film (1990: 412) is also pertinent for an understanding of Catherine's ability to act: the white and wealthy Catherine is able politically to go beyond the boundaries of social categories.

Although Catherine can be seen as the object of both the gaze of the camera and the intradiegetic look of the film's male characters (most notably in the infamous leg-crossing scene), she is never fully "mastered" by either.[11] It is Catherine who overwhelms Nick, even to the extent of re-enacting Catherine's own performance at a police interview. He begins to become Catherine and she toys with him, undermining his presumption of male authority.[12] While Bree's sexuality is contained by silence, Catherine's ability to speak ensures that she eludes the simple categories of male and female, good and bad, hero and heroine. It is her very skill with words, giving voice to the unspeakable, that marks her trajectory through the film. Catherine may be seen to be the film's subject of desire, rather than its object.

Nevertheless, the work of Kuhn, Humm, and Rich points out that when a movie depicts women speaking, it is done within a context created by the film-makers. The genuineness of that female voice is a question worth considering and is an important one if we are to understand the disruptive potential of female heroes in 1950s science fiction films. In the science fiction texts with which I am concerned we are certainly not dealing with non-patriarchal or pre-symbolic language (see for example Kuhn's discussion on the "feminine voice" of cinema, 1990: 258-260), but with dialogue created within a tradition which denies female characters access to authority and heroism.

If, as Silverman proposes, the female spectator "knows herself from the place of language" (1990: 309), then what might become known about that subjectivity in the science fiction movies of the 1950s? I want to consider this question by dealing with just one issue raised by Silverman in her article "Dis-embodying the Female Voice" (1990): that of the unreliability of the female voice. Commenting on the way in which the classic cinematic apparatus has helped to foster the impotence of the female subject, Silverman asserts:

> [E]xclusion is articulated as a passive relation to classic cinema's scopic and auditory regimes—as an incapacity for looking, speaking, or listening authoritatively, on the one hand, and with what might be called a "receptivity" to the male gaze and voice, on the other. . . . Women's words are shown to be even less her own than her "looks." They are scripted for her, extracted from her by an external agency, or uttered by her in a trancelike state. Her voice also reveals a remarkable facility for self-disparagement and self-incrimination—for putting the blame on Mame. Even when she speaks without apparent coercion, she is always spoken from the place of the sexual other (1988: 31).

Using Silverman's analysis of the workings of traditional cinema, it can be argued that the female hero cannot exist: she can neither speak, look nor act for herself, and therefore cannot compromise the trajectory of the male-centred narrative. This is one reason why we have so many heroines and so few female heroes, for heroines cannot speak with a contrary voice or compel us with the veracity of their utterances. Furthermore, Silverman's point about the scripted nature of women's language is a significant one. When taken to its extreme, we might suggest that the only genuine female voices arise from feminist women film-makers, from documentaries where women speak for themselves, or from films that rely on the improvisation of their actors. Even then, one can still argue that the patriarchal nature of language offers only silence for women's voices.

Yet, as Silverman asserts, the voice of the woman is constituted by more than simple silence. To illustrate this she uses the example of the woman's cry or scream in classic cinema, an issue of importance to science fiction movies of the 1950s in which we are lead to believe that

screaming is one of the few functions of the heroine. In analysing the work of Chion, Silverman points to the way in which he (and patriarchal discourse) constructs a description of narrative film around gendered binary oppositions. Silverman observes that "Chion opposes the maternal voice to the paternal world, and so identifies the mother with sound and the father with meaning" (1988: 75). Thus she maintains that by linking the maternal voice to that of the infant, Chion is able to imply that both woman and child occupy "an anterior position to the paternal world. . . . [T]he maternal voice is associated with . . . darkness and formlessness" rather than with logic or knowledge. The maternal or female voice is thus linked to interiority, to chaos, to impotence.

Within this concept, an inherent feminised nature over-writes all that the voice is capable of enunciating and, like the child, the woman's scream is an expression of the meaningless sounds of that alterity. It is not surprising therefore that the canon of science fiction film history reminds us only of the female lead's cry of fear rather than her demonstrations of scientific expertise. Male screams in *The Giant Claw* (1957), *It Came from Beneath the Sea* and *Them!* go unheard because, by virtue of masculine identity, the male voice is not known by cries but by logic. Thus the shockingly inhuman wail uttered by Matthew Bennell (Donald Sutherland) at the end of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978) is made all the more disconcerting and inimical because it comes from the mouth of the former male hero. Yet Rhona Berenstein suggests that even the heroine's scream can do more than simply announce female distress. With reference to 1930s "mad doctor" movies, Berenstein maintains that the scream can also mark the occasion (and the disturbing pleasures) of male anguish (1996: 123). She posits that women's identification with the film will not necessarily be curtailed by the heroine's cries, but may instead be aroused by the suffering the male hero is about to endure on behalf of the screaming woman. Berenstein is thus concerned with identifying the female scream as a marker of gender discord, rather than simply the place of entrapment.

Nevertheless, Silverman is persuasive in her description of the female voice's disempowerment in traditional cinema. In classic Hollywood films it is no accident that we hear the inner musings of the hard-bitten *film noir* cop but not those of his nemesis, the *femme fatale*. Discussing 1940s "women's films", Mary Ann Doane also notes that the voice-over of the female protagonist used in some movies, such as *Rebecca* (1940), does not sustain female authority in the unfolding story (1984: 74). In Jacques Tourneur's *I Walked With a Zombie* (1943), Betsy's narration is actually broken in upon by her employer Paul Holland in an act of "mind-reading": he cuts off her romantic musings at exactly the right moment, explaining that their surroundings are not as benignly beautiful as she thinks. He effectively silences Betsy's diegetically anchored voice while robbing it of credibility. Yet such vocal authority is not unassailably masculine, as Lib Taylor (1999) notes in regard to Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993). It is Ada's voice-over at the beginning and end which we hear, de-stablising the position of the masculine from the centre of diegetic authority. Taylor observes that this film helps to violate the ascendancy of patriarchal language and plays with notions of the mute woman established in Hollywood movies such as *Johnny Belinda* (1948). Silverman asserts that the diegetically anchored voice has traditionally been used to reflect a male character undergoing some deadly terror, as in *Double Indemnity* (1944) (1988: 52). Certainly Ada has been traumatised, yet her voice speaks from an inner, transcendent claim rather than that of corporeal terror. Sarah Connor also offers an anchored narration in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991). As Sarah's voice comments upon the possible fate of humanity, the film suggests that it is *her* judgment that displaces a universalised male sovereignty.

By concentrating on female exclusion or lack we can fail to hear the possibilities inherent in film dialogue. Rather than accept the conclusion that female speech can be known only by its lack of authority or its unreliability, it is a fascinating point that in 1950s science fiction

movies we can *always* trust the voice of the female hero. Remarkably she rarely offers faulty advice or incorrect information, and her dependability offers a signifcant challenge to the concept of the unreliabile cinematic female. In *Fiend Without a Face*, it is Barbara Grisselle who correctly interprets her late brother's notes, discrediting the male lead's conspiracy theory. Female scientist Hideko Murata accurately translates a foreign language at a crucial moment in *Twelve to the Moon* (1960). In *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), it is Kay Lawrence who wisely tells her male colleagues to leave the Creature alone. She also provides scientific information, such as instructing Captain Lucas on the nature of the lung fish. In *Tarantula*, Steve Clayton eschews Prof. Deemer's isolationist science and speaks of his experiments to Doc Hastings. In *Them!* Pat Medford not only rejects the male lead's patronising tirade, but goes on to lecture senior government authorities on the nature of the giant Ants. In *It Came from Beneath the Sea* it is Lesley Joyce who correctly identifies the nature and origin of the Seabeast, even when she is ridiculed by a disbelieving (male) official. Sally Caldwell in *The Giant Claw* correctly surmises why an extraterrestrial bird has come to Earth, while in *The Thing* (1951) Nikki Nicholson tells the beleaguered men what to do with a vegetable, be it a carrot or an alien life-form.

It is worth considering *The Thing* in particular because of the particular kind of speech acts portratyed in the text, and what these might imply about the film's relationship with patriarchal authority. In this film, the military hierarchy's words are proven almost useless: its orders cannot be interpreted, arrive too late, and are counter to common sense when they finally are received. Dr. Carrington, the leader of the scientific group, is revealed to be at best misguided in that his concerns for the Thing over-ride the needs of humanity. At worst he is a deluded patriarch who speaks on behalf of the government (having been involved in atomic bomb tests). Jancovich observes that Dr. Carrington speaks sententiously and gives "monologues and speeches in which he sets himself up as an authority who hands down

information and orders to others" (1996: 37-38). This is in direct contrast with both the military and other personnel on the Arctic base where most of the story unfolds. These characters all express themselves in overlapping dialogue in a way that gives voice to communal ideas and speculations. Although Jancovich acknowledges that this latter style is a characteristic device of Howard Hawkes (1996: 37), it is the juxtaposition of these two styles that is of interest in the context of the film. The deliberate speech of Carrington and the (seemingly) chaotic dialogue of the others demonstrates the way in which Hendry and his men "are not the representatives of state authority, but its subjects" (Jancovich, 1996: 34). Thus the male hero speaks from outside a system of formal authority while still representing it.

Nikki, who is Carrington's secretary, takes on greater responsibility for his words than merely transcribing them. She becomes a mouth-piece when, suffering from fatigue, Carrington asks her to read his notes aloud to a group of scientists. Although she presents his report, it is apparent that she is alarmed by the content and manner of his documentation in which he clinically records his experiments with the Thing's arm and human blood. Nikki later reveals the contents of this report to Hendry, exposing the grisly research just as Steve Clayton reveals the truth in *Tarantula.* Having no formal authority, Nikki is not bound by the scientists' code of silence. Thus, *The Thing* can be found to discredit patriarchal hierarchies through the metaphor of speech. When this is coupled with the credibility of its female hero, the film offers an atmosphere of narrative uncertainty in which the blame is on rationality and logic rather than on Mame.

The various forms of feminist psychoanalytical film criticism I have discussed in this chapter, focusing variously on the gaze and the voice, have offered ways to express the exclusion or diminution of females in Hollywood-style film-making. In so doing, a range of theorists have illuminated the issues of gender, revealing that cinema is no more sex-neutral than any other

area of cultural production. Yet the critical tools that have been vital to this *dénouement* deal less effectively with texts that potentially disarm the oppositional binaries of phallocentrism. One of the main characters to suffer from this apparent inflexibility is the female hero. It seems that she is just as improbable within feminist criticism as she is within masculinist commentary.

Despite what seem insurmountable theoretical and representational barriers, I believe that the continued search for the female hero remains a viable one. While the patriarchal gaze can be shown to construct female characters as domestic and/or sexual objects (with lingering shots of their bodies), we should not overlook the polysemic nature of film. Rather than acquiesce to patriarchal victimisation, I contend that some viewing practices may disrupt and redirect the sexed space of the screen in surprising ways. Female heroes can disassemble the terms of phollcentrism and move beyond passivity, and in so doing they offer the female spectator a more powerful relationship with the text. In the two chapters to follow, "Attack of the Little Men" and "*Her! Her!* The Spectacular Female Subject", I will elaborate these issues by proposing the importance of a transgressively gendered viewing practice, one that redirects the viewer from the heroine and towards the female hero.

Part 2

Alien Redirection

"I feel different right now."

Helen Benson to her former boyfriend
The Day the Earth Stood Still (1951

Chapter 3 - Attack of the Little Men

In the preceding chapters I have sought to explore some of the reasons why traditional patriarchal discourses have claimed the hero to be the male subject, while restricting the place of the female to that of passive object. I have described some of the narrative functions fulfilled by the feminine within phallocentrism and the way these influence construction of popular film. How might a gendered reimagination of the female in popular movies change or transgress such practices? One way in which to reconsider gender in narrative is to explore some fundamental questions. How much contestation of sex and sexuality can take place in these texts? Are the stories they tell always male-focused and directed? Is there a female hero, a subversively symbolic princess, to be found within the complex of narrative desire and pleasure offered by popular culture? If so, how might we go about reimagining such a heroic female subject? In an effort to explore these queries, the following two chapters explore the potential for transgressive representation and reading of gender in 1950s science fiction movies and more generally in popular narrative cinema.

"Attack of the Little Men" considers the nature of film masculinity, with a focus on 1950s science fiction movies. Rather than view the masculinity presented in science fiction cinema as predictably and inevitably successful, I see it as often difficult and problematic. Like other 1950s movie males, and more recent heroes such as John McClane in *Die Hard* (1988), the male lead can have a difficult relationship to his own accomplishments. We should not assume, however, that such representations alone allow room for female heroes to emerge. Even if we accept that a precarious masculinity has the potential to be transgressive, will this necessarily privilege female heroism, subvert heterosexism, or fracture the male-centred narrative? Does the expression of homosocial bonding destabilise the privileges of

phallocentrism? I consider all these issues in this chapter, with particular reference to the remarkably fluid construction of masculinity in *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957).

The decade of the 1950s, according to Lynne Segal, brought with it a new kind of male cinematic hero. Beneath their manly facades Rock Hudson, Montgomery Clift and James Dean were fragile souls, demonstrably different to 1940s-style men exemplified by Humphrey Bogart, James Cagney and Gary Cooper (1988: 71). In Harry Benshoff's view, "this new type of leading man was more sensitive and compassionate; often he is internally conflicted, and given to feminizing traits such as emotionalism and occasionally even tears. . . . [He] could easily be read as queer by those audiences inclined to do so" (1997: 137). Benshoff contends that a shift in the cinematic encoding of homosexuality underlies representations of "the sensitive, spectacularized young man" (1997: 138) represented by James Dean's famous performance in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). Lynn Spigel observes a generalised disillusionment with social conformity and gender in the 1950s, leading to the "juvenile delinquent" movies of the era as well as to films like *All That Heaven Allows* (1956) and *Come Back Little Sheba* (1952) (1991: 208; 230-1 n7). Richard Meyer notes that yet another form of masculinity also gained popularity in the 1950s: basing his comments on the presentation of Rock Hudson's body on film and in movie magazines, Meyer notes that Hudson's career depended upon a "quieter masculinity" in domestic melodramas, invoking a "less aggressive and more eroticised" movie hero (1991: 260-3). While placing Hudson's ever-present masculinity on display, filmmakers could depict him as domesticated and dependable (1991: 262-3). Meyer also reminds us that the traditionally macho figures of John Wayne and Gary Cooper were still the two biggest box-office draws in the Hollywood of the early 1950s (1991: 284n9).

The reasons for an apparent change in the representation of masculinity are complex. Steven Cohan (1997) cites a number of factors related to the social conditions in post-war U.S.A. as underlying influences on cinematic males. These include the fear that war-induced mental and physical instability would be found in returning veterans, rents in middle-class values systems, economic changes brought about by women's participation in what were previously male spheres of employment, and the complex politics of a Cold War environment (1997: xi-xii). Cohan also notes that the Kinsey Report on male sexuality, released in 1948, revealed unexpected levels of both adultery and homosexual activity, further questioning the whole sphere of "normal" masculine identity (1997: xii-xiii). Yet looking for dichotomies between the masculinity of 1940s and that of the 1950s should be viewed with some caution. Frank Krutnik has argued that many of the *films noir* of the 1940s also offer portrayals of troubled masculinity at odds with culturally sanctioned behavior (1991: 91). Thus the emergence of an actor such as Marlon Brando, portraying both emotional turmoil and physical violence in *On the Waterfront* (1954), might be seen as an *e*volution rather than a *re*volution in the tradition of manly angst. Dennis Bingham also warns that the "sensitive" young man of the 1950s was often rebelling against "femininity and 'momism'" and we should not mistake them for woman-friendly characters (1994: 5).[1]

Tensions in the characterisation of masculinity in the 1950s are reflected in science fiction movies of the time. Paul Wells questions the transcendence of the male hero in the science fiction 'B' films of the decade, and notes that these texts engage in a "systematic destabilization of movie-made masculinity" (1993:181). He maintains that their heroes are placed into positions where they can no longer be sure of a presumed superior status. Certainly, many films depict masculinity as a problem-riddled characteristic of the male hero, part of his uncertain identity: Pat Hendry in *The Thing* (1951), Russell Marvin in *Earth vs. The Flying Saucers* (1956), and David Reed in *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954).

Wells also observes that such males "demonstrate ineptitude in their attempt to secure power and take control of their circumstances" (1993:182). In *This Island Earth* (1955), Cal Meacham is unable to help Ruth Adams when she is attacked by a Metalunan mutant and it is the force of gravity that kills the creature. Cal merely rushes solicitously to her side after the event. In *20 Million Miles to Earth* (1957) one may also ask why Col. Bob Calder escapes the dangers of Venus with only a small wound while nine of his party mysteriously die around him. Has he been a "real" man at all, or merely fled from encounters that claimed half his ship-mates? Such are the charges levelled at lone survivor Col. Edward Curruthers in *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* (1958). In *Fiend Without a Face* (1957) Maj. Jeff Cummings has a number of strikes against him: he is wrong about the involvement of a local man in spying activities, has a fist-fight with the local police constable, plays an indirect role in the creation of the Fiends, and finally gets himself locked in an air-tight crypt. He has to be rescued from certain suffocation by Barbara Grisselle who, accompanied by Capt. Chester, rushes to the graveyard to save Cummings. Another example of the besieged hero is John Putnam in *It Came from Outer Space* (1953). Instead of being the methodical, careful, intellectual hero Patrick Lucanio says is necessary to battle outsiders and save society (1987: 23), John is emotionally immature. He blurts out news of an alien craft to skeptical on-lookers and immediately begins to feel threatened, exclaiming to Ellen Fields in a paranoid outburst: "They've talked about me before!" John is not only mocked by the townspeople, he is actively disliked by the sheriff who never trusts the film's overly emotional hero. In one scene John follows an alien Ellen-double across the desert at dawn in a surreal and outlandish pursuit. As the only human to be involved with the extraterrestrials in this way, the text suggests an ethereal link between John and the alien-Ellen's unearthly manifestation. Putnam is probably the most emotional and intuitive of all the science fictional male leads of 1950s. While this helps make him a particular favourite of mine, his character is not that of the empowered male hero. Rather than directing or controlling the narrative, he stumbles from

crisis to crisis. At the very least, such a text compromises the presumption of logic and rationality the male hero is said to embody.

A number 1950s science fiction movies offer a complex and difficult relationship between the male lead and "masculine" traits. One example of this is found in the character of Tom Nesbitt from *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953). While able to achieve feats of derring-do by the film's end, Tom's masculinity and his logic are compromised throughout the narrative. He works for the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission and, despite heading a successful testing program, he is plagued by doubts about the entire atomic agenda. A conversation takes place early in the film between Tom and his friends Col. Evans and Prof. George Ritchie. They discuss the atomic test with which the movie opens:

> EVANS: Eight weeks of preparation and it's all over in a second, eh?
> NESBITT: Jack, when energy of that magnitude is released, it's never over. What the cumulative effects of all these atomic explosions and tests will be, only time can tell.
> EVANS: You mean scientists can't tell, huh?
> NESBITT: The world's been here for millions of years. Man's been walking upright for a comparatively short time. Mentally, we're still crawling. This test will add to our knowledge. Wouldn't you say so, Ritchie?
> RITCHIE: That's right. You know, every time one of these things goes off I feel as if we are helping write the first chapter of a new Genesis.
> NESBITT: Let's hope we don't find ourselves writing the last chapter of the old one.[2]
> EVANS: You sound like a man who's scared, Tom.
> NESBITT: Who says I'm not?

The exchange ends with nervous chuckles from the three men. Tom has nagging fears—one might even say intuitions—about the outcome of atomic testing and readily accepts Ritchie's (non-rational) parallel between the Bomb and Biblical prophecy. Tom also seems to acknowledge that he is not in control, implying that some outcomes are beyond the reach of the hero. Shortly after this exchange, Tom encounters the Beast in the arctic and sees Ritchie killed. As a result of these experiences, the scientist is hospitalised and is said to be hallucinating. Tom's status as an expert/hero becomes permeated with doubt and emasculation. This is made visible in one scene at the hospital. As a doctor completes a

physical examination, we are offered the sight of Tom leaning back on a chair with his shirt open and chest exposed. Rather than presenting him as powerfully masculine, in this context bodily display is linked to the passivity of the patient. The image is evocative of Meyer's description of Rock Hudson's body, particularly in movie magazines of the 1950s. A similar pose to that struck by Nesbitt is described by Meyer as "immobile, available as an object of erotic delectation but without the threat of male action" (1991: 262). At this point in the film Tom has given up the idea of acting (of identifying the strange creature that attacked him), and it is only at the prompting of Lady Scientist Lee Hunter that Tom resumes this task. Yet even then his masculinity is still at risk, for it is Lee who invites Tom into her home to look at sketches of prehistoric animals. That is, he is asked to look at *her* etchings, inverting the power relations of this clichéd sexual ploy.

Such uncertain males and questionable masculinity can create spaces in which resistant or oppositional reading techniques might flourish. As Cohan notes, a film like *Picnic* (1956) both disputes and reiterates the masculinity in 1950s Hollywood (1993: 228). This movie can be seen as specularising its male star's body, offering him as the object of intradiegetic female lust, while still positioning him as its narrative centre.[3] As readings of more recent films can illustrate, this kind of heroic male character has a tricky and unreliable relationship with gender disruption. The film *Die Hard* and its male lead, the New York cop John McClane (Bruce Willis), offers an interesting parallel to the problems of 1950s males. At first sight John seems to be the successful hero. To present his attainments using the terms offered by Joseph Campbell (1988a), John is thrust onto a quest, is misunderstood and threatened by figures of authority, and has to slay a goodly number of "dragons" in the course of his adventure. In so doing he saves the "princess" and her people, and inspires others to overcome their own limitations (the desk-bound Al Powell fires his weapon and reclaims his manhood). Yet, as both Fred Pfeil (1995) and Yvonne Tasker (1993) discuss, this is not such

a simple story. Pfeil deals with a series of texts from the 1980s he calls the "male rampage" films, specifically the first two movies in both the *Lethal Weapon* and *Die Hard* series. He proposes that each has a similar plot, offering "a white male protagonist, portrayed by an actor of proven sex appeal, [who] triumphs over an evil conspiracy of monstrous proportions" (1995: 1). Pfeil sees John McClane as enacting a difficult mixture of nostalgia and heroic self-sufficiency, using class-coded survival skills debased by the feminised capitalist excesses of Los Angeles (1995: 28). Most particularly, the depiction of the "wild, violent, mortified white male body" (1995: 32) proclaims its own brand of over-determined hyper-masculinity.

Tasker also writes about performative masculinity in *Die Hard*, noting that such an identification:

> connotes the male body as spectacle, offering up an image of the hero as performing pre-existing images of masculinity. This kind of self-aware performance fits nicely with Willis's own star image [of] self-mocking bravado and verbal wit (1993: 62).

In action cinema the masculine body has become a site of over-achievement as well as contestation, where self-reflective irony can compromise *and* reinscribe the manly embodiment it seeks to personify. For example, in *Die Hard* Hans Gruber taunts McClane by asking him whether he is "an orphan of a bankrupt culture who thinks he's John Wayne, Rambo, Marshall Dillon?" McClane responds by choosing to call himself Roy Rogers. This last character is, as Tasker comments, "a significantly dandified version of the cowboy" (1993: 62). McClane could reject Gruber's jibe by choosing to be Wyatt Earp, Jesse James, Clint Eastwood or any one of a range of mythologised Western heroes, real or imagined. Instead, he self-consciously identifies himself as Roy Rogers the singing-cowboy, a character known for his close relationships with a woman (Dale Evans) and his horse Trigger. Any inclination to read McClane as purely macho can therefore be confounded by the choice he makes in naming himself.[4] Importantly, this ability to re-identify oneself also extends to

John's wife, who chooses to be known by her maiden name in her high-powered corporate workplace. John sees this as emblematic of their troubled marriage, wherein both gender and class play a complex role. Yet at the end of the film John appears to accept this re-naming when he introduced his wife to Al Powell as "Holly Gennaro". It is at this point Holly returns to the more traditional "Holly McClane". Whether Holly's choice is convincing or not is another matter: an acceptance of her marital status might seem to restabilise masculine privilege and reward John with the return of "his" wife. Yet even this is not a simple restoration to feminine passivity, for it is at this point that Holly assaults an unscrupulous television reporter, knocking him to the ground with one well-placed punch. The use of names in *Die Hard* helps signpost the complex and mobile gender/class identifications found in the characters of both John and Holly. For all John's brutal tough-guy action, such factors serve to problematise the character of the male hero. Yet we may question whether McClane's masculinity has undergone any kind of transformation at all. At one point John stammers a message of apology and asks Powell to deliver it to Holly. John's clumsy articulation may be read as his escape from the emotional cocoon within which tough-guy masculinity has enshrouded him. Pfeil, however, suggests that John's outpouring occurs within a complex of race and homosociality, wherein it is his "black buddy" Al Powell who is being addressed by this sensitive outpouring (1995: 14-15). Both readings fit within a complex of repudiation and reinscription, serving to focus our attention on John's form of angst-ridden maleness.

Science fiction movies of the 1950s can also offer examples of homosocial bonding between "buddies". *The Atomic Submarine* (1959) features such a relationship between Lt. Cdr. Richard (Reef) Holloway and Dr. Carl Nielson. Forced together to track down a destructive alien craft, Reef at first displays active dislike for Carl. He considers the young scientist cowardly and "peace-loving" (a discreditable position in the context of the film), while Carl

sees Reef as a domineering warmonger. During the course of their adventures both Reef and Carl respond in a heroic fashion and develop mutual respect, even walking away together as buddies at the end. Welsh Everman sees this reconciliation as necessary to the political climate of the film, its conclusion reconciling science with the military (1995: 25). Yet the movie's homoerotic implications are also in evidence. The text offers only two female characters in minor roles, and Reef is summoned away from one seductive female presence when he receives his orders. Once on board the atomic sub, Reef repeatedly needles Carl with emasculating taunts, telling him he has no place on the vessel. These exchanges resemble the way Lady Scientists are often told that they have no part to play in a man's world, and Carl's position in the narrative is clearly feminised, He becomes the unmanly outsider in the macho world of the submarine. While Reef's uncompromisingly pro-war masculinity does not vary during the film, his heterosexual mask slips, making a queer reading possible. The film's alien invader (resembling a giant phallus-like eye) threatens to kidnap/possess Holloway. Although Reef is able to shoot the creature, this is not necessarily a repudiation of homosexuality for he then returns to Carl waiting to escape with him in a minisub. Reconciled, the two men join forces to permanently dispatch the invader who would monopolise Reef's affections. The two men also walk off together at the film's end, much as the hero and heroine are said always to do. In these concluding moments Reef announces that his "little black book" has been lost during the course of the adventure. Shedding their straight personas, one may image Carl taking the place of the black book in Reef's romantic life. *Conquest of Space* (1955) offers not only a similar homosocial bonding but also the suggestion of incestuous homosexuality. Gen. Sam Merritt orders his first officer and son, Capt. Barney Merritt, to serve on a orbiting space-station only a few weeks after the younger man's marriage. A stickler for rules, Sam surrounds himself with obedient men and denies his son's sexual yearnings by refusing permission for shore leave. He states that Barney "belongs" with his father rather than with his new wife. On an expedition to Mars, Sam goes

crazy and is accidentally shot and killed by Barney. In a neatly Oedipal ending, Sgt. Mahoney (Sam's faithful "friend") finally accepts Barney as a substitute leader. Mahoney does this by grasping Barney's arm in a companionable gesture previously reserved only for Sam. Both men seem to welcome this homoerotic change in their relationships.[5]

Texts that problematise or even satirise male heroes do not necessarily subvert the power or discursive position of masculinity. As well as its homoerotic subtexts, a film such as *Die Hard* relies on a form of humour Tasker identifies as self-mocking bravado (1993: 62). Linking movie star Willis with the films and television shows in which he appears, this humour can provide yet another level of difficulty when considering movie masculinity. Tania Modleski reminds us that one way to assure male ascendancy is to incorporate forms of feminised power within the patriarchal body (1991: 7). Thus John McClane's plight and dandified nickname should not necessarily be read as softening his character. The crisis of John's masculinity may simply reinscribe male power, offering no new ground for gender contestation at all.[6] The self-conscious heroism of Indiana Jones, for instance, revels in and re-works the action adventures of years gone by. When the music swells and the camera zooms in on the partially clad, manly figure of Indy about to trounce the evil Thugees in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), we know we are seeing a complex of genre images. Its screen conventions mingle the attributes of pulp magazine good-guys and Great White Hunters with mythological searches for arcane knowledge, all tied together and satirised with notions of patriarchal success and dominance. While such illustrations can offer disruption to gendered codes, their satire may also serve to reinscribe the traditions of the masculinised genres to which they refer. In spite of its self-conscious irony, *Die Hard* and John McClane remain invariably heterosexist. John can use this straight persona to rebuke the bumbling acting-police chief Duane T. Robinson as having just been "butt-fucked" by the

terrorists, while the film's "good" male characters are virile heterosexuals, married with (or expecting) children.

Masculinised genre images can, nevertheless, be subverted when linked to female characters. In the movie serial *Panther Girl of the Kongo* (1939) it is the Panther Girl, replete with jungle costume and handy knife, who dives into a river to wrestle a crocodile and save her male companion. Similarly, in an episode of the television series *Xena: Warrior Princess* ("The Xena Scrolls", 1997), we are offered a time-slip story set in the 1940s in which Gabrielle is re-cast as an "Indiana Jane". With the whip and hat characteristic of Harrison Ford's Indy, the episode succeeds as a pastiche of a pastiche. While the Panther Girl on her own does not establish a new paradigm for 1940s female heroism, the allure of genre heroes can be found in their fluidity as subjects and in their subversive intrusions into the nature of the traditional hero. Pfeil observes that a film such as *Die Hard* offers a "discontinuity with classical Hollywood cinema" (1995: 3), and points to McClane's ability to "move behind and through the skin of . . . new surfaces to the mechanics and generators that run them" (1995: 29). Such a hero disturbs the boundaries and limits of the solid objects of late capitalism, showing us that "the sign of the white-straight-working-man is in flux and open to re-negotiation" (1995: 33). The fascination of these texts and the form of gender relations they offer, rests within their ambiguity, their intertextual and polysemic nature.

The science fiction films of the 1950s also offer a number of complex and contradictory stories within which the difficulties of heroic masculinity are played out. One important movie of this period, *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, incorporates many examples of troublesome heroism, particularly in terms of gender and heterosexism. The film literally explores Pfeil's concern for getting beneath the surface of the world in which its hero finds himself. *Shrinking Man* is not an invasion film in the sense Lucanio proposes in *Them or Us:*

Archetypal Interpretations of Fifties Alien Invasion Films (1987), and it is omitted from his analysis. Yet the film certainly deals with the invasion of the person by outside pressures. While the nature of these forces can be read in several ways, the male lead's masculinity is continually highlighted. This allows the movie to be enthusiastically interpreted as a "boys' own" style of adventure by many science fiction film commentators. John Baxter maintains that it is director Jack Arnold's masterpiece. Baxter describes it as "a fantasy that for intelligence and sophistication has few equals" (1970: 123) and sees it representing the peak of science fiction filmmaking of its era. John Brosnan also approves, noting that the film "concerns a man who realizes that all his familiar and comfortable surroundings . . . are becoming increasingly threatening—that his world is not the safe place it seemed but one of pure nightmare" (1978: 132). Phil Hardy's *Aurum Film Encyclopedia* notes that "Matheson's script perfectly captures the paranoia rampant in Cold War America as the hero's life, marriage and prospects literally collapse around him as he shrinks to oblivion" (1984: 169).

To construe *Shrinking Man* as simply an adventure story in which one man battles overwhelming odds, under-estimates (indeed ignores) many of the film's subtexts. Cohan places the film into a group of 1950s movies depicting "the fragility of the male body in comparison with the female", texts that express anxiety about the emasculation of the American male (1997: 57-58). As Carlos Clarens points out, the film draws upon a particular kind of fear: "not instant annihilation but a gradual inexorable descent into nothingness" (1968: 195). Whether the protagonist actually becomes a "nothing" is debatable, but bodily wasting may indeed be a metaphor for a number of dangers including nuclear fall-out, a perceived spiritual decline accompanying the arrival of the nuclear age, as well as the problems of being a man in a world where traditional values are under increasing pressure. It is possible to link the hero's shrinking body/masculine identity with the re-enactment of Biblical events in this movie. There is an intriguing interplay between all these themes which,

if taken separately, would not necessarily develop into a transgressive reading. It is their interaction that creates a rupture in masculinity and the relationship between man and the infinite.

The Incredible Shrinking Man presents the misadventures of Robert Scott Carey, a happily married advertising executive. Although he is called "Scott" by his wife and brother throughout the film, the hero grants himself the prominence of using two Christian names. Via a diegetically anchored narration, he introduces himself using this full form of address twice within the first few moments of the film. The application of these names by a young-man-on-the-rise may reflect his need to add character and weight to his identity, an ironic desire given the nature of the story which is about to unfold. It also creates a feeling of an "inner" and "outer" man. He has a name for public purposes (Mr. Robert Carey) and one for family use (Scott). This problem of positioning oneself within a public/private dichotomy is an important subtext to the film. Normally we would expect phallocentric binaries to link male and female subject positions to notions of "activity/passivity" and "public/private". Yet, in *Shrinking Man*, those dichotomous relations are themselves troubled as well as intriguingly interwoven.

Except for a few of the film's earlier scenes, most of the spaces in *Shrinking Man* are domestic ones. Although Scott briefly mentions that he has done military service, we never actually see him as a public figure. In an early scene we find him dressing smartly for work in a suit and monogrammed shirt, just as in military life he would have worn dog-tags and a uniform that bore his name. The monogrammed shirt may be simply another kind of public performance, this time serving the purpose of the middle class rather than the armed services. Yet despite these displays, Scott appears to have no work-mates or male acquaintances beyond his brother Charlie. We never see him at his place of employment, he makes no

advertising deals, nor does he solve any executive problems. Also, during the course of his shrinking Scott begins to keep a diary as a chronicle of his experiences, hoping it might be sold in order to raise money. This diary, despite its legitimate (public) purpose, allows him to continue to narrate the story long after he has physically ceased recording his daily problems. The nature of diary writing is also a complex mixture of the public and the private. By using a heroic tone in the voice-over narration, Scott's experiences presage important events, reminding us of "the male hero who on the eve of battle contemplates the meaning of the universe before he risks death" (Dale Spender, 1986: 262). Yet there is also a sense in which the diary, like letter writing, is a genre for introspection and confession, one favoured by women dealing with the details of life rather than its big events. Although Scott may wish to speak publicly of his experiences, he is unable to do so. Due to intense media interest, his wife Louise is forced to have the telephone disconnected because of continuous nuisance calls. Thus while his narrative voice continues to be heard within the diegesis, it is as compromised as it is informative.

From its outset, *Shrinking Man* engages with the problems of being male and the difficulties of attaining, performing and keeping a sense of manly (physical) integrity. While Margaret Tarratt proposes that the film focuses on castration anxiety at the hands of a dominant wife (1986: 273), this reading alone cannot provide for the depth of representations offered in the text. For instance, the movie opens on board a boat, where Scott and Louise are enjoying a relaxing holiday. Louise's breasts (in a tight sun-top) are pre-eminent in the frame as the two bodies bask in the sunshine. Scott wears only swimming trunks. The female body is appropriately contained *and* displayed, while at the same time we can see that Carey is no wimp: he is a healthy, robust example of manhood. Scott and Louise engage in good-natured banter until he proclaims: "To the galley, wench. Fetch me a flagon of beer!" Mark Jancovich notes that while this scene is presented humourously, it underlines the expectations

of their marriage and "his complacency about his own position as a man" (1996: 190). Contrary to Tarratt's claim that the couple are not married at this point (1986 272), my reading suggests that they are, and have been for six years. The point of their banter is that Scott's marriage to Louise fits him so perfectly that he has lost track of time. Louise leaves to do her husband's bidding. At this point a mysterious cloud moves across the surface of the water and rapidly approaches the boat. Given the Biblical themes explored by the film, it is tempting to link this cloud to the words of *Genesis 1:2* ("And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.") Scott is engulfed by the mist which leaves his skin shining with a strange luminescence. That is, it leaves its mark on him and links body, old-fashioned manliness, and unnatural phenomena.

The link between shrinking and Scott's masculine identity is alluded to in many places, particularly in the first part of the film which sees him trying to hold onto his sense of manhood. The family doctor is sympathetic but mildly condescending when Scott consults him about physical change. The doctor assures him nothing is wrong, thus feminising Scott in terms of his condition: the male hero does not know his own symptoms and misjudges his own manly body. Yet Scott's fears are confirmed and translated to sexual terms when he realises that Louise no longer has to stand on her toes to kiss him. He literally cannot measure up to the husband he once was. A significant conversation occurs shortly after his condition has been confirmed by his doctor. Seated in a car outside the medical centre, Scott speak earnestly to Louise. He tells her:

> SCOTT: . . . start thinking about us, our marriage. Some awful things might happen—there's a limit to your obligation. . . . You love Scott Carey—he has a size and a shape and a way of thinking. All that's changing now.

Louise assures him that they are married forever, and as long as he wears a wedding ring there is nothing wrong between them. The ring falls from his shrinking hand as they speak,

pointedly showing how Scott is slipping out of his manhood and his marriage. This is a particularly corporeal masculinity, one that is tied to the size and shape of a man. The film proposes that masculinity therefore has certain physical trappings: it can be put on or be removed from his middle-class body. This aspect of class is significant, for it is usually the body of the working class male or the renegade (for example, the Western hero who exists outside the law and society) whose masculinity can be so tied to his physicality. The middle class male has access to other mechanisms, such as political power or wealth, to delineate a successful capitalist manhood. Scott's depiction in this film distances him from these exterior trappings, so we see that he carries masculinity through his body and its physical being.

The sexuality of the 1950s science fiction male hero is also under pressure in *Shrinking Man*. Moreover, Scott's heroic male identity is dependent upon his relationships not with masculine buddies, but with three women. When Scott temporarily stops shrinking (leaving him at a height of thirty-six inches), he finds time to dwell on the new reality of his marriage and its sexual relations:

> SCOTT: My relationships with the world had ceased with everyone—except my wife and I knew I was driving Louise from me, but burning inside—adding its own ominous pressure to everything else—was my desperate need for her.

As if to drive home the point, Louise retires for the night asking: "Coming to bed?" He declines, commenting via his narrator's voice that "I felt puny and absurd; a ludicrous midget." As David Thomson (less than delicately) puts it, he has dwindled "far beyond the scale of a human dildo" (1984: 60). This revelation of sexual inadequacy taps into a patriarchal belief that there is an essential male need for sex, so that Scott is building up pressure like a head of steam which *must* be released for the sake of his sanity. Seeking some kind of release from this torment, he ventures forth alone into the night for the first time. Stumbling upon a circus freak show he beholds Tiny Tina, described by the barker as "Thirty

six and a half inches of feminine pulchritude!" The camera does not fix closely on Tina, who does in fact appear to be a small-statured performer. Scott is repulsed despite the fact that he and Tina are the same height. Scott goes on to meet Clarice, a circus midget. Clarice is played by an actor of usual height and they are both filmed against large props. This allows the two characters to be depicted as "normal" except for their stature. Clarice offers him hope, saying that it is not the little people who are out of step, but the rest of the world. She recasts their reality into positive terms and encourages Scott to write his diary. His sense of mastery is restored when he realises she is shorter than he is: Clarice has to look *up* to him. Jancovich comments:

> Probably due to the censorship of the period, this relationship is made straightforwardly platonic. (But) when he realises that his continued shrinking has now made Clarice taller than he is, he runs from her. He is both horrified by his lack of control over the shrinking process, and by the thought that this change in size will make her dominant over him (1996: 195).

Women can no longer be sexually available to him, and Scott's fleeing from Clarice marks a shift away from his accustomed heterosexual role.

If the 1950s male science fiction hero is thought to embody heteronormative values, then Scott's tale is particularly unusual. While the narrative invests more screen time in the kindly Clarice, it may be Tiny Tina who allows us to partly unravel the gendered nature of this curious hero's story. Instead of pointing Scott on the road to successful heterosexuality, his encounters with Tina and Clarice signpost his inexorable diversion *from* his accustomed sexual identity. The contrast between the two small women brings to mind Judith Butler's discussion of "intelligible" genders in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999). Butler describes these as gendered identities that "in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire" (1999: 23). Despite her small frame, Clarice's femininity is intelligible in a traditional sense, while Tina's gender poses a problem for Scott. While Tina may be presented to us as a

female grotesque, importantly she also expresses the text's investment in gendered discontinuity. Tina embodies Scott's own sexual fears for himself, and replicates the way in which his gendered identifications are beginning to change. In the next scene the male hero's relationship with masculinity and heterosexuality is cast into a new relief.

When seen again, Scott has dwindled in height to a mere six inches and, not surprisingly, he has given up all hope of normal (sexual) relationships. He now lives in a doll's house on the floor of the living room, wearing make-shift clothes. There is no monogram to be seen on this new shirt for he is losing touch with the privilege of ownership as well as with his sense of himself as performing gender/class. Although the neat interior of the doll's house is as comfortable as the real home occupied when Scott was its "master", Brosnan sees this new abode is the "ultimate sexual humiliation" (1978: 132-133). Alternatively it might be seen as a literal example of Pfeil's comment on the ability of a hero to get beneath the surfaces of the material world (1995: 29). Whether it is seen as a disgrace or an enactment of heroism, Scott's new relationship to masculinity is about to be played out against this backdrop. Remarking on masculinity as spectacle, Steve Neale has observed that "in a heterosexual and patriarchal society, the male body cannot be marked explicitly as the erotic object of another male look: that look must be motivated in some other way, its erotic component repressed" (quoted in Hunt, 1993: 69). *Shrinking Man* upholds this contention and, like the Peckinpah movies Neale discusses, deflects the eroticism of the male body into violence. Yet the following sequence and its implications seem to be critically overlooked in terms of homoerotic content. The film is missing from Benshoff's (1997) work on homosexuality in horror movies, which does chronicle other science fiction films of the 1950s.[7] What is particularly significant here is that the trajectory of the male hero and his quest can survive even the end of heterosexuality: Scott may slip out of his straight life, yet this is not a simple emasculation or denial of male power.

Phallocentrism tends to organise sexuality within a binary structure, as focused either upon *hetero* or *homo* sexual desires. While queer theory places a strain on such binaries, the 1950s science fictional male hero, and the narratives in which he found, are generally construed as tales of heterosexual privilege. If this is so, then *Shrinking Man* offers another set of insubordinations to this presumption. Following an argument with Louise, Scott retreats to the gloom of his miniature dwelling and throws himself down on a couch. He is in despair and unshaven, lit so that deep shadows accentuate his handsome blonde face. It is here that the pathetic Scott Carey is suddenly presented from a different perspective. The camera peruses his upper body. His face and well-muscled arms (in a sleeveless shirt) are emphasised. He raises his hands and runs his fingers through his hair. The homoerotic implications of this posture are compelling: he is a desperate, beautiful young man laying back, in turmoil, his back arched. The camera seems to love this image, lingering over him. A bizarre kind of danger now awaits. On her way out to do the shopping, Louise accidentally allows the family cat into the house. The cat's name is Butch. As Scott reclines erotically on the couch, he is observed by Butch, who sniffs around the doll's house and finally finds a way to force its walls apart. Aroused from his daze, Scott must flee across the floor, hiding behind various household objects to escape the rampaging cat. Butch succeeds only in partly ripping Scott's shirt from his body, leaving the man exposed and glistening from exertion (reminiscent of the deliberate fetishism applied to Jim Kirk's body in the original *Star Trek* series). Butch's toying with its prey takes on a sadomasochistic dimension, for we know this mouse is actually a diminutive male body.

Thus the camera itself changes perspective in relation to Scott's physicality. Up to now we have been presented with the (small but perfectly formed) body of the male hero who has not been eroticised. It is only when his "normal" sexuality is removed that Scott is displayed as a

sexual being. He is, as it were, shedding the confines of heterosexism as well as the confines of his old body. The Production Code in the U.S.A. forbade explicit mention of homosexuality.[8] In such an atmosphere, the cinematic depiction of a man who owned a cat was often used to encode a gay character.[9] Yet the camera's homoerotic gaze is directed into violence, deflecting its sexual threat into a physical one. The fact that Butch the cat attacks when Scott is thus eroticised presents a conflicting and fascinating set of symbolic possibilities. For example, in his flight from Butch, Scott is accidentally locked in the cellar and when Louise returns home she finds his small blood-stained garments scattered about the living room. Thus everyone believes that Butch has *eaten* Robert Scott Carey.

Discussing the topic of homoeroticism in epic films such as *Ben-Hur* (1959), *Spartacus* (1960), and *El Cid* (1961), Leon Hunt maintains that these texts "construct masculinity as something that can no longer be taken as "implicitly known" and as something almost impossible for men to live up to" (1993: 65). At the same time he observes that virtues such as loyalty and bravery are displayed in these films in a context of heterosexuality (1993: 75).[10] The portrayal of male affection it is always paralleled with "legitimate" male friendships (as well as heterosexual attachments). Thus in *Spartacus* manly virtues off-set the homoerotic bond between Spartacus and Antoninus. Commenting on the depiction of masculinity in *El Cid* and *Spartacus*, Hunt remarks:

> In their construction of a 'more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego', the films offer homoerotic images and relationships but pursue patriarchal themes and heroic codes. Both films are named after men who live according to rigidly defined codes of honour, and in doing so, become more than ordinary men (legends at least, and in *El Cid* something like a God), but give up their lives in the process. This transcendence, however, takes place within a specific relationship with the law and the father (1993: 78).[11]

Although *Shrinking Man* is no epic (its scale is miniaturised not massive), it nevertheless employs heroic themes and transcendence in order to stabilise its homoerotic images. It also

mobilises a range of interpretative possibilities around the construction of hegemonic masculinity.

Scott's experiences trouble the presumption of heteronormality in 1950s science fiction movies. Insofar as he literally shrinks out of heterosexual activity, and then is displayed homoerotically, his form of masculinity can be read as "implicitly unknown" in terms of traditional male heroism. Yet Scott's erotic depiction is then off-set by his life in the cellar, in which he is able to display survivalist ingenuity. He seeks out shelter in a match box, fashions tools, finds water, fights a giant spider, and scales a cupboard which has now assumed mountainous proportions. While these activities take place in a basement, within the most interior of domestic sites, Scott's tiny presence can redefine the very nature of his surroundings. The space in which he is enclosed becomes a wilderness fit for the trials of a manly hero. Nevertheless one of his first acts when trapped in the cellar is to rip his trousers from his body with the help of a now-gigantic dressmaker's pin. Jancovich interprets this action as stripping away the guise of civilisation and donning the equivalent of a caveman's bearskin made from the remnants of his now useless garments (1996: 193). In light of the previous encounter with Butch, however, Scott's actions can also be viewed as casting off the symbols of heterosexuality in favour of a self-made tunic. Thus he re-fashions himself and his sexed identity while retaining his manly achievements.

From the point in the narrative where Scott eludes Butch, Biblical parallels come to the fore. Not only does Scott experience the Fall (into the cellar), but there is even a version of the Flood which occurs when a water-heater bursts and threatens to swamp his new home. When Scott revives from this near-drowning, he finds he has experienced an epiphany and has come to regard his spider-foe like unto himself. Despite being weak with hunger and exhaustion he feels a "giant strength—urging me to the death struggle." While I cannot bring myself to

agree with Baxter, who places this final confrontation with the spider "among the great moments of film" (1970: 128), this is nevertheless a dramatic episode which can be counted as pivotal if it is read as the film's climax. By proclaiming that he is at one with the spider, Scott re-enacts the mythical wholeness of hunter and hunted, a narrative which covers the same gendered ground upon which he (Scott, Oedipus, Perseus, Everyman) slays his enemy/dragon/monster. His battle takes on an even more suggestive Oedipal dimension if we construe the spider as the black widow, a many-legged Sphinx which must be destroyed in order for Scott to achieve this full masculine destiny.[12]

Hunt also finds Biblical parallels important in the hero epics of the 1950s and 1960s. He believes that such texts become a kind of male melodrama, one in which the ultimate goal is the transfiguration of the leading man (1993: 81). Thus the Cid becomes God-like by leading his army *after* death, becoming an even more idealised ego than when he was alive.[13] Similarly, viewing Scott Carey's end as a story of Paradise reclaimed, of man's re-attaining grace, reinscribes the Oedipal destination. The white male who transcends the flesh and finds/becomes God can be considered a conservative storyline. In the tradition of *El Cid*, Scott appears to live on beyond his own death, becoming both mankind and Christ risen. After his battle with the spider Scott is too weak to eat the only food source available, a piece of cake left in the cellar accidentally by Louise. Scott collapses in the dust ("dust to dust"). It is this inability to eat the cake that Jancovich reads as particularly meaningful in terms of a reversal of the Fall. By failing to eat the cake (the apple), Scott recaptures a state of grace. It is instructive that the figure of Eve is largely absent from the Christ/Adam symbolism of Scott's revelation. We should note, however, that it is Louise who leaves the tantilising cake in the cellar, food which Scott refuses to eat. In so doing he is able to manfully deny the sin of the Apple. Thus Man redeems himself, and Scott awakens to a new plane of existence. Finding that he has dwindled in size even further, he crosses to a nearby window and looks up

into the night sky. Instead of bemoaning his existence, as he has continually done up until now, he comes to see that the infinitely large is no different from the infinitely small. Therefore he is at one with the galaxies and the furthermost stars. He is, in fact, reborn into this new knowledge. He goes out into the garden (*the* Garden), where he is dwarfed even by the blades of grass. Scott wonders whether he is the first of a new race, for he is surely not the only one to encounter the mysterious cloud (the hand of God). As his narration culminates, the music swells and our last images are those of the vast galaxies beyond the Milky Way:

> SCOTT: I had thought in terms of Man's own limited dimension. I had presumed upon Nature: that existence begins and ends is Man's conception, not Nature's. And I felt my body dwindling, melting, becoming nothing. My tears melted away. . . . To God there is no zero. I still exist!

There is an interesting echo of Scott Carey's words in the conclusion of *Gattaca* (1997). At the fruition of his own journey of self-discovery, Vincent/Jerome looks into the stars and tells us: "They say every atom in our bodies was once part of a star. Maybe I'm not leaving, maybe I'm going home." His struggle has been against genetic disadvantage in the same way as Scott's has been against physical wasting, yet both young men are capable of invoking oneness with the infinite as the climax of their heroic stories.

Rather than seeing the film re-inscribe the ultimate journey of the male ego, Jancovich's perspective on its ending offers another option. He notes that this movie, along with *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, can not only "question conventional notions of sexuality and gender, but also suggest that alternatives can exist which may be more desirable" (1996: 90). That is, by combining the familiar and the alien, these films contest normality. Jancovich interprets *Shrinking Man*'s message of religious transcendence as part of a disruptive reading of gender:

> Rather than maintaining his hierarchical view of existence and desiring domination over those defined as inferior to him, Carey comes to accept a universe without hierarchies in which he does not need to assert his dominance and independence. He comes to see existence as a

> 'gigantic circle'. . . . If God is invoked at this moment, He is not a patriarch who exists independently from creation, but is the cosmic universe itself (1996: 194).

Scott finally understands that life can be unfolding and circular, rather than closed, linear and logocentric. Certainly the closing words ("I still exist!") place Scott linguistically in the perpetual present. He no longer narrates past detail. His voice becomes not one of difference, but of concurrence. Thus his words offer both narrative closure and open-endedness. Commenting on the corporeal masculinity in *Shrinking Man* and *The Amazing Colossal Man* (1957), Wells observes that it is only when the male characters are "distanciated from the functional orthodoxy of their bodies [that] they actually address the spiritual and emotional aspects of their identity, previously only defined by the efficiency of their physicality" (1995: 192). Scott Carey's story awakens the possibility that even the bourgeois/white/heterosexual male subject can be transformed. We should also remember that Scott's tale can easily be seen as the triumph of the male hero. He is an individual thrust onto a quest, who is turned away from the everyday and comes to accept uncertainty; he encounters fearful beasts and trials; he learns to act on a higher level and gains a new perspective on existence; and he returns his knowledge to us via his narration; and finally we are left to ponder his life with nostalgic pride. Scott can be transfigured because he *is* male, the idealised mythical subject. Like Spartacus the former slave, Scott the former advertising executive becomes more than himself. Hunt reconstructs how Spartacus the man can become Spartacus the Ideal by reference to a famous scene near the epic film's end (1993: 81). The captured rebels, knowing crucifixion awaits their leader, each rise in turn claiming to be Spartacus. The man becomes a legend, and his power and his fate are accepted by all. In Scott's case the human has undergone a journey to become *more* than a man. He is at one with God not through a normal demise, but through transcendence of death. In this latter reading, Scott can grow only when he jettisons his relations with women, giving his idealised mythical self the chance to find its full potential.

Shrinking Man's male hero represents one of the most provocative redeployments of masculinity in the science fiction movies of the 1950s. The transformations of gender and sexuality enacted by Scott Carey offer room for both feminist and queer theoretical intervention. The film presents masculinity as a troublesome corporeal condition. Its boundaries are permeable and dangerous. Even his normal masculinity "bothers" Scott, and must be reinforced with manly performance (his monogrammed shirt, his physical height compared to Louise). Yet if these activities make gender arduous, they also make it something for which he is willing to struggle. The contradictions of this narrative eventually lead to the masculinisation of the Scott's world, to his continuing journey of heroic self discovery.

Despite the film's enjoyable transgressions of heteronormative behaviors, it offers no room for the emergence a female hero. Louise Carey remains a minor character, one left behind by her husband in the best tradition of masculinised heroic narrative. It comes as no surprise that *The Fantastic Little Girl*, an announced sequel to *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, was never made. In this film, Louise was supposed to follow in Scott's shrinking footsteps. Recalling de Lauretis' discussion on Medusa and the Sphinx, and the way in which their stories have been subdued by history (1984: 109), it is interesting to ponder what Louise's journey might have been. Would her brother-in-law Charlie, at first solicitous and concerned, later become an unwanted suitor? Would her motives in shrinking be therefore based on pursuit or escape? To what processes might Louise subject her body in an effort to begin the change? Is it likely that she would take a lover on a side-road of this quest? Most intriguingly, would she have been able to shrug off traditional heteronormative femininity and thereby reach that point of transcendence known to her husband? Such questions allow us to see that narratives of the

hero rest upon sexual difference, and tell stories about the masculinity of their mythical subject.[14]

Problematising or even satirising cinematic masculinity does not necessarily subvert its narrative position. The incongruities and complications of depicting male gendered identities can be made visible without disarranging the underlying discourses upon which they are constructed. Rather than detracting from the desirability of manhood, the difficulties of achieving and retaining a successfully masculine identity can serve to confirm its authority. If we are to seek female heroes in 1950s science fiction movies we cannot rely on finding narrative spaces vacated by uncertain male heroes. It seems likely, therefore, that the ability to perceive female heroism requires the development of specific reading practices and tactics. In the chapter to follow, "*Her! Her!* The Spectacular Female Subject", my task is to search for ways to discern the presence of female heroes in narrative film, ways to articulate how and why such figures *can* exist. To do so I will draw on the work of a number of feminist film theorists and I will argue that the depiction of a range of characters in 1950s science fiction movies, as well as more contemporary genre films, provide significant room for the negotiation of transformative gender and power relations.

Chapter Four - *Her! Her!* The Spectacular Female Subject

In *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* Kaja Silverman observes that cinema is typically preoccupied with "the coherence of the male subject" (1988: 2). It continually addresses itself to any threat to that subjectivity, so much so that its re-enactment becomes the "obsession" of film rather than simply one theme among many possible others. If, as Silverman suggests, the apparatus of the cinema is engrossed in its own masculine persona, any claim to an intrusion upon this obsession needs to be made with care. As I have sought to show in Chapter Three, the depiction of problematic manhood will not by itself destabilise the narrative position of masculinity. The incredibly small Scott Carey is still a worthy man, the beset Pat Hendry is still victorious, and the naive and emotional John Putnam is still the narrator of his story. The difficulties of achieving and retaining manhood are the very essence of the hero's tale. Silverman also argues that in order to highlight the plight of its subject, cinema must exclude or subordinate an Other (1988: 12), an *object* of filmic discourse. The presentation of women in film reveals the way cinema is structured as a "symptom of the male condition" (1988: 24), rather than as a reflection of any external female reality.

In the following chapter I would like to propose a re-imagining of the conditions imposed by patriarchal repetition: not to deny that phallocentric practices are in evidence, but to suggest that they are not nearly as monolithic or as seamless as they may appear. In so doing I will endeavour to distinguish the female hero as a character who undermines the gendered presumptions of heroism, one who disconcerts and contradicts the presumed transcendence of the male subject in popular narrative. Critics working to articulate the transformative female in cinema include Yvonne Tasker (1993), Elizabeth Hills (1997), Rebecca Bell-Metereau

(1985) and Marleen Barr (1991), all of whom explore the difficult ground beyond gendered binary oppositions. By acknowledging and investigating the nature of gender representation, their critical concerns focus around three integrated issues: (i) the nature of gendered identity being offered by a text or set of texts; (ii) the reading practices necessary in order to see females being or becoming heroic; and (iii) the articulation of a group of accomplishments exercised by heroic female characters. My discussion will investigate how we might assemble these elements to reveal cinematic females escaping from the oppositional binaries of Oedipal logic. In order to illustrate this investigation I draw primarily on the films *Alien* (1979), *Blue Steel* (1990) and *Thelma and Louise* (1991), as well as a range of 1950s science fiction movies.

It is not my intention to devise (or suggest we should implement) a "female hero formula", an exclusive category suitable for all occasions. Instead, I propose that is it possible to discuss a set of practices, relationships and competencies which allow us to speak about a female character becoming and being disruptively heroic. I intend to explore how certain kinds of portrayals can reveal and reassemble the nature of heroism, and to see how we might develop signposts for their recognition. What opportunities exist in figures as diverse as Ripley, Megan Turner, and Thelma and Louise in contemporary films, as well as Helen Benson, Lesley Joyce and Kay Lawrence from the 1950s? What happens to them on the screen? What do they do and say? How can *we* look in ways that see them as transgressively heroic? In Rhona Berenstein's work on 1930s horror films, she remarks upon the ability of such texts to simultaneously confirm and destroy the *status quo* by a "depiction of behaviors that push the parameters of patriarchal culture" (1996: 9). I believe similar processes are at work in science fiction films from the 1950s and more contemporary action cinema.[1] Rather than describe the same course as the male, the female hero survives in a world of perpetual uncertainty. She has a very different narrative trajectory from that of her male counterpart.

There are a range of conceptual dilemmas involved in disrupting the trajectory of the male-centred story, including the sexed processes of narrative identified by Teresa de Lauretis (1984: 103ff) and discussed in Chapter Two. These uncertainties influence the ways in which femininity and popular film can be conceptualised. In *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), for example, Helen Benson is an attractive widow and loving mother. Helen is also the woman who saves the world. Why then does general critical opinion acknowledge her feminine qualities and yet seem to ignore her heroic ones?[2] Part of the explanation rests within liberal/humanism and the nature of binary oppositional thought. Rather than seeing Helen as a site for the discursive construction of gender, one open to multiple forms of contestation, a liberal/humanist response would tend to position her on one side of a fixed (sexed) division. Given the nature of such oppositional divides, Helen seems readable only in feminised terms. We need also to consider the sexualisation of the female body in 1950s science fiction films. Certainly the figure of the female lead is often emphasised in a manner evoking the descriptions used by Laura Mulvey (1989): the viewer *is* offered the curvy and beautiful female-as-spectacle: Steve in *Tarantula* (1955), Kay in *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), Pat in *Them!* (1954). Yet rather than consider ways to negotiate patriarchal specularisation, a Mulvey-style analysis seems to lead us in an opposite direction, curtailing its scrutiny of popular film at the point where the fundamental sexism of the narrative is revealed. That is, using a psychoanalytical model to denounce the phallocentric apparatus of the cinema seemingly offers nowhere else to go but to the politics of repudiation. Locked within the problematics of oppositional binaries, this form of critical thought acknowledges only a rigidly systematic sexism where little (or no) opportunity exists to admit heterogeneity into the depiction of women. Unrepresentable as "herself", woman becomes what man is not. Woman is the heroine and never the hero. Phallocentrism encourages gender to be both

(re)produced and perceived within the traditional constraints of femininity, and these offer a coherent and consistent account of gender based on the passivity of the female.

Tasker, seeking new female articulations in cinema, identifies the "bad" woman or active heroine as a particular kind of assertive position for female characters to occupy (1993: 140-1). She offers the example of Catherine Tramell (Sharon Stone) in *Basic Instinct* (1992), a character who uses her beauty, wealth and aggressively polymorphous sexuality against the film's males. Tasker maintains that Tramell and other such portrayals can create ambiguous characters who drive the narrative and who are themselves potent images of power. While such ambiguity is important, Tasker believes we must look beyond sexual terms to redefine the female hero (and her body) as possessing powerful characteristics. In other words, she urges a concept of the heroic beyond the terms of feminised or masculinised embodiment. The characters in science fiction films of the 1950s which I seek to describe as female heroes also suggest other ways for women to be powerful. The characters of Ruth Adams, Pat Medford and Lesley Joyce use knowledge and learning as attributes of empowerment. Like Tasker's action heroines, this kind of power is laid over pre-existing film traditions (the sexy assistant, the romantic lead, the feisty woman), yet can be read as a challenge to these established conventions.

My contention is that 1950s science fiction films offer female characters who are not necessarily circumscribed within a system of gendered binary oppositions. These science fictional females can lead us to question and reassess how gender and sexuality can be exposed in popular genre movies. These are characters at once beautiful *and* disruptive, spectacular *and* perverse. While the films in which they are found are usually seen as typical male adventures, within them a feminist analysis can find considerable ground for contesting gendered identity.[3] Writing on the nature of such gendered disorientations in a film of a very

different type, Hollywood's "women's films" from the 1930s to the 1950s, Jeanine Basinger asserts:

> If it is true, as many suggest, that Hollywood films repressed women and sought to teach them what they ought to do, then it is equally clear that, in order to achieve this, the movies first had to bring to life the opposite of their own morality. To convince women that marriage and motherhood were the right path, movies had to show women making the mistake of doing something else (1993: 6).

It is a moot point whether popular cinema creates or reflects desires and fantasies, or is involved with them in a complex interaction. Yet we can infer from Basinger's comment that the production of meanings occur through the viewer's complex and often refractory relationship with the text. If subversions can be gleaned from cinema directed at women, what then may occur in the similarly (or even more) ambiguous science fiction films of the 1950s? In these films women heroes are rarely punished for non-conformity, and retain both career and man. Or they might repudiate the man altogether in pursuit of a greater good (as does Helen Benson). By so doing, many of these texts can be said to reject what Basinger calls the "I think I'll bake cookies instead of curing cancer" approach found in many films depicting women's public success (1993: 13). Furthermore, in 1950s science fiction movies verbal attempts by male characters to marginalise women because of their sex are rarely successful. Such onslaughts are usually refuted vociferously or rejected with a laugh (in *Them!* and *Tarantula* respectively). The knowledge possessed or gained by female heroes in these movies make them powerful figures. Thus, while not being originally constructed as pro-female texts, such films can be at odds with conservative patriarchal narratives. At the very least they can present problematic spaces from which there is no certainty that heroic masculinity will be convincingly reinscribed. These antithetical pleasures are not simply located in capitulation to patriarchal discourses; they involve the interrogation of (and confrontation with) the film's conspicuous story and presumptions of gender and sexuality. A

re-imagining of these films rests upon the kinds of questions we are willing to ask about them, not with the intentionality of the filmmakers.

This chapter, therefore, introduces a series of questions that I seek to pose and to investigate. What kinds of tactical reading practices allow us to identify and articulate the female hero in popular cinema? Moreover, what kinds of experiences, associations and capabilities are unique to such a character? One figure in particular, Ellen Ripley from the *Alien* films, provides an opportunity to articulate the attributes of a hero, and to consider critical responses to such female exploits. I believe that the ability to read Ripley as a distruptively heroic female is particularly important for she represents the pleasures of the subversive female hero, that character whose narrative destination does not wait upon the arrival of Oedipus. I therefore want to consider Ripley and the film *Alien* in detail, and in so doing build a basis for discussing female heroes in science fiction movies of the 1950s.

There are many critics to whom Ripley is not a female hero at all. Martha Nochimson, for example, believes that the linearity of *Alien* marks it as a "guy's" movie and concludes that Ripley's character fits neatly into a male story, being "almost completely masculinized" (1992: 32). She sees Ripley as simply one of the chaps.[4] Ros Jennings offers a more conciliatory view and her comments are instructive. She writes:

> When I left the cinema after seeing *Alien* (1979) for the first time, I do not claim that my life was changed in any significant way. Nevertheless, despite the occasional twinges of fear and discomfort that I felt at certain sections of the film, I sensed that I had encountered something in that film that I had not come across before. More importantly, I had found something that I had constantly found to be missing up to that point. It was the start of my love affair with Ripley, and though I would not declare my interest as being in anyway unreserved, Ripley became the object of my admiration because she was the first female protagonist that I had ever encountered, who in my opinion, was wholly intelligible, attractive and heroic (1987: 193).

Jennings' remarks are both heartening and of concern. As she notes, when it is possible to find meaningfully heroic female characters they often remain problematic. The fact that Ripley is the *first* such protagonist that Jennings has encountered underlines the sorry status of the female hero. However, I do not believe that the female hero is such a rare figure, nor do I subscribe to Jennings' claims that Mulvey's analysis of film can comfortably explain some of the supposedly voyeuristic elements of Ripley's depiction in this film (1987: 195-198). Our willingness and ability to read male characters as successfully heroic and female characters as inexcusably problematic is the result of both dominant masculine narratives and patriarchal critical practices. While sharing some elements of Jennings' response to the character of Ripley, I contend that (like 1950s science fiction films) the *Alien* movies offer remarkable examples of the female heroic in operation. To ignore them is to accept masculinist interpretations of popular cultural phenomena.

In order to elaborate the position of Ripley as a transformative female hero, it is informative to consider the work of Elizabeth Hills. In "From "Figurative Males" to Action Heroines: Reconceptualizing Images of Transgressive Women in Hollywood's New Action Cinema" (1997),[5] Hills discusses the need to perceive female *trans*gression as different from a masculine *re*gression. Drawing on Deleuze, Hills challenges the binary logic of the passive female/active male constituent of psychoanalysis. She urges that we move away from "habituated modes of acting and thinking in favour of a multiple and changing process of experimentation". In order to look beyond binary oppositions, Hills discusses a number of female characterisations in popular cinema. Writing of heroic female characters such as Ripley and Sarah Connor (from the *Terminator* films), Hills comments:

> Not only do these female characters take up the central spaces in action genre films which are usually reserved for men but they act in ways that are usually described as "masculine" for they derive their power, not from sexuality, but from physical strength and their creative and intelligent uses of technology. Though these powerfully transgressive characters open up

> interesting questions about the fluidity of gendered identities and changing popular cinematic representations of women, action heroines are often described as "pseudo males" or not "really" women (1997 n.p.).

This perception offers an alternative way to conceptualise female heroes. Rather than being the symbolic male proposed by Carol Clover (1992), Hills looks for women of power who suggest ways to colonise a new part of the place/space of the screen. Instead of accepting that the male hero and the male-centred narrative provide the only position from which to theorise, Hills sees women who usurp the role of the hero as stepping outside the gendered subjectivity of the heroine: they prise open the story of the hero and the trajectory of the narrative. It is interesting to contrast this with Clover's position. For example, Clover sees the Final Girl's rejection of boyfriends as a denial of her own sexuality, and as a contributory factor to her masculinisation (1992: 63). Hills, however, finds that female characters who derive power from sources other than sexuality can be potentially transformative, reassembling their female bodies from all resources available to them (1997 n.p.).

Seeking a way to reconceptualise female transgression in contemporary action cinema Hills discusses Ripley, seeing her as embodying a group of heroic capacities such as creativity, adaptability in the face of change, and displaying a readiness to experiment and to transform herself as a result of her experiences. It is again interesting that Clover has listed similar attributes for her Final Girl: competence, skill and cleverness not mediated by male characters or boyfriends (1992: 40). The difference between these positions is that Hills interprets the portrayal of certain skills, such as technical competence, as a characteristic not tied to gender. Hills' analytical stance is significant for the female hero, reclaiming the popular representation of resourcefulness, intelligence and courage as abilities which any character, regardless of sex, can use. Ripley does not need to be "desexed" or turned into a symbolic male in order to be perceived as heroic. Due to complex corporeality in the *Alien* films Ripley can exist across a range of territories not limited by gendered binary oppositions. Hills refers to Barbara Creed's

(1993) reading of the nature the creature in *Alien* as being masculine while at the same time portraying the monstrous-feminine, suggesting that such representations allow for multiple and contradictory possibilities rather than being limited to a set of either/or divisions. Ripley's own body is linked to technology, weapons and computers, and in *Aliens* (1986) to a mechanical suit. Hills sees these links as disrupting the body/technology border that places woman on one side (as female/body/nature) and man on the other.[6] Ripley can inhabit, rather than be inhabited by, technology. What this creates is neither an embodiment of masculinity nor of androgyny, but a place of difference, offering the pleasurable (dis)embodiments of Donna Harroway's cyborg women (1991: 149-191). Hills' analysis allows us to propose that female heroes can be identified by their personal skills and abilities, as well as through a disruptive corporeality. For her Ripley represents "a transgressive assemblage of forces which weakens the hierarchical nature of phallocentrism: in this instance the assemblages of woman with alien, woman with machines, and woman with action" (1997). Hills sees Ripley becoming increasingly identified with the Alien, not at the level of maternity but through the ability of their bodies to be transgressive, to confuse patriarchal reality.[7] The hybridity of a character such as Ripley, existing on the borders of human and cyborg, can be considered a leap forward in the search for female heroism. Rebecca Bell-Metereau agrees, noting that Ripley becomes a character "so foreign as to be unrecognizable to most popular critics" (1985: 10).

I would like now to offer my own gendered analysis of *Alien* and its heroic female lead. In order to form a reading that identifies Ripley's transgressive heroism and corporeality, it is useful to consider her in relation to two non-human presences in the film. The first is the physical environment of the Company's spaceship; and the second is the Alien itself (a creature valued and sought after by the Company). One of the ways the text makes its associations is by forging physical links between the wrecked craft found on the planet, the

environment of the *Nostromo*, and the body of the Alien. Although the *Nostromo* has brightly lit, familiar-looking spaces where the crew congregate, the bulk of the vessel is as darkly tubular, flatly metallic and non-human in design as the unknown ship and the adult Alien's body. It is only the physical existence of people on board the commercial towing vehicle that marks it as a human environment. In an opening sequence we are shown the barrenness and the emptiness of the vessel. Its strange non-human noises and reflections are emphasised in a panning shot. An empty space suit visor blankly reflects a computer screen. The Alien is able to exist and prey upon the crew because it bears a striking resemblance to the Company's design blueprint. When the Alien kills Brett, and later Lambert and Parker, it is able to rear out of the very structure of their own ship. Dallas is taken even though he is armed and receiving radio instructions from Lambert. It is as if the vessel has been built to camouflage the Alien. In a film not renowned for its dialogue, there is an important piece of information conveyed by the android Ash after it has been beheaded in its struggles with the remaining humans. When questioned about how to kill the Alien, Ash replies:

> ASH: You can't. You still don't understand what you're dealing with, do you? Perfect organism. Its structural perfection is matched only by its hostility. . . . I admire its purity. A survivor: unclouded by conscience, remorse or delusions of morality.

Ash, the Company's robot responsible for most of their immediate predicament, has defined the standards of the Company. The Company too acts without a sense of right and wrong, compunction, or ethics. It is also effectively non-human and the *nostro homo* desired by the Company is an alien. Judith Newton observes that the creature is the "ultimate Company Man, and the Company means to use it in its own defence, as part of 'the weapons division'"(1990: 83).[8]

The final part of the film follows from the disclosure that Ash is a robot, and it is from this point that Newton believes Ripley fails as a hero. She observes:

> It is in these final moments that the film subtly reinvests Ripley with traditionally feminine qualities. First, while Parker and Lambert are racing to get off the ship, Ripley is sent on a prolonged search for Jonesey the cat. This is an impulsive, humanitarian, and therefore traditionally feminine action—'Here kitty, kitty, here, sweetheart'. Also, immediately before Ripley's encounter with the alien on the space shuttle, we see her stripped to her bikini underpants, not standard gear for space duty perhaps, but exposing a long, and lovingly recorded, expanse of marvelous body. Finally, both before and after blowing the alien into space, Ripley is shown tucking her cat into bed. Ripley is not only divested of coalition and reinvested with femininity, she is also reaffirmed as a Company Woman (1990: 86).

Newton's reading rests on three main issues: that Ripley's search for Jonesy is a barrier to escape (that is, she enters the terrain of the heroine-as-obstacle); that the search for the cat can be equated with feminised behavior; and that the "striptease" is a way for Ripley to be subdued. The question-mark created over the nature of Ripley's heroism is important because it parallels the way in which 1950s science fiction females are understood to behave, their potentiality as hero undermined by a scream, a tight dress or a lingering close-up of shapely legs. I therefore wish to propose some alternatives to the propositions offered by Newton and suggest some further articulations of female heroism.

As *Alien* draws towards its climax, the deaths of Lambert and Parker serve to undermine the expected narrative trajectory of the film. Usually those who stick together stay alive, while those who wander off alone die. Not so in *Alien*. Just as Dallas—the figure of the tough-minded, pragmatic (and scuffily sexy) male hero—is eliminated in an unforeseen death, so too does the attack on Parker and Lambert destabilise traditional narrative expectations. Clearly in command, Ripley dispatches Parker and Lambert to obtain coolant for use in the air system of the shuttle craft. Having readied the shuttle, Ripley then hears Jonesy the cat. In the dark, tubular, alien-like hold of the vessel, Parker and Lambert frantically struggle to load coolant cylinders, while in the white, well-lit command quarters Ripley begins her search for Jonesy. She finds and cages the cat just before the Alien attacks the remaining humans, their screams echoing through the ship's loudspeaker. Ripley runs to their aid but they are dead before she

arrives. Contrary to Newton's suggestion, it is *from* this point on that Ripley launches her most telling reprisals against her two enemies: the Alien and the Company. Rather than becoming heroine-like, she fights both opponents using technology, intellect and physical agility.

Can we accept Newton's reading that the cat symbolises Ripley's re-absorption into femininity? During the course of the film the snarling, squealing Jonesy has twice been mistaken for the creature lurking in the shadows. Cats have long been thought to possess the very characteristics Ash ascribes to the Alien: a disregard for the fate of their prey, and an instinct for survival. It is these that are most prized by the industrial complex. Jonesy is therefore similar to, yet different from, the Alien and is also linked in a complementary relationship to Ripley. Ripley clearly *does* express human values such as a sense of right and wrong (it is wrong to open the inner hatch to allow an unknown life form onto the ship). The furry, furious yet vulnerable Jonesy is as much a stranger on board the metallic *Nostromo* as Ripley is alien to simple constructions of femininity. Both Ripley and Jonesy are survivors: they are the only ones to come face-to-face with the Alien and live.[9] Rather than symbolising Ripley's return to femininity, her search for Jonesy signposts her inexorable heroic journey away from her companions. One might say she becomes a hero as a consequence of this act, because she does *not* abandon the cat. While retaining her "impure" human qualities, Ripley also possesses (and this can be seen literally in that she cages Jonesy) the survival skills necessary to defeat the inhuman enemy.

Ripley the female hero lives not because she becomes feminised or (within Clover's concept of the Final Girl) masculinised. Ripley represents not one set of values or capacities, but lays claim to a range of abilities and emotions. Bell-Metereau notes, for example, that Ripley remains both "tough-minded and sensible" while maintaining this attachment to the cat (1985:

18). Ripley is a complex of identity, a gendered assemblage of characteristics and potentials. Similarly, the character of Nikki Nicholson in *The Thing* (1951) could be seen in purely feminised terms: as the scientist's beautiful assistant, the love interest, and the bearer of domestic comfort (when, for example, she delivers coffee to the beleaguered men). Nevertheless Nikki is quite capable of interpreting scientific notes as well as out-drinking her suitor Capt. Pat Hendry. Nikki questions Pat's masculinity and is amused by his romantic ineptitude, but is herself never marginalised by Hendry or the other males in the party. She is in fact crucial to their survival. Nikki reveals Carrington's grisly experiments, and then later tells Pat how to kill an intergalactic vegetable. Mark Jancovich notes that it is only by "combining her domestic knowledge with practical science" that the humans can overcome the Thing (1996: 41). Like Ripley, Nikki offers a hybrid range of abilities and skills, neither being fixed wholly within femininity nor cast as a quasi-male.

Ripley's "striptease" at the climax of *Alien* is usually seen as the film's most controversial invocation of gender. Thomas Byers maintains that through these scenes the text repudiates Ripley and reinscribes masculinity, a classic case of cutting her down to size through the phallocentric apparatus of narrative cinema (1989: 86). This too has resonance for the science fiction films of the 1950s, particularly as depictions of their female characters are said to be often built upon eroticised images of women who are punished for their participation in the story. Jennings analyses the "striptease" section of *Alien*, detailing how its cinematic technique "is constructed for maximum voyeuristic effect" (1987: 196). It is important to consider these concerns not only for their visual impact, but also within terms set up by the film. Given Ripley's disruptively gendered presence throughout most of the movie, Jennings finds this sequence surprising and considers it to be driven by nothing more unusual than scopophilia and voyeurism. She specifies her concerns:

> If, as Mulvey asserts, Hollywood film conceives of women as being the object of the controlling male gaze, then it would seem that Scott's conception of Ripley is tainted by this belief. Therefore, although he chose to make her the hero of the film, he also chose to inscribe her in such a way as to neutralize the significance of her threat in ascending into the domain of movie hero. By rendering her available to male voyeurism, Scott's control of filming in the final scene ensures that in addition to the 'so-called' masculine traits of bravery, technical ability, and so on—all of which we have seen her demonstrate so well up to this point—she now signifies a wholly intelligible form of femininity (1987: 197).

In particular, Jennings notes the way the hand-held camera is used in the undressing scene, describing how it takes the position of the spectator/voyeur, not that of the lurking Alien. So, when Ripley bends to remove her overalls, "the camera itself dips at the same time, indicating an audience or camera viewpoint" and, clothed only in singlet and bikini briefs, Jennings sees Ripley as reduced to the status of a porno figure. When she stretches to operate controls "her rear view is emphasized as sexually available" (1987: 195). Jennings notes that the camera changes to a more neutral position once Ripley is in the space suit and ventures forth to defeat the Alien. She believes that this sequence illustrates that Ridley Scott cannot quite avoid sexually objectifying Ripley who otherwise is notable for her power and autonomy (1987: 198).[10]

Jennings' position is well argued and her reading is a valuable one, but there are further complexities to the film's final action sequence. For instance, Bell-Metereau asks that we recall the opening scene "in which we see Kane emerging from hypersleep in a similar state of semi-nudity. Both scenes provide a framing device that creates suspense; the roving camera gives the audience the idea that the characters are not alone, and the nudity creates a greater sense of their vulnerability" (1985: 20-21). I agree that the scene of Kane's awakening is important. The camera shows us the weedy, all-too vulnerable body of actor John Hurt, not those of the women or the robust forms of Yaphet Kotto (Parker) or Tom Skerritt (Dallas). Dressed only in over-sized briefs, Kane awakens, sits up and stretches.[11] In a head-and-shoulders shot, Kane tilts his neck back in a gesture we will later see repeated in the stretched

head and jaws of the Alien. Kane's body echoes the vulnerability of Ripley alone with the Alien in the shuttle, but he is not treated with the same extreme close-ups that serve to problematise the film's representation of the female body.

It *is* important to notice Ripley's flesh on display (and the manner of its representation), but there is imagery deployed in this penultimate sequence of the film that moves beyond simple sexism. Ripley's body can also juxtapose the human with the Alien and with the Company's dark technology, continuing visual parallels and disruptions occurring throughout the film. Once more the creature hides within the very structure of a Company vessel. Ripley virtually touches it when operating a control panel, the round curves of her human flesh contrasting with the dark metallic-like curves of the Alien's head emerging from the shadows. Even though the Alien's threat becomes phallicised (it extends its toothed jaw towards her), there is an ambiguous symmetry between the curvature of Ripley's hip and the arch of the Alien's head. They seem to offer a visual hybridisation, a disjuncture in sexual dimorphism that serves to project both woman and Alien into a zone where biological sex is no longer the most important measurement of the body. Ripley then retreats to the locker and squeezes into a space suit. Huddled in the locker, she gazes out at the extension and contraction of the Alien's slimy-toothed phallus. We should note, however, that once she has donned—literally occupied—the space suit, we do not see this phallic image again. Nor does the angle of the hand-held camera substantially change after Ripley has clothed herself; we continue to be offered the same angled close-ups as she manipulates the controls of the suit and loads the weapon used to blast the Alien through the hatch door. It is when her vulnerable human body is made cyborg, controlling technology and occupying that which is beyond her own flesh, that she can emerge to defeat her opponent. Despite Ripley's fear, the imagery of the phallus no longer restrains her. In triumphing over the Alien, Ripley slips out of the limitations of sexual desirability and into the realms of the disruptive female hero.

The issue of the display of Ripley's body helps demonstrate the problems of the woman as hero, both in the past and in more recent films. At one point in *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, Kay Lawrence stands on the edge of a boat contemplating the waters of the lagoon. Finding herself alone on deck, she removes her robe to reveal her shapely body in a white swimsuit. There is an obvious intent at this point to depict Kay as sexually attractive. She faces the camera when discarding her robe and is thus revealed to the audience in a voyeuristic manner. Although her swimsuit does not show a great deal of flesh, it acts like an old-fashioned girdle, pulling in her waist and emphasising her hips and breasts. The bodice of the swimsuit also follows the fashion of its day with a severely structured brassiere. Shortly before we are presented with this image, Kay speaks to one of her male companions who has recently returned from a dive. He describes the water of the Black Lagoon as being "like another world" and, with wonder in her voice, Kay says "I'd like to see it". If we concentrate only upon the curves of Kay's body we may overlook her transgressive plunge into the unknown waters of the lagoon, into that other world beyond the control of her would-be (male) protectors.[12]

The quest of the female hero must deal with such problematic intrusions into unknown places. The female hero does not simply take a journey into the unknown to make it knowable (in patriarchal terms). The quest's "dragons" cannot necessarily be slain. The woman-as-hero reveals a new relationship with unfamiliar realms. Hills' comments on the heroism of Ripley are particularly pertinent:

> Ripley illustrates the point that the site of the unknown can also be the site of a transformative encounter—a potential moment of change—for she demonstrates that as your context changes so must your responses to it change. This transformation into female hero occurs through a change in her thinking. . . . (1997 n.p.).

In this context the unknown can become transformative; it is not simply a fearful, invasive or deadly mystified realm. This has immediate relevance to the science fiction films of the 1950s, wherein critics commonly use the terms of the Cold War to describe a mysterious Other as horrific and malevolent. Yet many of these films exhibit a sense of wonder surrounding place and time, even when linked with destruction. Movies such as *This Island Earth* (1955), *Forbidden Planet* (1956), *It Came from Outer Space*(1953) and *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* evidence a curious and complex relationship with difference. The alliance of space and difference is inscribed in the journey of the female hero, one which does not necessarily reach a conclusion or obtain closure.

Just such a journey is undertaken by the two leading characters in *Thelma and Louise*, both of whom find themselves thrust upon a quest taking them out of the known and into the unique landscape of the hero. Barr argues that Thelma and Louise exist in a transpolitical space, entering "a terrain beyond patriarchal language—ultimately beyond all aspects of patriarchal reality" (1991: 81). Through their "ability to rise above the patriarchal real", Barr asserts that these characters become science fictional tropes. Like Ripley, they battle monsters and are re-modeled by their experiences, made into new creatures. The difference is that the monsters these two women travellers encounter are male humans. Not only is there a sense that the women themselves become aliens but, as Barr notes, men become foreign, malevolent creatures. Ultimately, Barr believes, the actions of Thelma and Louise convey a sense that patriarchal malevolence can end, that worlds and monsters and limitations may be left behind (1991: 81-82). Furthermore, Tasker notes that when the women decide to go to Mexico Thelma says "Something's crossed over in me. I can't go back - I just couldn't live" (1993: 138). She has begun to move "beyond".

As I have discussed Chapter One, de Lauretis uses the traditional construction of heroic narrative in order to articulate the division between male-hero-human and female-obstacle-boundary-space (1984: 118-121). Her summation of the gendered nature of the traditional quest is one wherein the hero is mythical male subject is construed as "the active principle of culture", while the female is what is not capable of transformation (1984: 119). In so arguing, de Lauretis quotes Jurij Lotman:

> Characters can be divided into those who are mobile, who enjoy freedom as regard to plot-space, who can change their place on the structure of the artistic world and cross the frontier, the basic topographical feature of this space, and those who are immobile, who represent, in fact, a function of this space (Quoted in de Lauretis, 1984: 118).

The problem of mobility can appear to be an insurmountable problem until a text like *Thelma and Louise* is considered. One of the movie's most disruptive (and also controversial) scenes occurs at its end, when the women choose to keep driving over the edge of the Grand Canyon rather than surrender to their male pursuers. Barr quotes Baudrillard who contends that "the crucial moment is that brutal instant which reveals that the journey has no end, that there is no longer any reason for it to come to an end" (1991: 85). The quest has no moment of absolute fruition. Barr herself comments:

> Thelma and Louise choose to hurl themselves into a fantastic zone . . . [they] plunge into a magical place of nonhuman signification; they enter an alternative text. By doing so, they become fantastic, magical, surrealist. Their car does not adhere to laws of gravity; instead of immediately falling, it flies. . . . Instead of allowing an army of men and machines to capture them, while ensconced within a vehicle which transcends the laws of nature, they enter a magical space—a place better than America (1991: 85).

Baudrillard's "brutal" realisation comes at that culminating moment when the laws of the hero narrative are over-turned, at the point where we understand the film not a realist text but as a fantastic one. The hero's journey is redefined not as an ending but a continuance, as an alternative to the here-and-now. Thelma and Louise refuse the no-win position offered by the "real" for the adventure of the transformative "outside". As their convertible flies onwards

one can almost hear the resonant tones of Rod Serling charting the escape of these two women from *The Twilight Zone.*

Sharon Willis (1993: 120-122) also believes that one of the difficulties popular critics have with *Thelma and Louise* is this failure to see its fantastic elements. Such debates centre on the issue of women and violence, and the film's alleged anti-male stance. Hence Clover sees the two leading players as characters in a rape-revenge film (1992: 234). Yet the film works against such interpretations. When J.D. the hitchhiker steals the women's money after a night in bed with Thelma, it is easy—as Willis observes—to think of them as victims (1993: 124). She points out that this event is constructed in a different way within the diegesis. Thelma refuses her victimisation, and is instead happy that she has had the greatest sexual encounter of her life. While it is usual to see robbery as a way in which a female character is "punished for her lust and pleasure", Thelma refuses this position. Another critical perspective noted by Willis suggests that the film is flawed because it shows women dealing with the clichés men are currently trying to reject (male bonding in westerns and road movies, for instance) and that *Thelma and Louise* does women no good in revisiting such worn-out themes (1993: 125). To so argue, Willis contends, fails to see how the film "remobilizes for women viewers the pleasures of fantasmatic identifications with embodied agents of travel, speed, force, and aggression . . . the spectacle of women acting like men works to disrupt the apparent naturalness of certain postures when performed by a male body" (1993: 125). Released from the passenger seat, the female driver takes us other-where.

There is yet a further dimension to the female hero, beyond her personal abilities, her challenge to gendered binaries, and even her transgressive physical presence: she has the ability to re-direct the course of the hero's journey. In *Psyche As Hero: Female Heroism and Fictional Form*, Lee Edwards asserts that the male hero's ultimate purpose is to re-articulate

the conditions of patriarchy (1984: 6-9). Discussing the traditional heroic quest, Edwards observes that the journey takes place in an environment of initial instability. The path upon which the daring male begins his journey is always a precarious one. No matter how dire his circumstances become, however, the hero can only be "transiently unmanned." After the journey, after the symbolic dragon has been slain, uncertainty tends to disappear and the hero's adventures lead to the constitution of a new status quo. His heroic story displays a controlled level of complexity and insecurity. We know the hero's tale is well and truly over when the excitement of the quest is replaced by nostalgia. Edwards believes that the movement from instability to certainty is an important part of the patriarchal narrative, and she argues that "male heroism is, in fact, a 'strategy of containment,' a device that provides local change and rearrangement at the price of preserving intact the central terms of order" (1984: 9).

An important example of this process of rearrangement can be found in the final scene of *Alien*. Ripley has dispatched her monstrous adversary and is finally alone (except for Jonesy). Floating in the escape pod she hopes for rescue, and records a last message. In these words can be found the necessary marginality of female heroism, one that Stephen Scobie believes presents Ripley producing a roll-call of the dead. She finishes the list of the fallen by adding her own name: "Ripley . . . signing off" (1993: 88). Commenting on this scene, Newton interprets the recorded message as a capitulation to capitalist values (1990: 82), seeing *Alien* as offering images of "white middle-class women, [who] at their liberated best, can be harmoniously integrated into the late-capitalist world, a world they will then symbolically humanize with a residual sensitivity" (1990: 87). Far from offering the certainty of economic and social submission, the character of Ripley manifests the precariousness of imposed order and the refugee status of the female hero. I suggest that *Alien* has taken us from certainty (or

at least equilibrium) into irreconcilable uncertainty, where the film's final image suggests even the *Nostromo's* last survivor may not survive.

The female hero is necessarily a fugitive figure when compared to male heroes and their narratives, and does not preserve patriarchal order. While the male hero (and his masculinity) is marginalised only briefly, the female hero's peripheral position does not end. Rather than bringing certainty, she remains a disruptive borderland figure, one who continually provokes problems. The character of Ripley once more provides clear examples of this process: in *Alien* her legal orders are often disobeyed; in *Aliens* she is treated disdainfully by the commando troops and is again exploited by the greedy Company; in *Alien*^{3} (1992) the inmates of the prison colony attack and try to rape her; while in *Alien Resurrection* (1997) the bodies of duplicate Ripleys are considered by the military to be mere hosts for embryonic Aliens. Like the female hero in 1950s science fiction films, these attempts to marginalise Ripley are never successful, nor do they dislodge her from her narrative position. Instead, she is placed within a complex association with the patriarchal world.

Such a precarious relationship with patriarchy brings to mind Elizabeth Cowie's reading of Megan Turner from *Blue Steel* (1997: 310-315). Cowie sees Megan as exemplified by lack: Megan is new at her job as a cop and makes mistakes; she has a troubled relationship with her abusive father; and later she lacks enough evidence to arrest Eugene, her lover-turned-murderer, for his crimes. While Megan is the active protagonist of the film, Cowie ultimately perceives the female as castrated when she throws aside her gun in the movie's final moments, symbolic of her unfulfilled search for phallic power. Cowie seems to be saying that the problem with Megan (and by implication, any female hero) is that she is not a man. A female can pursue a phantasy of phallic power but is destined to fall short of it. What appears to be overlooked is that men too fall short of the power of the phallus. As Judith Butler states,

"[t]he injunction to become sexed in the ways prescribed by the Symbolic always leads to failure and, in some cases, to the exposure of the phantasmatic nature of sexed identity itself" (1999: 72). The very act Cowie perceives as failure (throwing aside the phallus) can also be theorised as the particular struggle of the female hero. At the same time as the film fetishes guns and the female body, as Tasker notes (1993: 159), it also challenges the traditional connection between weapons and masculinity.[13] Is the title's "blue steel" the gun (the supposedly substitute phallus) or is it Megan herself? The blue of her uniform, the steel or strength of her character is what makes her stand out as the narrative focus of the story. The depiction of Megan opens up a complexity of meaning, which can disrupt phallic phantasies, and offers the spectacle of a female who uses and repudiates patriarchal methods. Rather than being limited by the Law, Megan as female hero acts "within" and "outside" simultaneously. The problems of Megan Turner can become signposts rather than barriers, pointing towards negotiation rather than lack, evasion rather than capture.

At the beginning of this chapter I noted Silverman's comments on "the coherence of the male subject" of cinematic discourse (1988: 2). In building a picture of the female hero, however, I do not suggest she exists in opposition to this male subject, that she represents a mysterious or chaotic feminine identity. The tactical reading practice of the female hero allows us to perceive and suggest alternatives to traditional forms of feminine embodiment. Female heroes in action and science fiction films are able to enact, challenge and transgress, and offer ways to reassemble the conflicting discursive environments of femininity and cinema: not by disavowing them, but by entering into them. Neither am I arguing that Kay's act of rebellion (swimming alone in the Black Lagoon) disguises or replaces the display of her body, anymore than suggesting that Ripley's disrobing should be overlooked in the closing scenes of *Alien*. When placed in the context of the disruptive female hero, however, these acts can produce spaces of transition, places between and beyond the realm of the Oedipal narrative. These are

not simply acts wherein the feminine is contained by the patriarchal imaginary, anymore than they offer unproblematic feminist fantasies of empowerment. Kay, Ripley and other fictive representatives of the female hero offer a way to engage in re-creating the meanings of gendered subjectivity, and the rearrangement of gendered territories. Moreover, there are some traditionally heroic actions that they do *not* undertake: they do not work to establish a new *status quo*; they do not recuperate uncertainty; they are not necessarily re-absorbed by society. In *The Fly* (1958) Helene Delambre's narrative is disbelieved and she is hospitalised as a mad murderer rather than a hero. Lee Hunter from *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953) watches the destruction of the Beast, its burning body wafting an unknown disease over New York.[14] Helen Benson is blocked and rejected at every turn by phallocentric institutions and patriarchs until she learns to repudiate them. In more contemporary cinema the patriarchal world is the obstacle Thelma and Louise must overcome in order to be transformed into heroes. We can hardly be surprised when we learn in *Aliens* that, having been picked up floating in space as the sole survivor of the *Nostromo*, Ripley's story is not believed by the Company. Female heroes defy the trajectory of the male-centred narrative, and so Thelma and Louise destroy its ending and its symbols (by blowing up a truck they symbolically explode patriarchy). These female characters can also disrupt gendered oppositions for, as Barr observes: "Thelma and Louise can only perceive Texas—and patriarchy—as an absence" (1991: 84). In phallocentric terms it is woman who is defined by absence or through "lack". In films such as *Thelma and Louise*, however, masculinity is not the measure of all things and patriarchy is dangerously contested by the female hero.

There are both parallels and differences between modern action heroes and female characters of the 1950s. Women portrayed in science fiction films of the earlier era only occasionally use guns or other weaponry as part of their repertoire, as do Clare Anderson in *It Conquered the World* (1956) and Sally Caldwell in *The Giant Claw* (1957).[15] Many are, however,

familiar and skilled users of science and technology. Such characters include Steve Clayton (*Tarantula*) and Ruth Adams (*This Island Earth*). Some female heroes venture into unusual or dangerous places, such as Pat Medford into the lair of the Ants in *Them!* and Hutch Hutchinson into the Carlsbad Caverns in *The Night the World Exploded* (1957). Although enterprising and adventurous, these characters are not physically strong or athletic. Modern female heroes have a greater opportunity to display physical strength, prompting Tasker to use the term "musculinity" to describe a relationship between the women and her body (1993: 3). In doing so Tasker suggests that a strong, muscular body can be female as well as male. The strength of such characterisations interrupts gendered binaries, as in the examples of Ripley from the *Alien* films and Sarah Connor from the *Terminator* movies. Referring to a similar set of texts to those examined by Tasker, Jeffrey Brown uses "hardbody heroines" to denote female heroes who transgress the boundaries of femininity through the presentation of a muscular body (1996: 60). Brown sees this description blurring the binary division linking female bodies with softness/passivity and male bodies with hardness/action. An example of such a gendered rearrangement can be found in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, when Sarah Connor upsets her hospital room so she can use the bed-frame as an exercise bar and thereby maintain her strong physique. While the female heroes of the 1950s do not display "musculinity" in terms of physical ability, they do learn and practice strength of mind and deed. Marge Farrell in *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1955) and Lesley Joyce in *It Came from Beneath the Sea* (1958) confront and see their respective monsters destroyed using their resources of intelligence and courage.

Despite the differences between the females of the 1950s and contemporary action/science fiction films, I believe that the earlier group of texts can be re-contextualised and reimagined using a range of contemporary critical tools. Armed with re-articulations of the heroic, I want to examine some of the female heroes from the 1950s in more detail, drawing attention to the

range of possibilities, relationships and skills they offer, as well as questioning how they might disrupt the traditional narratives of the hero. What outrages, for instance, might the female voice inflict? Does the dialogue of the female hero repudiate or inculcate the patriarchal imperatives of the cinema? In the discussions to follow I divide my cast of characters into Housewife Heroes and Lady Scientists not to delineate discrete categories, but because each grouping seems to suggest its own cluster of issues and embodiments. Part Three, "The Housewife Hero: She Walks Among Us", encompasses Chapters Five to Seven. Here I will discuss the films in which Becky Driscol, Marge Farrell and Helen Benson appear. Such females at first occupy familial roles in the text—variously those of girlfriend, daughter, wife and mother—but emerge out of domesticity to challenge the transcendence of the Oedipal narrative and of the male hero. Part Four, "Lady Scientists Strike Back", includes Chapters Eight to Ten. These chapters concentrate on the figure of the Lady Scientist, looking specifically at Lesley Joyce, Kay Lawrence and Pat Medford, and the movies in which they are found. Such Lady Scientists possess technical expertise and intellectual abilities that mark them out as unorthodox figures from the very beginning, and allow us to chart the unpredictable course of the female hero.

Part 3

The Housewife Hero: She Walks Among Us

I hate your living guts for what you've done to my husband and my world. I know you for the coward you are and I'm going to kill you. You hear that? I'm going to kill you. . . . You think you're going to make a slave of the world. (*Discharging shotgun at alien*) I'll see you in hell first!

Mrs Clare Anderson to alien invader
It Conquered the World (1956)

Chapter 5 - Evasion of the Body Snatchers

In this chapter and the two that follow, "I Married a Misogynist from Outer Space" and "Farewell to the Master)'s Gaze", I explore how the Housewife Hero, an ostensibly domesticated female character found in 1950s science fiction movies, can announce and perform a complex role within the politics of the gaze. I will examine how this type of female hero can enact a pleasurably disruptive relationship with the monstrous, and offer the opportunity to re-evaluate the gender of aliens. The figure of the Housewife Hero can also allow us to question how female characters might destabilise the outcome of the Oedipal narrative, and make slippery the boundaries of the gendered body. Films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1958) and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) are peopled with ordinary women challenged to become more than heroines by the fantastic circumstances in which they are placed. The narratives chart the emergence of heroic qualities in these female characters who are thrust onto journeys in which males and patriarchal law become their main obstacles. In all these films the presence of the Housewife Hero serves to fracture traditional oppositional binary logic. They challenge the assumption that 1950s science fiction movies always rely on the success of male heroes and the inevitability of the Oedipal resolution.

Invasion of the Body Snatchers is widely read as a male-centred story in which the protagonist fights for his humanity against overwhelming odds, being ultimately betrayed by his female lover. My interpretation in this chapter investigates both the nature of the film's political allegory and challenges the conventional wisdom of its climatic scenes. In so doing, my aim is to investigate the transformative nature of the hero and her ability to re-gender the female body. I also use *Body Snatchers* to consider difficulties surrounding the ordinary woman's

attempts at "looking", and the ways in which she can be both specularised and resist the camera's phallocentric I/eye. In so doing I refer mainly to Nancy Steffen-Fluhr's (1984) analysis of this film. To conclude this discussion I will offer a re-imagining of its famous sequence in which the hero flees from his transfigured girlfriend.

Before considering these possibilities in *Body Snatchers*, I want to discuss briefly the problem of dislodging binary oppositional thought in 1950s science fiction movies, and comment on the difficulties such reconstituted positions can pose for the Housewife Hero. In her work on the cultural symbolism of monsters, Judith Halberstam proposes that some female encounters with monstrous creatures can challenge the nature of gender (1995: 144). She asserts that the surviving woman in a horror movie, particularly slasher movies, can be reconfigured as a new kind of "posthuman" female. Such characters re-wrap the old binaries, the two sexed zones of narrative, re-stitching them into something more than a singularly sexed body (1995: 144). Halberstam argues the Final Girls identified by Carol Clover (1992) offer neither feminine or masculine positions, but a "monstrous gender" that disrupts the basis of binary categories (1995: 143). The idea of revealing a monstrous new gender is an intriguing one. It can also prove a valuable way to view the Housewife Hero, allowing her to become transgressive and transformative. This kind of fantastic character can re-embody the feminine and the monstrous, and offer a way to escape the entrapment of traditional femininity and mandatory heterosexuality.

The War of the Worlds (1954) offers an evocative example of this kind of monstrous gender complexity in 1950s science fiction films. The text is quite conventional in its depiction of *human* gender relations and in its deployment of the male hero. The movie's female lead Sylvia van Buren is certainly not a hero in the terms I pursue in this discussion.[1] Even though she tells Clayton Forester that she has a Master's degree (holding out the early hope that she

might be a Lady Scientist), her character is given little opportunity to rise above the role of terrified heroine. Sylvia remains the female ground (the chaos of the destroyed city) through which the scientist-hero must battle. At one point she relates a youthful escapade to Clayton: as a child she ran away from home only to huddle in a church waiting for her Uncle Matthew to find her. When the Martian invasion is in full swing, it is Forester (replacing the dead uncle) who searches for the frightened woman waiting to be rescued in yet another church. Insofar as the Martians actually win this technological conflict, Kim Newman is prepared to see *The War of the Worlds* as "that rarity: a defeatist SF film" (2000: 120). Yet if we opt for a religious reading, picking up on one of the film's main subtexts, then failure can be transfigured into masculine triumph. The Martian war machines self-destruct just at the point where Clayton Forester accepts his own mortality and reclaims his heroine in a place of worship. Clayton's belief in science is symbolically replaced by faith in God, and he is re-born into self-knowledge. When the Deity overthrows alien biology and re-establishes the centrality of His creation (Mankind), the male hero is rewarded by the death of the Martians and the achievement of his own narrative destiny. It seems that this movie offers only a traditional rendering of the male hero's quest and does little to destablise the centrality of sexed binary oppositional relationships.

The Martians, however, provide a more complex dimension to the representation of gender disruption, complicating notions of difference and the sexed presumptions of the gaze. In a famous farmhouse encounter between the humans and a Martian, the invaders take up a variety of positions in relation to traditional notions of "looking": that of the active male, the non-phallic monster, *and* the punished female. The farmhouse sequence occurs after Sylvia and Clayton have sought shelter in a ruined building, only to find themselves surrounded by alien war machines. The Martians seem particularly interested in looking at Sylvia, and actively seek her out (just as the Phantom seeks out Christine in the Paris Opera House). At

first they send out a phallic "eye" to gaze upon the woman. When this is symbolically castrated by Clayton, one of the Martians takes its place. It creeps stealthily into the house and, stealing up behind Sylvia, places a spindly silver hand on her shoulder. At first speechless with terror, Sylvia turns slowly to see the Martian. She screams once her horrors (and those of the audience) have been realised. Thus the alien can be said to adopt an active position within the politics of the gaze: it is determined to look at (and possibly capture) the human female who fears its power and who is therefore its inferior. The Martian's desire is that of the voyeur who longs to control the object, and thus it seems to adopt a masculinised position in the text.

Despite the masculinised power of the Martians to look, there are further complications to their monstrously gendered depiction. For the few dramatic seconds when the alien is on the screen we see a very perplexing creature. It may be read as a phallic entity with the power to destroy the world of the Fathers and end all patriarchal privilege. Able to threaten both hero and heroine, it also evokes the terrible power of the non-phallic monster described by Linda Williams (1984b). Yet it is also has a puny, dwarf-like form which hardly seems physically sexed at all. Instead of having a distinct torso, the body is made-up primarily of a tri-lensed eye. It seems to be a creature entirely designed to "look" rather than to be seen, and is thrust into a parodic position where it must over-perform the act of looking. At the same time, however, it becomes a fascinating spectacle, a horribly enjoyable vision through which the audience can confront its own acts of scopophilia. When Clayton shines a torch on the gazing Martian (and then throws an object at it), it screams and runs away, changing from masculinised voyeur to feminised object punished for its overdetermined desire to look. This kind of monstrous gender adds a valuable dimension to the film, suggesting that creatures in fantasy texts can destabilise the two-sexed binaries of narrative and unseat the surety of the masculinised gaze.

While the Martian form of monstrosity offered in *The War of the Worlds* may defy binary logic, this kind of disruption does not necessarily create hospitable environments for female heroes. Martian technology offers an example of this difficulty. The invincible war machines they inhabit have rounded, vulva-like external contours from which emerge their phallic "eyes". They can discharge a death-ray as well as passively protecting themselves with an invisible shield. Furthermore, the Martians prove that their nature is completely alien by failing to acknowledge the symbols of patriarchy waved before them: the martial semiotics of a white flag or, just as importantly, the Christian Bible mean nothing. Instead, they destroy all the phallocentric institutions they encounter. With their three-lensed eye as a metaphor for their social organisation, they embody the proposition that a culture can be built on other than binary relationships. Yet despite the ambiguous nature of their bodies, machinery and acts of looking, the Martians utilise their superior science with deadly intent. Commenting on similar issues, Hassan Melehy recalls the manner in which the monstrous cyborgs of the *Terminator* films unseat binary oppositions (such as life/death and human/machine) while remaining traditionally recognisable figures of violence and fear (1995 n.p.). Sylvia may have an ambiguous confrontation with a monstrously sexed Martian, yet such encounters do not necessarily transform the sexed nature of the narrative. In the tri-sexed world of the Martians, the malevolent exercise of power still holds sway and the position of the human female continues to be demarcated within the bounds of the heroine.

While there are a number of films from the 1950s that can illustrate the dilemma of heroism and monstrous gender, the perplexing *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is a significant text. It is a memorable, eerie film full of suggestive and complex imagery (such as the bursting Pods in the greenhouse and the unearthly body on the billiard table). When I first watched the film as a child I found the ending, in which Miles flees from a monstrously changed Becky,

unsettling as well as frightening. In their final confrontation Becky seems to become a powerful creature who can re-configure her relationship to Miles. She becomes both a repulsive and a fascinating creature, while at the same time appearing to represent betrayal. As a young viewer I was not altogether sure where to place the blame for this betrayal: should I blame the hero Miles Bennell, or Becky, or place the onus somewhere else entirely? I was aware that the film's conclusion reveals a man who does not win, one who can never sleep easily again. At the very least, his on going horror prises open the notion of the fairy-tale ending in which all the heroes are successful and live happily ever after with their heroines. Becky's transformation suggested that romantic attachments might be a thin disguise for other kinds of associations, ones more difficult to name.

One way to understand *Body Snatchers* is as a film compromising the integrity of the Oedipal narrative, while still marking sexual difference as a significant element in the text. If Miles' fight for heroic identity is compromised in this text, then perhaps the sexy Becky has been doomed from the start, mastered as she is by the twin encumbrances of scopophilia and fetishisation. When she finally succumbs to sleep and the Pods, it is easy to see her a failed heroine. She is denied a proper heterosexual relationship with the hero and can never complete her narrative destiny. I find it inadequate, however, to dismiss Becky as a failure. Instead she can be seen as a figure who can reveal much about the nature of heroism because (at the last minute) she appears to be robbed of it. Becky can be understood as a new kind of gendered creature, a hero in which monstrosity and the female body unite to plot the kind of space referred to by Halberstam as the "posthuman" female (1995: 144). By becoming a particular kind of Pod (a point to which I will return), Becky herself becomes more than simply monster or woman. Thus by proposing a disruptive relationship between the Housewife Hero and the gaze, it is possible to discern a different narrative pathway for the brave but ambiguous character of Becky Driscoll.

The film is set in the small town of Santa Mira, and focuses on the characters of Becky Driscoll and Miles Bennell. Miles, the local doctor, returns from a medical conference to find that many people in the town have suddenly developed the belief that their friends or relatives are changed. People are not who they should be. Becky visits Miles' surgery because her cousin Wilma has just such a delusion. Soon the two leading characters are caught up in a confrontation with Pod people. These are alien invaders who hatch from giant egg-like seed pods. Each newly-hatched creature then replicates a sleeping victim's body. The person whose identity has been subsumed then dies, leaving a Pod-double to take over their life. By this inexorable process the Pods plan to colonise the world, heralding the end of the human race and the replacement of individual passions with an unemotional, painless existence.

Based on the film's themes of infiltration and concealment, most science fiction film commentators concur that the text offers a Cold War allegory. The exact nature of its political position is less certain. A year after its release, *Body Snatchers* was appraised by Ernesto Laura as an anti-Soviet text in which the Pod people equal godless communists (1972). Yet David J. Skal (1993: 250) and Phil Hardy's *Aurum Film Encyclopedia* (1984: 158) both note that the movie remains politically ambiguous. The text can read as either anti-communist or anti-McCarthyite depending on the perspective of the viewer. Director Don Siegel maintains that the movie upholds a message about the dangers of mass conformity, and in an interview asserts that it is about:

> Pods. Not those that come from outer space, vegetables from outer space. People are pods. Many of my associates are certainly pods. They have no feelings. They exist, breathe, sleep. To be a pod means that you have no passion, no anger, the spark has left you (Quoted in Kaminsky, 1976: 77).

We should certainly bear in mind that the social climate of the 1950s was one of unease. Lynn Spigel writes of a social concern for the commodification and homogeneity of American

culture expressed at the time (1991: 206ff). She notes also that some movies of the decade, such as *All That Heaven Allows* (1956) and *Imitation of Life* (1959), reveal "the rigid social codes of middle-class ideals and the devastating consequences that class, race, and gender expectations have for the public" (1991: 208). A collective spirit of *mea culpa* is evident in *Body Snatchers*. Hand-in-glove with an overt concern for these national disappointments, however, is the film's presentation of the struggle of the male hero. Miles Bennell's task concentrates on differentiating himself and his girl from the Pods and then maintaining these bodily boundaries. Miles battles both the outside world and his own deteriorating sense of identity, fighting for his right to be an individual, to strive against comfortable conformity, and to accept pain and discomfort. All these travails represent the obstacles encountered by the human on the hero's journey towards heroic masculinity.

Most popular summaries of *Body Snatchers* overlook other themes with which this text overflows: those of sexuality, gynophobia and monstrous gender. Even Margaret Tarratt seems to agree with Siegel's own assessment of the movie, noting that the film warns against "a vegetable contentment" and should not be read as deliberately misogynist (1986: 274). Putting the director's intentionality to one side, in overlooking the gendered themes in *Body Snatchers* we risk neglecting a rich and fascinating text. In "Women and the Inner Game of Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*", Nancy Steffen-Fluhr (1984) offers an important alternative reading of this film. She observes:

> Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) is not primarily a political allegory but a complex psychomachia written by and for beleaguered males of the 1950s. The inner game of *Invasion* is a very traditional version of the War Between the Sexes in which overt antagonism has been suppressed and re-projected as a War of the Worlds. Miles's fear of surrendering to the alien pods—and all they represent—is precisely parallel to, and comments upon, his unarticulated fears of other surrenders: to Becky, his androgynous 'other-half'; to his own uncontrollable passion; and most importantly, to his (and Siegel's) hidden desire for forbidden surcease. Surrender, passivity, receptivity, deemed by the patriarchal culture of the `50s to be mere womanish weakness, are projected onto the alien pods and ultimately rejected as inconsistent with manly emotion—indeed, inconsistent with survival itself (1984: 152).

Steffen-Fluhr sees *Body Snatchers* as principally a narrative of male nightmare. Kenneth Von Gunden and Stuart H. Stock also comment on the quality of nightmare in the film (1982: 143), particularly in the episode where Miles (clad only in pajamas and dressing gown) rushes off in the dead of night to whisk Becky away from her house and its possible lurking dangers.[2] This dream/nightmare sequence may be seen to merge Miles' fears of passivity/sleep (it is an unconscious Becky he lifts from the bed) with his sexual desires. With Becky's diaphanous negligee trailing the ground as they go, Miles clasps her to him and flees head-long from the Pods. Steffen-Fluhr sees his character as running from a range of unspoken needs such as his longing "for surcease, for release, for genderless intimacy and androgynous psychic wholeness" (1984: 153).

Rather than view the romance between the two main characters as a side issue to the battle of the male hero, Steffen-Fluhr contends that their love affair provides the movie's fundamental substance. This being so, it is no coincidence that Becky's arrival in her home town of Santa Mira parallels the invasion of the Pods. Using Miles' perspective, she comments:

> It is his burgeoning intimacy with Becky, not the burgeoning pods, which is the hidden source of fear. She is the familiar stranger, alien flesh to which he is about to bond himself, and he is worried that this merger may entail some loss of freedom and identity. The pod plot is, at least in part, simply a surrealistic projection of these unacknowledged anxieties, of a man's terror of falling helplessly in love (1984:140).

It is important to note that Miles' reaction to Becky is not simply romantic: he is also repeatedly lustful and is intent on consummating unfulfilled adolescent desires aroused by a renewal of their relationship. His ogling and sexual innuendo leave little to the imagination. Becky and Miles have the following exchange after Dr. Kaufman tells them that a strange mass delusion is sweeping the town:

> MILES: Let's hope we don't catch it. I'd hate to wake up some morning and find out that you weren't you.
> BECKY: I'm not the high school kid you used to romance, so how can you know?

MILES: You want to know? (*They kiss*) Mmmm, you're Becky Driscoll . . . .
BECKY: Is this an example of your bedside manner, doctor?
MILES: No ma'am - that comes later.

When Miles drives Becky home after they have examined what seems to be a dead body on the Belicec's pool table, his mind is still set upon sex:

BECKY: Come in while I turn the lights on.
MILES: You're a forward wench, dragging me into a dark hallway to be kissed.
BECKY: (*Turning light on*) I'm dragging you into a dark hallway because I'm scared of the dark tonight.
MILES: In that case I'd better stay and tuck you in.
BECKY: That way lies madness.
MILES: (*Turning light off*) What's wrong with madness?
BECKY: (*Turning light on*) Madness! Now good night.

Here Miles kisses Becky to be sure she is "real". When he kisses her again at the end of the film it is to reveal that she is no longer genuine, no longer herself. Woven into the fabric of *Body Snatchers*, therefore, are several threads: Becky's and Miles' relationship; the nature of their sexuality and desire; the theme of submission (to the Pods, to sleep, to sex); and questions of sanity and reality. It is the film's melding of these ideas—freedom and conformity, human and pod, reality and appearance—that helps create its nightmarish world. Santa Mira is a place where *both* wakefulness and sleep are destructive, and sexuality pervades the diegesis.

Despite the complex interactions of the film, the character of Becky Driscoll seems to offer a recognisably ordinary femininity. She is introduced as a divorced woman, one unsuccessful at her wifely role. After the break-up of her marriage she has returned to her father's house, where she receives alimony from her ex-husband (about which Miles makes a joke to draw attention to his own recent divorce). In this sense Becky is economically dependent on both her father and her former husband, and is defined in relation to them. Even without the status of marriage, however, she remains a figure of domesticity in that she returns to the role of daughter even, it seems, reverting to her maiden name. Steffen-Fluhr maintains that

throughout *Body Snatchers* this character is both significant and marginalised, and comments that "although Becky is one of the most important characters in the film, she is a mute object rather than a controlling consciousness. 'She' has no voice in this male chorus" (1984: 141). Clearly Steffen-Fluhr is concerned to reveal the phallocentrism of the text by placing Miles at its centre; as a result she does not see Becky moving beyond the role of passive, silenced heroine.

Despite being represented as a caring, sensible person, Becky is depicted in more sexual manner than the other women in the film. Her clothes are revealing when contrasted to the conservative necklines of her Cousin Wilma and friend Teddy (Theodora) Belicec, and our first view of Becky is as someone to be gazed upon. She is introduced to the audience when she visits Miles' surgery wearing "a strapless sun-dress in demure gingham except for the bra-style white bodice. This bodice seems to expose her breasts to our gaze, even as it rigidly restrains them from any natural movement" (Steffen-Fluhr 1984: 149). The idea that her breasts are on view is merely a suggestion for there is no sign of cleavage, even though the front of the strapless dress is low-cut. The impression of exposure is assisted by a white flounce across the bodice of the dress which seems to exist in place of her breasts and to which the eye is drawn. To add to this sense of undress, several camera angles show Becky in a close shot (from the shoulders up) thus creating the illusion that she is topless. Her depiction may be different to the other women, yet hers is not an identifiably powerful position. Becky retains her status as an ordinary, if beautiful, woman who at this point has a traditional relationship with the classic male gaze: she appears to be displayed for Miles' (the male spectator's) delectation, and this non-parodic presentation of her body underpins Steffen-Fluhr's reading of the film's gynophobia.

On several occasions in *Body Snatchers* the fear of women's bodies is negotiated through the presence of the Pods. While Miles ogles Becky when she is clothed, and several times attempts seduction, the narrative proposes that her body—and the female body in general—is to be feared. At one point Miles searches for a Pod in the basement of Becky's family home. He raises the lid of a storage box and is startled to see a naked Pod Becky covered loosely by a blanket. Here the curve of her breasts *is* visible, rather than being simply represented by a lacy bodice. Instead of glaring speculatively at the figure as he has done at the human Becky in her sun-dress, Miles' face registers horror at this view of her body. He recoils, and slams the box closed. Later, when the second Pod Becky hatches in his greenhouse, Miles again expresses repulsion at the developing naked torso but seems unable to run it through with a pitchfork (penetrate her body) as he does with the other hatching Pods. The dressed Becky is safer than her nude counterpart and Miles' recoil appears to be laced with sexual fear as well as repugnance at the alien life-form.

To accompany Miles' ambiguous sexual attraction/repulsion, we are also given a hint of his inadequacy to cope with feminine desire. On several occasions he tells Becky the problems involved in being a doctor's wife (he is never at home when he should be) and such warnings perhaps carry a deeper message. Following their first traumatic night of bodies and human doubles, Becky makes breakfast for Miles and he (yet again) makes amorous advances. While preparing their food she inquires whether his ex-wife ever made him breakfast. "Oh yes," he says, "she liked to cook. That's why I'm single. I never was there when dinner was on the table." If food (as well as sleep) can be considered a metaphor for sexual appetite, perhaps Becky should take this as a warning. Significantly, she cooks and serves him boiled eggs: symbolic, pod-like ova.

Steffen-Fluhr notices a similar use of reproductive imagery in *Body Snatchers*. She recalls the way in which archaic myths of the *homunculus* propose that a complete human is formed at the point of conception, making woman merely Pod-like bearers of the new, male-created life (1984: 142). She also refers to patriarchal myths that saw woman as the bringer of both life and death (1984: 143), and the parallel between the female body and the Pods in this context is clearly in evidence. By reproducing and taking over, as Miles says, "every human man" a new Pod life will mean death for Miles. Steffen-Fluhr further links the subtext of gynophobia to the physical appearance of the Pods. She notes that, when not reproducing, they "strongly resemble ovaries in both form and function. When they are not open . . . they resemble closed female pudenda—oval shapes bisected by a longitudinal seam" (1984: 142). When Miles find Pods in his greenhouse, they are just beginning to erupt, spilling forth a sappy uterine-like fluid. In an imitation of child birth, they break open like stretching vaginal tissue, and from them push outward their unformed, frothy Pod babies. The vulva-like Pods thus also represent a form of monstrous birth. This birthing is observed by Miles and Becky, along with their friends Teddy and Jack Belicec. Interestingly, the four friends are childless, and the idea that these monstrous offspring will take over their lives is yet another point where fear of sexuality (and its consequences) can be read into the corporeal nature of the Pods. Witnessing this opening, Becky demands "What happens to *our* bodies?" This ambiguous question may refer to the fate of the people being doubled, or reflect gynophobic horror at this parody of human birth. By gazing on the birth of the four Pods, the gynophobia of the film is once more offset, directed away from female reproduction and onto the aliens.

The climax of the film insofar as Becky is concerned begins when she and Miles are recognised as the only remaining humans in Santa Mira. They flee the town to evade a search party and take shelter in the cave-like mining tunnels in the hills surrounding the town. They coffin themselves under loose floorboards in a tunnel and thus escape their pursuers. The

imagery of these scenes fits closely to Lotman's discussion of mythic narrative moving into and out of an enclosed space, such as a cave or a grave, where the male encounters an antagonist or obstacle (de Lauretis 1984: 118-119). The crucial sequence unfolds after the mob has withdrawn. The exhausted Becky and Miles are about to escape to the main road when they hear a romantic lullaby wafting over a nearby hill. It is at this point Miles fate turns aside from Becky's. He signals this divergence by saying "Bye, darling" before going forth to search for the music. This is not, however, the hero embarking on a lone quest (as happens when Ripley searches for Jonesy the cat). By leaving Becky, Miles is returning to the past rather than going forth to forge a new future. He chases a song of childish delight and comfort, which is revealed to be a chimera - it is merely a radio broadcast from a Pod-controlled vehicle. His illusions have let him down again and he returns to the cave, back into the enclosed space of the obstacle.

It is here that Becky seems to become a traitor rather than a hero, a weak woman who must succumb to sleep and from whom Miles will flee in revulsion. The way in which the revelation of the Pod Becky is filmed is significant. Following his return from the hillside, Miles picks the exhausted Becky up in his arms to carry her from the tunnels. He stumbles and they both fall to the ground into a puddle of muddy water. We see them at ground level, with their heads and shoulders in the middle of the screen so that the rest of their bodies are largely obscured. They are framed in a medium close shot in which Miles' body overlays Becky's in what resembles a sexual embrace. He kisses her face and neck longingly, finally kissing her mouth in what might be, in other circumstances, the preamble to sexual intercourse. Here for the first time Miles appears to be genuinely unrestrained and spontaneous. It is at this crucial moment his worst fears are realised. In a series of very close shots (framing out both the chin and top of the head), Becky is revealed looking directly at Miles/the camera. We cut to a shot of Miles who is framed in the same manner, his face

registering horror. These two shots are repeated once, the last sustaining the terrified look on Miles' face. John Baxter (1970: 141) comments that, as Miles kisses her, the woman's "eyes slowly open into a knowing stare" and the Pod Becky is revealed in all her inhumanity. It might equally be said that her eyes open (pupils dilated, one interrogative eyebrow raised), in a state of sexual arousal. As he runs from her side, pursued now by a group of alerted Pod people, Miles' voice-over narration reveals all:

> MILES: I've been afraid a lot of times in my life but I didn't know the real meaning of fear until—until I'd kissed Becky. A moment's sleep and the girl I loved was an inhuman enemy bent on my destruction.[3]

The nature of Miles' "inhuman enemy" has a precise expression, for he says that it is an alien life form which "must take over every human man". Man/males/Miles will be overcome. This use of words is very important because we know from the foregoing story that men, women and children have become Pods. Jack and Teddy Belicec, Dan Kaufman, cousin Wilma, as well as Nurse Sally and her baby, have all fallen victim to the invaders. Our doubtful hero, however, informs us that the enemy will subdue *men*.

The most clearly accessible cinematic image to the one presented by the close-up of the changed Becky is that of the *femme fatale*. Despite Becky's sexy depiction throughout the movie, this is a surprising development. Her character has been shown as kind and loving, and not overtly "fatal" at all. Yet Becky can be read as fitting Mary Ann Doane's description of the *femme fatale* (1991). Throughout the film Becky has been a troubling presence, a "figure of a certain discursive unease" who is "never really what she seems to be [while she] harbors a threat which is not entirely legible, predictable, or manageable" (Doane, 1991: 1). Referring to Virginia Allen's work on the fatal woman, Doane observes that:

> Allen has associated the femme fatale with "that moment of abandonment in the sex act" and the ensuing "loss of self-awareness." The power accorded to the femme fatale is a function of fears linked to the notions of uncontrollable drives, the fading of subjectivity, and the loss of

> conscious agency... She is not the subject of feminism but a symptom of male fears about feminism (1991: 2-3).

These are exactly the fears identified by Steffen-Fluhr—the loss of manliness and control—and the nature of the *femme fatale* directly parallels her reading of the film (1984: 153). Despite Pod Becky's ability to represent such castration, the terrors thus embodied might position her as "not the subject of power but its carrier" (Doane, 1991: 2). Using this formulation, she can never become a female hero, but is instead burdened with Miles' fears of surrender and of receptivity. Little wonder that Becky does not leave the tunnels of Santa Mira for, as de Lauretis has remarked, the space of the female/monster is the cave or maze and represents the trial imposed upon the male hero (1984: 109).

There are, however, two signposts to another interpretation for both the end of the film and for the fate of Becky as a representative of the Housewife Hero's disruptive transformation. The first hint is that Becky's change into a Pod goes against the logic set up by the movie: that is, Becky becomes a *special* kind of alien. Until Becky's transition the story has proposed that a Pod must be placed near the intended victim before the change can occur. This has led to Pods being left in a cellar, a greenhouse, a car boot and, in a chilling incident overheard by Miles, a baby's playpen. After the Pod has hatched it must then drain off the mind of the human over a period of time during which the victim is asleep. This is not an abrupt process, yet Becky's metamorphosis takes place either in the few moments when Miles leaves her in the cave or later when he falls to the ground with her. Von Gunden and Stock observe that "there is no pod around when Miles leaves Becky in the mine, nor would one have time to grow. Becky's transformation therefore defies all the careful explanation that has gone before" (1982: 143). We may choose to assume that the Pod Becky is the duplicate from Miles' greenhouse. In the greenhouse scene it does seems that he is unable to kill the Becky-double. It may alternatively be another Pod left unseen in the tunnel by their pursuers,

although this explanation is not canvassed by the text. If, on the other hand, the real Becky goes to sleep only to awaken as a Pod, then she transgresses all the alien biology proposed by the narrative.

The second pointer to an alternative reading resides in Miles' final narration, in which he also re-casts the nature of the story. As he runs from the new Becky his voice-over proclaims: "That moment's sleep was death to Becky's soul. . . . Their bodies were now hosts, harbouring an alien form of life, a cosmic form—which to survive must take over every human man." This dialogue can be read to imply two things. Firstly, it supports the reading that Becky has been transformed rather than replaced. The moment she falls asleep in Miles' arms she changes into a creature he perceives as alien. Furthermore, he informs us that humans have become the "hosts" for Pod life. If the aliens are simply lurking within human bodies then there is no need for duplicates at all: the aliens would simply appropriate the host bodies they require. The reasoning set up by the film is that the humans have been physically copied and their memories used to create new Pod life. These points help recast the narrative and touch upon the very nature of Becky's final alteration. My reading suggests that she is *not* a simple duplicate, but rather a new phenomenon. We must ask, therefore, who or what has the alternative Becky Driscoll become? If she awakens as a Pod person, she has certainly travelled beyond Miles' nightmare, moving to a realm where his sexual angst can no longer entangle her. Yet the Pods do not appear to be offering a feminist utopia. Even though she appears to move beyond patriarchal reality, Becky's new position may not be one of her own making. Pod society may offer only one more version of imposed identity.

It is possible to return once more to the myth of Medusa in order to construct an alternative metaphor for Becky and Miles' final encounter. Barbara Creed (1996: 36) reminds us that Freud discussed Medusa by likening the Gorgon's head of snakes to female genitalia. Freud

saw Medusa's monstrosity residing in her difference from the male and her invocation of castration anxiety: the man who gazes upon her turns to stone, symbolising both sexual arousal and death. Certainly, Miles' horrified stare at the changed Becky (following his passionate embraces) might easily fit this description. Creed notes:

> The Medusa, whose head signifies . . . the female genitals in their terrifying aspect, also represents the procreative function of women. The blood that flows from her severed head gives birth to Pegasus and Chrysaor. Although Neptune is supposed to be the father, the nature of the birth . . . suggests the parthenogenic mother (1996: 54).

Creed surmises that the fear of Medusa may be that of woman the life-giver, and her death at the hands of Perseus can signify the suppression of the power of the mother-goddess (1996: 54). The powerful look of Medusa is a threat to the vision of men, and both monster and the look must be slain.

By the end of *Body Snatchers,* however, we know Miles is no Perseus. Just as he nears that point in the narrative where he can claim his woman, his masculinity and his heroism, he falters. Miles crosses the feminised space of the heroine without ever reaching his own heroic destination. He does not kill the monster (the Pod in the greenhouse or the changed Becky in the tunnel) and thereby reveals the necessity for murder in the traditional Oedipal journey. It is not simply Joseph Campbell's "dragon of the status quo" that must be dispatched (1988a): it is the slaughter of the *female* dragon that is the essence of male heroism. If the human cannot kill, he becomes neither a man nor a hero. The girl he loves, the aliens, and the territory through which he flees, all become that "inhuman enemy bent on my destruction." If we read Becky's transformation as a failure on her part, then she simply becomes one more weak vessel, one more female who cannot get by without her man. If we presume, as Steffen-Fluhr seems to do, that the film's basic premise is this form of "black misogyny" (1984: 148), then it is Miles' fears and phobias that become its central theme. Given these narrative

constraints, how can *Body Snatchers* ever leave any place for a powerfully reconstructed feminine presence (even one as transgressive as a female hero)?

In seeking to address this question I want briefly to consider the original work from which the film was derived. Both Mark Jancovich (1996) and Steffen-Fluhr also consider the movie in this way and, while there are problems with such comparisons, I would like to use one point of contrast between the two texts in order to highlight the nature of Siegel's film.[4] *The Body Snatchers* was written by Jack Finney and was serialised in *Collier's* magazine in 1954. It was published in an expanded form as a book in 1955. In Finney's story Becky "not only saves Miles's life, literally and emotionally; she saves the whole of mankind. In her will to prevail and in her ingenuity, she is every bit Miles's equal, and then some" (Steffen-Fluhr 1984: 148). Jancovich discusses an additional complexity of the book absent from the film. The Becky of the novel pretends to be a weak heroine, and in so doing enables the couple to launch a counter-attack against the Pods (1996: 72). Thus by assuming and then abandoning femininity through a mimetic act, she is able to become a hero. Considered in this context, the film-Becky seems doomed by her recasting as the heroine who is both betrayed and betrayer, forever excluded from the realm of the Housewife Hero.[5]

My own reading of Becky asks for just such a recasting of her character, but sees her as a subversive female hero who sends the male protagonist running for his life. Becky's transformation may be able to offer us the contradiction of female desire and subjectivity. She can illustrate what Medusa saw when looking upon the terrified faces of men who could no longer control their women. One of the film's most significant moments of disruption occurs when Miles and Becky exchange looks lying on the floor of the tunnel. While Miles' narration interprets only his horror, it is worth considering what Becky sees. Miles' terrified stare, directly into the camera, is juxtaposed with her aroused and puissant expression, and it

is interesting to analyse these looks in relation to the matter of transformation. Their dialogue is also instructive:

> BECKY: (*Firmly*) Stop acting like a fool Miles and accept us.
> MILES: No. (*Shaking his head.*) Never.
> BECKY: (*Calling*) He's in here! He's in here!

At this point Becky is not asking Miles to become one of "them", but for him to accept her (their) difference. It is this he refuses to do. I have already mentioned the way in which de Lauretis characterises the heroine as being that part of the landscape which is incapable of change (1984: 119). Yet in *Body Snatchers* it is the masculine position that is unable to transform. Steffen-Fluhr also finds that the Pods are "associated with growth and union [while] Miles is associated with stasis and the past" (1984: 147). Becky allows the female spectator to look upon a person who is unable to become other than what he is: a human who will never become a man.

It is Becky, the female character originally constituted solely within the realm of the domestic as divorcée, daughter and girlfriend, who can become this new kind of hero, something more than the intersection of human and Pod. Elizabeth Hills, discussing the Deleuzian notion of becoming, observes that "the process of transformation [occurs] when a body disconnects from its habituated modes of acting and thinking in favour of a multiple and changing process of experimentation" (1997 n.p.). The Becky we see at the movie's end is a being who has defied the logic of the film's transformation process, emerging to challenge and defeat Miles' patriarchal privilege. She is human and alien, feminine and potent, desirable and repellent, sexual and (according to Dan Kaufman's Pod duplicate) passionless. Yet the supposedly passive Pod-Becky's yell of "He's in here!" is full of emotion and is arguably the most animated she becomes in the entire movie. By embodying all of these elements and more, she "unzips" their implied binary associations. Becky becomes a post-human female.

De Lauretis enquires whether it is inevitable that the beast-woman must die, caught "in the web of a male Oedipal logic" (1984: 152). Will the hero (Miles as the stand-in for Oedipus) simply move on to another heroine more in keeping with the image of the woman he desires? Housewife Hero Becky Driscoll allows us to answer "no" to both propositions. In Becky's story, it is Miles (his gynophobia and inability to change) which is the beast she confronts. When de Lauretis considers other possibilities for the story of Oedipus, she suggests an alternative outcome in which "Oedipus does not solve the riddle. The Sphinx devours him for his arrogance" (1984: 156). In *Body Snatchers* Miles may not literally be devoured, but he understands the likelihood of this result if he does not escape. In one sense, the film can be read as an inverted version of "Sleeping Beauty". Writing of this tale Hélène Cixous has observed:

> Woman, if you look for her, has a strong chance of always being found in one position: in bed. In bed and asleep—"laid (out)." She is always to be found on or in a bed: Sleeping Beauty is lifted from her bed by a man because, as we all know, women don't wake up by themselves. . . . She is lifted up by the man who will lay her in her next bed so that she may be confined to bed ever after, just as the fairy tales say (1981: 43).

The fairy tale princess is bound to her prince and to her prince's bed. Prince Charming awakens his beloved and saves her with a kiss, appropriating her through heterosexual desire. Yet Miles Bennell's impassioned embrace puts *his* beloved to sleep rather than arousing her. It could be said that the changed Becky abandons passivity, leaving behind the inertia of the princess and of the bed, as well as the reputation of the good woman. By forsaking the destination of the heroine and refusing the Oedipal resolution, Becky also relinquishes the male hero, who can never again return in the guise of the handsome prince. In a patriarchal story this is the worst result of all: the female has repudiated romance for power. Thus Becky can be seen to awaken from her sleep not simply as a Beauty or as a Beast, but as the hero who has escaped both domesticity *and* decapitation.

It may well be argued that the change from human into Pod is Becky's downfall and not her finest moment; that rather than challenge the Oedipal narrative *Body Snatchers* asks us to identify with a beleaguered and betrayed male hero. Steffen-Fluhr's analysis exposes the film as an essay in gynophobia, yet even this insightful examination does not account for the "illogical" ending which sees Becky's metamorphosis as unique. More than just gynophobia, however, the Pods can be read as very queer creatures. They are neither male nor female. As the bodies on the Belicec's billiard table and those in the greeenhouse demonstrate, the new hatched Pods are "blanks" that form themselves to meet their survival needs. They are not masculine or feminine in any binary oppositional sense, but simply adopt a masquerade of human behavior. This allows us to speculate that for Pods gender is irrelevant, and a great deal of the horror expressed in the film can be related to the slipperiness the Pods bring to reading gender on the screen.

In describing Becky Driscoll as a Housewife Hero, an ordinary or traditionally feminine woman who steps beyond the limits of the female object, I have sought to articulate a space of difference for her in a narrative that is predominately read as male-directed. Becky is not powerful within the terms offered by masculinity, but becomes so because she is capable of transformation. Her character suggests that the human/alien boundary is not immutable nor does it inevitably trace only two distinct zones of identity. Becky is not linked to the alien/monster because she sees in it her own phallic lack, but because her contact with the Pods has re-engendered her body. The only way Miles can see this difference is by describing it as monstrous, as inhuman; and yet in this story it is not Becky who we see punished for the look, but Miles himself. A man cannot look upon the face of the Gorgon and remain a man. When Becky looks into Miles' face neither can she remain what she has been, and moves

from an ordinary woman to a re-embodied hero with the power to control both man and the gaze.

The next chapter builds on issues of the gaze and narrative disruption raised in the foregoing discussion. It explores *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1958), another film featuring a Housewife Hero. This movie is also one that can disconcert traditional Oedipal expectations and presents the viewer with a spectacular variety of disruptive pleasures. We are offered an ordinary woman, Marge Farrell, who confronts both her alien husband and hegemonic masculinity, the patriarchal obstacles from which she must struggle to free herself.

Chapter 6 - I Married a Misogynist from Outer Space

I Married a Monster from Outer Space (1958) involves an attempt to colonise Earth by a group of male aliens and the fight undertaken by a human female to stop them. The film engages issues of gender and bourgeois marriage, disconcerts traditional narrative expectations, and reveals the dark underside of sexuality in American genre cinema of the 1950s. During the course of the film its female lead, Marge Farrell, changes from a blushing bride into a Housewife Hero, saving the world from colonising misogynists from outer space. Yet this film can still be read as a story of anti-Communist paranoia in which good American men are taken over by evil outsiders. The most apparent characteristic to attract such a reading is the film's title. Bill Warren (1986: 115) and John Brosnan (1991: 78, 80) both point to the parallel between *I Married a Monster* and the 1949 film *I Married a Communist* (distributed as *The Woman on Pier 13*).[1] Thus the science fiction film's name can seen as emblematic of its substantive Cold War theme. Contained to such an explanatory strategy, the movie's intriguing story, dialogue, multiple layers of meaning, and heroic female lead all seem to go unexplored. More than re-telling a reds-under-the-bed (or more literally a red-*in*-the-bed) nightmare, *I Married a Monster* integrates issues of marriage, violence, sexuality, class and colonisation, while concentrating sexual tension into a taut, claustrophobic atmosphere. In order to illustrate the spectacular infringements offered by this text and its female hero, in the following discussion I will concentrate on four main issues: (i) the peculiarities of Marge Farrell's journey and how her ordinariness helps her to find heroism; (ii) how the gaze can be used to transgress the narrative position of the passive heroine; (iii) the way in which the colonisers use the structures of marriage, sexuality and traditional gender expectations as obstacles to Marge's quest; and (iv) the unforeseen dangers colonisation brings to the invaders. In distinguishing this Housewife Hero's journey, I will draw primarily on the works of Homi Bhabha (1992), Harry Benshoff (1997) and Linda Williams (1984).

The ploy used by the colonising Aliens is to kidnap and replicate human men from the small town of Norrisville, U.S.A They then substitute their *doppelgängers* for the real humans. Unlike the methods used by the Pods in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), the original men are kept alive and linked to their doubles by means of a life-support device on a spacecraft hidden in the woods. Having lost their own female population, the invaders hope to reproduce by breeding with human woman whom they have married. When Marge Farrell realises the truth of this colonisation plan, she must struggle with her alien husband Bill and his fellow invaders, as well as with human patriarchal structures, in order to free herself from domination. Through the text there are a number of pointers to the colonialist attributes of these invaders. Homi Bhabha writes of the importance of ambivalence in constructing colonialist discourse, of forging an "'otherness' that is at once an object of desire and derision" (1992: 313). Discussing the bodies of human men they have taken over, a group of Aliens comment:

> HARRY: I'm getting tired of the childish game we're playing.
> SAM: I know nothing of the unconscious of the body you took over, but as far as mine goes, there's nothing childish about it.
> HARRY: Personally, I find human beings disgusting.
> SAM: I kinda like 'em.
> BILL: Like them or not, we got to live with them.

These creatures both desire and deride the humans they colonise. They engage in the process of creating themselves as the colonialist subject while casting the humans into an ambiguous territory of that which is knowable ("I kinda like 'em") as well as that which is disordered or debased ("disgusting"). The male invaders fabricate their knowledge and domination around sexuality and inscribe their colonialism within exploitative sexual relationships.

Despite the complexities of colonisation and gender representation implied by the narrative, the central focus of the story can be read as a masculine one. In offering a summary of this movie, John Baxter writes:

> [O]n his wedding night, a young man driving home from a bucks' party witnesses the landing of a spaceship and is "taken over" by one of the aliens, who assumes his shape. Next morning, his fuzzy recollections are explained away as a hangover, and the wedding goes on. Not until the honeymoon night does his wife begin to see that something is wrong, the gloomy nature of the story to come heralded by a horrific scene in which the man, standing on the balcony during a thunderstorm, is momentarily frightened by a flash of lightning into dropping his guard. In the glare his face dissolves into a hideous alien mask, then is abruptly re-constituted into human form (1970: 142).

An important factor in Baxter's description is the perspective he adopts, relating the activities of the real Bill Farrell and his double as the principal positions offered by the text. Due to the perspective the camera adopts in the film's opening few minutes, we *do* initially expect that Bill is to be our traditionally tall, dark, handsome male hero. Yet heroic expectations can also be breached when the real Bill is abducted (secreted away in an alien-induced fog) not to reappear again until the movie's closing moments. Baxter's description melds both the human and alien characters into one male presence and by so doing smoothly re-centres the tale from human to alien while retaining a focus on the masculine framework of the adventure.

Mark Jancovich also sees the story as being male-centred (1996: 76) and suggests that the film focuses on the real Bill initially, moves to Marge only for a short time, and finally concentrates on the Alien. In this analysis, Marge is displaced from the centre of the narrative when she begins to respond to the invader with hostility. At this point the false Bill begins to take on human characteristics and emotions as a counter to Marge's "increasingly cold, awkward and distant" demeanor (1996: 76). Jancovich also argues that marital estrangement is the film's main issue. He writes that in this movie:

> [W]omen are not entirely blameless victims of masculinity. One female friend [of Marge's] continually talks about her attempts to 'land' herself a husband, and ignores any warnings against marriage, so great is her desire to legitimate herself through marriage, an institution

> which seems to have less importance to her as an emotional bond than as a sign of status and conformity. Even Marge is presented as a callous conformist who enters her marriage without thought, and fears anything which differs from her conventional terms of reference (1996: 77).

These observations place marriage and conformist sexual relations at the text's centre, while overlooking the issue of colonisation and the economics of gender also inherent in the film. Jancovich's analysis of *I Married a Monster* raises important questions about Marge which influence our ability to read her role as heroic. By seeing the Alien Bill as taking over the film's narrative focus (changing and developing his emotional attachments), Jancovich is able to view Marge as a lesser figure, as a conservative element unused to change. He maintains that Marge enters marriage blindly, yet we are offered no information about the pre-marital relationship of the two lovers. Bill does, however, leave his buck's party early in order to visit her. His male friends tell him this is bad luck, but perhaps Bill's break with tradition suggests their relationship is not as conservative as Jancovich's reading allows. Nor does the trusting Marge ever appear callous or thoughtless, except where the invader is concerned. It is by tracing the heroic and transformative changes in both Marge *and* the Alien Bill that the film's heroic narrative can be followed. Making accusations similar to Jancovich's against the movie's *male* contingent, Cyndy Hendershot claims that *I Married a Monster* offers "a pseudo-community of evil men who threatened and persecute women" (1997b: 79). Yet this film is too immersed in gender and colonialism to simply draw a line between good women and bad men, and delivers more than the story of flawed individuals wrapped in a fantastic package.

David Halberstam's *The Fifties* helps position the film within its broader social context (1993: 587-592). Halberstam describes the way in which the immediate postwar years saw the construction of a form of femininity based around a woman who did not work outside the home. Those middle class women who had found a new social worth for themselves as

workers during World War Two now discovered that they were being diverted from paid to domestic labour. Halberstam notes, for example, that the jobs of over two million female workers were terminated within two years of the end of the war (1993: 589). The decade encouraged the tendency to re-locate newly formed families to middle-class suburbs, further disconnecting women from existing familial support systems. This served to make their home, husband and children the sole focus of their existence. *I Married a Monster* seems to echo these kinds of living arrangements, referred to as "patrilocality" by Marilyn French (quoted in Susan Jeffords 1987: 73). The television series *America in the 50s* (1997), based on Halberstam's book, further explores some of the changes in the society of postwar U.S.A.[2] For example, within one year of the war's end, 2.2 million American couples had married and the average marriage age had fallen to 18 years. In the period 1945-50, 32 million babies were born. The woman of the 1950s was supposed to be fulfilled by being a sexy, fertile homemaker, while her ex-serviceman husband was expected to fit back unproblematically into the mundane existence of a nine-to-five job. Halberstam's comments on women unhappy with their new lot in this postwar environment have a particular resonance within the film under discussion:

> Those women who were not happy and did not feel fulfilled were encouraged to think that the fault was theirs and that they were the exception to blissful normality. That being the case, women of the period rarely shared their doubts, even with each other. If anything, they tended to feel guilty about the qualms they had: Here they were living better than ever—their husbands were making more money than ever, and there were bigger, more beautiful cars in the garage and appliances in the kitchen. Who were they to be unhappy? (1993: 592).

The human Bill Farrell and Marge represent the aspirations of ordinary people in the 1950s, seeking the mature fulfillments deemed appropriate by their society. In this context, the ability of Jancovich to call Marge a "callous conformist" becomes an artifact of the 1990s. While there are a number of viewing positions available in this text (including those of the alien invaders and the human men), the character of Marge not only allows us to uncover a

wealth of gendered detail, but drives the narrative forward and is responsible for bringing it to its climax.

Despite the heroic potential within this character she begins her screen life as an ordinary woman. She is conservatively feminine, interested in love, marriage, children and by implication the promise of fulfilling sexual relations with her attractive new husband. Her femininity is presented neither as extraordinary nor extreme. While she desires Bill, she is not, and never becomes, a *femme fatale*. Neither is she idolised or made madonna-like. She does not work outside the home and is dependent on male figures of authority embodied by her husband Bill and her godfather (Chief of Police Collins). Given her later struggle for independent selfhood, the first image we are offered of Marge provides a perplexing point of reference: she is dressed in her wedding gown and is anxiously pacing the church because Bill is late for their marriage ceremony. Marge appears to be the film's "love-interest", introduced as a bride who waits for her handsome husband. As such she appears ill-fitted for the forthcoming conflict. Her position seems to offer the familiar territory of the waiting women that Teresa de Lauretis has observed in westerns, adventure and war movies (1984: 139). This woman may occupy and personify the "waiting" space which the male hero will traditionally cross to claim. When the Alien Bill enters the church, her relief is such that she rushes to him and kisses him ardently. Thus we see the publicly good woman (the wedding, the white dress), private sexuality (the passionate kiss), and the waiting space of the heroine, all embodied in the same character. What is particularly interesting about this image of Marge is that it is largely false. Instead it is the real Bill Farrell, that male character who we at first think will drive the narrative, who is held as a waiting space. Hooked to an alien device in their spacecraft, it is Bill who will become the prize for the female hero to claim. In this most conservative of movie images—the white wedding—are therefore hidden hints of disruptions to come. In the world of gendered film stereotypes, it is usually for the groom to pace

impatiently at the altar waiting for his bride-to-be. In *I Married a Monster* it is Marge who anticipates the arrival of her groom, and reacts to his subdued entrance with a passionate embrace. Marge is not simply delineated by her wedding dress, but is involved in the destabilisation of taken-for-granted gendered expectations throughout the film.

Marge the female hero is the only character in the diegesis who sees clearly. She not only discovers the truth about the invasion, but through her we find revealed the hidden underside of 1950s respectable bourgeois married life (a point to which I will return shortly in more detail). To illustrate Marge's plight, the film's *mise-en-scène* is concerned with looking into things, into mirrors and windows wherein are reflections of deceit or reality. Marge (and the viewer) often spies hidden events happening, as when she looks through a window to see a Western Union operator tearing up an urgent telegram, effectively cutting off her call for outside help. The film also uses transparent and opaque barriers as a metaphor for sexuality and identity. Thus the storm scene described by Baxter (in the quote above) does more than offer an eerie view of the alien Bill. The flashes of lightning reveal the coloniser for what he really is, and it is interesting to compare this with a later scene in which Marge visits Dr. Wayne, the town's kindly male doctor. Worried over her ability to have children, Marge and the doctor examine an x-ray of her pelvic region. We literally see *inside* Marge Farrell: a healthy (human) woman with nothing to hide. At another point the false Bill looks through a window at an unknown married couple kissing in their bedroom, their shadows reflected on a curtain. This image evokes both the sexuality and loving comforts that the lonely Alien desires, as well as his estrangement from the reality of such longings (it is only the shadow of warmth that he sees).

Despite her clear-sightedness, a major challenge to the Housewife Hero is her lack of authority in the misogynistic universe she inhabits. Marge is not considered to be reliable or

knowledgeable by figures of male power or authority. While men (human and alien) seek to restrain her in various ways and continually contest her integrity, the audience realises that she holds the key to the invaders. Marge sees and understands the truth in the terms offered by the text. As a consequence, ensuing events tend to disrupt the connection between patriarchal law and knowledge. Rather than collapsing the possibilities of meaning, the scenes in which Marge finds male obstacles open up a range of disruptive possibilities. Two important encounters occur immediately after Marge experiences a dream-like adventure in a forest. I would like to consider these challenges in turn because they are crucial in helping us re-imagine the heroine's escape from the enclosure of traditional femininity. Her movement towards heroism takes place as a result of an evolution in the narrative, one that can be charted by a series of movements approaching and withdrawing from independent action, as she struggles with the consequences of her choices. In order to depart on this journey from down-trodden housewife to hero, from landscape to protagonist, she must first leave behind the image of the world she knows.

A pivotal sequence in this journey begins one night when, clad only in a white nightdress covered by an overcoat, Marge tracks Bill into the woods where the invaders' spaceship is hidden. By concealing herself in the bushes she manages observe a glowing form emerge from Bill's body. This creature then enters the vessel, leaving its human shell rigid and unmoving behind it. Marge approaches the figure of her husband. As she calls to him the body falls stiffly backwards onto the grass. While it lays on the ground we are offered a close-up of the male face positioned diagonally across the screen. His eyes are open but he cannot "see" for a scurrying insect running over the face reveals that we are not looking upon a real person. The camera cuts to Marge in a medium close-up. She stares almost directly into the camera before uttering a shuddering cry and running away. As she rushes onwards we see a

collage of nightmarish images, representing her shocked state of mind. Under the weight of this horror, she collapses in the undergrowth.

Drawing upon the terms offered in "When the Woman Looks" by Linda Williams (1984), we could say that Marge has looked at the monster and has been punished, just as Christine is punished when she looks upon the face of Erik in the 1925 version of *The Phantom of the Opera* (1984: 86-87).[3] Williams argues that Christine's look is structured so that the audience receives a double thrill. When the hideous face of Erik is unmasked, he is revealed to us in all his deformity and then we are also offered Christine's horror when he turns to face her. It is significant that Christine's act of unmasking the Phantom is surreptitious; that is, she creeps up behind Erik and furtively snatches at his disguise. When revealed, it is Erik who stares directly at the camera and his is the dominant gaze. Christine is doubly punished because "everything conspires here to condemn the desire and curiosity of the woman's look" (1984: 86). After his true visage is revealed, the Phantom can control his protégé: she falls to the floor, grovelling and pleading, while he advances upon her.[4] We might similarly determine that Marge's surreptitious act of looking, the horrible vision that awaits her and her terrified fight, all act to constrain her with the terror of the heroine. She *must* "look", even when the female gaze, as Williams writes, "is punished . . . by narrative processes that transform curiosity and desire into masochistic fantasy" (1984: 85). Patriarchal filmmaking practices present woman as a looked-upon object rather than the enquiring subject.

Must we construe Marge's encounter with the lifeless mannequin Bill as a punishment? She has followed Bill through the streets and woodlands and hidden while the Alien has left its body. She then boldly marches up to the figure she believes is her husband and confronts him. In return she is rebuked for her acts of looking by being offered the terrible sight of the lifeless figure. Does this active gaze bring about her undoing or move her beyond the passivity of the

heroine? Using the traditions of a Hollywood-style politics of the gaze, we would expect the mastering look and voice of Bill to carry narrative authority. Normally a close-up of the male face should reflect such mastery. That is, by being the mythic subject of the camera's gaze, Bill should be able to control Marge (the object of his look). While Laura Mulvey contends that phallocentric cinema "depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to its world" (1989: 14), in the foregoing sequence from *I Married a Monster* we are offered the image of the monstrously castrated man, the man who is no man at all. For, at this point, it is only the facade of Bill that looks into the camera. Moreover, this version of Bill we see before us on the ground cannot speak and therefore has no voice to control the female body. What *is* this nasty thing that Marge has seen in the woods? It is only the facade of Bill that the camera looks upon, a shell that cannot see or speak. The Alien Bill is simply a life-sized doll. Rather than gaze at her own phallic lack projected onto the now-monstrous body of her husband, Marge sees the false Bill's macho form of masculinity as an act. It is *this* revelation that horrifies her. It is easier to accept that her husband is cold, cruel and aloof than to see these attributes merely as performance. Marge's chaotic flight from this vision can be construed in traditional terms (the heroine screams and runs away), or it may be understood as the painful challenge the female hero must face. Marge has already embarked on her quest.

While Marge is not considered to be reliable or knowledgeable by males within the diegesis, men (even Alien ones) speak from positions of power. Yet rather than collapsing the possibilities of meaning, the scenes in which Marge encounters masculine authority serve to open up a range of disruptive possibilities and disarrange the traditional connection between patriarchal law and truth. Importantly, two such encounters occur immediately after her dream-like flight through the forest. I would like to consider these in turn because they are crucial to her escape from the enclosure of femininity. The first incident happens when Marge recovers consciousness directly after her encounter in the woods. She awakens on the

footpath near Grady's Bar. She then rushes inside to beg Grady and another man (a shady character who identifies himself as "John Smith") for help. She tells them she has just seen a monster. This is, however, a bar and Smith tells her that here everyone has seen monsters. Desperately Marge says:

> MARGE: They look just like us.
> SMITH: [*Regards her closely*] Some of us look different than others.
> MARGE: You're not really listening to me!

Marge is positioned in a complex way in relation to the people in the bar. The drinkers have all had delusions (this is a function of their shared experience of alcohol) and in this scene she is perceived as one of them. Smith eyes her speculatively, for her overcoat has fallen open to reveal the flowing nightdress beneath. She is also clearly a middle-class woman, a fact Smith recognizes when he later remarks to Grady that she is not the usual "lush" he would expect to encounter As an outsider himself, Marge arouses Smith's curiosity. He realises that she is a disturbing woman but interprets this as related solely to sexual vulnerability (and pays for this mistake when later he is murdered by Alien police officers). This sequence serves to move Marge from the safety of her traditional roles of wife and sensible, sane woman. She is aware that her story and her actions sound "crazy". She confronts the authority of male-directed sexuality, from which she flees when she realises that hey are "not really listening" to her. Marge's second encounter with male authority represents a substantial obstacle: a patriarchal authority figure in the person of Police Chief Collins. Collins is her godfather and as such embodies formal power and avuncular concern, a high-ranking male of public and private influence in whom she can confide. In the imagined safety of his office late at night (with sounds of a storm brewing outside) Collins provides Marge with the domestic security of a cookie and cup of coffee and takes her story seriously:

> COLLINS: I've known you a long time Marge. I wouldn't risk a nickel on your temper or your cooking. But I'd bet my pension on your sanity.
> MARGE: I almost wish I were insane. . . .

COLLINS: What you saw doesn't have to mean that Bill is changed, or is even "inhabited". We better make sure. I can do it. In the meantime go home to your husband.
MARGE: No, I can't.
COLLINS: Marge, you've got to. Suppose you're right. If you don't go home Bill will realise that you know. They'll be warned. We don't know what action they'll take.

Collins is kindly, puts his arm around her shoulder and acknowledges that she has seen "something". It seems as if Marge's burden of knowledge has been lifted from her and passed to formal (male) channels, but after she leaves a flash of lightning reveals the face of an alien superimposed upon that of Collins. He too is one of *them*.

Instead of simply showing us a female character being punished for her actively inquiring gaze, this sequence of encounters with patriarchy can chart another narrative trajectory. As a consequence of Marge's vision—of seeing the alien Bill's useless shell—she begins to change. Her encounters with John Smith and Collins, immediately following the revelation in the woods, can allow us to view Marge as evolving into a transgressive feminine presence. The scenes in the forest, the bar and the police station do more than represent unsafe environments, for they are public spaces into which Marge physically intrudes. Marge imposes her domestic presence into the public world, challenging and mingling these previously dichotomous spaces. John Smith desires Marge and responds to her as a sexy, vulnerable woman he may be able to exploit. In Collins Marge has sought the imagined safety of a man who is a patriarch, the head of legal and community authority, and a personal friend. All these relationships fail her. The Alien Collins tries to force her back into the private space of her home. Both the Alien and the human Smith wish to reduce Marge to the passivity of the traditional heroine. It is therefore pertinent that, by sending her home again, the false Collins is further propelling her along the path of the hero on which she must find inner strength and the ability to act for herself. Once she understands that she has been betrayed, she propels herself along the path of the hero, finding the inner strength and the ability to act. Her insights will change her in unpredictable ways and, as a female hero, will not always

guarantee recognition or public gratitude. The more obstacles are placed in her way by the misogynist invaders, the more she struggles to overcome them. This blurring and stretching of boundaries moves Marge outwards from the safety of her traditional roles of wife and sensible, sane woman, towards the disruptive place of female heroism. In so doing Marge moves into the chaos and danger of the misogynists' world.

The landscape of the external space Marge must cross on her heroic quest is violent and sexually charged. One of the main themes of *I Married a Monster* delves into the cruelty and exploitation offered as a subtext to sexuality and marriage. On the whole its depiction of 1950s gender and martial relations is a bleak one. The setting of the film is a comfortable middle-class community of neat homes and orderly streets set in a rural landscape. Yet there is a marked contrast between the respectable public persona of the town and its underlying nature. For example, the film begins on a pleasant evening with a car pulling up next to other vehicles in a parking lot. From a nearby club-house the sound of up-beat music is heard. Two men alight and walk pass a convertible in which an anonymous man and woman are kissing passionately. For no apparent reason, one of the men slaps the side of this second car with his open palm, making a loud noise. While this blow seems intended to interrupt intimacy, the lovers take no notice and continue kissing. When Bill Farrell later leaves the club he walks past the same couple still locked together. Suddenly the woman slaps her partner's face although we cannot see why she has picked this moment to do so. The blow to the side of a car becomes a slap to the face. Unseen things have begun to happen and the "unseen" in Norrisville is violently sexual. This theme of sexuality and violence is found throughout the film. Towards the end of the movie, for example, the false Bill breaks down Marge's locked bedroom door after he has been threatened with exposure. He is in a rage and resembles the wife-abuser whose violence (the act of destruction) is sexually charged (the broken bedroom door).

The Aliens have therefore arrived on a planet eminently suited to their invasion needs. A predator/prey relationship characterises most of the heterosexual relations expressed throughout the film, with its underpinning of violence (victim/aggresser) and exploitation. Such adversarial relations pre-exist the arrival of the aliens and allow them to easily usurp the place of human males. Adopting the mores of the prevailing patriarchal culture, the male invaders can subvert it for their own purposes. Female desires constructed around traditional feminine values fall straight into the hands of the colonisers. For example, Marge's older friend Helen announces her engagement to her (alien) boyfriend by declaring:

> HELEN: The walls of Troy have fallen! Sam's finally broken down—he proposed to me. . . . Well, I'd just about given up hope. I was reading books about Florence Nightingale, Joan of Arc, Madame du Barry—you know—*career* women. But now I've been saved.

In Helen's context a "career" woman is one who cannot make it as a wife. The three famous woman named represent the extremes of female experience, from visionary warrior to king's lover, and Helen implies that she would have been driven to such desperate measures had marriage not been a more realistic and desirable alternative. Yet rather than plot the ground of Helen's victory, her acceptance of marriage marks her defeat in the terms offered by the film, for it is she who receives the Trojan Horse offered by the alien males. When Marge tries to warn her friend not to marry Sam, Helen refuses to listen saying: "After all the years it took me to land him?" Barbara Ehrenreich (1983) sees this association of "landing" a husband as central to the sexual and economic reality of the 1950s. Ehrenreich notes that such a "landing" implies a confrontational stance involving sexual frustration and premarital indiscretions, both of which might lead to the "prolonged hostilities of wedded life" (1983: 1-2). *I Married a Monster* plays out such everyday insecurities by contrasting Helen's joy with the grotesque intentions of her Alien fiancé. It is significant too that Helen is older than Marge. Ehrenreich observes that older unmarried women in the 1950s were often poor,

having "missed the boat" of marital economics (1983: 2). This suggests that Sam is Helen's last hope for the bourgeois postwar dream of home, sex and children.[5]

Jeanine Basinger places *I Married a Monster* within the "bad-marriage" tradition of cinematic melodrama, dealing as it does with the concerns of a woman tricked into heterosexist wedlock (1993: 386-388). Basinger's reference to the film's melodrama-like qualities is pertinent, particularly as the woman's film often focuses on a female lead fighting for a similar narrative destination (to find and keep her man). Marge may be married to a methane-breathing misogynist from outer space—leaving her unhappy, childless, disempowered and sexually unfulfilled—but this can still be construed as the very stuff of melodrama. Marge's sexual exploitation begins on her wedding night. Alluring in her negligée (a garment representing both sexual vulnerability and availability), she gives up her virginity not to the man she loves but to a creature in a symbolic rape. During the evening the false Bill "forgets" niceties of masculine behavior and merely mimics the clichés of romance. At this point he has no emotional involvement with Marge and his acting can be seen to represent a colonialist domination of his bride. A further indicator of the problems of the Farrell marriage occurs after they have been married for a year. Marge tries to compose a letter to her mother, writing that she is frightened and bewildered, that Bill is not the same man with whom she fell in love. He has become a stranger. There is nothing new about the idea that men change after marriage, or that a period of adjustment is necessary, and these platitudes are implicit in her letter and her behavior.[6]

If bourgeois marriage is important to the film's female characters, it is an obsession for most of its males (both human *and* Alien). For instance, during Bill's buck's party two sexy women sit at a bar trying to make themselves conspicuous to Farrell and his inebriated friends:

WOMAN 1: Those guys aren't even giving us a hard look.[7]
WOMAN 2: Maybe they're married or somethin'.
WOMAN 1: Well, if we're willing to overlook it, they certainly oughta.

We may read these woman as prostitutes or simply sexually active. From their dialogue they are constructed as working class, disinterested in marriage perhaps because they can support themselves economically without the constraints of wedlock. Yet these available woman remain invisible to Bill's group, all of whom are upwardly-mobile executives snared by their nine-to-five jobs as much as they are sexually entrapped by their own bourgeois moral code.[8] In contrast to these working-class women, Farrell's male friends are plagued with the idea of marriage and speak about it in terms of life imprisonment or death. Talking about Bill's marriage, the men comment:

HARRY: Aaar! He's such a nice guy—it's a shame it has to happen to him.
SAM: Well, if you're so smart, Harry, how come you never figured out a way of avoiding matrimony?
HARRY: I did. . . . It hurts. . . . Mass suicide.

Marriage has become the focus of their self-pity and dissatisfaction: one man orders a drink by calling for "Freedom on the rocks!" The freedom Bill's friends speak about—presumably a large part of which is sexual—is offered to them the night of the buck's party by the two women at the bar. Yet the men are so cocooned by their own impotence in the fight against matrimony that they fail to realise this alternative. Ironically the alien men (at least outwardly) make better bourgeois husbands than do the humans. The replaced men become "respectable" and no longer spend their nights at the local bar as did their predecessors. Instead they go to work and then straight home to their wives. One night Bill's friend Ted looks out the window of Grady's Bar to see the sober and faithful (Alien) Farrell walking home and comments: "Well, there goes a ruined man." The human males are positioned as Other to accepted middle-class values and to the dominant value systems publicly espoused by 1950s culture. The Aliens can thus become good men in this society just as the *nostro hommo*

desired by the Company in *Alien* is also non-human. In a sense then, the human males are already aliens well before they are copied by the invaders.

Such is the importance of middle-class marriage to the colonising Aliens that they destroy any obstacles to these unions. They also perceive unrestrained sexuality (outside wedlock) as a threat to their masculinist ascendancy. The colonisation of marriage impacts on the way the film deals with sexual issues, and again links sexuality and violence. For example, the text is surprisingly open on the topic of miscegenation given the restrictions still imposed at this time by the Production Code.[9] The false Sam is the first to reveal that Alien scientists are mutating female human chromosomes so that they can breed with their wives. The film's ability to incorporate such connotations brings to mind Barbara Creed's discussion of miscegenation in the *Tarzan* films of the 1930s (1987 n.p.). Creed observes that "suggestions of forbidden desire . . . were inevitably followed by scenes in which blacks were punished and brutalized." *I Married a Monster* off-sets Alien sexual desire with violence, except that it is white lower-class humans who are punished rather than black characters. Bearing in mind Jonathon Rutherford's observation that "[v]iolence is a common response when masculine identities are under threat" (1988: 29), it is pertinent that Grady is assaulted by the Aliens after a prostitute called Francine makes advances to Farrell's inhuman friends; the murders of Francine and the shady John Smith also both parallel incidents in which the colonialist masculinity of the Alien Bill has been jeopardised. Yet it is not only class and endangered masculinity that are being enacted here, but also the primacy of the Aliens' colonisation plans. Smith and Francine are not constrained by social mores, and represent the kinds of unencumbered (uncolonisable) bodies that are an anathema to the Aliens. Francine, for example, is killed after mistakenly soliciting an invader in the street. Prior to this slaying the Alien is seen gazing at a baby doll in a toyshop window. The free-wheeling sexual game of the prostitute is not the kind desired

by the Aliens, whose need is not to "play house" but to develop a controlled and colonised domestic security.[10]

While the colonisers use the structures of marriage, sexuality and traditional gender expectations to enslave Marge, *I Married a Monster* also allows us to explore the narrative presumption of heterosexuality. After a year of marriage Marge has not become pregnant and pays a visit to Dr. Wayne. Having done tests on Marge, Wayne suggests it is Bill who should pay him a visit. Although pregnancy is the outward concern here, masculinity, potency and sexuality are also involved. Why is the desirable and healthy Marge not pregnant? How much of a "man" is Bill Farrell? Harry Benshoff believes the subtext of the film is not the invisible nature of alien invaders but of homosexuality in the 1950s (1997: 130-131). If Bill has a secret, it could be that he is gay.[11] Certainly, homosexuality can be read into a number of exchanges between the invaders. The Alien Sam makes his presence known to the false Bill in a manner that supports such a reading. They are alone in a dimly lit living room when Sam asks: "You make many mistakes at first?" Bill hesitates, not being prepared to reveal that he is "different". Basinger takes up the description by observing ""Well . . . congratulations," softly whispers Tryon, as he moves sinuously towards another man who has admitted he's in the club, as it were" (1993: 387). Sam marvels at the way humans manage to enjoy themselves in their puny bodies, but he may equally be complaining about the sexual inclinations of those bodies.[12] One way to read these gay innuendoes is to see them as deliberate parallels equating gayness with communism. Thus the movie's subtext may be one in which queers and commies are the evil outsiders, as socially undesirable as non-human invaders. Perhaps more intriguing possibilities rest within a queering of this text, a disengagement of the inevitable heterosexuality such films are thought to invoke, and the suggestion that sexed identities that are mobile and volatile. While the alien Bill ultimately

falls victim to the desires of his human body—learning the meaning of *heterosexual* love—his place of sexual difference helps plot the film's destabilisation of heteronormative values.

One of the more intriguing sub-texts in this film is the way in which the Housewife Hero's journey parallels the changes taking place within the Alien Bill. The coloniser is himself being colonised in unexpected ways. There are two interesting aspects to this metamorphosing colonialist. The first can be read in reference to Judith Halberstam's discussion of monstrosity as a position that opposes positive human values (1995: 119). The Alien Bill, for all his macho faults, destabilises the idea that monsters are unequivocally evil, existing in an oppositional relationship to good human men. The ability of even a nasty intergalactic misogynist to *begin* to become a new creature (an Alien with human feelings) is one of the more transgressive aspects of the film. The suggestion that he is capable of change serves not only to individualise him, but to show that he is not quite what he perceives himself to be, as the following exchange with Marge implies:

> MARGE: Why did you have to come here?
> BILL: You have no idea how rare life is in those cold, countless miles of space.
> MARGE: Did you *love* your women before they died?
> BILL: Love? (*Turns his back to her*) No. We came together for breeding purposes only. That's why it's taken me so long to understand.

I Married a Monster thus reveals the problem of adopting a non-parodic identity. Postcolonial theory usually construes subjectivity as being the prerogative of the coloniser, while the identity of subjugated peoples is subsumed as an Otherness to the colonial power.[13] The Alien Bill demonstrates the difficulty in this understanding of domination, for his *alien* identity exists side-by-side with a developing set of *human* qualities. At the same time as Marge has begun her quest outwards, the Alien Bill is beginning to long for an ordinary human life. His new interests focus on his home and his relationship with Marge. The notion of "home" set up within the film is conventional, a feminine place of comfort and warmth,

and both the Earth itself and the house in which the Farrells live represents this ideal. This home exists in contrast to Alien society built on coldness, violence, and the necessity to breed. The things this false Bill longs for are usually perceived as feminine desires: warmth, security, emotionality, happiness, sensuality, as well as family and female friendship. The Aliens, on the other hand, are homeless and without love, a nomadic patriarchal society which cannot provide for itself. Although the false Bill acts out a masculine persona, his unspeakable desires are not dissimilar to a traditionally feminine position. A great deal of the pathos of the unnamed creature who masquerades as Bill is that he has begun to learn (but does not altogether obtain) receptivity, sensitivity and love. The colonisation process, which the Alien invaders suppose to be one-way, is shown as dynamic and unexpected. The germ of self-enlightenment found by the Alien Bill makes his colonialist engagement with violence all the more chilling. In one sequence Marge gives him a puppy as an anniversary gift, offering it as a child substitute named Junior. When the tiny animal snarls at the Alien, he kills and buries it. Not only does this offer a pointer to the cold, unemotional parent he might become, it also reminds us that even the mutable coloniser will be ruthless and cruel in pursuit of subjugation.

As a Housewife Hero, Marge must rally her resources in order to fight her colonial objectification by the Aliens. She cannot use science or technology to combat these invaders (she does not design a new ray-gun or make a theoretical observation that leads to their destruction). After finding herself physically constrained by the takeover of the town's male population, Marge courageously engages with her extraterrestrial husband on the level of domestic and personal intimacy. Much of the warmth Bill seeks in his new homely environment stems from having sex with his beautiful human wife. It is on this physical level that Marge's horror of the Alien is expressed. When confronting him with her knowledge, she says: "I know you're not Bill. You're some *thing* that crept into Bill's body. Some thing that can't even breathe the same air we do. . . ." The same "thing" has been having sex with her; it

has "crept into" her body too. The false Bill then tells Marge that she will be having "our kind" of children. That is, if the invaders have their way, Alien babies will be creeping *out* of her body all too soon. Marge will be forced to create a whole new generation of alien misogynists. Cold, inhuman male colonisers, they will continue their enslavement of women for their own patriarchal purposes. While this reading is formed upon gender and colonialism, we should remember that *I Married a Monster* reflects a number of discursive influences. A very different reading might result from viewing Marge's horror of miscegenation as based upon white bourgeois racism; that is, her desire for children may be seen as the longing for nice *white* babies rather than simply nice *human* ones. My own reading, however, hears the Alien articulating the very keystone of masculinist and colonialist domination. As Bhabha observes:

> The construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference—racial and sexual. Such an articulation becomes crucial if it is held that the body is always simultaneously inscribed in both the economy of pleasure and desire and the economy of discourse, domination and power (1992: 313).

In explaining that Marge will bring forth monstrous children, the false Bill positions her as the instrument of his pleasure and power. He will exercise a sexual and racial dominance in which the human woman is defined and delimited by her difference from the colonial subject, the Alien male.[14]

Once the Housewife Hero understands the true mission of her Alien husband, she searches for a way to defend the Earth. In launching this counteraction, Bill Warren asks why Marge does not turn to "the one group she can be absolutely certain are not aliens: the *wives* of the suspect men" (1986: 120, original emphasis). There is no textual evidence that Marge would receive help from women who may (or may not) be married to invaders from outer space. Moreover, this text does not propose a general overthrow of gender roles. The Housewife Hero can call

on resources that challenge the monsters of a male-centred story, even destabilising or transgressing the traditional heroic narrative. We should remember, however, that these are fantastic figures who emerge out of the ranks of ordinary women. Although the image of an armed and angry group of wives turning on the Alien misogynists is a mightily attractive one, female heroes remain exceptions rather than the rule in science fiction films of the 1950s.

The alternative offered by the text is in keeping with its interrogation of gender. Marge chooses Dr. Wayne as her ally, correctly guessing that the physician is still human due to an accident in which he kills the Alien Sam (administering oxygen after a boating mishap). Ironically, given the Aliens' desire for offspring, Wayne knows exactly how to distinguish human males from invaders. He dramatically proclaims: "Don't you worry, Marge. I know where to get our men, *human* men." The way the doctor seeks *bona fide* masculinity is particularly informative: he thrusts open a hospital door labeled "Maternity Ward". Wayne and the real men, those whose wives have just had human babies, then set off to the spaceship to engage the invaders. Given that the Aliens cannot consume alcohol, some real men might also be found drunk in the local bar. But this latter group does not represent the solid citizens the doctor is seeking. Wayne's way of distinguishing human males can be read as heterosexist, linking manhood (human-hood) to the ability to father a child (have successful heterosexual relations). Another intriguing implication is that heterosexual male humans *must* look to their wives to define their manhood. The Aliens are not real men because they have no relationship with their own women. The 1950s American husband depicted in the film becomes a fully-fledged man only when that manhood is bestowed upon him by his wife.

Marge does succeed in her quest to conquer the aliens, free herself from exploitation, and find the real Bill. Yet there are aspects of this victory that make it an equivocal one. When Marge confronts the false Bill in the forest at the end of the film, his alien companions are dead, their

humans captives are being freed, and the invaders have conceded defeat. The Alien speaks quietly and with resignation:

> BILL: Your people have won. That makes you happy, doesn't it? We never knew happiness or love or any emotion until we came here to your "Earth". (*Ironic smile*) I'd just begun to learn—

These words allow us to see the doomed creature as a far more self-inquiring character than any of the human males so far encountered. Although the invader motions Marge away from the indignity of his death throes, she does not leave. Instead she sees the false Bill fall to the ground writhing in agony. He dies before her (our) eyes, turning into an unrecognisable, unearthly mush which spills from his corpse onto the ground. Marge's presence is integral to the grisly death of the Alien. That is, unlike the unmasking of the Phantom in Williams' (1984) analysis of horror films, Marge's ability to "see" parallels that of the camera. Her vision is as direct as our own. When she observes the horrible death, so do we. When she momentarily places her hands over her face, we too look away. The real Bill calls to her the instant the Alien dies, whereupon Marge's vision switches from horror to reward. This is not a simple or a happy outcome, however, for here we again confront the ambiguous nature of the female hero. Marge herself is silent during the doomed Alien's last speech. This tends to support Jancovich's contention that the Alien has come to occupy the focus of the narrative (1996: 76). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the false Bill chooses to talk about happiness, love and emotion with this final breath, not domination or conquest. He appears to have colonised part of a feminine position. Such a claim needs to be made carefully, however, for it is easy to see the male (even an extraterrestrial one) taking over all the spaces of the screen—to see him become the subject of the narrative to the exclusion of Marge. I suggest, however, that rather than exclude her, this depiction of the false Bill serves to again destabilise the boundaries between femininity and masculinity portrayed throughout the film, blurring gendered territory.

Despite these gendered complexities, we may still choose to privilege the love story as Marge's basic motivation. If so, then it seems that her fight to be reunited with her real lover may repudiate her potential as female hero. Writing about the nature of love stories in traditional cinema, Mary Ann Doane observes:

> The "love story" is, paradoxically, both central to and a marginal discourse within the classical Hollywood cinema. It is central insofar as the couple is a constant figure of Hollywood rhetoric and some form of heterosexual pact constitutes its privileged mode of closure. Its marginality, on the other hand, is associated with its status as a feminine discourse—the "love story" purportedly "speaks to" a female spectator (1987: 96).

I Married a Monster enacts *and* disrupts this paradox. At the film's conclusion Marge rushes to Bill's embrace just as the Alien spaceship explodes. One might interpret this as the film's "heterosexual pact" being reasserted at the earliest opportunity. Bill's call of "Marge!" at the film's end could be said to plot her return to domesticity and marital promise. This is again a contradictory image, for while Marge has been moving into and out of these feminised realms, Bill beckons her back toward the *status quo* and the film's final moments can be seen as a recuperation of traditional values. Throughout this movie, however, the familiar story of the male hero has been continually off-set by a female-centred one. The human Bill has been held as a fixed territory, a waiting-space, while Marge has crossed the dangerous landscape to claim *him*. Bill has had little or no implied off-screen journey of his own. It is the Housewife Hero who finds the expectant groom waiting to embrace his triumphant love. It is the male who becomes the object of narrative closure. While her Alien husband has been domesticated, it is Marge who has been forced outwards to a complex and difficult heroism.

What new kind of female is the heroic Marge? Despite the entrapments of bourgeois marriage and extraterrestrial colonialism, Marge challenges and escapes from the heroine's traditional place in narrative. Her search takes her out of the every-day and forces her to confront the

restrictions imposed by both her human and her Alien colonisers. It is this search, coupled with Marge's determination and courage, that drives the story and allows us to see her as a heroic character. By placing herself in incongruous and threatening situations, Marge steps beyond the commonplace and becomes a Housewife Hero. She breaks free of the heroine's space. In this struggle, Marge's weapons are not bullets or disintegration rays, but her own courage and determination. Compared to her, the real Bill looks dazed and wimpish as he is helped from the spaceship. While their final scene is that of the classic movie embrace, Marge's heroism ill-fits the attempt to squeeze her back into simple heroine proportions. While Bill's may be the usual form of the hero, it is Marge who has undertaken the hero's quest, casting aside her good name, her claim to sanity, and her ordinary wifely virtues in the process. For a woman of the new postwar middle-class, this is a particularly precarious path. Although she enlists a helper in her struggle, Marge comes to rely on herself and not on masculine law, and is ultimately able to look upon the image of the monster—the Alien Bill—and not be punished. The doomed love-lorn Alien invites attention as he speaks his romantic farewell, but is powerless to prevent Marge/the camera from watching his death. While Williams contends that a girl/woman will turn away from a vision of horror on the screen (1984: 83), *I Married a Monster* questions the sexed division of such acts, confusing the roles of watcher and watched. It is true that Marge's journey remains securely heteronormative in nature for her search is for a *real* man. Yet the quest of the hero tells us that the seeker may ultimately reach a destination of which she did not originally conceive. Thus it is Marge's search for Bill and her journey to find him that has lead her to triumph over the misogynists from outer space.

In the following chapter, "Farewell to the Master('s Gaze)", I conclude my discussion on the Housewife Hero with an analysis of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951). This film's female

hero, Helen Benson, is also portrayed as an ordinary woman living an uncomplicated life in difficult circumstances. Yet as the film progresses she moves from its periphery, through the role of a concerned mother, to friend, and finally to hero. The most profound change to take place in Helen occurs when the Earth is stopped by Klaatu, the intergalactic visitor.

Chapter 7 - Farewell to the Master('s Gaze)

In *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* Teresa de Lauretis argues that a female viewer must give her consent to engage with a film (1984: 137). For this cinematic experience to be successful, furthermore, the viewer must enjoy the movie, allowing it to evoke "a personal response, an engagement of the spectator's subjectivity, and the possibility of identification" (1984: 136-137). For me, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) is one such desirably engaging film, while its characters of Helen Benson and Klaatu suggest the pleasure of disruptive subjectivities. In particular, Helen's journey from the private domain of widow and mother to Housewife Hero, the woman who single-handedly saves the world, helps re-chart the terrain of patriarchal film narrative. *The Day* is also one of the most spectacularly ominous science fiction films of the 1950s, remembered mostly for its alien Klaatu and giant robot Gort. It also boasted high quality special effect sequences, such as the depiction of a space craft landing in Washington D.C.

Given this kind of imaginative backdrop, the leading female character of Helen Benson at first seems a very unlikely science fiction hero. Widowed by World War Two and the mother of a young son (Bobby), Helen works as a secretary and lives in a boarding house. She has no connection with unusual occurrences, science or formal power structures. At the point at which Helen is introduced she is considering a marriage proposal from her insurance-salesman boyfriend Tom Stevens. Tom quips that he wants to take her on as his financial "dependent", and this appears to sum up her heroic potential: constrained as the heroine, she is the carrier of Tom's heterosexual desire and middle-class aspiration. Helen's ordinariness and her place in domestic matters also seems oddly out of step with the wider issues of global destruction canvassed by the film. It can be argued that *The Day* is a far more politically

equivocal text than is usually accepted, offering several disturbances to the traditional narrative. In particular, the characters of Helen and the sexually ambiguous Klaatu suggest ways to dislodge a masculinist hold on knowledge and power, with the visitor from space intervening in human affairs to demonstrate capabilities well beyond the control of hegemonic masculinity. Instead of remaining restricted to the domestic sphere, Helen's fantastic adventures with Klaatu teach her to defy the confinement of the heroine until she ultimately rejects Tom and his world. In the discussion to follow I consider several key issues faced by Helen in her struggle, including the political climate of the film, her place within it as a Housewife Hero, and the way both she and Klaatu disrupt traditional patriarchal expectations. Finally, I explore whether Helen's famous rendezvous with the giant robot Gort might not be re-imagined from the perspective of the female hero, and thereby forge an alternative narrative destination for the Housewife Hero.

Based on the story "Farewell to the Master" by Harry Bates (first published in *Astounding Science-Fiction* in 1940), *The Day the Earth Stood Still* tells of the arrival on Earth of an extraterrestrial craft. This ship bears the intergalactic ambassador Klaatu and his giant robot Gort. Having landed in a park in Washington D.C., Klaatu emerges to offer greetings to the people of the world. Before he can do so he is shot and wounded by a trigger-happy soldier. After receiving medical treatment, Klaatu unsuccessfully attempts to discuss his mission with political authorities. He then escapes and lives among the humans in order to understand them, and it is here he meets Helen and young Bobby, as well as the eminent scientist Prof. Barnhardt. When the woman and the scientist understand the purpose of Klaatu's visit they both agree to help, and watch as his extraordinary powers make the Earth stand still by inhibiting electrical energy. Before Helen can assist Klaatu to escape from the military authorities, he is shot again. This time he is mortally wounded and it is Helen who must prevent Gort from destroying the Earth. Gort then restores Klaatu to life long enough for him

to scathingly denounce human aggression. The visitor represents cultures that have installed a robotic police force, and Gort is an example of this unequivocal form of justice. Klaatu returns to the stars, leaving the ultimatum that the Earth must learn peace or be destroyed by Gort.

Most science fiction film commentators see *The Day the Earth Stood Still* as offering a critique on post-war America and on human society in general, a plea for peace and common-sense to prevail in a dangerous time.[1] Bruce Rux even reports that the U.S. Army refused to help the filmmakers because of what was seen as the movie's "extremely pacifistic script" (1997: 183). The film's overt message certainly seems pacifist in nature, for the human society it depicts is marked by tension, fear, mistrust and worry. The Earth is not a comfortable place where even hearth and home are not safe. Thus the occupants of Helen's boarding house are riveted with fear when Klaatu (in the guise of Mr. Carpenter) quietly arrives to ask for a room. This discomfort pre-dates the appearance of his spaceship, and we are informed of this by the world-weary Presidential representative, Mr. Harley. Harley talks of "evil forces" in the world—of *them* not *us*—and is regretful that this is the reality under which they live. When Klaatu tells him "Apparently I'm not as cynical about Earth's people as you are", Harley sadly refuses to be moved. Later, in the guise of Carpenter, Klaatu is asked by a radio interviewer if he is afraid. He replies: "I *am* fearful when I see people substituting fear for reason." This is not what the interviewer wants to hear and he quickly moves on to someone else in the crowd. Klaatu's peaceful intent can also be read in the scene in which Bobby takes Carpenter to Arlington National Cemetery to see the grave of the boy's father, Robert Benson. The visitor (and I must add, the spectator) is awed by the ranks of the dead represented by the neatly assembled headstones. It is this destruction that Klaatu seeks to prevent. Thus Peter Biskind views *The Day* as a movie of the Left, pitting the good but idiosyncratic individual against the rest of the world (1983: 152). As an example of his

political claims for the film, Biskind equates the kindly, sensible Professor Barnhardt with Einstein, an unpopular "foreigner" in terms of a H.U.A.C.-riddled post-war U.S.A. (1983: 153).[2]

Yet the political allegory of the film is not straightforward. Nor is it very different from the real-life world of the Cold War era. H. Bruce Franklin informs us that in 1946 the U.S. was considering the Baruch Plan, in which all nations on earth were to be offered a choice between:

> 'World Peace' rather than 'World Destruction' . . . by submitting to a new international agency, not subject to veto, to be staffed by personnel 'with proven competence' in atomic science (in other words, by those who have created America's atomic bombs), and empowered to evoke the 'immediate, swift, and sure punishment' of any nation violating its orders (1990: 164).

When John Brosnan (1978: 84) comments on the questionable morality of the "peaceful" peoples represented by Klaatu, we should indeed consider the political world in which the text was produced: Klaatu's mythical community is not the only one to consider it appropriate to meet dissension with ultimate violence. The science fictional setting of *The Day* places decisions of life and death into the hands of a robot police force rather than unspecified "atomic experts", but the similarity of the two schemes is remarkable. Once seen from this perspective, the totalitarian implications of the film and of the world it represents are difficult to avoid. The Earth is a place where reason, morality and community have become the pawns of military strategists and inhuman creatures.[3] From this vantage point, the regime Klaatu represents begins to resemble the stance of the U.S.A. towards the Soviets during the Cold War: better to join Us than die as one of Them. Better *dead* than Red. Even the seemingly benign Klaatu warns Barnhardt that a demonstration of Gort's power might include the needless violence of destroying New York or blasting the Rock of Gibraltar.

By repudiating leftist readings for this film, Mark Jancovich sees the text calling for the repression of the individual and the elimination of those found to be out of step with a "better", more "enlightened" order (1996: 41-46). This form of universalism overlooks difference in favour of similarity. Jancovich also comments that in this film "it is ordinary people who are the problem, and they are presented as needing the authority of experts in order to keep them in line" (1996: 43). When Klaatu is shot at the beginning of the movie it is done by a lone, nervous soldier who acts without orders.[4] So too Barnhardt's secretary tries to erase Klaatu's invaluable calculations from a blackboard in a fit of pique. Yet another reading of the film's political stance may be the message that, once the Atomic Age has dawned, there *are* no easy alternatives left for humanity.

Observations on the political nature of this film are significant because they allow a number of narrative subtexts to emerge. Yet neither leftist nor conservative perspectives fully account for the nuances and contradictions of the movie. Nor can they offer a contestation of gender or allow for the emergence of a female hero. While most accounts of *The Day* present Klaatu as its main protagonist (as well as its heroic male lead), the part played by Helen Benson is usually minimised.[5] Jancovich offers one of the few analyses of Helen to be found, but sees her role as that of a traditional heroine limited to passivity by the film's conservative political allegory. His discussion of both Helen and Klaatu is influenced by this reading of the text and he finds little that is disruptive represented in either character (1996: 41-46).[6] Jancovich observes:

> Helen displays traditionally maternal qualities of self-denial and self-sacrifice. She represses her own interests and defers to authority. This feature is particularly clear in her relationship with her boyfriend, David. When he finds out that Klattu is the alien, David decides to inform the Pentagon. However, Klattu has spoken to Helen and has persuaded her of the universal importance of his mission. She accepts his authority. . . . Unfortunately, [David] is filled with dreams of individual power and heroism. . . . Helen asks him to consider the broader implications of his actions, but he only responds, 'I don't care about the rest of the world'. In this film, individualism is merely irrational selfishness, but all the film has to offer

> in its place is self-denial . . . [calling] for the repression of individual desires before an authoritarian state (1996: 43-44).

Jancovich assesses Helen in terms of her relationships with male characters. He asserts that by changing allegiance from Tom Stevens to Klaatu, Helen merely swaps one kind of authority figure for another. Once under Klaatu's influence she will repress her own judgment in favour of a new kind of governance, a universalised good that will stifle individualism. This view sees her as retaining a traditionally feminine position in the narrative, as the side-kick and helpmate to two competing males in a patriarchal story. That is, she changes loyalties when it becomes clear that Tom is not the man he should be, while Klaatu becomes a replacement lawgiver. Jancovich views Tom's angry exclamation ("I don't care about the rest of the world") as an example of the flawed individualism offered by the text, highlighting its conservative stance. The perception of Helen in these traditional terms severely limits any hope of re-imagining her as a Housewife Hero, a character who disarranges the outcome of a patriarchal narrative by breaking away from domesticity and passive femininity. It is therefore important to re-consider some of the film's gendered relationships in more detail, focusing on Klaatu, on Helen herself, and her relationship with masculine authority.

In the figure of Klaatu we are offered an ambiguously gendered alien without a core or fixed individuality. He exists outside the formal identities of human masculinity, and finds himself surrounded and assailed by its hegemony. Upon landing, for instance, he proclaims a message of friendship and peace, and is almost immediately shot. These same military forces, augmented by the police and government agents, will ultimately pursue him to his death. To these ranks of masculinised culture Klaatu is alien and threatening. Although Klaatu shares similar physical attributes with humans (as pointed out by a doctor at the Walter Reed Military Hospital), the visitor's appearance is demonstrably *alien*, and his arrival in the city of Washington helps delineate this difference. Klaatu's round, glowing spaceship skirts over

massive public buildings, over their hard, square lines and huge proportions. In a sidelong view we see its oval shape pass the needle-point phallus of the Washington Monument in a tight series of three cuts: approaching, over-head, and passing. The spacecraft's round, fluid form settles within the circular configuration of a park, and is converged upon by the army and their dark, austere, angular weapons. We see a series of images in which the military is alerted, male announcers spread word of the arrival, and men give orders. When he emerges, Klaatu—tall, slim, and silver—is visibly a different kind of being to the rest of the masculinised world confronting him. He seems to be as smooth as his craft, a body without rough edges, at one with his technology. Vivian Sobchack interprets the smooth silver design of the spaceship as representing the "Platonic virtues of clarity, sanity, [and] reason" so missing in the film's human population (1997: 77). Reading the film via Jancovich as a conservative text, we may equally see the same design as emblematic of dispassionate utilitarianism. What may be most pertinent here, however, is to recognise the gendered *difference* of the spacecraft and of Klaatu rather than assigning any precise definitions or designs to these bodies.

This gendered ambiguity can be read into the way Klaatu rejects the use of patriarchal titles. He tells Harley that he is not *Mr.* Klaatu, and later refers to himself only as Carpenter. He adopts this earthly appellation because a suit of clothes (acquired from the hospital laundry) bears the name-tag of a "Major Carpenter". Klaatu's human disguise might be seen as an arbitrary one, further helping to delineate him from other male characters such as Tom Stevens who wants to create a "name" for himself and have his "picture in the papers".[7] Thus the visitor rejects both the military office of authority (the "Major") as well as the civil amenities of masculinity (the "Mister"). Klaatu's character is able to suggest difference, to offer alternatives to habitual modes of thinking. He also does this when explaining to Bobby that atomic energy can be used to power a space ship, an idea Bobby has never encountered

before. Using his alien perceptions Klaatu helps widen the limits of the possible, disrupting boundaries between masculinity/femininity, aggression/passivity, and mind/body. Klaatu's own sexuality is indeterminate. He is certainly not overtly feminised: his is a male body and, when he dresses in a business suit, his appearance implies conservative, middle-class values. Yet the voice and tall, slim physique of actor Michael Rennie lend his portrayal an ethereal, androgynous quality. We may even see David Bowie's Mr. Newton from *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976) as Klaatu's more eroticised descendant. Neither should we accept that Klaatu is necessarily a rival for Helen's affections (as the suspicious Tom believes). The visitor's gendered difference points to the possibility of constructive, non-sexual relationships between men and women. His other-worldly identity does not foster an oppositional relationship with his female friend. On the other hand, Tom and the military see him as a grave and immediate threat for the visitor jeopardises not only their authority, but patriarchal privilege as well. Although these forces attempt to victimise Klaatu (he is hunted, shot, wounded, and even killed) he does not become their victim. His character is too dignified, and his knowledge and the power he welds are too great for him to simply become a martyr. He has travelled to the Earth with an important message to be delivered equally to all people and even death does not prevent him from courageously completing his task.

The character of Helen herself also deflects and disarranges narrative relationships in a way not accounted for by those readings concerned only with the larger political stance of the film. While Jancovich interprets Helen through her "traditionally maternal qualities of self-denial and self-sacrifice" (1996: 43) there are other perspectives that can be found in this character's depiction that suggest a very different pattern of gendered behavior. By failing to be phobic and irrational, Helen may be read as a sensible individual who uses her reason and common sense rather than negative emotions to interact with the world around her. In so doing she enters a terrain not dissimilar to that proposed by Elizabeth Hills (1997), that of the female

hero who steps aside from the gendered subjectivity of the heroine. For instance, while the people with whom Helen shares the boarding house conjecture on the evil nature of the so-called monster from outer space, she puts herself in the place of such a being and wonders aloud what she would do if their places were reversed. She does not succumb to fear but is willing to speculate with concern and reason. It is Tom Stevens, the would-be hero, who attempts to divert Helen with his suspicions and paranoia. While common sense and reason are usually the attributes seen in the logical, sensible male, it is Helen who is the bearer of the hero's qualities in this film.

In making the claim that Helen's commonsense and logic allow her to stand out from the crowd, it could be said that I am describing a character whose qualities mark her as special from the very beginning of the narrative. If Helen is exceptional at the outset, how can she be seen to evolve and develop into the Housewife Hero? It should be remembered, however, that my deployment of the term Housewife Hero does not suggest a discrete category, but rather a general way in which to approach the kinds of characterisations found in these texts. The Housewife Hero is a figure who begins by offering a traditional and unexceptional relationship to femininity, as a female who is not herself identifiably powerful or does not hold a preeminent position in the world. The circumstances within which the Housewife Hero finds herself will allows her to develop and demonstrate her heroism. *The Day* thus shows Helen as a loving mother living in straitened circumstances (she and Bobby rent two rooms in a boarding house). Her economic situation restricts her to the domestic roles of widow, mother and girl-friend. While Helen does have a job in the Department of Commerce, it is simply that of a secretary. As an ordinary woman Helen does not have access to formal power or status, yet her burgeoning heroism allows her to confront the police and the military, as well as public opinion.

Rather than simply being a straightforward and sensible female, Helen's character mobilises another set of paradoxically heroic capacities that draw on and subvert her domestic role. It is Helen's very ordinariness that allows her to evade male authority and pursue her hero's path. This can be seen in one stark scene towards the end of the film in which Klaatu is shot and mortally wounded. Helen runs to him, anxiously bending over her injured friend. This might constitute a familiar melodramatic image in which the sorrowing woman bends over her fallen hero. Klaatu's shooting is, however, dark and brutal, while Helen's rush to him grimly determined rather than sentimental. Just before the military arrive to cluster around his dying body, Klaatu entreats Helen to perform the dangerous task of restraining Gort. She does not cry out or draw attention to herself, but slips away silently into a nearby subway entrance while a crowd gathers around the dying figure in the street. For this purpose she becomes Mrs. Benson, the mother, widow, secretary, and Tom's "honey". Helen the ordinary women becomes unseeable to the masculinised eyes of the authorities and she safeguards her escape with the perverse invisibility of the Housewife Hero.

Helen's relationships with Tom and Klaatu might certainly be read as subservient, illustrating the way in which the classic movie heroine acquiesces at first to one form of patriarchal authority and then to another. Alternatively we can also perceive Helen as the only character capable of growth; it is she who *changes* during the course in this film while most humans prove themselves incapable of even the smallest transformation. It is this metamorphosis of Helen that I find the most intriguing expression of the stillness which the visitor imposes upon the Earth. Her power to act grows from the cessation of other powers, from the time Klaatu turns off the world by inhibiting all electricity.[8] The visitor's power to keep the Earth "standing still" enrages the patriarchal military, allowing them to feed on their own fear and animosity. On the other hand, it permits Helen to out-grow her old self. To illustrate this change the film offers visual parallels between the characters of Helen and Klaatu, beginning

with a scene in an elevator scene. The two enter the elevator just before the world "stops", trapping them alone together. The ordinary lift lighting is replaced by a grid-like illumination which casts a shadow across their faces and upper bodies. Helen is afraid, separated from Carpenter/Klaatu by her fear. The light falls on their faces in an angular, distorted pattern as Klaatu begins to explain himself and his mission. As Helen begins to understand his position and his need to address the people of the world, her fear of him subsides. Their new relationship is reflected in the pattern of lighting, for in a two-shot they are now linked by a regularity of cross-hatching. When the power is resumed, they walk out of the lift together, shoulder to shoulder, and similar imagery connecting the two reappears later in the film. Biskind interprets this shift in Helen as her defection "to the Other side" (1983:152). It is worth suggesting that Helen, the ordinary woman, never really had "a side" in this phallocentric diegesis, simply a feminised role which she has now moved beyond. She has moved from a worried and suspicious mother, and it is significant that from this point her son Bobby is no longer seen in the film. Helen becomes Klaatu's friend and the one to whom he entrusts the words to control the robot Gort.

Jancovich refers to Helen's final confrontation with Tom Stevens—her would-be hero and erstwhile suitor—as the text's rejection of the unruly individual in favour of repressive authoritarianism. Their encounter is an important one. Helen rushes into Tom's office where he is trying to put through a telephone call to the military. He has discovered that Carpenter is the alien and wants to reveal this information to the right authorities. Helen attempts to prevent him:

> HELEN: Believe me Tom, I know what I'm talking about.
> TOM: He's a nuisance to the whole world. It's our duty to turn him in.
> HELEN: But he isn't a nuisance. He told me why he came here.
> TOM: He told—he told *you*? Oh don't be silly honey, just because you *like* the guy. You realise of course what this would mean to us? I could write my own ticket. I'd be the biggest man in the country.
> HELEN: Is that what you're thinking about?

TOM: Why not? Somebody's got to get rid of him. . . .
HELEN: Tom, you mustn't, you don't know what you're doing. It isn't just you and Mr. Carpenter. The rest of the world is involved.
TOM: I don't care about the rest of the world! You'll feel different when you see my picture in the papers.
HELEN: I feel different right now.
TOM: You wait and see—you're going to marry a big hero.
HELEN: I'm not going to marry anybody.

Tom turns to speak into the telephone and Helen rushes from the room. Jancovich's reading sees Tom, who "dreams of individual power and heroism", as being repudiated by Helen's conservative, self-denying fervour (1996: 44). Her argument with Tom can thus be viewed as the heroine's final capitulation to right-wing values. It seems inadequate, however, to position Tom as the narrative's lone (if flawed) individualist. In making his bid for notoriety, Tom is seeking the approbation of "the authorities" rather than striking out on an independent course. He will be able to write his own ticket only if he is formally recognised as a hero of the state, the man who delivers the alien. It is acceptance Tom desires, not individualism. This need for success is reminiscent of Laura Mulvey's discussion of the hero narrative in Freud's work on day-dreams (1990: 27). Mulvey describes how hero stories speak of male phantasies of ambition in which an idealised ego can dream of making his fortune and marrying the princess. Insofar as the masculine hero narrative follows such a male day-dream, the exchange between Tom and Helen can be seen to transgress the immobility of the heroine *and* disavow her Oedipal destination. It is not Tom the individualist whom Helen must evade, but Tom the conformist.

The effect of this repudiation scene is to mark the division between two characters formerly bound together by heterosexual desire. Throughout the sequence it is Helen's perspective that remains the key, and it is her desperation to make Tom understand that is conveyed to the spectator. We see Helen's expression when his betrayal is announced and it is Helen with whom we identify when she abandons Tom and the world he represents. Tom endeavours to

contain Helen within the terms of erotic passivity, as the waiting ground of the heroine. She is tempted with marriage and patronised as a foolish woman who is a poor judge of character. The two attempts to disempower her go hand-in-glove and she rejects both. Until this time Helen has relied heavily on Tom. Early in the film she even asks him whether Carpenter is a suitable baby-sitter for Bobby. After the foregoing exchange, however, Helen must exercise her own judgement. She even rejects marriage, that final fulfillment of the heroine. It is Tom, and Tom's view of the world, that is *her* obstacle, the barrier that she must overcome. Like the fantastic journey of Thelma and Louise, Helen's character also suggests that there is a point of no-return on the female hero's journey beyond, a point at which the influence of heterosexism can end. When Helen says "I feel different right now . . . . I'm not going to marry anybody," she reaches towards that alterity. It is the counterpart of Thelma's acknowledgment that "Something's crossed over in me." From the point of view of Helen's heroism, Tom's outburst of "I don't care about the rest of the world!" marks the completion of a process of change that began during the time the Earth stood still.

The Housewife Hero's most dangerous confrontation in this film is not with self-serving masculinity or ambiguously omnipotent aliens, but with a machine representing ultimate phallic power: the terrible robot Gort. This is a key sequence in terms of the female hero and here I will consider three ways to theorise Helen's encounter with the robot. The first sees this confrontation reinforcing Helen's position as overpowered heroine. Biskind (1983) and Dennis Saleh (1979) offer such a view. The second position can be adapted from Linda Williams' (1984) reading of *Peeping Tom*. As discussed in an earlier chapter, Williams contends that women are usually punished for acts of looking. It is only if they are sexually non-threatening females, however, that they stand a chance of surviving the deadly phallic gaze. I am particularly interested in how these positions deal with the action surrounding the

words spoken by Helen to control Gort and save the world. As a third reading, I will offer my own understanding of the encounter between Housewife Hero and killer machine.[9]

Writing of Helen's confrontation with the robot, Biskind observes that "Gort runs amok, and his first move after his master is 'killed' is to stalk pretty Helen Benson" (1983: 158). Saleh describes the episode in a similar manner:

> When Klaatu is shot again, Helen flees to the saucer. Her face fills with terror as she sees Gort melt from the plastic block and start towards her. Gort's shadow falls over her, her face fills the screen tremendously, and she is at last able to blurt the words out. . . . Gort carries her into the saucer, before retrieving the dead Klaatu from a jail cell (1979: 47).

Helen flees, blurts, is terrified and carried off, and it is by these standards that her actions can be measured. Helen is made visible in terms of the heroine who is acted upon, who manages (only just) to survive, and is borne away. She becomes the heroine-as-obstacle, with Saleh's interpretation being told from Gort's perspective (as the one who *acts*). These examples illustrate how the maleness of the narrative can be universalised, reminding us of de Lauretis' discussion of Lotman (1984: 118-119) and the exclusion of the female from the hero narrative: "she" cannot be transformed and is reliant upon male heroes for her survival.

The confrontational sequence follows the shooting of Klaatu. Helen must leave her friend dying in the street and make her way to the enclosure in which the robot is held. Gort has begun to melt the special material within which the military has sought to encased it, and the giant figure is suffused with a fierce hot glow. It has already used its disintegration ray to kill two soldiers and Helen faces it alone. Dressed in a dark suit against a dark backdrop and night-time lighting effects, Helen's figure appears small. After entering the compound she stops, momentarily draws back, but then continues forward. Her face is tilted upwards, staring at the robot. To emphasise her fragility, the camera offers us a perspective taken from

Gort's shoulder. She is in a very long shot while the robot's shoulder forms a large foreground in the frame, giving the impression of immense size. The robot begins to move towards her, knocking aside chairs assembled for Barnhardt's peaceful scientific gathering. Helen backs up until she is pinned against a solid fence. She falls to the ground and screams (once) as the monster's shadow towers over her. In a full close-up, Gort raises its visor, preparing to kill her. The camera tightens on Helen, beginning with a close shot and ending in a close-up in which her entire face fills the screen. She is now looking almost directly into the camera, at both the spectator and Gort. With a small but steady voice Helen speaks the words that save the world: "Gort—*Klaatu berada nikto.*" Upon hearing these words repeated, Gort (also in close-up) closes its visor. The robot moves towards Helen and (off camera) picks her up, carrying her into the spaceship. Gort then leaves to find Klaatu, sealing Helen inside the eerie craft. The robot returns bearing Klaatu's body, offering parallel images of both woman and extraterrestrial being similarly carried onto the vessel.

Williams' (1984) discussion of *Peeping Tom* is relevant here, particularly to Helen Benson's ability to confront the deadly Gort. In *Peeping Tom* Williams finds a text in which a female character can resists the scopophilic and sadistic pleasures of the male gaze. The reason offered for this empowered position for *Peeping Tom*'s leading female is that she is a non-sexual woman whose look carries no desire (1984: 92-93). Yet it is not the absence of sexuality or desire that allows Helen to overcome the gaze of the deadly robot Gort. Kenneth Von Gunden and Stuart H. Stock note that actor Patricia Neal imbues the character of Helen with "intelligence, sensitivity, and mature sexuality" (1982: 47). Until the arrival of Klaatu/Carpenter, Helen and Tom Stevens are having a serious romance. They are shown kissing and embracing, and arrange to spend a day alone together (which we might read as a code for sexual activity). Instead of invoking sexual naïveté, Von Gunden and Stock see Helen using "daring and strength" to control Gort and save the world. These are heroic

qualities and are not dependent upon the purity of the heroine. It is possible to argue, however, that punishment is meted out by Gort when it scoops Helen up and carries her into the spacecraft. Although she has been able to stop Gort destroying the world, she pays for her presumption and succumbs to the mastering gaze of the robot. The monster has taken control of the female who must submit to her fate until Klaatu, as the figure of the idealised male ego, arrives to free her.

I would like now to offer my own reading of Helen's confrontation with Gort and in so doing suggest that she is every bit as remarkable as the female survivor identified by Williams in *Peeping Tom*. At first Helen can appear to be a foolish heroine. She confronts the monster, only to scream and huddle in fear when it looms over her. Margaret Tarratt offers such a description, describing her as the "cringing heroine" (1986: 268). At this point, however, Helen does not simply signify the choice between binary opposites, between female and male, passivity and action, resistance and transformation. Helen becomes a character who inhabits all these positions and in so doing embodies the reassembled nature of the female hero. She is small, fearful and powerless, determined, forearmed and calm, and sutures these positions together into a new creature who is discernible as a figure of transgression. Moreover, the danger Helen faces goes beyond the dreadful menace of the killer robot, for in this confrontation can be found a correspondence of deadly imagery. The visual link between Gort's metallic visor and the shield of Perseus readied to reflect the monstrosity of Medusa, is a forceful one. Rather than being struck down, or turning her head from the sight of an impending horror, Helen looks into the I/eye of the camera. Instead of turning to stone, made dumb by the knowledge of her own phallic lack or paralysed by her victimisation, Helen speaks. Her voice is not that of the tremulous heroine, but is steady and determined, and her words can neither be ignored or rejected: Gort *must* hear and obey.

The sounds Helen utters do not originate within the Oedipal, within the symbolic order of language. The speech she uses comes from "outside", from a place of alterity. We do not really know what is said. The words save the Earth, but have no Earthly meaning. We presume to know what is signified by the sounds Helen speaks, but there is no real understanding of the competing discourses within which this communication operates. In only three words a considerable amount of information is conveyed to the robot. Although Gort's subsequent actions involve complicated activities, Helen may well be saying something as mundane as "Execute Plan B", as suggested by Bill Warren (1982: 27). Yet again, these sounds may interact in such a way as to suggest a multiplicity of meaning. This unknowable language can be thought of as both rational (inasmuch as the robot responds in a comprehensible manner) as well as irrational (we have no way of interpreting it as a language). It is possible to argue that Klaatu is yet another male giving words to a female, replacing old Law with new. I have, however, endeavoured to suggest that the extraterrestrial himself plots a differently gendered space to that of ordinary human male. As such, Klaatu and Helen both speak from a newly gendered place, from outside the binary oppositions of masculine and feminine.

There is one further transgression performed by the Housewife Hero in *The Day*. Christian religious allegory permeates this film, as Klaatu's assumed name of Carpenter might suggest. Warren dismisses any religious theme as a minor motif, little more than a joke on the part of scriptwriter Edmund H. North (1982: 26-27). Given the depth of textual parallel, however, Warren's position is hard to justify.[10] The movie offers a number of Biblical references: a peace-loving Carpenter who comes from the heavens; the betrayal; his death and resurrection; the message that Man must change or face the consequences; and the awful wrath of an indifferent God (or the Angel of the Lord, depending on how Gort is interpreted). Klaatu is symbolically crucified, dies and is physically reborn. He is the Word made Flesh, bringing to

the sinful Earth the knowledge of those more powerful beings beyond the skies. If indeed Klaatu is recognisable as Christ, then it is intriguing to note that He places the fate of the world into Helen's hands. A *woman* shall lead them; a woman will save the world, intervening between humankind and God, speaking the correct invocation. Does Helen become the disciple of Klaatu/Christ or his sister? When Klaatu leaves, it is Helen he salutes, her radiant face becoming a counter-point to the blank, unreadable faces of the other listeners. Helen is not whisked away to a better place in the sky, but stays on the Earth. Helen is the woman who has spoken in the name of God, and one wonders what her role would be in a re-embodied—a re-engendered—Church.

In *The Day the Earth Stood Still* the Housewife Hero, Helen Benson, not only discovers the words to save the world, she also survives the deadliest cinematic gaze of them all: that of the reflective visor of Gort, the powerful phallic monster. This movie and the character of Helen support de Lauretis' call not to destroy pleasures, but to reconstitute "another (object) of vision and the conditions of [her] visibility" (1984: 68). Helen's power rests in her actions and her words, as well as in the subversion of her female heroism, her perverse invisibility. The film offers a gendered incoherence of meaning as well as a set of fantastic potentialities. It also exemplifies Yvonne Tasker's contention that the ambiguity and richness of popular culture rests with the possibility of a "dissolution of rigid categories within the imaginary space of the cinema" (1993: 146), categories which include the divisions between masculinity and femininity, active male and passive female roles. Helen's journey from ordinary woman (widow, mother and secretary) to Housewife Hero is one such rich and ambiguous story.

The films I have discussed here all represent the inner turmoils of gender relations as well as the themes of infiltration from outside. In particular, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and *I Married a Monster* deal with the inner landscapes of personal relationships: the dark interiors of marriage, sexuality, things that cannot be spoken of. At the same time their characters help alter the trajectory of the male hero narrative. Helen Benson's success lies in her strength of character, her ability to reason, and her readiness to follow the lonely path of the hero. All these characters shown themselves capable of metamorphosis and are able to live in a space alterior to that of binary oppositions. Here, a hero's obstacle is the masculinised world, its overt and covert fears and suspicions. Helen is certainly the marginal and disruptive heroic figure to which Lee Edwards alludes (1984: 6-9), one who acts even when scorned. Elisabeth Hills' description of Ripley as one who moves through the unknown to a transformative moment (1997: n.p.), can equally be applied to Helen, Becky and Marge. All of them take us further along the little-charted course of the female hero discovering a space beyond.

Part 4

Lady Scientists Strike Back

LORENZE: I had to have help in my work.
CLAYTON: But why choose a woman?
LORENZE: She's a scientist.
CLAYTON: A female scientist?
LORENZE: Well?
CLAYTON: All tears and hysterics and can't keep a secret!

Dr. Lorenze and his male assistant
The Man Who Changed His Mind (1936)

Chapter 8 - She Conquered the Oedipal Narrative

In Chapter One I quoted Dennis Saleh's comment on female characters in the science fiction cinema of the 1950s. He maintains that "[o]ne of the few ways women got into the films at all was by being scientists" (1979: 55). His statement implies, among other things, that the Lady Scientist is a way to inject a sexual presence that is subsumed within the male narrative. We should put no emphasis on the character or career of the female astronomer or entomologist or geophysicist, for these are mere fictions to be over-written and contained by scopophilia and fetishisation. If she is merely a token it is easy to imply that only male characters have a "real" or substantive place in any narrative. The Lady Scientist may be considered a minor character when compared to the male hero(es). In contrast to this reading, I will argue that the combination of corporeality and ability enacted by these female characters allows the viewer to find points of familiarity with, as well as disruption to, traditional femininity. This supports Diana Fuss's observation that processes of identification are "mobile, elastic and volatile . . . [and that] the meaning of a particular identification critically exceeds the limits of its social, historical, and political determinations" (1995: 8).

It Came from Beneath the Sea (1955) exemplifies the kinds of disturbances that can result from a gendered re-imagining of 1950s science fiction movies. The film tells the story of a giant Seabeast and three people who seek to stop its trail of destruction: scientists Prof. Lesley Joyce and Dr. John Carter, and U.S. Naval commander Pete Matthews. In unveiling this story, the movie offers fantastic cinematic pleasures while being particularly transgressive in its representation of gender and power. The usual pattern of the phallocentric narrative, which hinges upon the concept of a human who struggles to be a man, is not absent from this film. It

is, however, made more complex by the existence of two male stars, neither of whom can survive without the other. Lesley Joyce is a hero at great remove from the cliché of the passive movie heroine. In the following discussion I will present some of her adventures, illustrating that not only is she successfully heroic, but more innovative and transformative than either the men or the patriarchal establishment. Lesley is authoritative and knowledgeable, with the potential to disrupt phallocentric logic (in which the model for science and reason is a masculine one), and to thwart the narrative destiny of the male hero. Her use of masquerade points to a range of issues important to female cinematic representation, as does her refusal of that ultimate narrative destination of the heroine: monogamous marriage.

There are cinematic devices in *It Came from Beneath the Sea* usually seen by feminist film criticism as inscribing phallocentrism into the fabric of a text. Yet this movie can also disrupt the phallic concerns of the cinema, particularly through the narrator's voice. Not only does an introductory extra-diegetic male voice direct our attention to a disruptive feminine presence (the submarine as an extension of Lesley herself), the same voice returns at several points to remind us of this inference. The narrator informs us that Lesley is one of the best minds in the nation, and points out that it is she who makes the break-through needed to identify the mysterious Seabeast. Following an opening voice-over sequence, an upper-case caption rolls from the bottom to the top of the screen. The narrator voice has prepared us to read the caption in male tones, and informs us that:

> For centuries the mind of man has learned comparatively little of the mysteries in the heavens above—or the seas below. Since the coming of the atomic age, man's knowledge has so increased that any upheaval of nature would not be beyond his belief.

The voice and caption invoke an appropriately perilous atmosphere to accompany the narrative. The lines might imply that knowledge (science) has not taken the place of old-

fashioned belief (faith) in spite of the upheavals of the world. This may be a conservatively religious message: belief and science remain compatible when the atomic bomb is in the hands of good (Christian) men. It is also possible to hear this extra-diegetic narration mixing knowledge and belief, culture and nature, technology and mystery to a complex of co-mingled elements without clear divisions. Just as the narrator's voice might herald a rupture of gendered binary oppositions, it can also herald a process of skewing taken-for-granted relationships.

One of the ways in which this challenge is continued within the film is through Lesley's own dialogue. She is given pivotal and authoritative lines throughout the movie, and it is she who orders the U.S. Navy to "Red Alert" when the Seabeast invades San Francisco Bay. Lesley is heard and obeyed, becoming the opposite of the receptive, silenced heroine discussed by Kaja Silverman (1988: 31). Not only are Lesley's words significant, but she is also supplied with a distinctive manner in which to articulate issues. On three occasions she lists information using her "A-B-C" technique. When confronting Pete Mathews in a dispute, she informs him:

> LESLEY: A—I've been privileged to classify an unknown sea-specimen; B—I have the honour of working with the great John Carter of Harvard, the inventor of analytical biology; and C—my mind just isn't attuned to discuss things on your level, Commander.

Lorraine Code's work on the politics of knowledge (1995) offers a way to frame this kind of speech. Code maintains that "the rhetorical spaces that a society legitimates generate presumptions of credibility and trust that attach differentially according to how speakers and interpreters are positioned within them" (1995: 60). Hence the ability of a person or group to be legitimate "knowers" occurs as a result of sociopolitical interactions, and is not simply the end product of a humanist investment in truth and logic. "Knowers" have power and can turn that power against others. On each occasion when Lesley uses the "A-B-C" rejoinder, she employs a specific kind of utterance to assert her authority and her veracity. Her points "A"

and "B" establish her as a knowing and therefore powerful speaker, while her point "C" uses this power to emphasise consequences. Lesley affirms that her knowledge carries power, and positions herself as smarter than the commander. Pete must then demonstrate his own intelligence before Lesley accepts him, and he does so by saying: "I read your book on marine biology and your plankton theory in tracing surface currents." It is possible to understand this rejoinder in traditional terms: the uppity woman is brought down a peg or two by the ordinary guy who can effectively punish or silence her verbal presumption by revealing his own cleverness. It is Pete, however, who must make the effort to establish credibility. Rather than simply asserting his ascendancy (authenticating the rights of the idealised ego), in this text the male lead must prove that he is worthy of the Lady Scientist.

Several conversations between the film's two male leads also point towards the film's form of verbalised gender transgression. A pertinent exchange occurs shortly after the two scientists (Lesley and John) have been called upon by the U.S. Navy to identify an unknown marine life-form. These experts agree that this process may take considerable time. While John is ready to devote himself to the problem, Lesley informs Mathews that she must return to "my school" as soon as possible. Before walking off-camera (leaving the room) she tells the two men that her presence is not essential in solving their problem. After she leaves, the men talk:

> PETE: Forgive my ignorance, doctor, but what makes her so unique?
> JOHN: Prof. Joyce is head of marine biology at the South Eastern Institute of Oceanography. I would say she's probably the outstanding authority on marine biology with the possible exception of Van der Hume himself.
> PETE: We'll get *him*.
> JOHN: Before you start looking, I may as well tell you: Van der Hume is dead.
> PETE: Oh.

It should be borne in mind that this exchange takes place at a point in the film before we have actually seen Lesley's appearance, for all three characters are wearing heavy radiation suits (a point to which I will return shortly). The conversation opens up several key elements in the

articulation of the Lady Scientist as hero. Lesley does not take up any of the usual narrative position ascribed to the feminine. She is shown to be a figure without peer, a crucial factor in the unfolding story. She can also affect outcomes and control events, with John's comment developing the perception of Lesley as intelligent and authoritative. It is the likable John Carter who acts as an intermediary/interpreter between Pete's traditionalist position and Lesley's transgressive presence. This gate-keeper role is one often attributed to heroines, although John is not at all feminised by the narrative and himself undertakes brave deeds. John's "new breed of woman" speech, which he makes later in the narrative in support of Lesley's position, indicates that he approves of her strength and determination. Carter can be seen as a "new breed of man", one who suggests the promise of alternative gender relations.

The information Carter conveys about the deceased Van der Hume also exposes a key ability of the Lady Scientist: her expertise can replace that of a man and be understood as a provocation to the authority of the male subject. This is not the usual reading that attaches to female characters in science fiction films of the 1950s. Thus Bill Warren refers to the characters in *Them!* (1954) by noting that "[t]the aging-professor-and-his-beautiful-daughter story is added to the woman-scientist-with-a-man's-name gambit, producing nothing new" (1982: 193).[1] Female figures in Western culture are generally described in relation to a male hero or some other significant masculine authority (the father, the husband, the mentor). The tendency to classify the Lady Scientist as daughter, helper or love-interest may be part of a process of "imputed characteristics" described by Sabina Lovibond (1989: 23). Lovibond discusses the way in which certain representations such as the good mother, the dumb blonde, or the plain housewife, emerge as cultural myths. These have the effect of imposing a range of implied attributes upon a person or character. Code uses this concept to assert that ready-made descriptions serve to diffuse the impact of an unusual or challenging woman, acting "to tame their newness, their potentially unsettling effects, their 'danger'" (1995: 75-76). Code

argues that such cultural mythologies help to hide or subdue female social disruption. Gayle Rubin (1975) refers to similar practices, such as the way in which anthropologists have traditionally identified women's status through their relationships with males. This may be one more reason why the female hero, a character challenging patriarchal prerogatives, is difficult to identify and readily disavowed.

These discursive influences shape our ability to understand the challenge of the Lady Scientist. Rather than being defined through her relations with a more powerful male, Lesley Joyce usurps male seniority and destabilises the prerogatives of masculine inheritance. Lady Scientist characters are shown in an array of relationships to older male scientists, including daughters, employees, colleagues, and pupils. The pairings of Pat and Harold Medford, Lee Hunter and Prof. Elson, and Steve Clayton and Prof. Deemer, all reveal women who will replace or outlive their male mentors. It may be that such females should be read as camouflaged "sons", lesser characters who learn masculinised scientific tradition at the feet of a Great Man and carry on in his name. It is equally feasible to see Lady Scientists creating the fantasy of the Great Woman, allowing other potentialities of gender to be imagined. Rather than passing on patriarchal privilege to younger men, such characters can transgress traditional relationships with masculine authority, knowledge, experimentation and creativity. They colonise a new ground that can be claimed for the female hero.

Another point, contingent on the Lady Scientist replacing male authority, can be gleaned from the exchange between John and Pete when it is revealed that Lesley is disinclined to help the military. Judy Wajcman writes that "[i]f there is one institution in society that underwrites hegemonic masculinity, it is the military" (1991: 146). By "drafting" Lesley in order to ensure her expertise, we might imply that Lesley is under the masculine control of the Navy. Yet her dialogue expresses the difference between herself (as a woman and a scientist) and Pete

Mathews (the male representative of the Military). At one point she says: "I'm a scientist, Commander. I don't have to be reminded that your objectives are not necessarily my own." While John Carter enthusiastically puts aside other duties in order to work with the Navy, Lesley is anxious to return to her own schedule. She distances herself from the military and its masculine rules. It is this reluctance, as well as her ability to distinguish between herself and male authority, which makes Lesley's character a threat to gendered hierarchies of knowledge. Moreover, it is her self-conscious acknowledgment of this difference that points to Lesley's status as a female hero, as a character who can transgress the classic position of the heroine in narrative.

There are several incidents in *It Came from Beneath the Sea* that inscribe Lesley's as a marginal and difficult form of heroism. This is clearly shown in her problematic relationship with masculine authority and officialdom. After Lesley identifies the mysterious specimen upon which they have been working as a giant cephalopod, high-ranking male officials are summoned for a briefing. Lesley and John initially take turns to describe their findings. Once the growing skepticism of the newcomers is made clear, however, the task of communicating with them settles upon Lesley's shoulders. She blames the hydrogen bomb for the appearance of the creature, explaining that it may have received a dose of radioactivity from tests in the Marshall Islands. She also links the Seabeast and certain unexplained happenings in the Pacific Ocean.[2] One of the officials chides her, saying that the bomb is erroneously blamed for all manner of unrelated phenomena. Angered by their continued skepticism, Lesley moves away from the group of men. She is asked for an alternative hypothesis, but has no other explanation to offer.

If one of the main tasks of the male hero is to re-confirm patriarchal legitimacy, then in this scene we are aware of John Carter's willing alliance with that privilege. John shakes hands

with the skeptical dignitaries as they leave, commenting that they have all been working too hard. Using the excuse of tiredness is a familiar way to contain and dismiss female anger, and John's excuse draws on this connotation. When things turn against them, neither John nor Pete support Lesley, and thus it is *her* scientific ability that is questioned by officialdom. Lesley is not a character harmoniously accommodated within the *status quo*, and it is this marginality that allows the female hero to be discerned. Like the characters of Ripley, Clarice Starling (*The Silence of the Lambs*, 1991) and Megan Turner (*Blue Steel*, 1990), Lesley offers us the precarious balancing act that the female hero must perform. She answers the demands of patriarchy while retaining a distance from its institutions. This incident can also be understood in terms of Lesley's position as a female knower within gendered binaries. Discussing the validity of knowledge in relation to subjective and objective "knowing", Code comments that within the logic of phallocentrism a "knower must either value objectivity absolutely or succumb to the vagaries of subjectivity run wild: there is no middle ground" (1991: 30). In the sequence described above the male officials adopt an absolute position. Lesley's information is too difficult for them to believe, and in consequence they decide that she has lost control of objectivity. It is easier to dismiss her professional assessment than to accept the knowledge offered by the Lady Scientist.

Despite the transgressive possibilities offered by Lesley's character, she can still be read in conservatively gendered terms. Dennis Saleh, for example, offers the following interpretation:

> She is an unusually present sex interest in the movie, veering between the two men at first, and then falling for the Navy commander. She even vamps a sailor mercilessly, bared shoulder, cigarette and all, for information about a reported sighting of the octopus (1979: 139).

Saleh's is a familiar reading: the female character is a sexy presence who disturbs the "real" or primary narrative concerned with monsters and heroic masculinity. This contextualises Lesley

purely as an "unusually present" heroine, the love-interest who is also a mercilessly vamping *femme fatale*. In specific scenes the Lady Scientist does become the double-object, gazed at by the audience and by male characters on the screen, and can be seen to fulfill the demands of the narcissistic and scopophilic camera. Another position is also possible: instead of detracting from Lesley's importance in the narrative, her physical attractiveness can be read as an important part of the Lady Scientist's dangerous relationship with phallocentrism.

There are several scenes in *It Came from Beneath the Sea* that allow us to see both Lesley's specularisation and her visual ambiguity. One pivotal sequence occurs in a laboratory complex where the scientists are working on the yet-to-be-identified specimen. As the first scene begins we find the three main characters attired in heavy radiation suits. These are thick, overly-large garments with angled glass visors. Most of the face beneath is obscured (although we are given enough of a glimpse to recognise actor Faith Domergue is one of the three figures). This veiling of the Lady Scientist may simply be a "teaser", a way to heighten the scopophilic pleasure of the audience until her body is finally revealed. Nevertheless, the camera does not immediately identify Lesley, Pete or John, and we learn little of their physical appearance apart from their voices and relative heights. The camera does not make scopophilic contact with Lesley as a female body, nor is there any active/passive division of labour between the three figures. We see and hear them discussing the nature of the specimen on an equal basis, shrouded within their suits. Lesley exists and the men have the "Van der Hume is dead" exchange. Before we "see" Lesley, therefore, she has been established as a unusual presence. Although certainly female, she is not embodied by a heterosexist gaze and is spoken about as an individual of authority known for the caliber of her work and her intellect.

It is not until the next scene that Pete Mathews and the spectator make full visual contact with Lesley, but this is not simply a process of exercising the male gaze. Pete follows Lesley out of the laboratory and into another nearby lab, removing only his head covering as he goes. We infer that Lesley is in an adjoining room (off-camera) changing out of her radiation suit. She enters doing up the buttons on her blouse, and thus draws our attention to her body. After the cumbersome radiation suit Lesley looks feminine and slight in this more usual attire. Pete, however, does not immediately look up when she enters the room, and it is she who gazes upon him. Within the film's logic this is also the first time that the two have come face-to-face. Keeping Pete in her view, Lesley crosses to him and towards the camera. It is only at this point that he notices her appearance. His interest in the beautiful Lady Scientist is clear: he stands upright (he has previously been slouching) and looks directly at her. We see Lesley's face in a close-up. We then are presented with three additional close-ups: Lesley looking at Pete; a corresponding shot of Pete returning the look; and then one of Lesley once more gazing at him. The two characters then move into a two-shot and dialogue is exchanged.

The scene can be explained in terms of Lesley becoming spectacle, momentarily halting the forward flow of the narrative so that the Commander and the viewer can gaze upon the heroine. In terms used by Laura Mulvey, Lesley's "appearance [is] coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that [she] can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (1990: 29, original italics). This signifies Pete's (and the male audience's) desire for her as sexual object and spectacle, and it can be said that the scene demonstrates Lesley as icon, to be looked at, pursued and controlled. Pete's immediate reaction to her is one of sexual alertness and an example of the male hero's regulating influence in the film's phantasy. Yet rather than simply fixing the feminine as an object these scenes offer considerable ambiguity. For example, the series of close-ups can be seen as reminiscent of the editing technique often employed by television soap opera, where a woman-man-woman shot is used to concentrate upon the

female presence as the focus of viewer identification. While Pete's expression during this whole exchange may be understood as lustful surprise, Lesley's is far more complex and equivocal, mingling defiance, annoyance and sexual interest. Hers is not the passive or impotent countenance of the mere object of desire. Despite having her own plans, the Commander tells her she has been "drafted" by the Navy and therefore must stay to work on the mysterious specimen. Having what seems to be the masterful last word, Pete moves out of shot. Yet, as he does so, the camera remains on Lesley who glances up and down at his retreating figure. Although it seems that Pete and his male authority have constrained her, Lesley's ability to look allows her to reinstate her power. The Lady Scientist's vision is the final (influential) one in their exchange, allowing her to defy the containment of her body.

In a subsequent scene Lesley again appears to be the object of Pete's (and the camera's) desirous look, yet once more remarkably resists sexist containment. During the course of the scientists' work to identify the mysterious specimen Pete picks an opportunity to "romance" Lesley. He lustfully backs her into a corner between two benches and quizzes her about her relationship with John Carter and with men in general. Pete picks up a long thin measuring jar and asks if she is "fond" of John. Lesley responds not in emotive terms, but mentions Carter's brilliance and creativity. In reply Pete suggests a relationship between himself and Lesley. She takes the phallic-like jar from him and puts it back on the bench, ducking past Pete and returning to work alongside John. Once alone with Carter, Lesley eyes him speculatively up and down, having been (seemingly) awoken to his sexual potential by the Commander's questioning. Rather than being placed into the passive position of the heroine, pursued and courted by the ardent Pete, Lesley can influence not only scientific results but also emotional ones. She manipulates the substitute phallus effectively and her gaze once again offers the possibility of a controlling female look. Lesley is not simply an over-educated, over-civilised woman, playing against Pete's forceful maleness, but is able to

embody a range of practices and skills unavailable to the naval commander. The scientist's skills are also beyond those of the military, a point expressed by the extradiegetic voice early in the film.[3] Although she may be "drafted", the Lady Scientist avoids the control of her body that such involuntary military service might imply.

One of the fascinating aspects of the Lady Scientist is that she does not disavow sexuality, and Lesley's sensual nature is important to the narrative. By being portrayed as a desirable and desirous woman, Lesley unveils one of the chief paradoxes of the female hero: that of the woman who "looks" with impunity. The issue of the sexually active woman who can "look" without punishment is one I discuss in Chapter Two with reference to Linda Williams' work on horror cinema (1984). Williams identifies the non-desirous (non-threatening) heroine as the only female survivor of the phallic imperatives of traditional film. Once she is conceptualised as a female hero, however, Lesley clearly fractures this inevitability. A significant scene in terms of Lesley's sexual identity takes place at a beach on the Oregon coast, where the Seabeast has come ashore and has killed several people in search of food. The scene opens on Lesley and Pete in a very long shot. They are wearing swimsuits and the camera tracks in to show Pete helping Lesley down from rocky outcrop. Cutting to a medium close two-shot, we see Pete embracing Lesley against his body as he slowly lowers her to the ground. This embrace is presented quite erotically, with Lesley languid against his body. Pete passionately kisses her neck, his face hidden from us by her body. Due to the manner in which their arms are draped, both actors momentarily appear to be naked. In a more contemporary film we might expect a sex scene at this juncture and it is not difficult to read the beach embrace as a coded reference to such activity. By "eating" her neck we see that Pete Mathews hungers for Lesley just as Seabeast hungers for its allusive food, and Lesley gives the appearance of being aroused by these attentions.

Having thus provided Lesley with an explicitly sexual identity, the narrative than does something quite remarkable: it re-emphasises her role as a scientist and as a participant in the adventure. It also compromises the nature of the heroic male protagonist with the re-emergence of the Seabeast. This occurs when the pair are joined on the beach by John Carter and a local sheriff. Having positioned Lesley as a receptive sexual object, Pete now seeks to change the nature of their relationship, turning it into a more familiar patriarchal form based on his assumed masculine privilege. In order to do so he appeals for John's help to remove Lesley from the search. John asks what Lesley thinks about such a proposition, to which Mathews responds "What's the difference what she says?" Carter refuses to see Lesley in such simplistic terms and rebuffs Mathews using the "new breed of woman" speech:

> JOHN: There's a whole new breed who feel they're just as smart, just as courageous as men, and they are. They don't like to be over-protected, they don't like to have initiative taken away from them.
> LESLEY: A—you want me to miss the opportunity to see this specimen—one that may never come again; B—you'd be making up my mind for me; and C—I not only don't like being pushed around but you underestimate my ability to help in a crisis.
> JOHN: My sympathies are entirely on her side.
> PETE: It didn't take me very long to lose that argument, did it?

Lesley does not discontinue her participation in their adventure, concede her independence, or step down from her status as a "knower" within the narrative. She has once more alluded Pete's attempt at patriarchal containment and he must admit defeat, overpowered and outmaneuvered by the Lady Scientist and her companion.

Yet another indignity awaits the would-be hero, rounding out this intriguing sequence. While the three principal characters are talking, the sheriff wanders off alone. The Seabeast looms up from the waves and we hear the man (off camera) shriek as he is attacked and killed. Lesley sees the octopus and utters a scream. The three leap into the sheriff's jeep. Pete drives off at high speed, crashing through a barricade in his haste. In Chapter One I mention John Brosnan's view of this particular encounter: he sees Lesley's whole persona being undermined

by her "very old-fashioned, movie-heroine scream of terror" (1991: 89). This view implies that Lesley's sighting of the creature and her scream form part of the punishment meted out to this female character who deviates from the heroine's role. It might also serve to illustrate Silverman's analysis of the movie scream (1988: 75). Silverman finds that patriarchal discourse predisposes the listener to hear such vocalisations as the interior, chaotic cry of the heroine, audible above all other utterances. The scream may therefore exist as a sign of impotence and denote Lesley's return to type, away from independence and back to the heroine. To adopt such a position, however, it would be necessary to overlook all her previous positioning within the text, as well as how the would-be male hero responds to the threat of the Seabeast. Pete Mathews has just offered Lesley safety and protection, a promise he clearly cannot keep. It is the illusion of masculine succor that can also be shattered here, not simply the transgressive potential of the female hero. All Pete can accomplish in the face of the monster is to drive a vehicle at break-neck speed in order to escape. One scream does not necessarily dislodge Lesley from her heroic position, for she has repeatedly been situated as one who knows, looks and speaks as an independent agent. Her authority is not compromised by having to flee in the face of danger. On the other hand, their encounter with the Seabeast can undermine Pete's masculinity and his heroic identity, showing that faith in both these qualities can be illusive and misplaced.

Lesley is unable to second-guess the irrational behavior of Pete Mathews or the Seabeast, and therein we can find yet another way *It Came from Beneath the Sea* imperils masculinist discourse. In a traditional film we often find a puzzled male hero trying to fathom the scatter-brained, childish or devious motivations of a woman.[4] In this movie, however, we have a female hero puzzling over the illogical behavior of her adversaries. Two incidents illustrate Lesley's confusion. The first occurs when Pete, John and Lesley visit a nightclub. The two scientists are buoyant, having announced their intention to leave for Egypt together on a

working holiday. After some preliminary banter Lesley dances with Pete and, when alone on a secluded balcony, they kiss. Despite the heterosexual promise of Pete's embrace, Lesley's plans for the future remain unchanged and she still intends to holiday with John. On hearing this news Pete mutters about "the nature of woman" and leaves abruptly. Contrary to Silverman's observation that a heroine readily accepts self-disparagement or self-recrimination (1988: 31), Lesley is confused but does *not* accept responsibility for Pete's outburst. Rather than automatically privileging a male perspective, Pete's dialogue and exit in high dudgeon leaves us with a bemused Lady Scientist recounting the event to John. The second incident to surprise Lesley occurs when the rampaging Seabeast enters San Francisco Bay, attracted to a live electrical grid established on the Golden Gate Bridge. Rather than being repelled by electricity (as it should be) the beast is drawn towards it. Emerging from the water in a dramatic scene, it wraps itself around a bridge stanchion and begins to attack the structure.[5] Puzzled, Lesley exclaims: "Instead of being driven off, it attacked!" Despite using her valid knowledge, she cannot predict or understand the behavior of either beast or Pete Mathews (the mysteriously unpredictable male).

Lesley's involvement with these incidents can be explained in traditional terms (illustrating failure at both womanhood and science) or can suggest the subjectivity of the female hero. Although Lesley responds to Pete's advances, she lacks the heroine's good sense to secure her man and is punished for deviating from domestic femininity. By failing to predict the behavior of the Seabeast, she might also be a poor scientist whose ineffectiveness means that men must put their lives at risk. It would be possible to suggest that Lesley's lack—of both knowledge and appropriate femininity—are indeed her problems. Alternatively, Lesley can be read as representing a central position of the narrative. Neither the Seabeast nor Pete are completely unintelligible to her, for in this text the Lady Scientist takes the position of the logical knower. The confrontation with Pete and the problem with the Seabeast are ultimately

revealed as setbacks to be considered and overcome. Frightening beast and old fashioned masculinity confront the future, the "new breed of woman" who is circumscribed by neither mystery or patriarchy.

Another important way to consider Lesley's depiction in this film is through the process of mimicry, serving to illustrate that the line between subversion and subjugation is an ambiguous one. Discussing the work of Frantz Fanon, Diane Fuss (1995) analyses the nature of mimesis and masquerade. Fuss explains Fanon's interpretation of identification as "an imperial process, a form of violent appropriation in which the Other is deposed and assimilated into the lordly domain of Self" (1995: 145). Subjectivity for Fanon becomes the ground of the coloniser. It is through the process of mimicry that the identity of the oppressed is lost "somewhere between difference and similitude, at the vanishing point of subjectivity" (1995: 146). The colonised are left with only the images and behaviors offered to them by their colonisers. Thus subdued people become the opposite to their conquerors by a process of developing Otherness and one's own identity is lost beneath an imposed set of qualities. Fuss observes that Fanon's understanding of mimicry and masquerade is at odds with contemporary feminist interpretations of these terms. She explains:

> [M]imesis is most frequently understood in opposition to the category of masquerade: "mimicry" (the deliberate and playful performance of a role) is offered as a counter and a corrective to "masquerade" (the unconscious assumption of a role). The critical difference between masquerade and mimicry—between the nonironic imitation of a role and a parodic hyperbolization of that role—depends on the degree and readability of its excess. In this reading, mimicry resists and subverts dominant systems of representation by intentionally ironizing them. Postcolonial discourse theory understands mimicry . . . not as a tactic of dissent but as a condition of domination (1995: 146).

Using the insights of feminism to inform her reading of Fanon, Fuss suggests that these opposing perspectives on mimicry (one as subversion, one as capitulation) in practice become very difficult to differentiate. She observes that the "mimicry of subjugation can provide unexpected opportunities for resistance and disruption, the mimicry of subversion can find

itself reinforcing conventional power relations rather than eroding them" (1995: 147). Fuss proposes that in trying to discern how the mimetic process is being deployed in a given set of circumstances, we must consider its context (who is doing what), as well as determining which identifications are being sought and which refused.[6]

These elastic processes of gender mimicry can be explored in what may be called the "vamping" scene. This takes place in a hospital were the authorities are trying to ascertain the veracity of a Seabeast sighting reported, but then recanted, by a group of rescued sailors. Saleh writes of Lesley's ability to "steam the story" from one of the sailors by showing him her uncovered shoulder (1979: 139, 141). While Saleh sees the Lady Scientist as becoming self-consciously provocative (he does call this a "parody vamp"), the kind of act to which he alludes is one perpetrated *upon* the heroine and, by inference, Lesley's performance should not be seen as a disruptive one. Her sleeveless dress has a wide neckline (a popular style of the 1950s) and the top of her shoulder is somewhat visible due to the cut of the garment. Yet it is Lesley's *act* that seems to intensify the impression of bared flesh and this scene offers an example of the slippery boundaries between mimicry and masquerade.

The Lady Scientist's actions can be read as parodic mimesis, an ironic exercising of femininity as performance. At the point at which the male authorities admit that they cannot determine the truth of the sailor's sighting, Lesley stands up, removes her cardigan and tells them: "I think it's my turn now." By removing this item of clothing—the equivalent of "rolling up one's sleeves"—the Lady Scientist is able to reveal another layer of her professional self, an act of which the male authorities are incapable. Lesley manipulates the environment of an office into which the sailor is shown, speaks first, and precipitates all the action in their encounter. During this interaction Lesley assumes a sexy guise made recognisable through a set of mannerisms. She changes her vocabulary, speaking voice, and

bearing, making herself more like the sailor himself (who is portrayed as an ordinary guy baffled by such things as doctors and scientists). Her voice becomes lighter in tone and more colloquial in expression. Using terms such as "Gotta match?" and "That's kinda personal", Lesley tells the sailor that she too has seen an unspecified "something" but that no one believes her. Finally able to feel at ease, the sailor truthfully describes his encounter with the Seabeast.

This gender parody draws its strength from the fact that it clearly *is* an act, very different from the "real" Lesley who is determined, articulate and self-confident. Thus it reveals, as Fuss terms it, "the rents and divisions [in the] narratives of domination" (1995: 147) by illustrating the difference between the character she is and the one she chooses to portray. Rather than being Saleh's "unusually present" heroine (1979: 139), Lesley Joyce is a necessarily present hero who, by acting-out feminine wiles, refigures them. There is room for slippage here, for Lesley's assumed femininity *is* clearly male-directed. She hitches her skirt and we see the man glance surreptitiously at her, although we see very little of the proffered legs (which remain mostly covered beneath a full skirt). Instead of offering the sight of Lesley from the sailor's perspective, the neutral camera angles focus on her mimetic act. In this Lesley Joyce is an interesting counterpoint to the action heroines detailed by Yvonne Tasker (1993) and Jeffrey A. Brown (1996). Characters such as Sarah Connor and Ripley allow us to witness a blurring of the boundaries between masculine and feminine performance, in which a biologically female body is able to carry out behavior gendered as male. They carry guns, fight, and give orders. Lesley, on the other hand, makes it clear that a range of feminine behaviors are also available to the female hero, and are every bit as performative.

Lesley's capacity to cross-dress recalls the attire of cop Megan Turner in *Blue Steel*. In both texts we find female heroes performing visual disruption to phallic phantasies. Elizabeth

Cowie views Megan's donning of a masculine police uniform in the opening sequence of *Blue Steel* as illustrating the character's attempt to become an impossible woman/phallus, and comments that after Megan's graduation "we watch her confident swagger as she walks home" (1997: 313). It is worth noting, as Tasker does, that the admiring looks her swaggering attracts are those of *female* on-lookers (1993: 159). While Megan is later revealed to be straight, there is an important blurring of sexual and gender boundaries in these images. Megan does not simply seek an impossible masculine identity, but engages with gender play in a parodic display. Another moment of disruption occurs when newly sworn-in officers (Megan among them) pose with friends and family for photographs. All the civilian women are dressed in extremely feminine styles, with lacy frocks and gloves. Megan is the only uniformed female officer we see. It seems too simple to view Megan's uniform as a purely masculinised image. We are made aware the Megan's is a self-conscious performance, that she enjoys dressing up with a lacy bra under her police uniform. Megan looks into the camera (into a mirror while she is dressing) and smiles at us. Lesley Joyce's mimetic vamp is more conventional in nature than is Megan's but, as I have sought to argue, it also plots a position of opposition and alterity rather than compliance.

It is through gender mimicry that strategies of patriarchy can become contestable and perverse. A similar act is echoed by Dr. Mary Sefton in *The Puppet Masters* (1995). In a similar mimesis, exobiologist Sefton draws attention to her cleavage in an effort to distinguish aliens from humans (the aliens being those who do not respond to her provocation). Rather than representing the politics of oppression, Mary manipulates one of the strategies of patriarchy to her best advantage. The heterosexist subtext of this ploy notwithstanding, it is a fascinating reenactment of Lesley's 1955 "vamp". Brown (1996) exemplifies another kind of gender disruption in his discussion of the action film *Point of No Return* (1993) and its female protagonist Maggie.[7] He contends that the "artificiality of both masculine and feminine roles

is exposed through Maggie's obvious play with gender convention. . . [by using a] duel drag" (1996: 67). Maggie is a masculinised woman who learns femininity, and can thereafter switch between behaviours in a calculated way designed to serve her own ends. It is when she is performing at her most feminine that the acts she undertakes are coded as most masculine (using a large pistol while wearing a sexy cocktail frock). Brown sees such confusion of gender identities as disrupting rather than re-asserting heterosexual logic (1996: 54). Nor is the use of ironic mimesis to highlight sexism restricted to female characters. This is illustrated in a scene from *The Night the World Exploded* (1957). In an effort to investigate strange seismic occurrences, scientists Dave Conway and Hutch Hutchinson must climb down a rope ladder into the deepest level of the Carlsbad Caverns. Half way through her claustrophobic descent, Hutch freezes. Trying to persuade her to save herself, Dave adopts an act of his own.

> DAVE: Wouldn't you know a woman would pull a stunt like this. You're all scientist until there's the slightest bit of danger and then you fold up. Want your mum and daddy? Well, if you want to be pulled up, okay, but just remember this - you're no help to us up there, you can take the first train home. . . .

When Dave threatens to replace her with a man, Hutch shouts: "Don't you dare! I'm coming down!" Safely on the ground, she remonstrates with him. Dave replies "It brought you down didn't it. . . . *You're* too valuable to lose." Dave's sexist parody provokes her to overcome her fear. We understand that Dave has spoken ironically, permitting Hutch to fight against the forces stereotyping her as inadequate because she is a woman. By performing a mimicry of masculinity Dave helps her surmount clichéd notions of femininity.[8]

If Lesley's form of gender mimicry delineates her as a transformative female presence, her relationships with John Carter and Pete Mathews are also intriguingly configured. While Paul Jensen praises the unconventional portrayal of Lesley in the film, he sees the two male leads as underdeveloped, with John becoming merely "a boring appendage" (1996: 106). Yet we

might see these two males as opposing poles of masculine behavior, functioning best when acting in concert. When John saves the Golden Gate Bridge, it is Pete who rescues him. Later it is the "new breed of man", John Carter, who must save Pete and carry the day after the commander has botched his final attempt to kill the Seabeast. The creation of a "double man", the combination of the traditionalist and the enlightened male, seems to echo the "double female" persona implied in the very name of the heroic Lesley Joyce. Thus when Saleh comments that we are offered the sight of Lesley "veering between the two men at first, and then falling for the Navy commander" (1979: 139), he underrates the interdependence of the three leading characters. Saleh views John as the loser in this rivalry, but this ascendancy is never clearly established. While Pete and Lesley are depicted embracing and kissing, it is Mathews who expresses his envy by telling John "You're a lucky man." When the two men return from saving the Golden Gate Bridge, Lesley first embraces John and then turns to hug Pete. Their relationships, wise-cracks and ambiguous glances are left to the audience to interpret. Except for the passionate beach scene between Lesley and Pete, which usually implies the development of an exclusive relationship, the three characters tend to act in a mutually supportive manner. They appear to be setting the ground rules for a *ménage à trois*, rather than the basis for a monogamous heterosexual pairing.[9]

To round off the subversive pleasures of *It Came from Beneath the Sea*, this film can also be seen to repudiate the outcome of the Oedipal narrative, perpetuate uncertainty and articulate a new kind of order outside that of the patriarchal. These possibilities are propose in both the final engagement with the Seabeast, and the closing scene of the film that follows the battle, both sequences utilising the disruptive possibilities of the Lady Scientist and her ambiguously successful male companions. For this final confrontation with the Seabeast Lesley builds an entirely new form of jet-propelled torpedo. She even quips to waiting reporters that her invention is so unusual that the Navy does not know how to respond to it (which is in keeping

with the relationship between the Lady Scientist and the military throughout the film). Armed with this transformed weaponry, an attack on the Seabeast is mounted in San Francisco Bay. The film's final action sequence sees Lesley take charge of the Navy's operational headquarters, while Pete and John board the submarine in order to track the monster. This climax can be read with reference to de Lauretis' discussion on the sexed nature of narrative (1984: 118-121). Two men enter an enclosed space (the submarine) and use it to cross a territory (the ocean) leading to danger and uncertainty. There they face their obstacle (the Seabeast). They must join forces in the face of danger in pursuit of their dual Oedipal goal. They emerge at the end of the ordeal (are rescued from the ocean), knowing that they have freed San Francisco and achieved their symbolic manhood. The death of the Beast brings narrative closure and certainty. Or does it?

A more contemporary film might place Lesley on the submarine pursuing the Seabeast herself, and it is all too easy to read her absence from this ultimate encounter as a sign of her marginalisation. While Lesley does remain physically in the operations room (a civilian woman giving orders to the Navy), she is represented during the battle, but not necessarily as the female obstacle. Throughout the narrative Lesley is linked to science, intellect and innovation. Not only does the Lady Scientist build the torpedo, the only effective weapon the Navy has against the creature, she can also be embodied as that "miracle of speed and power" the opening narrator has informed us of: as the atomic submarine itself. It is also at this point that a link crystallises between Pete Mathews and the creature via the call-sign the commander gives. Once underway, Pete radios Lesley saying "This is the Seabeast." Such a complex of associations suggests that the monster Pete pursues is himself, while it is the Lady Scientist who kills the beast.[10] If, as Lee Edwards believes, the hero's tale is a patriarchal strategy of containment (1984: 9), then one of the transgressive elements in this film is indeed this failure of the male hero. If the ultimate quest of the individualistic male hero is to kill his personal

dragon, then Pete Mathews *is* a failure. He cannot successfully slay the beast and causes the sub to be captured by the creature. Having been stunned in the course of the fight, Pete floats unconscious underwater until John steps in, dispatching the monster and rescuing his friend. Were the film to end on this note, however, we may still be inclined to return to traditional reading practices and find that masculinity, although challenged by its beasts, does finally win the day.

It is the final scene of the film, however, that jeopardises this traditional outcome. Although Brosnan (1991: 89) believes the scene shows Lesley turning down Pete's marriage proposal, the film remains equivocal in portraying the relationship of the three main characters. Lesley, John and Pete sit at a table in a restaurant. They are framed in a medium close three-shot, with Lesley located in the middle. Her chair is not placed centrally and is slightly closer to John than to Pete. After telling the scientists that he has been ordered to sea for some months, the commander asks:

> PETE: Will I be seeing you, Lesley?
> LESLEY: You mean, when I get back from Cairo?
> PETE: I mean, women can change, move away, get married, have families.
> LESLEY: There's that possibility, but . . . A—there isn't time for that to happen to me; B—I can be reached at the School; and C—how would you like to collaborate with me on a book: how to catch a Seabeast?

Lesley takes Pete's chin in her hand and kisses him. She then glances affectionately at John, with whom she is about to spend her holiday. An uncomfortable Mathews looks at Carter and says: "Say, doctor—you know you were right about this new breed of woman." Nothing is finalised in terms of their relationships. Sitting between the two men, Lesley meets both their gazes in turn, smiling.

It is informative to consider this ending from using Mulvey's analysis of the role of marriage, the male hero, and textual closure (1990: 28-29). Basing her comments on movie westerns,

Mulvey speculates that the male hero can gain status by accepting or refusing marriage. Her point is well made, for the rewards involved can be construed as purely masculine. The male hero is honoured whatever the result, and the Oedipal outcome is satisfied whether he settles down with a good woman or rides into the sunset on his horse. Female eroticism, on the other hand, can be suppressed either within marriage or by being denied married sexuality. Thus a heroine may exist to define the marriageable condition of the male hero, who in turn can either choose marriage or reject social responsibility. If a western hero refuses the heroine, his act "personifies a nostalgic celebration of phallic, narcissistic omnipotence" (1990: 28). Mulvey's argument on the purpose of marriage does not consider the possibility that the hero's proposal can be rejected or avoided by the heroine (although, it must be said, such a refusal is a rare occurrence).

Lesley eludes any attempt to make her a "real" woman with marriage and children as her only priorities. The Lady Scientist reiterates that she is not changeable or inconsistent, and her life will not be disrupted simply because she is sexually interested in both Pete and John. Neither is she the vehicle through which Pete achieves social integration, and she is certainly not responsible for *his* Oedipal resolution. If we accept the link between Pete and Seabeast, we may also propose that Lesley's weapon harpoons more than simply the creature. At the film's end Pete no longer tries to dictate to Lesley, but cautiously inquires about her intentions. Rather than offering us a woman who has simply ensnared her man, Lesely has invented the means to penetrate him. By accepting Pete's passion and refusing traditional values Lesley does not embrace passive sexuality. In psychoanalytical terms Lesley could be thought of as regressive, as not feminine enough, and hence she refuses a veiled wedding proposal. She may not be a "real" woman after all. My contention is, however, that Lesley disrupts conventional gender relations and the oppositional binaries underpinning masculinity and femininity in narrative. Whereas, in *Duel in the Sun* (1946), Mulvey sees that "Pearl is unable

to settle or find a "femininity" in which she and the male world can meet" (1990: 32), Lesley Joyce—scientist, hero and lover—has no difficulty at all. Lesley's pleasures and sexuality offer a fantasy built upon strength not sadness, upon disruption not defeat. This Lady Scientist embodies that which is mobile and mutable, a gendered Self permanently incoherent to the Oedipal narrative. It is her triumph over phallocentric logic of categories that conquers the Seabeast.

In the next chapter, "White Woman in a Black Lagoon", I discuss another Lady Scientist, Kay Lawrence. She is the disruptive female presence in *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), through which the subtexts of the film are opened for exploration. Kay's gendered presence evokes homoerotic and racial discourses, elements made all the more significant in this text because of its alliance of power and sexuality. Kay's intrusion into a male domain is emphasised throughout the film, and her narrative relationship with the Creature itself reveals the confrontation of gender and colonialism.

Chapter 9 - White Woman in a Black Lagoon

There is one figure to whom I always return when imagining the Lady Scientist: Kay Lawrence, the female lead in *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954). Kay's disruptive abilities may not be immediately apparent. She does not make a stand against masculine authority, or uncover scientific marvels, or save humanity. Indeed, there is a sense in which Kay seems a poor example of a female hero. She is largely under the protection of men, undertakes only a few independent acts and, to top it off, is one of those female characters who *is* actually carried away by a monster. Kay is most often remembered for her swim in the Black Lagoon. Represented as a sexy, bathing-suit-clad figure, the carrier of heterosexual desire and monstrous lust, she can become that female injected into the narrative to represent the scopophilic and fetishistic requirements of phallocentrism. She seems singularly ill-fitted for hero status, with little power to intervene in or to influence a male-centred story. How is it, then, that this character retains her fascination? Barbara Creed notes that the woman's body in science fiction/horror films can often be "a metaphor for the uncertainty of the future" (1990: 215), one in which both creativity and destruction are disturbingly intermingled. Creed also observes that the alien with designs on the human female can help reveal a range of societal insecurities. Reading Kay in *Creature* allows us to take both these ideas a step further, and in plotting her adventures I draw upon a number of critical sources, primarily the work of Harry Benshoff (1997), Mark Jancovich (1996), and James Snead (1994).

Kay's presence and relationship to her male companions and to the Creature itself exposes the uncertainties of masculinity and of phallocentric claims on posterity. In the discussion to follow I will suggest that Kay also offers a way to endanger hierarchical notions of difference, as well as exposing and disarranging the masculinist ownership of knowledge and power.

Furthermore, when her sexed identity is considered in relation to the Creature's, we have an opportunity to unwrap the oppositions of man/woman, white/black, and hetero/homoeroticism. The film does not simply side with the former of these binary concepts. That is, while the narrative tends to adopt the perspective of the scientists (the white colonialists) and expresses a liberal point-of-view, it remains a contradictory text in which the hegemony of this perspective is never fully assured. To consider the interactions of gender, sexuality and race in *Creature*, the following discussion focuses on three issues: (i) the infringements Kay Lawrence brings to the patriarchal narrative; (ii) the manner in which the homosocial tussle between Mark Williams and David Reed immerses the film within a tensely homoerotic atmosphere; and (iii) the way race and imperialism are negotiated through the "black" body of the male Creature.[1] These are not, however, discrete themes. *Creature* remains a complex film which is, as Jancovich suggests, "unremittingly sexual" (1996: 176). All its threads are tightly interwoven and inform the entire narrative.

By setting *Creature from the Black Lagoon* in the wilds of the Amazon, the film might successfully be read in the tradition of jungle-adventure movies. Rhona Berenstein (1996: 162) discusses a number of such films from the 1930s, including *Ingagi* (1930), *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932) and *King Kong* (1933). In so doing she identifies the genre as one in which white characters "domesticate blacks and jungle creatures with the aid of guns and other 'civilized' tools" (1996: 163). Such films tend to portray white heroes as intruders, for it is they (rather than invading monsters) who venture into "foreign" territory. Berenstein also views these texts as proffering the white female body as an intrusive bridge between the civilised and the primitive:

> [M]ost white women in jungle films are both conventional icons of female fear and the vehicles through which social conventions are transgressed. They highlight the supremacy of white males when, as victims of dark creatures, they cry out for heroism. Yet in their own doubling with dark animals and black men, white heroines remind heroes that acts of bravery—and an insistence on

> racial purity—do not always translate into conquest and supremacy. Boundaries between white and dark, human and animal, are crossed repeatedly in the genre, no matter what white heroes do to keep them intact (1996: 164).

Berenstein thus sees 1930s jungle-adventure movies as muddying traditional gender and racial boundaries, and destabilising the surety of white masculinity. *Creature* does have concerns similar to the jungle-adventure tradition, and can be seen to traverse similar territory to those films described by Berenstein (1996: 171ff). It concerns a group of American scientists working in a South American marine institute as guests of the government. They meet a colleague, Dr. Carl Maia, who has brought a strangely humanoid fossil to the Americans for examination. He has found it near a remote tributary of the Amazon River, locked in limestone deposits from the Devonian age. The group is eager to investigate this find and Mark Williams, the dictatorial leader of the scientists, agrees. Williams hopes that uncovering artifacts will increase his personal prestige and wealth, while the others claim to be motivated by scientific curiosity. The story also involves the romance of Kay Lawrence and David Reed, their troubled relationship with their employer Mark, and their thrilling encounters with the Creature. Most of this adventure takes place in the eerie Black Lagoon, wherein its indigenous Creature conforms to the stereotypically lustful black savage described by innumerable Hollywood films.[2]

Using this frame of reference, Kay Lawrence may represent a troublesome but conventional leading lady pursued by dark masculinity and restrained by white male colonisers. At a more fundamental level this film also reiterates the hero's quest, the symbolic Oedipal journey. A group of people find an enigmatic relic and set off on an adventure to a mysterious locale. There they hope to find and return with glory, wealth and knowledge. On this journey they must endure trials and risk their lives in order to uncover hidden secrets. They must also save a white woman menaced by a monster. The film can thus be seen to take the male characters (and the male spectator) on a mission to discover or reconfirm their own manhood, passing

through a dangerous and mysterious world constituted upon the universal obstacle: the feminine. Thus in an overtly racist and sexist narrative, Kay's place in the film and her connection to the Creature may re-tell the ambivalent relationship of mysterious white femininity and savage black masculinity. As Homi Bhabha has noted, such ambivalence can be the very foundation of colonialist discourse, creating a duplicitous union between what is known and what must be retold in order to contain the representation of the Other (1992: 312). Both Kay and the Creature may attract an excess of uncontested meaning, embodying "knowable" racial and sexual anxieties and serving to curtail rather than arouse textual transgressions. Kay's sexualisation could therefore be seen as necessary for her role as jungle heroine. Such a summation would also echo Dennis Saleh's view on female characters in 1950s science fiction films. That is, rather than introduce a disturbing unfamiliarity, the job of scientist merely reflects the need for an appropriate object of desire in the narrative (1979: 55). Given this possibility, Kay's enactment of the Lady Scientist may well be too clichéd to include her as a hero. Yet Kay offers far more than the passive, if sometimes unruly, presence of the heroine. Her attraction rests not merely in colonialist ambivalence but in her escape from a coherency of meaning. She may be afraid, but is not a traditional timorous female. She may be carried off by the Creature, but she is not its victim.

Within the first few moments of the film Kay is established as the epitome of a 1950s Lady Scientist. Jancovich believes that "modernity and science" have negative associations in this film because they are linked to Mark Williams and his dictatorial methods (1996: 181). Yet I find science and knowledge strongly connected with Kay. She is an attractive, competent, active woman engaged in scientific endeavour (in this case, marine biology). She is at home with technology, being the only one of the party to skillfully pilot a high-powered speed boat at the marine institute. She is shown to be on convivial terms with her male co-workers and demonstrates scientific authority to match or better her male counterparts. It is Kay, for

instance, who steps in when Capt. Lucas mentions the legend of a man-fish. Her colleague Dr. Thompson thinks such stories are far-fetched, while her employer Mark Williams sees the unknown thing as an adversary to be tamed/killed and exploited for profit. Kay reminds the group that the lung fish is a living fossil, a "true" legend, and explains its history to Lucas. Kay classifies the lungfish and the Creature as befits her scientific outlook. The Lady Scientist is also able to suggest that reason and emotion need not be oppositional states. On several occasion Kay intervenes when Mark (the rationalist) and David Reed (the dreamer) clash about the nature of science. These disputes are not simply about science, but also reflect the class position and form of masculinity represented by the two male characters. The self-confident bourgeois Mark expects tangible results and endeavours to obtain them through the exercise of his forceful masculinity. David, the old-fashioned scholar, exists on ideals and imagines a better future for humanity rather than financial rewards for himself. Kay tries to settle one such dispute by saying that vision and confidence are both necessary for the pursuit of knowledge, implying that their oppositional stances are unproductive. Despite her common-sense approach, care needs to be taken with Kay's position in these arguments. Such intervention may be appropriate for a heroine, as one who soothes flustered male egos. Furthermore, as Sarah Franklin contends, reason can link with romance to become the imaginative ground appropriated for masculinist science (1995: 63). The trustworthy Kay values both vision and logic, yet stands upon difficult terrain.

Kay's connection with romance is just as important to the narrative as is her scientific skill. Kay is emotionally involved with David, their relationship being close, companionable and (if we once more look beyond Production Code restraint) presumably sexual. At one point Kay and Dr. Thompson comment on the conflict between David and Mark, which stems ostensibly from rivalry over her affections. Kay admits her feelings for David, much as Hutch confides her love of Dave Conway to Dr. Morton in *The Night the World Exploded*. Thompson,

fulfilling a similar role to Morton, tells Kay that she should "be the scientist" about her dilemma. Thompson could be thought of as an avuncular character telling Kay to be a sensible woman and follow the demands of her sex, pointing her along the road to feminine passivity. Yet the sympathetic Thompson adopts a position much like Kay's own, and seems to be suggesting that reason and intellect can sit comfortably with romantic love. In so doing he helps delineate the position of the Lady Scientist, one which integrates love with reason, and passion with intellect. The text also implies that marriage may not be the most significant thing in Kay's life for her dialogue often combines discussion of her career and her love-affair as equally important.

As well as offering Kay as a Lady Scientist, *Creature* also illustrates the way knowledge can be gendered by hegemonic masculinity. We are informed, for instance, that Mark has repeatedly commandeered Kay's expertise. His appropriations are made clear in a conversation between Dr. Thompson and Kay:

> KAY: Why, if it weren't for Mark Williams I wouldn't have my work or even a job.
> THOMPSON: That's true: he helped you through your training and gave you a job, but he needed you just as much as you needed him. . . . You've more than repaid him many times over. Why a good part of his present position at the Institute is due to your valuable research.

Mark derives considerable professional status from exploiting Kay's work. He has "captured" Kay through her sense of indebtedness much as he sets out to subdue the Creature and its Lagoon. Yet another scene exposes Mark's inadequacy as a scientist, taking place as the group examines a fossil:

> MARK: Could it possibly have belonged to a Pleistocene man?
> THOMPSON: Chances are much greater that that hand belonged to an amphibian, Mark. One that spent a great deal of time in the water.
> KAY: Well, how do you account for the structure of the fingers? Obviously for land use.

Mark is unable to make an accurate analysis, leaving it to Kay and Thompson (his staff) to discuss the evidence. To cover this error, Mark then presents himself as more banker than

scientist, concerned with results rather than processes. There are issues of class here, for Mark the employer feels no compunction in exploiting his staff for personal notoriety and monetary dividend. Thus when Kay tells David that she has been rebuffing Mark's advances for some time (well before her relationship with David), we are left to ponder whether Mark's calculated motives are purely romantic. Whilst he depends upon Kay, Mark also dismisses her good advice. After deciding to kill the Creature, Kay cautions her boss: "If you let it alone it won't bother you." This is not only a sensible admonition, but hints at the hidden nature of Mark's pursuit, resting within economic, sexual and colonialist hegemony.[3]

Despite various attempts to dominate Kay, she continues to embody the Lady Scientist's insubordinate intrusiveness. She trespasses into male domains, particularly that of the masculine scientific hierarchy by which she is surrounded. Because she is referred to as "Miss Lawrence" we cannot determine her official status in the group. Yet, rather than simply indicating an inferior position, such exclusions can allow the Lady Scientist movement into and around masculine authority. A particularly important sequence in terms of Kay's intrusive ability occurs when Maia brings the fossilised arm for examination. The action takes place in an office of a marine institute, against the backdrop of sea fishes viewed through an enormous glass window. This setting might be a large aquarium but, judging by the size of the fish, it seems more likely to represent a window onto the ocean from a room situated below sea level. We are offered a panning shot from the view-point of the fish; that is, the camera is in the water looking through the glass. We gaze through the swimming sharks and fish, and see Kay on the other side (the interior) of the glass wall. Like several other 1950s science fiction movies, *Creature* was filmed in the 3D process. Shots of Kay and the fish were probably designed to maximise these effects in the cinema. Yet they also attune the viewer to the underwater scenes to follow, insinuating the film's *mise-en-scène*, its visual relationship between the illuminated (white) world of the humans, and the dark, shadowy

depths wherein lives the (black) Creature. The scene then cuts to the interior of the room, with Kay still framed against the glass. Maia's voice off-camera calls all the scientists together to look at the fossil, saying: "Here it is, gentlemen." The camera pulls back, with Kay as its focus as she turns and approaches a bench containing the hand. The male characters congregate around Kay and the specimen. She is in the centre of the shot while the assembled group examine the remains of the humanoid amphibian. She offers her scientific opinion and asks the views of another colleague. It is at this point Mark agrees to the expedition.

One way to understand the sequence, and Kay's depiction in it, rests on the understanding of the female body as spectacle. The camera is interested in Kay only insofar as she is as lovely and as exotic as the fish she looks upon. Both she and the underwater landscape seem troublingly out of place: rather than being engaged in setting up the specimen or some other appropriate actively, we find her gazing at the passing array of sea life. Our visual focus may remain on Kay as she approaches the bench, not to offer hers as the perspective we are asked to adopt, but rather because she satisfies the scopophilic objectives of the camera. Maia has called the group together with the word "gentlemen", to which Kay responds despite her exemption from that category on the grounds of sex. We might find that she conforms to Peter Biskind's understanding that female characters in 1950s science fiction films are often positioned as "one of the boys" (1983: 135n), gaining their only status from *de facto* membership of a masculine hierarchy. Thus the phallocentric text can enjoy her sexual presence while containing it.

Alternatively, this scene can illustrate yet another way the Lady Scientist introduces danger into patriarchal structures. Discussing the concept of a one-sex body in film, Cyndy Hendershot offers support for the destabilisation of gender hierarchies, writing of the ability of

the fantasy body to suggest that "sexual difference may be a conceptual category and not a biological fact" (1995: 375). It is interesting, therefore, that the term Maia uses to call the group together remains a masculinised one. Yet one of the undercurrents of meaning within *Creature*, and made readable by the Lady Scientist, offers the transformation of "gentlemen". By responding to Maia's call, Kay may be understood to appropriate part of the symbolic order, to circumvent her implied lack through invasion of the patriarchal term "gentlemen". It is her subject position rather than her biological sex that is important here. Kay is clearly not male, and therefore can expose the perilous condition of the sexed body and language. Rather than being adopted into a fraternal category, she breaks up "gentlemen" into something else, widens it to become a category of "all competent people" or "all scientists". Instead of containment, what we can see is the instability of the subject which can reconstruct itself even within the phallocentric confines of language. Instead of representing acceptance of masculine authority and feminine submission, Kay discloses the precarious nature of sexed oppositional logic as well as pointing to the mutability of the body (offering an important link between herself and the Creature).

The display of the fossilised arm, coming directly after Kay has gazed into the sea, also has interesting ramifications. The incident sheds light not only into the nature of the forthcoming expedition, but also points to Kay's invasive position in the narrative. Writing about 1950s science fiction movies, Margaret Tarratt has commented on the significance of the wounded male arm as a phallic symbol (1986: 264-266). In discussing *The Thing* (1951), she draws a parallel between the sexual (albeit alien) potency of the extraterrestrial and the traditional masculinity of the film's male lead, Pat Hendry. The Thing's arm re-grows after being bitten off by dogs, and the creature can thereby avoid castration anxiety.[4] Just as impressive as the Thing's regenerative limb, is *Creature*'s preserved phallic arm. It is a symbol so potent that it has turned to stone: it is literally hard forever. Belonging to some lost form of primeval

"man" (as Mark declares), its existence is a threat to Mark's patriarchal imperialism, while ironically representing the very power of the symbolic. The pursuit of this phallic humanoid amphibian thus underlines the many forms of castration anxiety that permeate the text. Kay's presence during the examination of the arm takes the encounter a little further. Hélène Cixous has claimed that "the [feminine] unconscious is impregnable" and confined to a metaphorical chamber within the symbolic (1991: 336), yet Kay begins to address the inevitability of this confinement. The liminally flowing waters of the ocean, the submerged room within the marine institute, the call to "gentlemen", and the stone phallus are all linked by her presence and her ability to move between and around each. It is this maneuverability that Kay takes with her into the mysterious Amazon jungle.

One of the most significant images in *Creature* involves the Lady Scientist's swim in the Black Lagoon. Swimming scenes are not uncommon in jungle movies, particularly the early *Tarzan* films, wherein foolhardy heroines such as Mary Brooks in *Tarzan the Fearless* (1933) are saved from crocodile-infested waters by the courageous Apeman.[5] While no one dives in to save Kay, the dangers of the water are more complex than are generally supposed. Her depiction in this scene is therefore crucial to the film. In Chapter Five I briefly describe the disrobing scene that precedes Kay's swim. I would like to return to this sequence now in more detail, and use it to begin to uncover the film's alliance of race, sex and colonialism. The scene in question takes place after David and Mark have had their first dive in the Lagoon. When they return, Kay asks David to describe his experience. He replies: "Like another world." Standing on the deck of their boat, the *Rita*, Kay looks around to make sure that she is unobserved by any of the men before she dives into the water. Of course she *is* observed by the camera and its phallocentric field of vision. She dives into the Lagoon and moves effortless away from the boat. Seen from below, looking up through the water, she is a graceful swimmer. She seems to enjoy her freedom and glides easily through the water. She

floats and performs a kind of water ballet for her own (and our scopophilic) enjoyment. The Creature sees her and begins to follow her movements from below. This shadowing goes on for some time without the Creature making any dangerous moves towards Kay. When it approaches her closely its action is to put out a tentative hand to brush or tickle her foot. Meanwhile, on the *Rita*, Capt. Lucas realises what Kay is doing. He calls in alarm: "You're too far out! Miss Lawrence!" The men hurriedly start the boat's engine and move off to Kay's rescue. As she returns to the vessel the Creature continues to swim below her but still makes no aggressive moves. After Kay is aboard, the Creature becomes entangled in the boat's net. It is only then that it fights back, destroying the net and damaging the winch.

The swim in the Black Lagoon is one of the most often recalled images in the science fiction movies of the era.[6] While this might make Kay the best remembered female character of the 1950s, it is her bodily display, a reading of her as sexual, fragile and available, that is most recalled. The film's director, Jack Arnold, has commented:

> Those scenes with the girl swimming on the surface and the monster looking up at her from below . . . played upon a basic fear *people* have about what might be lurking below the surface of any body of water. It's the fear of the unknown (quoted in Nicholls, 1979: 144; italics added).

One cannot help but be reminded of Steven Spielberg's use of similar fears and imagery in the opening sequence of *Jaws* (1975). This parallel is also noted by Brosnan who infers, but does not investigate, its gendered implications (1978: 99, 129-130). Yet it is no mere coincidence that Spielberg arouses our anxiety by portraying a vulnerable female body in those opening shots, the lone swimmer in a dark body of water. Arnold uses the female body to convey a fear he says is universal, yet there is certainly an intent to show Kay as a sexually attractive and available female rather than simply an every-person. In her structured swimsuit Kay can readily be seen as a fetishised, her breasts in particular being emphasised as objects of erotic contemplation. Baxter's response to this scene echoes the availability of such a reading:

> A key scene in the film is when the heroine (Julie Adams) enters the water for a swim, unaware that the creature is swimming just below her, admiring. Shots looking up towards the surface show the girl penetrating a Cocteau-like mirror, her white suit with its accentuated breasts, her choreographed leg movements all overtly sexual. Gliding beneath her, twisting lasciviously in a stylised representation of sexual intercourse, the creature, his movements brutally masculine and powerful, contemplates his ritual bride, though his passion does not reach its peak until the girl performs some underwater ballet movements, explicitly erotic poses that excite the Gill Man to reach out and clutch at her murmuring legs (1970: 121).

In film, women swimming alone in the water are always on show and always observed. Their movements are always sexual, their breasts always on display. Baxter's comments conjure a world in which even a woman's ankles "murmur" their allure. Similarly David Thomson sees the Creature as a "surreal phallus" pursuing the "swimming spread-eagle of actress Julie Adams on top of the water" (1984: 60). And while David Hogan is prepared to regard the Creature as a noble being, of Kay he can only note that she is "more scrumptious than vanilla ice cream" in her Catalina swimsuit (1986: 111).

Such analyses are, of course, racist *and* heteronormative. Firstly, Kay's white swimsuit references more than just her female body: it points to the film's investment in racial difference. While the whiteness of the swimsuit is usually mentioned by critics, what remains unremarked is the contrast been this very snowy garment, the shadowy lighting used for the underwater sequence, and the dark body of the Creature. In James Snead's view, one of the primary means Hollywood encodes race is by overdetermining colour contrasts (1994: 5-6). Snead maintains, for example, that by presenting images of extreme blackness or whiteness (such as dressing very dark-skinned actors in very white articles of clothing) film reproduces and magnifies racial boundaries. In *Creature* such a racial signifier, the white garment, is warn by Kay and seems to serve a similar purpose to the very white bodies of Ann in the original *King Kong* or Mary in *Tarzan the Fearless*.[7] Secondly, we may well ponder whether the Lady Scientist's sexy figure alone accounts for the unusual level of interest in her swim. Does its notoriety rest solely in the erotic depiction of the beautiful Kay, or upon other

foundations? E. Ann Kaplan's analysis of the imperial gaze in Hollywood film can offer a possible alternative. Kaplan asserts that whether white male colonialists look upon women or upon colonial Africa (the two traditional "dark continents") the result is the same:

> [He] confronts—gazes at—something Other to [himself] that causes dis-ease. Why does this gaze cause dis-ease? Because the male and the white subject need to be in control: They assume power lies with them, in their gaze, and are uneasy when there is an entity that seems to elude their control, to look and perhaps be different. Their discomfort leads to their construction of the primitive/civilized binary categorization so as to defend against difference (1997: 62).

Commentaries on the swimming sequence seem to confirm that just as imperialist discomfort creates racial categories, patriarchal dis-ease needs to interpellate and control sexual difference. These underwater scenes are troublesome until they are contained by race, brute sexuality, rape metaphors, and the victimisation of the female body.

Such patriarchal and imperialist readings work not only to suppress feminine and black subjectivities, but contrive also to deny the eroticised male body. For example, just before Kay's swim we have seen David and Mark in the water, collecting rocks for Dr. Maia to test. It is not *their* bodies upon which the fear of the lurking unknown is said to be projected, although while swimming they too are watched by the Creature. Mention is rarely made of the men's skimpy clothing. Nor does it seem that the near-naked physiques of the men, both of which are on display during much of this film, can be considered erotic objects. Critics have not "seen" the male body in the same way as they have the female. The potential for erotic pleasure derived from watching male bodies seems unrepresentable within this heterosexist discourse. Yet from the point at which they arrive at the Black Lagoon, neither of the two leading men are seen again fully dressed except for occasions where they don open-fronted shirts. Kay's swim is the only time in which her body is so clearly displayed. Elsewhere she wears trousers or shorts with a shirt or sun top. If a homoerotic reading is available, Kay's tightly swimsuited figure can be read as a counter-point to the uncorseted,

nearly naked bodies of Mark and David. We may well see the camera's focus on Kay in the water as an attempt to re-assert the primacy of heterosexuality, even as homoeroticism permeates the film's imagery and dialogue.

One of the ways homoeroticism emerges as a theme in *Creature* is through David Reed's uncertain masculinity. For instance, when Carl Maia jokingly asks why the couple are not married, it is Kay who responds with the wry: "David says we're together all the time anyway—might as well save expenses." David then quips that he is waiting for their boss to give Kay a pay rise so that she can afford to keep him. While this playfully inverts feminine responsibility (*she* will have to afford *him*) it also transacts a larger array of sexual fears.[8] One exchange is particularly informative, placing these fears into a sexual *and* a racial locale. After failing to find artifacts near Maia's camp, the group argues about whether to press on to the legendary Black Lagoon or return to civilisation empty-handed. David puts a protective (puny human) arm around Kay and says:

> DAVID: Well, there's just one thing Mark: going into unexplored territory with a woman.
> KAY: I'm not afraid, David, and we've come this far.
> DAVID: Yeah, I know but I keep remembering what happened to Carl's men.
> MARK: That doesn't sound like the dedicated scientist talking, David. . . .

At the time this debate takes place both men are covered with dirt after an unsuccessful day's excavation. If, as Judy Wacjman observes, "dirt, noise and danger" are fundamental to hegemonic masculinity (1991: 143), then these earthy elements are the very stuff of their manhood. Wearing his masculinity on his skin, David's concern for Kay masks deeper fears than her safety. The Lady Scientist is about to be admitted to a domain that would otherwise exclude her. Just as in *Them!* (1954) Bob Graham tries to prevent Pat Medford from meddling in men's work, David is unwilling to take a woman into the unmapped regions of the Amazon. It is pertinent that the Lady Scientist is not afraid of the journey to the Lagoon, for femininity is not jeopardised by potential danger or the Unknown. The "unexplored

territory" to which David refers is not simply that of the Black Lagoon, but includes the hidden terrain of their relationship and his insecure manly identity.

Importantly, David's concern for "unexplored territory" invokes Freud's "dark continent", the metaphor used to characterise a sexual life for women based on lack and inferiority (1959: 212). As Mary Ann Doane has pointed out, however, Freud's use of this expression also embodies colonialist ideas of dark races and the unknown, as well as the enigma of female sexuality (1991: 210). David's worries for Kay thus infer a space of opposition: that of interiorised/savage nature, the chaotic obstacle, the feminine. Writing on the gendered nature of scientific discovery, Sarah Franklin asserts that the pursuit of knowledge is often described in masculinist terms, "as a domain of seminal breakthroughs, trail-blazing pioneers and uncharted territories" (1995: 63). Franklin's language is apposite in the context of *Creature,* capturing the image of an intrepid (male) coloniser struggling with those alien places hiding from the "rational scientific mastery" of Man and his reason (1995: 65). In *Creature* the term "unexplored territory" ventures even further, and leads also into the realms of homoeroticism and non-sexual difference. David's fears are of the Dark, of that monstrous place beyond his experience where women and Creatures might dwell free of (white hegemonic) masculinity.

There are many examples of homoeroticism and homosociality in *Creature.* On several occasions Mark interrupts Kay and David's romantic embraces, at one point by brandishing a menacingly erect speargun. Mark uses this particular phallic implement to establish his domination not of Kay, but of David. Finding the heterosexual couple kissing in the stern of the *Rita*, Mark demonstrates the effectiveness of his weapon by harpooning the vessel's equally phallic mast. The (heterosexual) lovers part. Later, when Mark spears the Creature in the back, he and David clash. Mark quips: "You sound like I put the harpoon through you." This telling piece of dialogue has resonance throughout the text. Mark's speargun is itself

fascinating in the context of the film. Lola Young observes that colonialist discourse tends to offer us "the savage with the spear versus the gentleman with the revolver" (1996: 66). The speargun in *Creature* seems to conflate these weapons, so that the savage, the civilised and the phallus meet in one implement. Mark embodies the barely concealed contradictions of the "civilised" man, and his relationship with his weapon brings to mind the character of Lewis (Burt Reynolds) in *Deliverance* (1972). This latter film, also based upon a dangerous river journey into unknown territory, is able to explore the savage/civilised boundary, not to mention masculine violence, more directly than was possible in 1950s science fiction. Yet in its more oblique way *Creature* also interrogates homosociality, savagery and brutality.

In another scene they employ a paralysing drug ("rotonon") used by the local people for fishing. The scientists form the substance into small bundles so it will percolate down into the Lagoon, spreading its white milkiness through the surrounding water. In this metaphorical rape of the environment, their symbolic sperm swirls into the body of the Lagoon and poisons it. During this endeavour Mark handles a shotgun (yet another powerful phallus), while David rows a small boat. They are tense, waiting to sight the Creature:

> MARK: Come on, come on.
> DAVID: You talking to me Mark, or something out there?
> MARK: Both, David. They won't believe it back home. . . . Sitting out here waiting for some monster to appear. That's why we've got to take him.

Here Mark wants to "take" (sexually own) both David *and* the Creature. Thus when Bill Warren writes that the film's "romantic rivalry is distinctly minimized" (1982: 170), he downplays the movie's heterosexual tensions and eradicates its homosocial struggle. Warren contends that the film depicts the rise of the down-trodden David to a point where his slow-but-sure nature "emerges victorious" over the showy Mark. He views Mark and David's major clash occurring over the capture of the Creature without any sexualisation of this conflict, and deprecates Kay almost to the point of invisibility.

Yet adopting a position in which the film is viewed primarily from a homoerotic perspective has disadvantages for the Lady Scientist. Harry Benshoff contends that significant homosocial strategies are deployed in all three *Creature* movies (1997: 133-135). The original film and its sequels *Revenge of the Creature* (1955) and *The Creature Walks Among Us* (1956) all offer two leading males (one of whom is always killed trying to catch the Creature), and a leading female over whom they clash. Benshoff argues that these female characters are all heterosexist smoke-screens, existing "ostensibly to defuse the homoerotic tension" into which the films plunge their males (1997: 135). Benshoff places the tussle with heteronormative values at the heart of the texts, with all three narratives working to dispose of one male in order to re-establish the primacy of the heterosexual couple. Although Benshoff offers an excellent discussion of these issues, particularly in relation to *The Creature Walks Among Us*, the centrality of this reading is contestable. For example, Benshoff notes that in *The Creature Walks* scientist Thomas Morgan pairs with Marcia Barton after the death of her husband (1997: 136). This claim overlooks the way in which the two characters shake hands at the film's conclusion. When Marcia asks "Will I see you again?" Morgan sincerely promises "Yes, of course." Rather than remove Morgan from a queer position in the narrative, this ending can be interpreted as leaving his sexuality in question. While Marcia looks at Morgan hopefully, the scientist's own expression is far more equivocal, gazing with sympathy upon the badly treated woman. We might argue that instead of Morgan, the late Dr. Barton's heterosexual competitor has been his assistant Jed Grant (whom Dr. Barton bludgeons to death in a jealous rage). Although Benshoff points out the problematics of sexuality in *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, he is unable to see Kay as a disruptive figure because of his concentration on homoeroticism. Positioned as a passive heroine, this reading offers little possibility of deploying either the Creature or the Lady Scientist as excessive or disorderly figures.

I would like now to return to Kay's swim in order first to re-imagine the gendered implications of her venture in the Black Lagoon, and then lead the discussion into the issues of race and colonialism. While Kay's plunge with the Creature can suggest an array of patriarchal dissociations, this portrait of the natural world and non-sexual difference needs to be created with care. As Jancovich suggests, it requires no great leap of logic to relegate the Creature and Kay to a feminine position in the narrative by virtue of gender fluidity:

> Debates about sexuality frequently assume a fundamental difference between male and female sexuality in which male sexuality is aggressive, goal-oriented and genitally centred, while female sexuality is none of these but altogether more diffuse and *fluid*. However essentialist these arguments might be, they are fundamental to a whole series of debates about masculinity and femininity. . . . (1996: 179-180, original italics).

While most science fiction film commentators accept that the Creature is a masculinised sexual predator, Jancovich offers a dissenting view based upon the heterogeneity of Kay and the Creature. Re-reading Kay's swim, he likens the connection of the two characters to an ill-fated romance, rather than to a rape attempt (1996: 178-9). That is, the Creature displays a "fascination and affection" towards the woman, perceiving her as different from the other (male) beings who have invaded its world. Jancovich observes:

> [T]he creature is first drawn to Kay when she is swimming on the surface of the lagoon, on the boundary between his world and that of the human males. She is swimming alone, and gaining pleasure from both herself and the water. In doing so, she displays a different relationship to the water from that of the men. The males literally penetrate the water, while carrying spear-guns and cameras in a manner that is clear associated with masculine aggression, control and objectification (1996: 179).

Rather than being threateningly sexual, Jancovich interprets the Creature's actions as a mirror of Kay's own behavior. Thus the Creature identifies itself with her, rather than with the human men. Kay's enjoyment of the water expresses "pleasure without recourse to males, a pleasure which is not genitally centred" (1996: 179), a response which the Creature itself experiences.

I certainly find little evidence of the Creature being worked into the sexual frenzy described by Baxter (1970: 121). Instead of overpowering Kay, the Creature at first swims towards her when she enters the water. Rather than displaying brute masculinity, however, it appears bemused and intrigued by the swimming figure. It copies her graceful movements and hides if she draws too near. It touches Kay's ankle carefully rather than grabbing at her in the spirit of sexual rapaciousness. This touch occurs as she treads water. When, after several hesitant attempts, it gingerly makes contact with her body, Kay does not scream or display fear. Instead, she looks curiously around her and submerges to investigate. The Creature then retreats from her actively enquiring gaze, avoiding rather than menacing the Lady Scientist. There even seems to be something of the "scientist" about the Creature as it tries to understand what kind of animal Kay might be, for it appears fascinated by her.

While an array of non-phallic possibilities can to be found in the underwater encounter of Kay and the Creature in the Black Lagoon, we should remain mindful of the gendered associations inherent in representing the natural world. As I have discussed in Chapter Two, the landscape is commonly interpreted as feminine ground, the backdrop to the male-centred narrative. It can be argued that the male quest for meaning and the meaning of phallocentric cinema is played out upon the feminine object (Kay) and the landscape (the Amazon and the Lagoon). Jancovich remarks that the film seems to describe an upward evolutionary progress, taking us from an early (feminised) fecund Earth to the contemporary striving for (masculinised) rationality (1996: 180-181). This can be inferred from the opening narration:

> This is the planet Earth, newly born and cooling rapidly from a temperature of 6000 degrees to a few hundred in less than five billion years. The heat rises, meets the atmosphere, the clouds form, and rain pours down upon the hardening surface for countless centuries. The restless seas rise, find boundaries, are contained. Now in their warm depths the miracle of life begins. In infinite variety living things appear, and change, and reach the land. Leaving a record of their coming, of their struggle to survive, and of their eventual end, the record of life

> is written on the land; where, fifteen million years later, in the upper reaches of the Amazon, Man is still trying to read it—

We seem to be presented with a world evolving from capriciousness towards restraint, of a natural striving for boundaries, just as the seas are "contained" when their rightful level is achieved. Over this concept is layered the image of the ungoverned Amazon jungle as a cacophonous, menacing place where only men are meant to journey. Capt. Lucas informs the scientists that the jungle is full of violence and aggression, where even catfish are killers. This ominous environment is the chaotic and cruelly feminised obstacle, a Mother Nature indifferent to male suffering. Commenting on a similar theme in *Tarzan the Ape Man*, Barbara Creed notes that "the jungle which sustains life also keeps hidden within its innermost recesses the secret burial ground of the elephants, the Valley of Death" (1987 n.p.). Thus the symbolic maternal will nurture as well as destroy, and thereby challenge the human to become a Man.

The intent of the text may be to paint this two-dimensional picture of the Amazon and the Black Lagoon. Both regions may represent the uncivilised Earth yearning for order, as well as describing the dangerous ground upon which masculinity is tested and renewed. Alert to this setting, *Creature* can still offer considerable terrain for contestation. The jungle itself is raucously heterogeneous, an alterior place that becomes a perpetual presence on the screen. While *en route* to the Lagoon, David tells Kay that the Mississippi is "a winding brook compared to the Amazon." This remark brings to mind Marleen Barr's observation (discussed in Chapter Three) on the way *Thelma and Louise* (1991) positions Texas as void in the narrative (1991: 84). *Creature* also recasts the normal terrain of patriarchy. The Mississippi, the U.S.A., can be reformed through absence and inferiority. David then draws a comparison between the present Amazon and the Devonian age 150 million years ago, telling Kay that the jungle has changed little since that remote past. There are some problems with

his science, for the Devonian Age was far more remote than 150 million years. The Amazon as such did not then exist, while the Earth of that Age was warm and arid instead of being lush and tropical. Such use of science in science fiction movies of the 1950s offers us, in Susan Sontag's terms, a "sensuous elaboration" rather than intellectually vigorous truth (1994: 212). More importantly in this context, by conflating the 1950s Amazon and its fauna with the Devonian, the film invokes a slippage between the ancient and the present, the real and the fanciful. This jungle defies time, partition and governance. It is an/other world, where history does not exist and the Mythic and the Now take place together. It becomes an uncontainable territory that slips between the masculinist logic of categories.

One of the attractions of Kay's swim is her readiness to plunge into this unknown alterior place, this "other world" of the Lagoon's waters. She enacts the unruly figure of the woman in landscape. She swims unaided, without the breathing paraphernalia needed by the men, and is both freer and more at risk than her male counterparts. Kay suggests a position beyond the extremes of regressive masculinity or passive femininity. Her solitary swim is in direct opposition to her male protectors. She goes "too far out", and it is her difference to which the beleaguered Creature is attracted. While both Kay and the Creature suffer from the projections of hegemonic masculinity, the relationship between them remains unspeakable because they exist outside traditional (genitally-sexed) oppositional binaries. Jancovich does note, however, that the Black Lagoon is womb-like, with a narrow mouth which must be carefully entered by the scientists' phallic boat (1996: 180). This may seem to ally Kay with the masculinist violation of the natural world. Yet this encounter is richly ambiguous, for the craft that intrudes upon the Black Lagoon is called the *Rita*. If we are to read the Lagoon as being penetrated, then the name of the vessel serves to irredeemably queer this encounter. Like Kay, it too trespasses where it should not venture.[9] As Kay's swim in the Lagoon intimates, the Lady Scientist can move between the zones of the air and the depths. Hers is a

different place, the borderlands between problematic worlds, closer to the sensuality of the Creature than to any rigidly policed sexual borders. When she swims "too far out" the men are in danger of losing their hold on her and they must scramble to bring her back. The Lady Scientist can elude them.

And what of the Creature itself? The male characters know from the start that they are dealing with a rival, with Dr. Thompson being the first to use the term "Gill Man". Most science fiction movie critiques are focused, at least ostensibly, on the Creature's aggressive masculinity. I would strenuously argue, however, that any profitable reading of this movie must include the dynamic of race. This Creature is not simply a male monster, it is a *black* male monster. Both Judith Halberstam (1995: 4) and Richard Dyer (1997: 210-211) point out that monsters can be racialised as well as sexualised. Halberstam observes that racist discourse constructs monstrosity around certain kinds of bodies, so that the tradition of European horror has often focused on the Jew as a hideous beast. Count Dracula can thus be read as an anti-Semitic figure, representing a Western belief in the depravity of the non-Christian East.[10] The reading of *Creature* I wish to now pursue takes up this complex representation. By embodying the sexualised fictions of imperialism, the Creature can become the incarnation of colonial nightmare: the sexualised and powerful black male.

The science fiction movies of the 1950s are generally understood to project Cold War fears onto the bodies of alien invaders. Yet another source for these fantasised beings is also possible, one related to the racial tensions of the post-war U.S.A.[11] Science fiction films of the era rarely depict non-European characters (and then only in minor roles)[12], yet many of their invaders or monsters are literally black terrors. *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), *The Blob* (1958), *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* (1956), *The Fly* (1958), *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* (1958), *The Thing* (1951), *Tarantula* (1955) and *The Wasp Woman* (1960) are

all populated by a range of swarthy enemies. There are several films in which race is a vital if unacknowledged element.[13] One such text is *The Mole People* (1956), wherein dark-skinned Mole creatures are kept as slaves by white-skinned subterraneans. This latter group may even be constructed as "southerners" insofar as the male heroes, Roger and Jud, have to climb down into caverns—literally "go south"—in order to find this world. The white northern abolitionists who stumble across this society are unhappy about its social arrangements, and they intervene to stop the flogging execution of several Mole creatures. In this ostensibly liberal narrative, the Mole people remain backwards and uncivilised. They possess a simple-minded loyalty, however, and mount an attack to save the good whites from the clutches of their overlords. In return, the humans escape to the surface and leave the Mole people to their fate. Added to this mix is the heroine Adad, a "tragic mulatto" in Donald Bogle's sense, doomed by her tainted blood (1989: 9).

In more general terms, the intersection of race and gender is acknowledged by Dyer in his work on whiteness in Western culture:

> All concepts of race are always concepts of the body and also of heterosexuality. Race is a means of categorising different types of human body which reproduce themselves. It seeks to systematise differences and to relate them to differences in character and worth. Heterosexuality is the means of ensuring, but also the site of endangering, the reproduction of these differences (1997: 20).

Given this context it is no surprise that critics see the body of the Creature as a lustful and powerful male, a competitor for the charms of the heroine. More than simply sexual apprehensions, however, these fears for female safety are also racial ones. For example, John Baxter describes a sequence from *Revenge of the Creature* in which the Gill Man breaks free of his chains and carries away the female lead. Baxter describes this encounter in terms of the "rape" of the woman. (1970: 123-124). This offers a link between the Creature and myths of unbridled black male lust. Escaping with a white woman, it seems that the primitive black

beast *must* rape. Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien argue that colonialist discourse places the black male into a position of difference: black masculinity is dangerous and other, just as indigenous or black peoples are Other to white colonialists (1988: 134). Such myths construct blackness as violent and animalistic, degenerate traits that provide a way for white masters to justify their treatment of those they colonise. Thus from the very first the Creature is construed as violent and aggressive by the white men, with Mark Williams launching a campaign to dominate "him".

By setting *Creature* in the Amazon, the film opens itself not only to a critique of race but also of colonialism. The entrepreneurial Mark, concerned primarily with results and rewards, reflects the very nature of the colonialist impulse. Dyer maintains that enterprising characteristics such as "discovery, science, business, wealth creation, the building of nations, the organisation of labour" reveal a self-defined heart of whiteness (1997: 31). Mark is the symbol of this imperialism: the energetic white male born to rule and to regulate. In Snead's insightful discussion of *King Kong*, our attention is drawn to the issues of imperialism and capitalism, particularly as they meet in the character of Carl Denham (1994: 15ff). A similar analysis is possible for *Creature*, for it is Mark's desire for profit and acclaim that permits and then propels the expedition. In such an imperialist universe the Creature can become the object *par excellence*. During the course of the next two films, for example, it is hunted by a number of white people, caught, manacled, forcibly removed from its homeland, mutilated (operated on to make it breath air), locked up, studied, and falsely accused of murder. It is finally left to drown as it vainly attempts to recover its lost homeland. In *The Creature Walks Among Us* the dark-skinned, oxygen-breathing Creature is even dressed in rough sack-cloth, clearly resembling the garb of the convict and the slave.

The distinctive role of race and colonialism in *Creature from the Black Lagoon* can be seen in a parallel drawn by Baxter. He describes the Creature as "the black and beautiful fallen angel vanquished by the white power of science" (1970: 121). In alluding to "white" science Baxter does not directly suggest the embodied whiteness of the scientists themselves, but rather their use of the white rotonon. We should recall, however, that it is the local people who use this substance for fishing. Capt. Lucas merely informs the scientists of its properties. It is *not* the Westerners who have discovered the power of the white powder, but the Amazon's indigenous inhabitants. Nevertheless, Baxter's white/black dichotomy denotes the territory of civilisation versus the primitive, of reason versus instinct, of God versus the beasts, rather than being a direct racial metaphor. Its wider connotations, however, are clear. They are resonant with Paul Hoch's description of racial mythologies:

> The conquest of manhood by the victory of the white godlike hero over the bestial villain in a life or death struggle for possession of what Robert Graves had called 'The White Goddess' is, according to him, at the heart of almost all Western myth. . . . The archetypal figure of the threatening super-sensual dark villain or black beast, though less clear cut, is also as old as the class societies of Western civilisation, perhaps as old as the Western family itself (1979: 43).

Kay can be seen as a white virgin, symbol of imperialist privilege, pursued by the Black Lagoon's dark beast. The Creature may also represent pre-civilised Man (death, unbridled sensuality) against which the white hero/lover must struggle to the death in order to possess the heroine/Goddess. David Reed is compelled to conquer the Creature and to re-claim his woman, because in doing so he also declares his Manhood. This tussle accords with Joseph Campbell's understanding of the male hero's ultimate goal: that is, the "mystical marriage with the queen goddess of the world represents the hero's total mastery of life; for woman is life, the hero its knower and master" (1968: 120). Finally, in order to complete this racialised tale of the white hero and his Goddess, Hoch maintains that the black beast must be totally subdued. Only then can all the "advanced" traits of the white hero—intellect, civilisation and the law—be seen to triumph. Snead takes this analysis into the cinematic realm by

considering the part played by the white spectator in the subjugation of the black body. In an analysis of *King Kong* Snead remarks:

> [T]he figure of King Kong would allow the white male to vent a variety of repressed sexual fantasies: the hidden desire of seeing himself as an omnipotent, phallic black male; the desire to abduct the white woman; or the combined fantasy: to abduct a white woman in the guise of a phallic black male. . . . [T]his assimilation of otherness, particularly if it releases repressed desires, is brief, and comes at the cost of increased guilt, a guilt that is often discharged in the oppression of the other (1994: 24).

By conquering (castrating) a black body that has brought voyeuristic pleasure, white masculinity can again prevail.

But does total subjugation of the Creature really occur here? In the course of this one movie the Creature has been caught in a net, harpooned, drugged, caged, burnt, nearly drowned, hacked with a machete, bludgeoned, stabbed, suffered numerous shotgun wounds, and left for dead. All of which should condemn it to the symbolic castration at the heart of the journey into the Lagoon. Even the uncertain David appears to avoid his masculine anxieties and acquire the accruements of the white patriarch following Mark's death. When the Creature blocks their exit from the Lagoon, the scientists place the remaining rotonon into an airbottle thereby making it possible to fire its contents under high pressure. David tests this device in the water, the milky substance squirting out across the surface. It seems that David has taken up the void Mark has left, for he now welds the phallus (the airbottle with its semen-like contents) which he uses effectively as a weapon to ward off the Creature and inseminate the Lagoon once more. Despite this one occasion in which David bests the Creature, he is more usually the loser in phallic encounters. When David, speargun in hand, bravely advances on the Creature at the film's climax, his monstrous opponent's first move is to seize his hated weapon and break it against the rocks. Thus disarmed/castrated, David draws a pathetically small knife/phallus and stabs at the Creature. David may win Kay, but will he be man enough to keep her?

Despite the racist construction of the Creature's difference, it is not a simple representation of evil. The Creature's position in the narrative could recall Linda Williams' work on the horror-film monster discussed in Chapter Two. The monstrous sexuality Williams articulates is that of potent and spectacular difference (1984: 89-90). By forging its connections with gender *and* colonialism, *Creature from the Black Lagoon* takes this form of analysis a step further: for the Creature manages to emerge with an unique identity not solely focused on its spectacular image. It is always curious, powerful and intelligent. Capable of finer feelings, as shown in its relationship with Kay under the water, its depiction is sympathetic but never sentimentalised. While Mark expects it to succumb, and even David wants to catch it like a wild animal, the Creature will not accept its subordinate position. Remarkably, considering its continued mistreatment at the hands of the white male invaders, it is not presented as inferior, and we begin to fear *for* it as well as being afraid *of* it. Jancovich informs us that when the film was first released it enjoyed great popularity with teenage audiences. They "particularly identified with the creature's victimisation by the adult males" (1996: 184). The defiantly raised arm (as the Creature floats away in the final shot) can thus be read as both a warning and a sign of unity. Not simply a dying monster's threat of revenge, it symbolises the Creature's ability to defy the worst excesses of patriarchal hegemony. This view of the now (presumably) lifeless arm of the Creature is also a linking image to the original fossilised arm, and it has lost none of its phallic implications. It is a fascinating coincidence that this final arm gesture so closely resembles the Black Power salute of the 1960s.

Ultimately, what kind of heroic journey does Lady Scientist Kay Lawrence take us upon? Earlier I claimed that her importance is due to her escape from phallocentric constraints. Kay *is* fearlessly intrusive, an authoritative speaker who disarranges masculine hierarchies. Nevertheless her last encounter with the Creature can be seen as the heroine's final

humiliation. The most common reading of the film's climax sees Kay seized by a threateningly sexualised monster and carried off to its secret lair. With the heroine's unconscious body used as bait, her captor waits nearby ready to kill the hero and claim the woman as its prize. We appear to be offered the inescapably heterosexist (and racist) impasse of the White Goddess. These are events surely designed to quash the autonomy of any uppity Lady Scientist. Yet before giving up on Kay there is a final question worth pursuing: does the ending simply restrain the Lady Scientist and defeat the Creature, or are other territories jeopardised more profoundly?

As Snead has written in relation to *King Kong*, the deliberate manipulation of a heterosexual subplot can work to conceal the most troubling aspects of a narrative (1994: 8). By presenting Kay as a sacrificial heroine and subsuming her within the white heterosexual couple at the conclusion, *Creature* too works in just such a manner. Yet it remains a troublingly complex text. On one hand the film exposes and refutes the economic motivation of Mark's colonialism, and posits that the self-aggrandisement of the imperialist is misguided if not dangerous. Yet on the other it does not question the right of the scientists to intrude into the Amazon for "legitimate" scientific purposes. While the movie allows the homosociality of the males to be revealed (and seems to revel in the erotically exposed male body), it centres these subversive impulses on the questionable character of Mark. By having Mark die in a heroically foolhardy manner, the potential disruption he poses to heteronormality seems to be repressed. Yet this also leaves the film's unruly sexuality tantalisingly unresolved. Added to these entanglements, the Creature itself can be seen to embody the intrinsic racism of Western imperialism and Hollywood cinema. The Creature remains, however, one of the singular creations of the era, a challenging protagonist with its own powerfully alterior individuality.

The character of Kay Lawrence is also a contradictory mixture of brave woman, intelligent scientist and White Goddess. If, as Snead remarks "[t]he weakness of the female . . . provides the chance for males to test and confirm the range of their strength" (1994: 24), then Kay offers very few opportunities for David's uncertain masculinity to emerge victorious. Throughout the narrative most of her fears have been for David's manhood rather than for herself, a point Mark emphasises when he directly challenges with: "I hope you're afraid for me too, Kay." Rather than eradicate the problems of masculinity, her concern serves to underline them. Only at the end of the tale can David *seem* to save his woman (although it is the intervention of Maia and Lucas that actually carries the day). Even then, having experienced the events that should snatch away her independence, it is Kay who is first in line to pursue the dying Creature out of its cave and back to the waters of the Lagoon. Kay resists an imperialist position in relation to the black Creature. It is her sensibility towards the Creature, and its response to her, that in large part reveals the film's colonial entrapments. By hovering on the boundary of heroic territory Kay places a wedge between oppositional binary concepts and allows gender and race to escape their discursive containments. If we think of a 1950s Lady Scientist as someone who reflects the contradictions of femininity, knowledge, power and technology, then perhaps Kay is one of the most crucial figures in this repertoire. Her appeal lays in her ability to reveal the ruses of masculinity, racism and heterosexism, and to portray for us the fragmentation of gender and of the colonial subject. Perhaps this is why her character is so interesting. In her can be recognised the complex relationships of femininity: to difference, to masculinity, to knowledge, and to the journey of the female hero.

The following and final chapter, entitled "Queen of the Ants", enlarges upon the possibilities of the Lady Scientist. Here I will discuss Pat Medford, a character who offers another variation on the theme of the authoritative female knower. Pat provides a way to unzip the

entrapment of nature/femininity in its binary tension with science/masculinity, disorganising the phallocentric discourses upholding these categories. She allows us to explore the problem of confronting specifically feminised monsters, as well as providing the spectacular and pleasurable uncertainties that arise when gender breaks out of its bodily confines, revealing itself to be permeable and inconstant.

Chapter 10 - Queen of the Ants

Them! (1954) is a movie teeming with the presence of the abject and images of castration anxiety. It is a fantastic text that does not limit its gender uncertainty, while its Lady Scientist, Dr. Pat Medford, is never irredeemably circumscribed as a heroine. The film does, nevertheless, offer a number of discursive challenges to the female hero. Firstly, the movie creates an unstoppable ahistorical matriarchy and thereby sets up an alternative model to male-centred humanism. As well as engaging fear of the abject, of castration, and of the possible cessation of patriarchal history, we are introduced to the blemished figures of woman-as-castrated and woman-as-castrator. Yet this is also a narrative in which, to use Barbara Creed's words, "the domain of the father, the word of the law, is spurned, derided, [and] banished" (1995: 153). Secondly, rather than position its female lead as a patriarchal dupe, the movie offers us a Lady Scientist who is an unfaithful subject forever locked in a tense and insubordinate relationship with the world of the Fathers. Pat repulses patriarchal attempts at marginalisation and faces monstrously sexed antagonists. The film thus establishes her difference from both the societies of Man and of monster. Thirdly, *Them!* disarranges the taken-for-granted embodiment of sex and maternity, and offers a fascinating encounter between monstrous and traditional motherhood. Finally, the text plays out many of its horrors through the male body and the male-as-victim, and can be read as a record of male anxiety and masochism. While the following chapter is structured around these issues, they are closely entwined and inevitably overlap throughout the discussion. The following discussion draws on a range of sources, but primarily centres upon Creed's work on the monstrous-feminine (1993, 1995) and Julia Kristeva's examination of the abject in *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection* (1982).

Them! has two features that make its engagement with gender significant in the realm of 1950s science fiction cinema. Whereas films featuring Lady Scientists often present worlds almost entirely inhabited by men, *Them!* depicts a number of female characters who are important to the narrative.[1] In *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954) Kay Lawrence appears to be the only representative of her sex in all of South America, while movies such as *The Night the World Exploded* (1957), *Tarantula* (1955), *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953) and *It Came from Beneath the Sea* (1955) offer the leading female actor as the only significant woman in the narrative. Other films such as *Phantom from Space* (1953) and *This Island Earth* (1955) provide some background to this near or complete absence of other females by placing their Lady Scientists within a restricted setting (respectively a scientific facility and an alien planet). Many movies simply offer a male-centred universe, asking that we regard it as normal or customary. The noteworthy portrayals in *Them!*, however, include the female hero Pat Medford, the orphaned and catatonic "little Ellinson girl"[2], a stoic mother and widow Mrs. Lodge, and an unnamed woman picked up by the police for speeding. The Ants may also be included as female, insofar as their queens are focused upon as instinctual egg-laying horrors throughout the film.

Another feature marks *Them!* as unusual in the 1950s: it is the only American science fiction movie of the era to feature a threat from a candidly feminised mass invasion force. Some movies do allude to similar ideas. In *The Giant Claw* (1957) an enormous extraterrestrial bird comes to Earth to lay eggs, but the issue of why it does so is not addressed. While *Cat Women of the Moon* (1953) and *Queen of Outer Space* (1958) posit the existence of female-led societies, these are kept securely tucked away on distant planets. The Pods in *Body Snatchers* may impose unmanly qualities upon their victims, but do not engage in the Ants' kind of conspicuously gendered combat. Meanwhile, aggressive female creatures such as in *She Devil* (1957) and *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (1958) are presented as individualised

aberrations. We do find a self-proclaimed matriarch, Nyah, who invades Earth specifically to find men with whom to breed in the British *Devil Girl from Mars* (1954). Nyah is, however, a lone would-be conqueror who does not invoke the same kinds of anxieties as do the fecund and elusive queen Ants in *Them!*

The polysemic landscape of *Them!* charts the discovery of a nest of gigantic Ants and an ensuing battle to save humanity (always termed "mankind" in the language of the 1950s). The Ants' mutation is attributed to the 1945 atomic bomb tests in New Mexico, which cause creation to go awry and the natural order (the phallic order) to break down. The movie proposes that these unpredictable atomic destabilisations are not compatible with the patriarchal world, and result in death and destruction.[3] This story is played out against a Cold War setting described in 1952 by Billy Graham as "barbarians beating at our gates" as well as "moral termites from within" (quoted in Peter Biskind, 1983: 106). One reading of *Them!* might see the film replacing one particular form of insect life with another in order to literalise, as Biskind remarks, the rhetoric of infiltration. The fight with the Ants may indeed be a metaphor for conflict with a communist invader in a world made deadly by the atomic bomb. Rather than offering a balm to these atomic worries, *Them!* resists closure, fractures boundaries, and leaves open the door to future upheavals.

The text, moreover, jeopardises much more than the body politic or its individual members, and has a symbolic basis embedded deeply within Western culture. The Ants can be viewed as a symbol of humanity's precarious hold on existence. There are, for example, a number of popular references to the survival abilities of ants recorded by Paul Boyer in his study on the social impact of the atomic bomb. Boyer quotes from a 1945 newspaper article which sententiously observes that the bomb may have "signed the mammalian world's death warrant . . . and deeded an earth in ruin to the ants" (1985: 6). A useful parallel may be found in the

work of Michael Uebel, who uses the notion of alterity to discuss relations between Islam and the West in the 12th Century. While trying to conquer the Holy Land, Christian crusaders described their opponents as a swarm of bees, imagery Uebel sees as particularly informative:

> The image of irrupting, swarming Saracens figures an other without place, a shifting, mobile threat to the limits of Christendom. The nomadic other is especially repellent, for it symbolizes the perpetual difficulty of asserting difference and distance. (1996: 269)

Using a similar analogy, our view of the Ants can represent not only a specific moment (the Cold War and the threat of atomic conflict), but also a Western dread of fracture, of discontinuity, and of the failure of borders. Cyndy Hendershot, also writing about *Them!*, draws attention to "The Empire of the Ants" by H. G. Wells and proposes a link between the military proclivities of humans and animals in both texts (1998: 325-326). Informed by the implications of Uebel's Saracens, however, Wells' work can also be contextualised as the fear of beings without a border, of things foreign against which civilised (Western) culture cannot stand. The way in which Wells phrases this threat is itself revealing, for he concludes "The Empire of the Ants" by warning:

> Of course it is extremely difficult to get any detailed information about these new competitors for the sovereignty of the globe. No eye-witnesses of their activity . . . have survived the encounter. . . . So far their action has been a steady progressive settlement, involving the flight or slaughter of every human being in the new areas they invade. They are increasing rapidly in numbers, and . . . will finally dispossess man over the whole of tropical South America. . . .
>
> By 1920 they will be half-way down the Amazon. I fix 1950 or '60 at the latest for the discovery of Europe. (1948: 107-108)

These are the same fears voiced in *Them!* when Harold Medford cautions: "Ants are savage, ruthless and courageous fighters . . . the only creatures on earth other than Man who make war." The militaristic tones used in both texts may disguise the deeper concerns of Western culture for lines of demarcation, dominion, and the exclusion of the abject. Similar themes can be tracked in the eco-disaster movies of the 1970s. In *The Swarm* (1978), for example, a huge population of African killer bees travels to Texas via South America. The Swarm's

many victims include the personnel of a nuclear missile silo, forging a link between those powers that would demarcate territorial borders and those that would defy them. In *Them!* such fears culminate in Harold's summation that "Man as the dominant species of life on earth will be extinct within . . . a year." "Man", the possessor of the phallus, has historically been favoured by science fiction films, a point discussed by Thomas Byers (1989). Writing about misogyny in science fiction, Byers observes that history is the prerogative of "the father who is the subject-speaker of the law" (1989: 78). Yet in *Them!* we find the continuance of law and of history threatened, for the Ants endanger the renewal of the patriarchal story and the future of the phallus.[4]

Given this context it is significant that Biskind's response to *Them!* echoes such phallocentric concerns. While Biskind finds that gender and maternity is crucial to the movie's political allegory, his analysis focuses on the death of the Father, and upon the shape of matriarchal violence:

> The ant society is, after all, a matriarchy presided over by a despotic queen. The queen, it seems, strikes only at patriarchy. Not only does she kill the male drones, but all her human victims are male (one man's phallic shotgun is bent like a paper clip), including two fathers. (1983: 133)

Biskind ascribes a "predatory" feminised nature to the queen Ants alone, claiming it is they who kill by striking only at human males. While the specifics of this description can be questioned (for example, it is not the queens but the workers that do the killing), both the nature of Biskind's analysis and the wording he chooses are noteworthy. When writing of the Ellinson child, he explains how "[h]er dad has just been killed and their trailer squashed like a beer can" (1983: 123). His interest seems to be the death of the male and not that of other family members. The Ellinson group consisted of a father, a mother and two children, three of whom die.[5] Even their destroyed caravan is described in masculinised terms.

Such concerns for patriarchy and for its boundaries are important because the female hero is herself a border raider, a character who lives in discontinuity. Pat Medford survives as an incessant intrusion, as spectacularly different from her male colleagues as from the Ants. She may be viewed as the self-aware subject at the brink of the symbolic, at a point where the essentialising natures of male and female no longer hold together. Such enjoyably perilous infringements of gender are often missing from discussions of fantastic cinema. Early in *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection*, Julia Kristeva writes:

> We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it - on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger. (1982: 9)

These insubordinations are constant and pleasurable; abjection "fascinates" its victims (1982: 9). At heart the abject is "neither subject nor object" (1982: 1). That is, it has no opposite number, nothing to square off against, but instead "it lies there, quite close, but cannot be assimilated" (1982: 1). As Lucie Armitt puts it, the abject bedevils the symbolic with "its irrepressible phantoms" (1996: 58). The abject offers deceitful creatures always on the brink.[6] One of the greatest pleasures of *Them!* is its depiction of these deceptive incursions, where Pat (like Ripley) can be seen to perform the work of abjection while not herself being abject. That is, in Judith Butler's terms, such characters can "threaten to expose the self-grounding presumptions of the sexed subject, grounded as that subject is in a repudiation whose consequences it cannot fully control" (1993: 3).

The Ants, and particularly their queens, are extraordinarily abject creatures. They not only strike at human society, they also represent a non-phallic form of social structure. There is no phallic order in this society, no feminine lack. Reproduction is not undertaken as the substitute for a penis, but is the most significant activity of the species. They live without the Law of the Father and as such propose a dilemma that strikes at the very heart of male

civilisation. Within the Ant society there is no father with the potential to castrate, and no "difference". The queen lays eggs that hatch into her worker-daughters, so that the entire Ant population share the same genes. They are effectively one entity. The only males in this world are drones, created specifically by the community for their mating capacity. After the drones have fulfilled their biological function, they die. These males are not the heirs to the future. The Ants can be seen to dispense with the binary logic of phallocentrism, so that the implicitly sexed dualisms of active/passive, superior/inferior, linear/cyclical, individual/community are challenged by this matriarchal horde.

Kristeva's illuminating discussion of abjection provides a range of options through which to consider the gender destabilisations found in *Them!* She lists an array of repulsions that point to the operation of the abject, to those taboo wastes evoking the fragility of borders, the places where the symbolic struggles to hold itself together. Almost all of these are present or implied in *Them!* In this film humans are food, devoured and then jettisoned into the dirt. Bodies are skeletons sucked clean of flesh, turned from individuals into loathsome refuse ejected even from the burrows of the Ants. Corpses are either left scattered behind (Gramps Johnson) or are spirited away to later be found as bones and scraps of clothing (the Ellinson family and Ed Blackburn). Other bodies are crushed, dismembered (Ben Peterson, Mr. Lodge). Buildings, a vehicle and a naval vessel are wrecked, torn apart from the inside. Only bloodstains and spoors remain. The Ants dig into the dirt, making their labyrinthine homes in the dark places of the earth. The walls of these tunnels are held together with saliva, their own bodily excretion. In Los Angeles the Ants seek out the seeping, dripping drains, hidden places where the wastes of a city are flushed. Unnatural creatures are spawned in grotesque matings, the evidence of which are found in the dead bodies of drones and the pulsing pupae laid by ever-gravid queens. These queens mate with their own "brothers", and afterwards have no further use for males. Even the Ellinson girl, walking alone in the desert, seems to invoke the fear of

incest or sexual crime: her diminutive, figure, her nightgown and broken doll allude to unspoken things that may befall little girls alone in the dark. She marches mute and zombie-like through the inhospitable terrain in complete retreat from the symbolic order.

The female hero's border incursions take place amidst yet another array of perilous associations. Barbara Creed observes that the "existence of the abject points to the subject's precarious hold on what it means to be human" (1995: 150). This can be seen literally in another instability of the abject which occurs, according to Kristeva, in "those fragile states where man strays onto the territories of the *animal*" (1982: 12, original italics), a boundary erected to guard against the sex and death intrinsic to corporeal nature. This again is a margin breached in *Them!* Humans are made to look insect-like in a number of scenes. In the opening sequence a small aircraft appears, flying low to the ground, and it is possible to mistake it for a giant dragon-fly skimming over the wilderness. Later when the investigating teams employ helicopters to search the desert for a nest site, they too may be enormous insects hovering over our heads. In the desert the humans don face-distorting goggles for their first encounter with a giant Ant in a wind storm. In the nest the three leading players wear breathing apparatus that render them insect-like, with huge eyes and proboscii. When Pat remarks that the tunnel walls of the nest are bounded together with ant saliva, Ben quips: "Yeah, spit's all that's holdin' me together right now, too." More than simply a moment of humour, Ben's aside takes on an additional dimension when considered in the context of the abject. The humans are at the border, teetering on the brink of the human/animal. In *Them!* these boundary confusions extend also to a machine/animal/vegetation confusion: the title sequence opens with the credits cast against stark New Mexico scenery, with a gnarled Joshua tree looming monster-like in the foreground. Crotty the pilot describes the Ants as flying saucers; while Jensen the drunk says they are little aeroplanes. Once boundaries are violated,

creatures are no longer restricted to only one form, and the differences between subject and object are blurred.

Drawing on Kristeva's concepts of the abject, Creed uses the term "monstrous-feminine" to describe frightfully feminised villains, arguing that they appear textually in relation to motherhood and reproduction (1993: 7). In *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993) Creed identifies a range of phallocentrically constructed characterisations which she argues carry the power of the *femme castratrice*, such as the possessed woman, the monstrous womb, and the witch. While not seeing such characters as woman-friendly, Creed's analysis reveals how unspoken male fears are expressed through female bodies and maternity (1993: 7). There are many incidents in *Them!* that coincide with Creed's descriptions. In particular, her discussion of the archaic mother seems pertinent to the female monstrosity portrayed in *Them!* (1993: 24-30). This figure of the archaic mother is a parthenogenetic being with no connection to the family or to symbolic law. She can be seen as the originating womb, pre-existing Oedipal relations. Creed uses *Alien* (1979) to formulate this analysis of the archaic mother, and *Them!* abounds with similar themes.[7]

Them! uses maternity to create a space for the clean and proper body. Mrs. Lodge, the long suffering mother, is the focus of this unpolluted space. She is surrounded by the horrors of the abject: her husband dies when his (phallic) arm is torn off by the Ants, while her sons flee to the dubious safety of storm drains inhabited by the giant insects. Yet Mrs. Lodge's stainless motherliness retains the power to sway those within the phallic order. For example, just before the military embarks on the assault in the drains, a city official questions the need to find the children:

> OFFICIAL: Are we supposed to jeopardise the lives of all the people of this city for two children who in all probability are already dead?

GRAHAM: Why don't you ask their mother that question, Mister.
PETERSON: Yeah, she's right over there.
[*Cut to a close up of an anxious Mrs. Lodge.*]
OFFICIAL: [Chastised] Yeah, I see what you mean.

David Hogan highlights this and other related scenes for portraying the importance and vulnerability of children in the film (1986: 26). Yet the vision of the good woman/clean body is crucial here. Such is the potency of the maternal image that the uncaring official is stopped in his tracks by mere sight of the tortured mother awaiting the fate of her sons (boys on the brink of the symbolic). In a moment the man has experienced a revelation and has been converted. Mrs. Lodge acts as the repository of all the "good" values phallocentrism has imposed upon maternity, being offered as the woman who will suffer in the service of the phallic family.[8]

It is worth invoking Kristeva's *Stabat Mater* (1986) at this point, and allow Mrs. Lodge to be reconfigured as that most clean of all female bodies: the Virgin Mary. In promoting the story of a virgin impregnated by the Word of a masculine God, women's true relationship with the maternal is, according to Kristeva, obscured within Western patriarchy (1986: *passim*). Kelly Oliver writes that "[t]he Virgin's only pleasure is her child who is not hers alone but everyone's, while her silent sorrow is hers alone" (1993: 50). Many concerned people join the search for the Lodge children, but suffering is the personal burden of their Mother. By accepting the mantle of the Virgin Mother, Mrs. Lodge's maternal responsibility is itself masochistic and eternal. There is even a sense in which she is to blame for the fate of the male members of her family. Mrs. Lodge (who, like the little Ellinson girl, is never given a name of her own) has no idea where her family might have gone on the day of their disappearance. She cannot help the rescue team in any way, except to identify a toy aeroplane as belonging to her sons. She has allowed her responsibility to patriarchy to lapse and will pay the price. Mrs. Lodge's characterisation also invokes the Virgin figure as described by

Marina Warner (1976). Warner charts the way in which Mariolatry has encouraged self-denial and physical suffering in ordinary women who aspire to the purity of the Virgin, noting that "in time of persecution, martyrdom made amends for nature's wrongs. . . . Through virginity and self-inflicted hardship, the faults of female nature could be corrected" (1976: 68-69). It is through the suffering body of Mrs. Lodge/Mary that the wrongs of the rapacious female Ants find atonement. She is the proper answer to their defilements.

In an intriguing counter-point to the symbolic Virgin, the film offers us an unnamed woman driver who takes part in a short scene with three male members of the investigating team (Bob, Ben and Maj. Kibby). Having tracked the Ants to Los Angeles, it is in a police station there that the woman is interviewed in the hope that she may have seen the creatures in the early hours of the morning. A flashy blonde, the driver sits upright in a chair with the men grouped about her. She complains:

> DRIVER: Gee, all I did was go through a red light—I was just in a hurry to get home. . . . I spent the night with a sick friend—I'd rather not mention any names, he's married.

The males exchange "knowing" glances without comment and tell her she can leave. Meanwhile, in another room, a crying Mrs. Lodge is told that her husband's body has been found.[9] If Mrs. Lodge may be understood as the Virgin, then perhaps we are to see the woman driver as her antithesis: the "working girl", the whore. Yet these two characters have a great deal in common. If the Ants invoke patriarchal fear and uncertainty, then Mrs. Lodge and the woman driver may be their remedy, a buttress against castration anxiety. The male-identified female, Jane Gallop explains, acts as surety in a threatening environment:

> She has no desires that don't complement his, so she can mirror him, provide him with a representation of himself which calms his fears and phobias about (his own potential) otherness and difference, about some 'other view' which might not support his narcissistic overinvestment in the penis. (1982: 70)

The mother and the sexy female embody strictly masculine desires: fecundity and sexual availability. Significantly, these desires are not retold through Pat, who remains as transgressive and as threatening as the Ants.

Another notable destabilisation in *Them!* is that the clean body does not always represent the expulsion of the abject, as seen in the person of the little Ellinson girl. When officers Peterson and Blackburn find the child in the desert she is not disheveled, her body is not harmed or despoiled in any way. The young girl is dressed neatly in night-attire, a dressing gown firmly tied at the waist and her hair carefully braided. Yet the catatonic child with her broken doll wears a scarcely human look. When Peterson asks "Who do you belong to?" she is unable to answer for there is no signifiable Mother or Father upon whom she might call. She has no identity after her encounter with the abject and continues to be called "the little Ellinson girl" even though her name must be known (her aunt is present at the hospital where the girl receives treatment). While she cannot identify herself, she can hear the Ants twittering to each other in the desert and is shocked into consciousness when Harold Medford makes her smell formic acid (a substance excreted by ants). It is the Ellinson child, nevertheless, who comes closest to the (un)identity of the creatures who have attacked her. By screaming "*Them! Them!*" when she recognises their smell, we know that she has named an indescribable foe, a monster with no familiar form, an existence that cannot be assimilated. The Ants exist just on the other side of a border, a place where the symbolic falls apart.

While the deadly fecundity of the Ants is important in *Them!*, one of the text's intriguing connections is that forged between the "female" monsters and the Lady Scientist. In order to pursue these issues further, I would like now to turn to the figure of Pat Medford and discuss some of the important features of her depiction. These include the nature of her heroism, her relationship with the Ants, and her connection to patriarchy. It is important to acknowledge

that feminised monsters pose problems for the female hero. Creed cautions that the monstrous-feminine does not necessarily assume or assert female subjectivity (1993: 7) and may do little more than reveal male fears. In the central heroic narrative discussed by Teresa de Lauretis (1984: 121) we are offered the story of a human who overcomes an obstacle/monster in order to be a *man*. It is *he* who must kill or subdue the opponent in pursuit of the quest. We seem to arrive again at the problem posed by Lotman; that is, that the space of enclosure (the symbolic womb) represents the feminine, while movement through and around such an obstacle is the prerogative of the male (de Lauretis, 1984: 118-119). Therefore, by overthrowing a figuratively feminised impediment, a female protagonist can be seen as defeating herself. By ordering the burning of the egg-chamber, the symbolic womb, Pat Medford may be joining forces with male agency and eschewing the feminine. The destruction of the breeding colonies in *Them!* and *Aliens* (1986) may well enact the kind of gynophobic sadistic impulse Laura Mulvey maintains is enacted throughout Hollywood style narrative film (1989: 21-22). Mulvey's analysis can find support in *The Giant Claw*. In a film which largely underplays the sex of the female creature attacking the Earth, it is Lady Scientist Sally Caldwell who finds the giant bird's nest. Being a "crack shot" it is she, not the male lead, who destroys the Claw's enormous egg. By dispatching the monstrous off-spring, we may well be watching a demonstration of sadistic gynophobia played out through the actions of the female lead. Following this train of thought, the sadistic story is that of the victory against "female" monsters, and belongs to the patriarchal institutions represented by, in terms of *Them!* and *Aliens*, the U.S. military and the Company.

It is possible to see Pat Medford as a patriarchal dupe who is forced to side with phallocentric constructions of monstrosity. Many critics have considered this point in relation to Ripley, seeing in her encounters with the Alien queens a female warrior who ultimately protects only the patriarchal establishment. The "selling-out" of Ripley's liberal feminism is an issue

pursued by several critics including Janice Rushing (1989), Lynda Bundtzen (1987) and Susan Jeffords (1987). Rushing sees *Aliens* as a text that represses an essential femininity, leaving Ripley to become purely a male-identified hero (1989: 18-19). In her analysis of Ripley, Bundtzen cannot reconcile a female body with one which uses technology. Thus she sees Ripley rejecting nature in favour of the "inorganic machine", and interprets this as misguided and inherently anti-female (1987: 16).[10] Writing of the first two *Alien* films, Jeffords proposes an important interpretation of Ripley's potential as a feminist hero, an argument with ramifications for Pat Medford. Jeffords asserts:

> Ripley's "feminism" . . . is victorious only because it accepts the point of view of a corporate masculism at the expense of relations between women. In order to "survive" as a feminist in this new environment, Ripley must brutally excise from existence ("Let's nuke the planet") a reproducing mother that is repulsively "alien" to her, and that the film presents as a threat, not only to her but to humanity itself. Severing any ties she might have with other women, these films succeed in recreating Ripley's "community" as a revised nuclear family supplied and supported by a corporate structure. *Alien/s* presents a "feminism" that can succeed only by making women "alien" to themselves. (1987: 73)

Jeffords sees *Alien* and *Aliens* as texts shaped by the liberal feminism of Hollywood, and understands Ripley as a feminist hero whose "battle with the alien becomes translated into a battle for the preservation of feminism itself, as she overcomes all of the obstacles that would push her back into a feminine role" (1987: 73). What we are witnessing, in Jeffords' view, is the separation of women on the battleground of motherhood: although the preservation of humanity is due to Ripley's feminist victory, the female hero must inevitably betray the cause and choose between survival and maternity. Jeffords' position is well argued. For example, she builds a picture of Ripley and Newt based on their survival skills rather than upon the creation of familial bond. She thus departs from the mother-and-adopted-daughter analogy employed by Robin Roberts (1989) to explain the connection between these two characters. Jeffords attributes Ripley's survival to her outstanding abilities, overcoming or out-living the machinations of the Company, a number of would-be heroes, an unfriendly android, and the Aliens. Yet Jeffords proposes that Ripley ultimately rejects the "woman as reproducer"

(1987: 75) by doing battle with the egg-laying Alien. By fighting a creature constructed as a monstrous mother, Ripley refuses not only masculinity but also any link with a community of women (as symbolised by the queen Alien).

It is possible to make a very similar argument for the role of Pat Medford as the one posed by Jeffords for Ripley. Pat is introduced into the narrative in the company of her father, having already jettisoned Mother Medford some time previously. Pat has taken on the same career as her father, structured herself in Harold's image. She stands up to Bob's misogyny, putting him in his place by emphasising her skills and knowledge (as a Lady Scientist should), and lectures government officials using the authority vested in her by her Father. Like Ripley, Pat is also ready to burn an egg-chamber by assuming that the reproducing queens are as much her enemy as they are the enemy of mankind. Pat is not directly connected with a child or any other object of maternal affection (it is Ben Peterson, one of the male leads, who rescues children), nor is she romantically linked to anyone in more than a cursory manner. Thus being largely separated from fecundity and sexuality, she battles alongside men to destroy a community of breeding females. The victory of the military hierarchy is her victory, and involves the crushing of monstrous motherhood as much as it ensures the rejection of Bob's overt sexism. Once again, this can become a very troublesome form of heroism, one in which Pat becomes a patriarchal stooge. While she wields some power and influence, she is identified through a relationship with her father and male symbols of authority. Most critics view this as an impossibly crippling confrontation, one that will reveal the impossibility of a heroic persona being applied to a female.

Yet rather than submit to an unavoidable containment, the Lady Scientist can announce the sexed nature of the hero quest. This is not easy territory, nor should it be. The female hero's experience takes place outside the conventions of traditional femininity, and she must be able

to defy both hegemonic masculinity and phallocentrism's self-defined evil Other, the killer matriarchy. Pat Medford is able to negotiate both traditional and hideous femininity. When writing in positive terms of Ripley in *Aliens*, Tim Blackmore (1996) engages with similar arguments that detract from that character's heroism. This causes him to wonder (with an air of exasperation) what kind of ending might please Ripley's detractors. He imagines a conclusion in which Ripley awakens to her own political position and makes an alliance with the "female" Aliens against the misogyny of the evil Company (1996: 223). Using this train of thought, we might find Pat declared Queen of the Ants, turning against the patriarchal military-industrial complex that spawned the atomic bomb and from which she is alienated. While this would allow the "female" communities in both movies to become one, the scenario is inevitably doomed. It is the failure of such a proposal that is vital. The satisfactions embodied by the Lady Scientist do not rest upon the same ground as male heroism: she intrudes, sign-posts, and disarranges the gendered quest of the hero. The female hero's objectives are not the same as those of her male counterpart or her inhuman adversary. She does not seek to eradicate uncertainty, shun ambiguity or remove all resistance. Neither Pat nor Ripley successfully circumscibe their antagonists, nor do they contain or destroy the monstrous feminine. Rather than serving to irredeemably confine the female, scenes such as the destruction of the egg-chambers in *Them!* and *Aliens* offer a confrontation with the monstrous gender of the obstacle, and render the Oedipal climax impossible. Instead of being the male hero's finest moment, the death of the female monster is revealed as a masculinist myth of linearity and closure. The feminised obstacle cannot be finally killed any more than we should expect the female hero to be easily or irrevocably triumphant.

Ideas about biology are also more open to contestation than some criticism acknowledges. For instance, Clark Blaise recalls the 1951 version of *The Thing* (1951) with great affection, while pointing out that its extraterrestrial should be considered *female* rather than male.

Blaise believes this because "her severed hand, the one torn off by the sled dogs, reveals a seed pod" (1990: 55). The creature's sex is read via its reproductive functioning rather than how its body is presented as a powerfully masculinised one. The Thing, portrayed by actor James Arness in make-up resembling that of a 1930s Frankenstein Monster, is difficult to read as a feminine presence, while its form of vegetative reproduction tends to break down boundaries rather than reassert them.[11] Nevertheless, Blaise's comment on the ability of the Thing to reproduce itself is important for it highlights the problem of interpreting maternity and female representation in science fiction texts.

In the *Alien* series the creatures do not appear to possess separate sexes. Their reproduction includes a dormant period, an impregnation stage, rebirth within a host body, and finally metamorphosis into the adult form.[12] Rather than setting down a pattern of Alien reproduction, I suggest that such texts can invade the linear narrative and destabilise literal readings of maternity. They imply fluidity rather than biological rigidity. It is even debatable whether we should describe the Aliens or the Ants using anthropomorphic expressions such as "motherhood" or "female". Science fiction can allow us to pose gendered questions unanswerable in human(ist) terms. Breeding, for instance, might be carried on through a range of biological arrangements not linked to male and female bodies as we construe them. Even something as basic as the two-sex paradigm of human biology can be challenged. Anne Fausto-Sterling (1993) proposes that our cultural investment in a two-sexed model for humanity is fundamentally flawed from a biological perspective, and proposes that intersexuality (that is, a range of sexual characteristics existing in the same individual) is as normal as any other sexed body arrangement. Similarly, science fiction films can destabilise received understandings of biology and reproduction, proffering a point of departure from patriarchal interpretation. If we perceive the queen Aliens and Ants *only* as stand-ins for biological females, then we overlook the potential of their inhuman biology and shut down

textual ambiguity. Like the bodies of intersexed people, Aliens and Ants can challenge the nature of difference. At the end of *Aliens*, for instance, the queen is able to jettison the ovipositor, abandoning sexual function seemingly at will. Rather than constituting essentialist categories, notions of reproduction can insinuate disorderly gendered positions, and (re)assemble spectacularly precarious identities.

One such reassemblage can be found in the nature of uterine or vaginal imagery. Biskind regards the Los Angeles tunnels in which the Ants take refuge as "womblike storm drains" hiding the all-important egg chamber. This enables the soldiers ultimately to "perform a hysterectomy by flamethrower" (1983: 133). Such metaphors can conjure the abject and the need to enact purification in the presence of the polluting power of the female. While Biskind's discussion of *Them!* draws attention to what seem to be male-imposed visions of gynophobia, other readings are possible. As well as pointing to sexual defilement, uterine imagery can bring its own challenges to linearity and the traditional hero quest. Thomas Vaughn suggests we look beyond the mere presence of such symbolism and consider whether a text can provoke more unusual connections. He notes that the internal tubular landscapes of the *Alien* films "systematically deconstruct the linear nature of birth" (1995: 430). In these places characters are held within a cycle of entering and being enclosed, without the prospect of escape. Through reinscribing *and* deferring symbolic birth, Vaughn sees these science fictional texts as "dislodging the subject from its prescribed direction" (1995: 431). In a similar vein, Catherine Constable notes that the vagina-and-leg imagery of the alien craft in *Alien* is complicated due to the presence of two entrances rather than one (1999: 176). A close examination of a still from the film suggests there may even be three vaginas rather than a single passage into this internalised world (Richard J. Anobile, 1979: n.p.). Alteration becomes perpetual, the final destination always deferred.

Science fiction films of the 1950s can offer similar disconnections. *Them!* concludes only after the humans have re-entered the terrain of the Ants, and the leading characters are left within this world as the final credits roll. Rather than representing the defeat of the obstacle and the consequent movement towards the Oedipal goal, the movie curtails forward motion before its patriarchal victory can be enjoyed. The heroes do not emerge victorious into the sunlight arm-in-arm. Lady Scientist and F.B.I. man do not embrace, looking upon their saved world with nostalgic self-satisfaction. Instead they seem locked in a relationship with perpetual uncertainty, left to ponder the problematic "door into a new world" opened by atomic testing. The only certainties revealed by this door are unpredictability and disjuncture. Containment is perpetually adjourned, and the future remains undetermined. Similarly insecure paths can be found even in those 1950s science fiction movies that appear to offer a care-free conclusion. At the end of *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* (1956) Carol and Russell Marvin relax on a sun-drenched beach. While this seems to return the world to a state of equilibrium, the foe defeated and romance in the air, there are other inferences that can be drawn. Carol questions her husband about the future. He says that the invaders might conceivably return but would never do so on such a beautiful day. He takes her hand and they skip playfully towards the water. Coming as it does after Russell's ambiguous admission, their final blissful romp evokes more than simple closure. The superficial optimism of the ending is such that the relief of resolution at least equals the discomforting pleasure of deferral.

Such risky identities and pleasures are also transacted by Pat Medford. In earlier chapters I describe some of her exploits, particularly her specularised arrival via the undercarriage of a military aircraft, and have cited her as an heroic female presence. In *Them!* the Lady Scientist negotiates a range of disruptively gendered activities: she exercises her own powers of observation (as well as being gazed upon); is attacked; forms bonds with male colleagues;

demonstrates her abilities as a professional scientist; and becomes a combatant in the fight with the Ants. Nevertheless, it is possible to see her role as circumscribed by her gender. Bill Warren describes her as a "beautiful daughter/assistant" (1982: 191), tacitly defining the character in relation to patriarchal prerogatives. Despite this implication, Harold Medford never treats his daughter as an inferior and uses her title of "Doctor" on several occasions. Dennis Barone contends that during the course of the film Pat "must give up science to be a 'woman.' She becomes attracted to one of the men with guns. . . . Eventually, she takes off her glasses and lets her hair down" (1996: 206). This is an unusual description of the character, who neither repudiates science nor wears glasses (real or metaphorical ones). Pat goes through no transformation scene, no symbolic unveiling of a sexy woman beneath the horn-rimmed spectacles. Such a comment may be contextualised by reference to Judy Wajcman who describes how women have traditionally been expected to deny femininity before entering the masculinised realm of technology (1991: 19). Thus in order to keep Pat within the feminine, Barone's reading sees her forsaking her scientific role and becoming acceptably sexualised. Biskind also offers a perplexing interpretation of Pat and the film's gender relations:

> *Them!* examines on a fantasy level and on an apocalyptic scale what it leaves unexamined on the "realistic" level: the conflict between Pat Medford's independence and the chauvinism of the two men. It conveys two complementary cautionary messages. To men the moral is: Better give an inch than lose a mile, better let Pat Medford assert herself, or face a far more serious challenge to male power in the future. To women: Don't be too assertive or you'll be punished for it. (1983: 133)

Biskind's comments on punishment seem more relevant to Mrs. Lodge's role in the narrative than to Pat Medford's. Biskind does not suggest how Pat is castigated unless we are to assume that this occurs in an encounter with a giant Ant (a scene to which I will return). It is just as feasible to assert that Pat is not chastened at all, but partakes in the adventure displaying courage and intelligence, intruding her own authority into the world of men.

Within traditional narrative it is usually assumed that the male hero will stand out from the crowd due to his superior skills and adaptability. Yet in *Them!* it is Pat who possesses the necessary expertise and flexibility to successfully investigate the Ants. The gendered position most compromised is that of hegemonic masculinity, particularly as expressed by F.B.I. agent Bob Graham. Bob regards himself as knowledgeable and becomes angry when both the Medfords disregard his status as an important government official. When the scientists avoid answering his questions, Bob protests:

> BOB: Now look Miss—er—doctor—
> PAT: If the 'doctor' bothers you, well why don't you call me Pat?
> BOB: I'd like that. Look Pat, I've got a job to do and I've got enough mystery on my hands already without that old - I mean, your father complicating things further.
> PAT: That old man as you started to call him is one of the world's greatest myrmecologists.
> BOB: Myrmecologist? You see. That's what I mean - why can't everybody speak English? Then we'd have some basis for an understanding.

The scientists speak over the heads of the traditional male heroes, excluding the police representatives from their accustomed position. Bob thinks he is the only one with "a job to do" and has difficulty situating Pat within his limited scheme of female roles. Her title of Doctor "bothers" him. Another important scene in which Bob is bothered by Pat occurs when the two characters argue over who will investigate the giant nest in the desert. When Bob and police officer Ben Peterson prepare to descend into the oversized burrow, Pat walks towards the site wearing coveralls and carrying appropriate equipment for the exploration. Bob responds to her appearance by demanding: "What are you made up for?" This choice of words is informative and implies that Pat is role-playing, that by attiring herself in a way similar to the men she is doing little more than dressing up as one of them. Her coveralls can be viewed as a form of masquerade wherein the Lady Scientist is trying to be "one of the boys". The body beneath the clothes remains sexed, despite the serviceability of the clothes she wears. When Pat reveals her intention to go into the nest, the F.B.I. man tries to prevent her:

> PAT: Listen Bob, someone with scientific knowledge has to go. My father's physically unable to do it. That leaves me.
> BOB: That leaves you here. Now look, we don't know what we're going to find down there or what will happen and there's one thing for sure—it's no place for you or any other woman.
> . . .
> PAT: Look Bob, there's no time to give you a fast course on insect pathology. So let's stop all the talk and get on with it!
> BOB: [Looks away] Okay, okay!

The text rejects Bob's desire to exclude Pat from the adventure, and his views do not recur again in the narrative. *Alien*[3] (1992) offers a more violent example of the same process. Ripley responds to Dillon's thinly veiled threat of rape and murder with the reply "Well I guess I must make you nervous." Like Ripley's, Pat's rebuff poses a dilemma for masculinity. Both female characters intrude upon a domain that seeks to exclude them, their bothersome presence fracturing its borders and refusing containment.

The presence of the Lady Scientist also demonstrates that the phallocentric control of science and technology is a very dubious proposition in *Them!* One of the main defects of the patriarchal military establishment rests in its inability to dominate those fields it most needs to claim An illustrative exchange occurs at the very end of the movie:

> BOB: Pat, if these monsters got started as a result of the first atomic bomb in 1945, what about all the others that have been exploded since then?
> PAT: I don't know.
> HAROLD: Nobody knows, Robert. When Man entered the atomic age, he opened a door into a new world. What we'll eventually find in that new world, nobody can predict.

It is interesting that Mick Broderick omits Pat's role in this conversation when reproducing the film's dialogue, allowing the exchange to take place between male characters only (1988: 16). Yet Pat's negative response is important for it echoes a similar reply in *It Came from Beneath the Sea*. In that film, Lesley Joyce is asked a comparable question by a reporter. Like Pat, Lesley cannot account for the unexpected outcomes of masculinised science/technology. Rather than reflect deficiencies on the part of the Lady Scientists, both

movies inform us that these characters are the last resort of knowledge. What the Lady Scientist does not understand is beyond comprehension. Wajcman has observed that conventionally the "control of technology is involved in . . . hegemonic masculinity" (1991: 143). Yet time and again *Them!* depicts the inability of patriarchal institutions to utilise and command their technological armoury adequately. One result is that the Ants overthrow an entire naval vessel with all its concomitant investment in hegemonic masculinity. When Pat stands to lecture male government and military officials in Washington D.C. she seems to embody the breach in this phallocentric hierarchy. Her body intervenes between the figures of patriarchal authority and the Capitol building (seen through a window behind her). She blocks the men from this symbol of power they historically represent. In clarifying the way in which the Ants infiltrated their vessel, the Lady Scientist speaks with authority. Yet she displaces the source of knowledge by presenting herself as a powerful female subject in the scene. *Them!* thus engages the tenuous authority of the military and scientific/industrial complexes, not their dominance.[13]

Despite Pat's ability to intrude into masculinist hierarchies, it nevertheless remains possible to see her contained by a romantic relationship. Biskind writes that "agent Graham falls in love with [Pat], raising the prospect that the alliance between science and the military, or, in any case, the law, will be ratified by marriage" (1983: 126). This reading is available even though Pat Medford and Bob Graham never hold hands, embrace or move beyond superficial verbal repartee. Apart from Bob ogling Pat early in the film, there are only a few incidents that might imply a romantic attachment. One possibility occurs towards the end of the film, just before the leading players (including Pat) lead search teams into the drains under Los Angeles. It is now Pat's turn to warn the F.B.I. agent to show some discretion. Climbing into a military vehicle she says to Graham: "Watch yourself, Bob." This comment could be motivated as much by friendly irony as by attraction. The Lady Scientist offers her own warning, and

indeed Bob gets himself into strife by not sufficiently heeding her words. Alliances other than romance can also be implied between Pat and the F.B.I. man. At the film's conclusion their relationship takes on a generational rather than a sexual significance. Having found the last of the Ants in the drains of Los Angeles, Gen. O'Brien gives the order for the creatures to be destroyed. The group of human survivors watch this unpleasant process from above. Harold Medford and O'Brien are "good" older men acting from a sense of community, yet are of the same generation and patriarchal world that loosed atomic radiation and mutated the Ants. Below them sit Pat Medford and Bob Graham, younger people who will be left to contend with their Fathers' monsters.

There is a particular encounter in *Them!* worth considering in some detail as it depicts Pat's (and our) first complex confrontation with a giant Ant and opens up many of the film's gendered issues. It takes place in the desert, with the Medfords, Bob Graham and Ben Peterson all searching for clues to help identify the mysterious killers. After finding an Ant-print in the sand, the three men stop to discuss the gravity of their situation, leaving Pat to search alone for further physical evidence. She walks on and is soon out of sight of the others. Just as she kneels to examine another huge print, the head of an Ant appears over a sand hill behind her. Following the classic horror tradition outlined by Linda Williams (1984: 85), the audience has the first glimpse of the monster. It takes Pat a moment to turn, see the creature, and scream. She then attempts to escape by running away, stumbling in the sand as she flees. Recently arrived from Washington, the Lady Scientist is still dressed in city clothes (a suit and high heeled shoes) and is not attired to scurry through the desert. The three men hear her screams. Bob rushes to Pat's side and shoots at the Ant, while Ben takes out his police revolver and opens fire from a position next to Harold Medford. Bullets seem to have no impact until the elderly doctor tells them to destroy the creature's antennae, because "He's [sic] helpless without them!" Peterson dashes back to the car, brings out a handy machine-

gun and kills the Ant. While the Medfords disclose the nature of the monstrous threat facing "mankind", a desert wind-storm seems to enclose them.

One way to consider Pat's experience is in relation to the inquiring gaze and the female victim. It is possible (and no doubt usual) to see the pesky Lady Scientist punished by both the monster and the heroic males. Condemned when she ventures away from masculine protection, Pat's fear and potential defilement become the focus of cinematic attention, and her character is kept in check by the phallicised processes of narrative. Pat's independence and active gaze can thereafter be viewed as a sham (even though she is the first to sight and photograph the desert nest). It is only Pat's victimisation that Harlan Ellison recalls when he describes the desert encounter (1984: 1). Ellison includes many sexist conventions of the genre in this retelling: the helpless Pat is too silly to dress properly and screams like Fay Wray when she finds a rampaging Ant bearing down upon her. Revealingly, Ellison recalls only Pat's scream and her "punishment". Such an account does not acknowledge that penalty also accrues to the inquiring male gaze in this film *and* that three men scream (Blackburn, Peterson and Graham) when attacked by the Ants. The screams of these characters are significant in light of the film's relations with the abject. Creed, writing on the failure of language in horror cinema, observes that non-rational utterance "challenges the rational discourse of the symbolic order and the seeming stability of the rational subject" (1993: 38). The scream, the howl of fear, can stand for much more than the defeat of the feminine: its gendered implications within the symbolic order draw us to the fracture of that order rather than to the failure of the female hero. We might equally see Pat's inappropriate desert attire as a warning against traditional femininity. Commenting on *Tarzan and His Mate* (1934), Creed observes that Jane is nearly killed when she dons a feminine gown (a present from a male character), the garment hindering her agility in the jungle (1987 n.p.). Similarly encumbered, Pat's encounter

in the desert cautions that the Lady Scientist can portray gender disruption as much as gender conformity.

The Ant encounter can also evoke the queering Harry Benshoff (1997) sees taking place in 1950s movies such as *Them!* By confusing binaries such as technology/nature and male/female, Benshoff believe that a number of Cold War texts making boundaries permeable (1997: 129). Thus in the scenes with the attacking Ant, Harold Medford tells Peterson and Graham to shoot the Ant's antennae because "he" will be rendered useless without these organs. With the creature symbolically castrated and then killed, Harold identifies an enormous phallic stinger as the animal's instrument of death. Although the Ants crush and rend with their mandibles (most of their victims having been torn apart), Harold asserts that the humans have died by being pierced with the stinger. If we assume that the worker Ants are the infertile daughters of one queen, as is generally the case in ant species, then these creatures are simultaneously "male" *and* Creed's *femme castratrice*, that feminine presence that serves to increase rather than resolve male anxieties (1993: 127). Furthermore, if we can read guns as phallic symbols, it is interesting that ordinary weapons are insufficient to dispatch the Ant: it takes an exceptional firearm, a machine gun, to kill it. In this sense the presence of the Lady Scientist serves to intensify these threats to masculinity.

There are a variety of such boundary phenomena at play when the Lady Scientist meets the giant Ant, all of which are indicative of gender disruption. Identities are slipping apart in the narrative, one form of alterity attracting another. Until Pat arrives, the Ants have been unseen, the source of mysterious, malevolent happenings. They only become visible after the arrival of the Lady Scientist. Bob Graham also knows immediately that Pat is the kind of doctor to give, rather than to cure, a fever. A similar intrusion occurs in *Tarantula*, with the giant spider appearing shortly after Steve Clayton makes her entrance into Desert Rock. Steve is

positioned as an oddity: young, intelligent, goal-oriented *and* female. At one level Steve's presence (and that of the Lady Scientist in general) may be said to represent no more than the problems of post-war masculinity, a nod and a wink at the difficulties of being a man surrounded by intrusive females. Yet Steve and Pat inject a more revealing form of gender insecurity into the narrative. In *Tarantula* Doc Hastings quips: "I *knew* it would happen. Give women the vote and what do you get? Lady scientists!" The remark is made light-heartedly, yet can serve as yet another pointer to the female hero's assault on patriarchal borders and identities.

Discussions of punishment in *Them!* seem only to focus on the female body. Yet this movie locates most of its gendered chastisement within masculinity and extends a harsh array of punishments to its male characters. Ed Blackburn, young, resourceful and a "crack shot", investigates strange sounds and shrieks off-screen when carried off to his grisly end. Ben Peterson seeks and finds the Lodge boys, only to be crushed to death screaming. And by venturing off alone in search of the egg chamber at the film's climax, Bob is cut off from his unit, letting loose a manly wail of fear before being saved. Bob also receives a tell-tale slash to the arm in this final skirmish with the enemy.[14] All of these male characters are caught in the act of self-consciously "looking" for which they experience more severe punishments—and in Ben Peterson's case a more graphic one—than Pat ever receives. The film certainly saves its most unpleasant penalty for the benevolent and courageous Ben. If we accept that there is very little in the text that positions the two male leads as romantic rivals, then Ben cannot be seen as an encumbrance, someone to be removed to preserve the heterosexual couple. This means that his is a perplexing death. That is, until we realise that Ben himslef expresses an abundance of gender ambivalence.

Benshoff notes that one of the main ways to depict queer male characters in popular culture is to give them an effeminate appearance (1997: 283). Vito Russo similarly identifies "weakness of character" as a cinematic pointer to sexual deviance (1981: 54). Yet Ben is traditionally masculine in dress, voice and movement. He is, moreover, a valuable member of the police force and seems to symbolise its heteronormative masculine authority. While Ben displays all the classic traits of male heroism, including bravery, determination and resourcefulness, he is not implicated in any heterosexist encounters. He does not take an active part when Bob ogles Pat early in the film, nor does he try to stop Pat from entering the desert nest. This effectively distances his character from the sexist stance of the traditionally straight F.B.I. man. Ben does, however, form close attachments with small children and with other men. It is Ben who finds the Ellinson girl and the Lodge boys. When he encounters a friend during the course of his investigations, Ben pointedly asks after the man's children. There is no textual evidence to imply a sexual interest in children, but rather an emotional (feminised) bonding. When the Ellinson girl becomes hysterical in the hospital, it is Ben who comforts her. Ben is also included in two adult male relationships, firstly with Ed Blackburn and then with Bob Graham. Both of these are terminated by the deadly punishment of the Ants. Male bonds in general are troubled in *Them!*, as illustrated in the death of the entire crew, a military brotherhood, on-board the S.S. Viking at sea. Ben's attachment to his male companions places patriarchal affiliation into a personal context, coloured by individual traits of kindness and loyalty, and perhaps affection. This may be why Ben's is a particularly unpleasant death. An Ant snares him in an underground chamber, lifts into the air, and crushes him in its mandibles. He struggles in vain and dies painfully as Bob leans over him. Although he saves the Lodge boys, thereby ensuring the continuance of the patriarchal family, Ben's death scene does nothing to reduce or offset the castration anxiety said to be invoked by the monstrous femininity of the Ants. Even the impersonal burning of the egg-chamber at the film's conclusion does little to balance Ben's loss. He has succeeded in this manly duty but,

by combining logic and action with warmth and affective bonding, he embodies an unforgivable combination in a male hero. He dies because it displaces gender angst not onto the female body but to the ambiguously sexed male who cannot be allowed to live.

The array of fascinations awaiting our attention in *Them!* become even more enlivened once the film's gendered nature is granted space in which to emerge. Pat Medford may well be readable as the patriarchal dupe, using her knowledge and heroism at the behest of male authority. Such a circumscription takes place within the binary tensions proposed by phallocentric criticism. Rather than accept that the feminine will inevitably be encumbered by overwhelming barriers, the Lady Scientist can be understood as an unfaithful female subject who can trespass between borders. She is able to engage with the fears of the abject and male castration, revealing—not succumbing to—their sexed nature. This is the key to Pat Medford's potentially catastrophic encounter with the feminised Ants. Like Lt. Ripley, Pat presides at the disordering of sex and maternity, and the dispossessing of self-confident masculinity. *Them!* insists upon the pliability of gender and the dispersion of boundaries, and opens up to us that very dangerous territory where female heroes thrive.

The movies I have examined in the last three chapters have all offered the fantastic figure of the Lady Scientist, a character who confronts and disarranges the nature of gender, knowledge and the symbolism of patriarchal reality. The films in which they are found offer the pleasurable encounters of attractive females who infiltrate and alter the male world. Each of the three Lady Scientists, Lesley Joyce, Kay Lawrence and Pat Medford, are presented to the viewer as erotic objects, yet manage not only to evade the passivity this capture normally implies, but to transform their physical image into a non-compliant corporeality. The outrage

of the knowledgeable female's voice is never irredeemably curtailed by the heroine's scream, but instead points to an array of gendered disassociations inspired by the female subject. The Lady Scientist announces that the traditional relationships and skills of masculinity (scientific insight, courage, adaptability) are not restricted to one sex, but can become part of the repertoire of the female hero. Most particularly, they are characters who help to pry open the trajectory of the male-centred narrative, revealing its greatest achievements to be artful phallocentric stories based on the false discipline of linearity and closure.

Conclusion

RIPLEY: We did it—we saved the Earth.
CALL: ...What happens now?
RIPLEY: I dunno. I'm a stranger here myself.

Ripley and Call
Alien Resurrection (1997)

"When the going gets tough, the tough get masculine" writes Janice Rushing describing her view of Ripley in *Aliens* (1989: 18). In Rushing's terms, Ripley's capabilities and actions show her as fighting "like a man"; she is a stand-in, as it were, for John Wayne or Clint Eastwood. The female hero I have sought to investigate in this work bears only a superficial resemblance to such macho figures. Ripley's strength resides in her ability to represent more than simply (as Jane Mills puts it) "tired old male fantasies" (1999: 50). Mills sees the *Alien* film series intruding upon phallocentric notions of the feminine, opening up an alternative female imaginary. The female hero is never embraced as a vision of manly virtue, but retains the permanently dissonant strangeness of Ripley and Call, the clone and the cyborg, the new/old woman and the un-human. The heroic figure sought in this work is not a humanist hero but a transforming, transgressive, even transhuman one.

The cinematic female heroes from the 1950s that I have been describing are constructed through a range of characteristics found in such an alterior imaginary space. They offer transgressive corporeality not restrained by sexualised spectacle. They display bravery and often also technical or physical competence. Female heroes disrupt oppositional binary logic and create places of gendered difference in text. They break down or fracture the "inescapable" destiny of the Oedipal narrative. And they are necessarily marginal figures who provoke problems rather than offering

the nostalgic certainty of male hero tales. These relationships, competencies and practices can be used in a reading practice that portrays a female character being insubordinately heroic. They venture where they should not go, and gain knowledge and power on the way. Their heroic confrontations take place anywhere: from within the home to the depths of outer space. They are concerned with deadly invasion, patriarchal colonisation and the survival of humanity.

Throughout this work I have also argued that 1950s science fiction films are complex and disruptive, mobilising discourses of gender, sexuality, class, race and colonialism. I continue to be surprised, therefore, that so little feminist research is undertaken into these movies. Robin Roberts remarks on a similar issue. Writing about the influence of pulp science fiction on the genre, Roberts calls on feminism not to dismiss an entire reserve of texts from its repertoire, but instead to provide an appropriate critique of both the sexist *and* the empowering elements of the pulp era (1993: 48-49). Furthermore, Roberts sees science fiction still suffering from "the desire of New Criticism to categorize and create hierarchies that [have] resulted in a canon of approved texts" (1993: 48). Science fiction tends to be somewhere near the bottom of such critical hierarchies, and to compound matters many forms of science fiction (such as old science fiction cinema) are relegated to the bottom of this already-devalued heap. Annette Kuhn adds another dimension, noting that while science fiction film "challenges several screen studies agendas", there is "little sustained reflection" on its nature (1999: 2). This impacts on a number of issues pertinent to 1950s films. How might we theorise the destabilising process of "becoming" in relation to movies like *Them!* (1954), *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957) and *The Wasp Woman* (1960)? How might we comprehend the sexed, gendered and bodily incursions found in these science fiction texts? A feminist who writes about science fiction movies from the 1950s certainly engages a whole series of marginalities. Critical feminist enquiry seems to have

succumbed to masculinist discourse concerning these films, distancing itself from a part of the genre already seen as strictly patriarchal, strictly of interest only to men and boys. If that should be the case, if *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1958) and *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954) and *It Came from Beneath the Sea* (1955) and *Them!* (1954) are pre-judged as of no interest to feminist scholarship, then we *have* succumbed to a tyranny of meaning perpetuated within patriarchy itself. If this is the case, then it is time to redress the imbalance.

Drawing to the conclusion of this work, there seem to be as many omissions from it as there are inclusions. I have merely scratched the gendered surfaces of *The Thing* (1951), *It Came from Outer Space* and *Phantom from Space* (1953), *Tarantula* (1955) and *The Fly* (1958). There are also an array of anti-heroes of the 1950s, marvelously monstrous females I have mentioned only in passing. These include *The Wasp Woman* (1960), *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (1958), and the British *Devil Girl from Mars* (1954). Like Vivian Sobchack (1994), I find the disruptive desires exhibited by such characters to be intriguingly insubordinate and well worth our attention. In Chapter Nine, "White Woman in a Black Lagoon", I began to address the issue of race in 1950s science fiction movies. A feminist investigation of aliens and other science fictional creatures as racialised figures would also be fruitful ground for further research. Such analyses would need to include both the cultural specificity of 1950s U.S.A. and a consideration of colonialist Othering so often evident in these texts. So too a feminist exploration of gender, technology and the depiction of the atom bomb in 1950s films would prove revealing. The Bomb is one of the most important recurring themes in 1950s science fiction films.[1] The unthinkable problems of the post-atomic world play a direct or an indirect role in *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), *It Came from Beneath the Sea*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *Fiend Without a Face* (1957) and *This Island Earth* (1955). The films *Them!* and *Tarantula* warrant

places here also, enacting as they do the perilous genders implicit in nature and bomb-related science. The science fiction movies of the 1950s remain rich terrain not only for the feminist researcher, but also post-colonial and queer analysis. Many of these issues have been beyond the scope of this work, but hopefully not of future study.

More than an academic exercise, there is a sense of personal release to be found in the work I have presented here. It is a complex articulation of the knowledge I had as a child, when I sat alone in the family lounge room in suburban Sydney in the 1960s and watched science fiction movies on a black and white television set. I saw 1950 female heroes challenging the way men and women might act in real life. I saw science fiction films that were complex and fascinating and full of meaning. My involvement with science fiction has embodied something fundamental about myself and the way I have lived my particular life as a woman. It has provided a fantastic lens through which to look at those patriarchal structures of the world that sometime threatened to engulf us. For me the female heroes of the 1950s interrupted the balance of power in gender relations and for years have continued to provide the possibility for a powerful female imaginary. Despite every other sexist message to the contrary, I learnt a basic lesson very early in my life: that a woman might *really* know the words to save the world.

Klaatu berada nikto.

END NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. For a discussion on media fandom and textual re-writing, see Henry Jenkins (1992).

2. For discussions of "Hawksian" women see Molly Haskell (1980: 476ff) and John Belton (1996: 279-279).

3. The reimagining of gender is also of vital importance for writers of feminist and queer science fiction/fantasy. Two contemporary works to address this task include: *Bending the Landscape: Science Fiction* edited by Nicola Griffith and Stephen Pagel (1999), a volume devoted to exploring non-heterosexist concepts of sexuality; and the fantasy anthology *Warrior Princesses* edited by Elizabeth Ann Scarborough and Martin H. Greenberg (1998) which retells the stories of mythic and historical women warriors in tales that challenge the passivity of the traditional heroine.

4. Minor characters can still be of particular interest. We may, for instance, wonder about Kathleen Hughes who portrays the girlfriend of a telephone linesman in *It Came from Outer Space*. Hughes offers a short, sexy performance, pouting and delivering *double entendre* dialogue for which she receives high-profile billing. Elsewhere Carolyn Jones plays a bit-part listed as "Dumb Blonde" in the credits of *The War of the Worlds* (1954), while "Francine the hooker" is killed by aliens in *I Married a Monster from Outer Space*. Although engaging, the questions of female performance raised by such characters are beyond the immediate scope of this work.

5. See Neyir Cenk Gökçe's complied list of definitions at: www.panix.com/~gokce/sf_defn.html

6. See, for example, Christine Geraghty's work dealing with the fan cultures of soap opera. Here issues such as repetition, the importance of sub-stories, and the familiarity with characters are salient features of viewing practice (1991: 11-15). John Fiske argues that some "sequel" films offer similar relationships to character and narrative, citing the *Rocky*, *Mad Max*, and *Rambo* movies as examples (1987: 150).

CHAPTER 1: THE INCREDIBLE MISSING WOMAN

1. Campbell became a well-known and a controversial figure in his own right. He was the author of numerous works on myth and heroic narrative starting with *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* in 1949. In 1988 (the year before his death) Campbell was the subject of a popular series of televised talks with interviewer Bill Moyers (1988a). Campbell was also at the centre of posthumous charges of anti-Semitism levelled in 1989 by Brenden Gill in the *New York Review of Books*. See Andrea Chambers (1989) for a summary of this controversy.

2. It is tempting to extrapolate Campbell's exclusion of Leia to ponder what his reaction might have been to the latest film in the *Star Wars* saga, *Episode 1: The Phantom Menace* (1999). Rather than see Queen Amidala as a strategist or a powerful leader, is it possible that her role would also become invisible next to those of Qui-Gon Jinn, the young Obi-Wan, and Darth Maul? Most assuredly, Anakin Skywalker, the child seemingly born of an immaculate conception, would embody the most sublime notions of transcendent *male* heroism.

3. See Terry Frontgla (1991) for a further consideration of these issues in relation to fantasy texts.

4. *The Phantom Menace* does not involve itself in romantic encounters. Rather than indicating a reduction in sexism, however, this omission may be due to a juvenilisation of the saga, as well as to an emotional coolness or distance between its characters.

5. For an analysis of liberal politics and race in the *Star Trek* universe, see Daniel Leonard Bernardi (1998).

6. In subsequent chapters I will expand upon many of the following descriptions of leading female characters in a range of 1950s science fiction films.

7. I do not suggest that all such re-tellings are a matter of sexism. For instance, when Jeff Rovin discusses *Creature from the Black Lagoon* he assigns different roles to the actors: Richard Denning now portrays Carl Maia rather than Mark Williams, and Kay Lawrence is re-named Kay Williams. Rovin also fuses the characters of Mark and Dr. Thompson (Whit Bissell) into one (1977: 94).

8. Jungian psychology, with its concepts of myth, archetypes and the mystical, has had a profound affect on contemporary ideas of the hero. Not only have C. G. Jung's principles influenced writers such as Campbell, they also form a significant position from which popular cultural narratives may be perceived and explained. See for example, the work by Louis A. Woods and Gary L. Harmon (1994) on the original *Star Trek* series. An evaluation of Jung's theories in relation to the hero is beyond the scope of this work, but for a feminist evaluation on the influence of Jung see Demaris Wehr (1987).

9. Here I use the term "homosocial" in the way proposed by Rhona Berenstein (drawing on the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick) as referring to both "the social and erotic charges that bind rivalrous men together in narratives", as well as the way women are overlooked by patriarchy (1996: 128). I will return to this concept for later discussions of 1950s science fiction films, particularly *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1958) and *Creature from the Black Lagoon*.

10. Of course, other readings of this tale are possible. It is just as viable to interpret it as a narrative of masculine betrayal, one in which the legendary evil of the Gorgons (luring good men to their deaths) is replaced by the treachery and foolishness of men.

11. For a discussion on Medea in this context, see Warner (1994: 6-10).

12. Lynne Joyrich still finds femininity rather than command to be the principal occupation for women in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, with female independence seemingly at the behest of patriarchal authority (1996: 67). See also Susan Kray for a discussion on the problems of being a female in *Star Trek* (1993: 283-284).

13. Female fan writers have been addressing the exclusion of women from the captain's position in their own material for some time. See for example Jacqueline Lichtenberg, Sondra Marshak and Joan Winston (1975: 226-231). *Star Trek*'s sexist imbalance appears to have been addressed in *Star Trek: Voyager* through Capt. Kathryn Janeway, whose intriguingly feminised double name seems a far cry from that of the imperiously dubbed James Tiberius Kirk.

CHAPTER 2: GAZE OF THE NON-PHALLIC MONSTER

1. For discussions of such characterisations, see Jeanine Basinger (1993) and Diane Carson (1994).

2. There is an echo of Pat's legs in *The Abyss* (1989). Lindsey Brigman's entrance from a military helicopter in smart suit and high heels marks her difference from the Navy SEALs who have descended the craft before her. Like Pat, we see a knee to floor view of Lindsey's legs, while thereafter she is dressed in working clothes (jeans or coveralls). Lindsey's arrival can also be seen as a point of departure rather than simply a frozen moment.

3. There are many such direct or implied claims throughout science fiction film literature and I will refer to these instances in more detail when discussing individual films. For example, see Peter Biskind's comments on the punishment of Pat Medford in *Them!* (1983: 133).

4. Williams contends that there are actaully two places in film where the narrative depends on the woman who looks: horror and melodrama. In "'Something Else Besides a Mother': *Stella Dallas* and the Maternal Melodrama" (1984a) Williams develops an argument based on Nancy Chodorow's re-interpretation of psychoanalysis, investigating how woman might speak to each other from ambiguous positions within patriarchy.

5. Whether we should accept that Erik, Dracula, the Frankenstein Monster, or any other of the classic horror characters are purely "non-phallic" is debatable. All these roles were played by male actors whose off-screen personas were heavily invested in the types of roles they performed (Lon Chaney Snr., Bela Lagosi and Boris Karloff becoming quintessential horror film stars). It seems likely that 1920s and 1930s audience brought a complex understanding of gendered embodiment to their own viewing practices, wherein the sex (and even sex-appeal) of the actor formed an integral part of the viewing process. Jackie Stacey's ethnographic work (1994) shows that the associations between star and audience are more complex and unexpected than some critical theories have proposed.

6. For a discussion of the one-sex model of humanity, see Cynthia Freeland (1996: 202).

7. The issue of names is an interesting one, for science fiction movies of the 1950s have their share of ambiguously named women, such as Nikki, Lee, Pat, Steve, Hutch and Lesley. Peter Biskind seems to agree that females thus named should be seen as *de facto* men (1983: 135n). Yet the names of *male* characters seem to go unremarked. The films of the era are filled with their twofold manhood: John Adams, Steve Andrews, Bob Graham, Russell Marvin, Pete Mathews, Dave Randall, Ben Peterson, Tom Stevens and Mark Williams being some examples. We may equally enquire why so many male characters are in desperate need of reinforced maleness, and I return in Chapter Four to discuss the problems of endangered masculinity in 1950s science fiction movies.

8. I will return to discuss *I Married a Monster* in more detail in Chapter Six.

9. Jackie Stacey also argues for a widening of the concept of desire. She advocates the necessity of going beyond the psychoanalytic assumption that desire has *only* erotic implications, and should move towards an understanding that encompasses meanings identified by women spectators themselves (1994: 29). Stacey believes that such a reconsideration can take account of the variety of pleasures women find in cinema beyond those inscribed by the processes of its patriarchal construction.

10. Silverman also offers a similar analysis of *Klute* and the manner in which its auditory/speech relationships reflect the heterosexist power embodied in the narrative (1988: 81-84).

11. For an enlargement on these issues, see Robert Battistini's (1992) analysis of *Basic Instinct*. Comparing it with Mulvey's 1976 work on women and cinematic representation, he argues that *Basic Instict* offers a female lead who subverts the traditional masculine hero of Hollywood film. Battistini's position can be contrasted to that of Celestino Deleyto (1997), whose psychoanalytical interpretation sees the film based around Catherine Tremell's monstrosity as the castrating woman.

12. This is a different process to that discussed by Diane Carson (1984), who deals with "screwball comedies" of the 1930s and '40s and their rebellious female characters. Carson describes how, in this type of film, "men conquer these verbally adept women by revealing the nonsensical nature of loquacious ramblings . . . or by co-opting their speech and silencing them" (1984: 214). For a contrasting feminist reading of the comedies of the screwball era, see Elizabeth Abele (1997b).

CHAPTER 3: ATTACK OF THE LITTLE MEN

1. The concept of "momism" is discussed by William H. Chafe (1972: 201-202). The expression, used by Philip Wylie in 1942, describes a pathological process of "mother worship" in American society. Wylie's theory neatly blamed mothers for preventing their sons becoming fully autonomous adults, while laying female social discontent at the feet of women themselves. If there was trouble with masculinity in the 1940s and 1950s, it was women who such theorists were the first to condemn. See also Lois Banner (1974: 212-215).

2. Commenting on the use of language in science fiction cinema, Vivian Sobchack asserts that these last two lines are spoken by soldiers locked in deadly combat at the climax of *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*. She thus offers them as an example of humourously sententious dialogue (1997: 155). Rather than being unusual remarks for the heat of battle, however, the words form part of a longer conversation occurring in a reflective moment near the beginning of the film. This setting casts the exchange into a different linguistic climate and helps set the scene for the narrative to come.

3. *Picnic* has attracted feminist critical attention centred on its techniques in portraying the bodies of its leading actors. For instance, Jackie Byars maintains that even a star with the macho screen personality of William Holden could be tenderised for this movie (1991: 171ff). Byars sees *Picnic* as focused on Madge's character and supports this reading with a frame-by-frame analysis of some key scenes (1991: 171ff). Molly Haskell, on the other hand, interprets the film as a traditional Hollywood tale in which Kim Novak's Madge is a sexually repressed small-town girl who needs "Holden's gleaming masculinity to bring her to life" (1987: 250).

4. For a further discussion on McClane and western heroes see Elizabeth Abele (1997a).

5. Another science fiction film to offer similar associations is *Alien Nation* (1988). After several near-death escapades, leading character Sykes comes to accept his alien cop buddy Sam Francisco. The movie ends at the wedding of Sykes' daughter, where Sykes himself remarks: "Well, my daughter's got a husband, I got a partner. You know, he really ain't half bad." This revealing piece of dialogue seems to directly equate the buddy relationship to a heterosexual union. Further examinations of the buddy movie in terms of repressed homosexuality can be found in the works of Cynthia J. Fuchs (1993) and Vito Russo (1981: 68ff).

6. For further reading see Dennis Bingham's discussion of the problematics of performing and representing such complex masculinity in Hollywood cinema (1994).

7. While not commenting on the film, Benshoff does mention Richard Matheson's novel *The Shrinking Man* (1956), wherein the hero is accosted by a homosexual. This incident is not depicted in the screen version.

8. The Production Code grew out of the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors of America (M.P.P.D.A.) formed in the early 1920s. Headed by Will Hayes, it saw a formal system of censorship adopted in 1930. The Code was concerned with the regulation of a range of behaviors and activities based broadly around violence, sexuality and "vulgarity". For a list of the "Don'ts and Be Carefuls" of the Hayes Office, see Richard Maltby (1996: 239). The Code remained in place until the mid-1950s, supported by the studio system and a range of pro-censorship groups.

9. This encoding is also often linked to perversion and crime. See, for example, *House of Horrors* (1946) and *Short Cut to Hell* (1957).

10. This is not always the case in science fiction movies of the 1950s. See Chapter Ten, "Queen of the Ants", for a discussion of this issue in relation to the character of Ben Peterson.

11. An updated version of the male epic can seen in *Braveheart* (1995), a film encompassing almost all of the points made by Hunt when he discusses the epics of the 1950s and 1960s. William Wallace transfigures himself by constituting a transcendent trinity of fatherhood: he begets a child with the future queen of England; teaches Robert the Bruce to be a "man"; and fathers Scottish nationalism with his dying word "Freedom!"

12 See Chapter Ten for a more detailed discussion of female monsters in science fiction movies.

13. In relation to *El Cid*, however, it is worth noting that this final image of the dead Rodrigo on his war-horse can be seen as less than transcendent: it is a very strange spectacle indeed. The moribund Cid is placed astride his horse which then canters off along a beach, rider swaying precipitously on its back. Rather than representing the "perfect" leader, which Hunt proposes with some reservations (1993: 69), a feminist analysis might suggest the lurching Rodrigo betokening a ludicrous and desolate form of hegemonic masculinity.

14. There is another pertinent shrinking female movie, *The Incredible Shrinking Woman* (1981), but I have not been able to view a copy of this film.

CHAPTER 4: *HER! HER!* THE SPECTACULAR FEMALE SUBJECT

1. We should note, however, that the contemporary female action hero is less disruptive of racial discourses than she is of sexist ones. With few exceptions, heroic female roles are cast with white actors. The linking of heroism to whiteness is itself a racialised characteristic of the hero narrative, as Margery Hourihan points out (1997: 58-62). I will return to the issue of race in 1950s science fiction movies in more detail in Chapter Nine, but for a discussion of non-Caucasian action heroines see Tasker (1993: 21ff).

2. For example, Bill Warren observes that the ordinary Helen is portrayed very well by Patricia Neal, with the only exceptional thing about the character being the amount of trust she places in Klaatu the extraterrestrial (1982: 24). I will return to discuss Helen in more detail in Chapter Seven.

3. In a similar vein, see Robin Roberts' discussion on the feminist reclamation of visual imagery in early pulp magazines (1993: 40ff).

4. The context of Nochimson's comment is relevant, for her work *No End to Her: Soap Opera and the Female Subject* deals with television genre she sees as having developed into a form of feminine discourse (1992: 2). Nochimson maintains that soap opera relies upon the non-linearity of its narrative, one which does not focus on the male hero and the female obstacle (1992: 32). While the linear narrative in film has a masculinised history, it does not follow that meanings are fixed or that film automatically creates a fixed set of reading practices (any more than soap opera necessarily offers disruptive or disorderly ones).

5. The term "action heroine" has been coined by Tasker to describe female protagonists in action cinema (1993: 132). She does not imply that the action heroine is a heroine in the traditional sense of victim or secondary character. Often the action heroine will be found in a role otherwise reserved for a male, carrying a gun, or demonstrating physical strength.

6. *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* offers a similar juxtaposition. When Sarah Connor recognises that the "good" cyborg will make a excellent parent, she leaves it in charge of her son. She then becomes a kind of human terminator. She tracks Dyson, the scientist responsible for Skynet (the deadly computer that will destroy the world), arming and dressing for battle just as the Terminator itself has done. She does (at least temporarily) take the place of the part-machine, blurring the divisions between human/cyborg, body/mechanism, and male/female.

7. I will return in Chapter Ten to discuss maternity and the monstrous-femme in *Aliens* and *Them!*

8. Both Bell-Metereau (1985) and Newton (1990) point to the name of the space vessel as the link to *Alien*'s underlying critique of corrupt commercialism. Newton observes that the name "*Nostromo*, 'nostro-homo', our man, makes allusion, of course, to Conrad's working-class hero, another company man, who dies understanding that he has been betrayed by 'material interests'" (1990: 82). Bell-Metereau agrees. By placing "greed, commercial exploitation, the baseness of company motives, and the essential aloneness of the individual" at the core of *Alien*, the film mirrors the pivotal themes in Conrad's *Nostromo*, *Heart of Darkness* and *Typhoon* (1985: 13).

9. The novelisation of *Alien*[3] by Alan Dean Foster also provides support for this reading. Pursuing another Alien, Ripley has time to remember: "She found herself thinking of Jonesy. . . . [S]he and the cat had survived the *Nostromo*. Curiosity and a talent for survival were two of the skills they'd shared" (1992: 145).

10. In an interview with Danny Peary, Sigourney Weaver maintains that director Ridley Scott had intended the film to offer matter-of-fact nudity as well as a Ripley-initiated sex scene with Dallas (1984: 162). If the character of Ripley had not become a female (it is generally accepted that Ripley's was originally to be a male role) would Scott have even contemplated such an encounter? One wonders how the "striptease" sequence might have been presented in this context. It certainly would be a very different text had this vision been filmed.

11. All the men seem to be wearing a similar style. With some resemblance to a baby's napkin, we are possibly asked to link this garment with the relationship between the humans and the computer called Mother that has awakened them from hypersleep.

12. I return to consider this and other scenes from *Creature from the Black Lagoon* in Chapter Nine

13. A different perspective of *Blue Steel*'s phallic imagery comes from Steven Shaviro's observation of bad-guy Eugene Hunt. Shaviro sees Eugene as a "the yuppie who is helplessly fascinated by the phallic power of [Megan's] weapon" (1993: 1). This view sees the phallicly-challenged Eugene as the one who is gun-obsessed, not Megan herself. The film's ending, in which Megan kills Eugene and then throws the weapon down, can thus illustrate a rejection of the phallus as a symbol of power, rather than submission to it.

14. The Beast's blood contains a deadly contagion with an uncanny resemblance to radiation sickness. The creature therefore cannot be burned alive, for this might simply spread its infected cells. Male lead Tom Nesbitt says it must be shot with a radioactive isotope in order to destroy the disease-carrying tissues. The Beast is cornered on the wooden roller coaster in Coney Island and injected with the isotope, but while doing so the flammable structure is accidentally set alight. The Beast perishes in the flames. Have they been in time or will the fire simply spread the disease? Has the world been saved at all?

15. We might similarly note that the male science fiction movie heroes of the 1950s are also less likely to carry weapons than modern-day male characters. This is particularly so when these heroes are non-military types. When, for example, John Putnam shoots and kills an alien in *It Came from Outer Space* (1953), this is an act of self-defence and an eerily poignant scene.

CHAPTER 5: EVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS

1. The character of Altaira in *Forbidden Planet* (1956), one of the most conservative science fiction films of the decade in its depiction of femininity, is also confined to a passive role, handed over from one patriarch to another as the film reaches its climax. Dashing spaceship captain John Adams overcomes the enemy, sees the old patriarch die, and claims his woman in one final resolution. In a movie with implied incest as a sub-text, it is important that Morbius relinquishes his daughter at the same moment he calls Adams "son". By placing Altaira into the younger man's keeping, Morbius

passes on the prerogatives of the Father to this male descendent. This pattern is most recently repeated in *Armageddon* (1998), a text redolent with themes of incest as well as homosociality. Before Harry Stamper (Bruce Willis) sacrifices himself for the good of humanity, he accepts A.J.'s love and bestows his daughter Grace upon the younger man, thus enacting the patriarch's privilege of passing dominant masculinity on to the next generation.

2. Miles' "kidnapping" of Becky takes place *before* they realise Mr Driscoll has become a Pod. It is not difficult, therefore, to imply that Miles is acting-out his own incest anxieties. This suggests a point of concurrence between *Body Snatchers* and *Forbidden Planet*, with the female leads in both films needing to be rescued from their fathers' clutches.

3. In 1997 I attended a screening of *Body Snatchers* presented at an adult education class in Sydney, Australia. This piece of Miles' dialogue was received with a collective groan from the audience, followed with laughter. The same response occurs when I present the movie in university lectures. The reading of over-the-top gynophobia/misogyny is one clearly available to contemporary Australian viewers, just as it was in the early 1980s to Steffen-Fluhr's audience of college students (1984: 139).

4. See Brooks Landon (1997) for a discussion of science fiction writing and its filmic adaptation.

5. David Seed notes that Finney's two written versions also have different endings. The 1954 serialisation sees Miles joining with the F.B.I. to defeat the Pods, while "in the novel he is on his own" (1999: 143 n4). Seed makes no mention of Becky. Yet in the most recently published version, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1998), it is clearly Becky's plan that sets the couple free to battle the invaders (1998: 193ff).

CHAPTER 6: I MARRIED A MISOGYNIST FROM OUTER SPACE

1. The link with *I Married a Communist* is not so straightforward. It is complicated by a number of similarly named films, such as *I Married a Witch* (1942), *I Married an Angel* (1942), and even *I Married a Woman* (1956). The gendered nature of the above titles reflects a male perspective in each case: that is, the "I" is a male one. *I Married a Monster* places the female protagonist at the film's narrative centre. The "I" of the title is Marge and the monster to be overcome is male. There are three other pre-existing *I Married* films wherein the "speaker" is female. *I Married a Nazi* (1946) is more usually known as *The Man I Married.* The remaining two are the little-remembered *I Married a Doctor* from 1936, and *I Married a Dead Man* (usually called *No Man of Her Own*, 1949). It is equally viable to compare *I Married a Monster* with these latter two films, invoking as they do feminine desires for bourgeois marriage and family life, the very thing *Monster* interrogates and destabilises.

2. The episodes entitled "Let's Play House" and "Mrs America" are of particular interest.

3. There are some other interesting parallels between *I Married a Monster* and this first version of *The Phantom of the Opera*. For instance, Christine follows her Master's voice into the hidden realms of the Paris Opera, and we could equally think of Marge as following her master's (her husband's) image into the unknown realm of the woods. The Phantom declares his love for Christine, just as the alien Bill realises he cares for Marge, yet neither is trustworthy. The pathos of Erik and the alien both arouse our sympathy: Erik says there is good in him, just as the invader demonstrates that he may not be irredeemable. Yet both are powerful, violent and dangerous. The Phantom also maintains he has an "evil spirit" within him, while the Alien Bill dwells within a look-alike shell, emerging from it like a ghastly malevolent spirit.

4. As I have discussed in Chapter Two, Williams proposes that the Phantom, along with other classic horror creatures, can be looked on as representing non-phallic sexuality, a power beyond ineffectual heroes such as Christine's lover Raoul (1984: 87). Erik's power over the woman can thus be thought of as both sexual and monstrous, phallic and non-phallic. For instance, in one scene he shows

Christine his bedroom, where he sleeps in a coffin. Here the film incorporates Christine's fear of rape (her captor's possible intentions) with the fear of the supernatural (the coffin of an undead monster).

5. Ehrenreich also points out that the older unmarried male in the 1950s was sexually suspect, as was any man who resisted his mature responsibilities (1983: 20ff). This provides an added dimension to the alien males' marital status, particularly to the character of Sam and his relationship with Bill (a point to which I will return).

6. The theme of the changed and/or deranged husband is a recurrent one in thrillers about married life, such as *Suspicion* (1941), *The Two Mrs Carrolls* (1947), and *Dial M for Murder* (1954).

7. The expression "a hard look" may have been common in the U.S.A. of the decade, but is not one that I have encountered. Its use here is intriguing given that manliness is a quality put under the spotlight in this movie. The connection between a "hard look" and a "hard-on", with the insinuation that both are missing, is not difficult to draw.

8. The conversation of these women is echoed in John Smith's attraction to Marge in Grady's Bar. This is another indication of the way this text links class-related behavior to sexual mores. The "lower" class looks upwards towards the newly expanded post-war bourgeoisie, but neither of the Farrells look "down" for sexual partners.

9. One of the earliest concerns of the Code was to exclude the depiction of miscegenation, as well as the use of material likely to cause affront to any racial group. Richard Maltby notes that in the 1950s "adult" movies began to appear and drew on miscegenation, prostitution and drug use as themes (1996: 248). Given that the main viewers of science fiction in the 1950s are generally thought to be children and teenagers, it is interesting that *I Married a Monster* seems to tap into changes aimed at adult audiences.

10. In *I Married a Monster* the only female occupations we see in Norrisville are that of prostitute and housewife. Although we assume that Marge and Helen had jobs prior to marriage, these are never mentioned. If Marge worked, for example, at the local astronomical observatory it is unlikely that our fears for her would be so great. She would have a persona in the outside world, work colleagues and scientific connections. As it stands, however, the threat to Marge and to the other women is created within the dark interiors of the home and sexually exploitative relations.

11. Hendershot offers an alternative explanation for Bill's "secret" (1997b: 72-75). In writing about the paranoia of the post-Bomb U.S.A., she observes that the "1950s security state was one in which knowledge and ignorance were often demarcated along gender lines. Middle-class women, and especially housewives, were sheltered . . . from the harsh realities which troubled postwar American society" (1997b: 72). In particular Hendershot refers to the deadly nature of the Manhattan Project, where wives questioned their husbands' identity: was he their "intimate partner or monster?" (1997b: 75).

12. Bill Warren observes that the invaders convey no sense of grief at the deaths of their own female population (1986: 119). By imagining a homosexual subtext, this omission takes on a different dimension: have the Aliens lost their own females due to a galactic accident (as they claim), or is this story little more than a cover for the real reason their species is doomed?

13. See for example Diana Fuss (1995: 141-148).

14. I return in Chapter Nine to discuss issues of race, masculinity and post-colonialism in relation to *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954).

CHAPTER 7: FAREWELL TO THE MASTER('S GAZE)

1. See, for example, the comments of Kenneth Von Gunden and Stuart H. Stock (1982: 39-49), Dennis Saleh (1979: 37-48) and Jeff Rovin (1975:86).

2. H.U.A.C., the House Un-American Activities Committee, was set up immediately after War World Two to counter the perceived threat of American communists. Its inquiries led to the famous conviction of the Hollywood Ten, writers and directors who refused to cooperate with the Committee's investigations into allegations of communist infiltration in the film industry. Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund note that by the 1950s anti-communist feeling had become anti-liberal, leading to a climate where even supporters of former President Roosevelt were viewed with suspicion (1980: 393). For an investigation of these issues see the work of Ceplair and Englund (1980), and Jeff Smith (1999).

3. It is worth noting that *Stranger from Venus* (1954), a film that is partly a re-make of *The Day*, offers an even more extreme contraction of 1950s fears. It depicts a Britain in which police officers wear military-style uniforms, carry guns, and threaten citizens with death for disobeying orders. The country is ruled by a president whose key governmental officials and military officers are either flawed or ruthless men willing to risk world destruction rather than listen to reason. In *Stranger*, World War Two and Cold War enemies have fused together to become the country's legitimate government in a harshly masculinist regime.

4. A similar "gun-happy" encounter also appears in *The Earth vs. The Flying Saucers*. Aliens land at a military base in the mistaken belief that they are there to hold negotiations, but are instead fired upon by troops. Rather than presenting the aliens as inherently bad, Paul Jensen believes that it is the "shoot-first mentality" of the gun-happy soldiers that provokes the entire conflict (1996: 111).

5. To Rux, for example, she is simply "the woman" or "Bobby's mother" (1997: 184), while to Brosnan she is a nameless "young widow" (1978: 84).

6. To avoid confusion it should be noted that Jancovich uses alternative names and spelling. He refers to Bobby as "Billy", to Tom as "David", and spells Klaatu as "Klattu".

7. This naming creates an even greater degree of complexity than simply the rejection of patriarchal status, and I return later to discuss a further possibility for Carpenter's identity.

8. Although he "turns off" the world, Klaatu does allow aircraft in flight and public utilities such as hospitals to remain operational. This compassionate yet omnipotent act again muddies any reading of the text's larger political message as straightforwardly of the Left or the Right. Klaatu's act of power is complex, and reflects the character's disavowal of clear parameters of identity.

9. Jancovich's discussion of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* makes no mention of Helen's rendezvous with Gort, and instead focuses on the wider political environment of the film.

10. A number of critics also note the religious allegory in *The Day*, including Krin Gabbard (1982), Cyndy Hendershot (1997a) and Dennis Barone (1996), with the last seeing Klaatu more akin to a devil than to a symbolic Christ. Rux quotes a 1995 *Starlog* interview with director Robert Wise in which the film's Christian references are clearly acknowledged (1997: 183). For a further discussion of other alien Redeemers in science fiction films, see Hugh Ruppersberg (1990) and Caron Schwartz Ellis (1995).

CHAPTER 8: SHE CONQUERED THE OEDIPAL NARRATIVE

1. We should bear in mind that the "daughter of a scientist" character is not necessarily female hero material, as in the case of Altaira from *Forbidden Planet.* Concerned mostly with decoration, bodily display, and the gauche examination of the human men, she is threaten by the planet's Calibans (the tiger and the Monster from the Id) when she becomes aware of physical sexuality as opposed to the remote and unemotional specifics of biology. Caught by Adams kissing Lt. Farman (an interesting choice of name for a space-farer), Altaira responds by foolishly repeating her would-be seducer's line about "a little healthy stimulation from hugging and kissing." Altaira does little to destabilise the privilege of masculinised speech and gaze.

2. An atomic test took place in the Marshall Islands in 1946, with hydrogen bomb testing continuing there until the mid-1950s (accounts of which are offered by Paul Boyer, 1985: 82ff). By linking the atomic submarine and Seabeast with the Marshalls, this text witnesses the very ambiguous relationship between the "good" use of atomic power and its unknowable negative consequences. This is an irresolvable dilemma explored in a number of 1950s science fiction films, including *The Beast from 20,000 Fathom* (1953), *Tarantula* (1955), *This Island Earth* (1955) and *Them!* (1954).

3. The narrator explains how, following the retrieval of the unidentified specimen, the Defence Department is confronted with a problem their Navy manuals do not cover. Lesley is one of the "best minds in the nation" then called upon to solve the problem. More than just scientific knowledge, Lesley embodies imagination and flexibility, abilities beyond the scope of both the military and Pete Mathews himself.

4. This kind of tradition can be illustrated through the screwball comedies of the 1930s and early 1940s examined by Diane Carson (1994). These movies helped to create the Hollywood pattern of the illogical female who eludes or confuses the sensible (if sometimes bemused) movie hero. Carson's example of Susan Vance in *Bringing Up Baby* (1938) clearly fits this madcap image of feminine illogic.

5. This scene is often described differently. Dennis Saleh (1979: 141/3) and Bill Warren (1982: 221) both believe that John Carter races onto the Golden Gate intending to start the electricity and repel the Seabeast. My reading suggests that the current is already on, and Carter's heroics take place in order to turn it *off.* The Seabeast's unpredictable attraction to the electrically-charged bridge then becomes readable as an unforeseen interaction of nature and technology (just as the creature's exposure to atomic weapons forces it up from the ocean's depths in seach of food).

6. Mimesis can embrace more than the transgressions of gender and race discussed by Fuss. Yvonne Tasker (1998: 21) draws our attention to the impersonation offered by Tess McGill in *Working Girl* (1988). Tess acts out bourgeois behavior, dressing and re-styling her body in a deliberate manipulation of her image. In so doing she can slip between playing herself (a secretary) and her boss (a business executive). Tasker sees this as a form of cross-dressing that challenges the binary divisions of class-based identity, creating a character who does not fit working or middle class categories. Yet a more extreme example of such cross-dressing occurs in *The Associate* (1996), in which Whoopi Goldberg's character of Laurel Ayres fractures the boundaries of age, class, race *and* sex. By dressing as her invented partner, Robert S. Cutty, Laurel becomes a rich older white male, choosing to unmask herself at the point where Cutty is being officially rewarded for possessing these very valuable patriarchal attributes.

7. *Point of No Return* is an English-language remake of the French *Nikita* (1990).

8. Although Warren notes that Hutch's first name is intended to be Laura (1982: 381), she is called by her nickname throughout the film and says that she is used to it. Recalling Carol Clover's comments on ambiguous names for female characters (1992: 40), this may indicate that Hutch is divested of her femininity, becoming "one of the boys" through a process of sexist colonisation.

Alternatively her naming may suggest an ability to move beyond the territory of passive femininity Dave Conway successfully parodies.

9. Bill Warren's position is rather different. He writes: "There's a hint of a romantic triangle between Tobey, Curtis and Domergue, but it's perfunctorily handled" (1982: 222). Warren views the film's special effects as its main attraction, with the rest of the text being merely a "fill in" between scenes of Ray Harryhausen's monster. He offers no reason why we should disregard the overall shape of the narrative or discount the "romantic triangle". The sexy beach scene, for instance, is not one I would dismiss as perfunctory. Although Warren mentions Faith Domergue's Lesley, he fails to observe either her importance or the significance of sexual tension to the film's structure.

10. I am reminded here of the symbolism generally ascribed to the film *Moby Dick* (1956). If one is to accept the reading that the Great White Whale is an enormous phallic symbol pursued by Gregory Peck's Captain Ahab, we are left to wonder at the possible hyper-phallic implications represented by the many-tentacled octopus sought by Pete at this point in the story.

CHAPTER 9: WHITE WOMAN IN A BLACK LAGOON

1. *Creature* is peopled with a number of other colonial character types. These are of Spanish and/or native descent and comprise Dr. Maia and his assistants Luis and Tomas, as well as Capt. Lucas and his crew. They too need to be read within the imperialist environment of the text. For example, Lucas and Mark Williams clash a number of times in the film. This may be read as a patriarchal tussle but also has imperialist/racist overtones, for the white American scientist tries (with mixed success) to subdue a man he sees as his economic, racial, cultural and intellectual inferior.

2. For discussions on the fundamental place of racism in Hollywood films, see E. Ann Kaplan (1997), Lola Young (1996), and James Snead (1994).

3. Despite the common sense of Kay's warning, her advice might be seen as flawed in light of the grisly attack on the unsuspecting Luis and Tomas (Maia's assistants). Their deaths are attributable to the manifest savagery of the Creature. Why is it that the Creature encountered at the Lagoon does not act violently until *after* it has been attacked by Mark? Is there more than one Creature? The text does not account for the difference in Creature behavior at Maia's campsite and at the Black Lagoon.

4. Comparing the Thing's potency to Pat's symbolic castration, Tarratt observes that "Hendry is slightly wounded in the hand, which is tended by Nikki. He undergoes a kind of emasculation that makes him acceptable to her" (1986: 265). The problem with this observation is that, while Pat Hendry does burn his hand during a clash with the Thing, it is not Nikki who administers to it (at least not in the two versions of the film I have viewed). We do see a female physician bandage a man's arm broken in the affray. Meanwhile Pat stands to one side and rubs salve into his own wound, with his second-in-command assisting him. Does this raise the possibility of auto- and homoeroticism? This point notwithstanding, Tarratt's comments on the symbolism of arms and hands remain pertinent in a number 1950s science fiction films.

5. Two 1930s Tarzans—Buster Crabbe and Johnny Weissmuller—were champion swimmers and this convention seems to have originated as a way for them to demonstrate their manly prowess in the water. It also offers a handy way to display the body of the heroine, so that in *Tarzan the Fearless* the very blonde Mary at first appears to be swimming completely naked but is later revealed to be wearing a white slip.

6. See, for instance, John Baxter (1970: 121-122), Peter Nicholls (1979: 144), Dennis Saleh (1979 129), Bill Warren (1982: 172), David Thomson (1984: 60), David J. Hogan (1986: 111-112), and John Brosnan (1991: 96).

7. On a similar note, E. Ann Kaplan (1998) describes the way in which racial binaries are constructed in the *films noirs* of the 1940s using light and shadow to indicate the literal and/or metaphorical blackness and whiteness of characters.

8. David's excuse is the same as that used by Pat Hendry, who cites concerns over money to explain why he cannot marry Nikki. Critics have commented on the avoidance of matrimony as a theme in a wide range of films of the post-war years, linking it to changing cultural institutions, social dislocation, and the threat to traditional masculinity offered in a Cold War environment. This issue is explored by Barbara Ehrenreich (1983), who characterises post-war sexual relations as the "flight from commitment". See also see the work of Paul Wells (1993) and Lynne Segal (1988).

9. While vessels are frequently given female names, this film seems to empart an identity to the boat. There are a number of shots of the bow where "Rita" is clearly painted. Lucas pointedly mentions it by name, even asking Kay if she likes the "best cabin on the *Rita*". Lucas also states that a lesser sailor could not navigate the boat into the lagoon's small mouth, but that "I, Lucas, will do it!" So that while Lucas penetrates where it is impossible to go, it is the *Rita* who takes him there.

10. Judith Halberstam argues persuasively for such a reading of *Dracula* (1995: 86ff). Yet Frank Grady notes that the literary Count presents himself (and his forebears) to Harker as defenders of the West *against* the Turkish East (1996: 239 n.14). The ability to both represent and repudiate anti-Semitism attests to the polysemic nature of this text and of vampiric lore.

11. For a discussion of the racial landscape in the U.S. of the 1950s, see David Halberstam (1993) Chapters 28-30.

12. Generally "foreign" peoples are merely huddled masses fleeing from, or stoically accepting, global destruction, as in *When Worlds Collide* (1952) and *The War of the Worlds* (1954). In this environment *Twelve to the Moon* (1960) is a rarity, for it features Lady Scientist Dr. Hideko Murata, an astrophysicist from Japan, and Dr. Selim Hamid, ship's navigator from Nigeria. Both characters have important roles in a text which posits that human survival must be based on reciprocity and self-sacrifice.

13. For instance, we might see Robbie the Robot from *Forbidden Planet* (1956) as the ultimate black servant.

CHAPTER 10: QUEEN OF THE ANTS

1. Another Lady Scientist movie of the decade to offer more than a lone female character is *Invaders from Mars* (1953). Along with Dr. Patricia Blake, we also meet two females who play important parts in the narrative. One is a little girl killed by the Martians, and the second is Mrs. MacLean, the mother of the film's child lead. Both girl and woman are taken over by Martian mind-control in a movie that places the Lady Scientist into the arena of extraterrestrial *and* domestic invasion.

2. Although the on-line *International Movie Database* (IMDb) lists this name as "Ellison", the actors pronounce it as "Ellinson".

3. *Them!* does not directly engage with the threat of the atomic bomb, nor is the atomic program critiqued except by implication. Yet the fierce wind-storms whipped up in the New Mexico desert seem to mimic the blast effects of an atomic explosion, and the parallel between the destructive power of the Ants and that of the bomb is eerily evoked.

4. Byers is also of the view that some science fiction movies have the power to threaten phallocentrism. Such films offer the "loosening [of] traditional restraints on women" (1989: 78) and expose identity as a fabrication. He uses *Metropolis* (1926), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978), *Alien* and *Blade Runner* (1982) to illustrate the constructed nature of identity, these texts being

differently concerned with the way in which people can be replicated. From the 1950s Byers might usefully have include *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1958) and *It Came from Outer Space* (1953), both films supporting his comments on the destabilisation of gendered identities.

5. It is true, however, that dead male characters greatly outnumber females in movies of the 1950s. Female deaths tend to take place off-camera, so that when a young girl dies in *Invaders from Mars* all we see is her slipping into a Martian lair. As Tania Modleski points out, the female corpse is "a figure of extreme pollution" (1988: 108) and as such it is likely that over-emphasising female demise in the era would have drawn considerable censorship. When *The Giant Claw* appears to offer us a road-side encounter with a dead woman, another character clearly states that she is only unconscious. Two exceptions are worthy of note. The death of Francine the prostitute in *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1958) is shown at relatively close quarters (a long shot). While we remain screened from her polluted corpse (she is disintegrated), Francine's profession may be a factor in showing her murder. The other instance occurs in *The Mole People* (1956). Adad, the female lead, is crushed to death while trying to leave the underground caverns in which her people have lived for centuries. This rare female corpse indicates that Adad's escape is a defilement of ancient ways, a crime for which a woman may be duly punished.

6. *The Blob* (1958) also offers an abundance of such abject pleasures. Newly arrived on Earth, the organism at first enthralls its curious human victims before engulfing them. Its size and shape are deceptive, and it shifts and reforms with dangerous ease. It is capable of assimilating but not itself being assimilated. It can be frozen and temporarily expelled, but not eradicated, hence the famous question mark at the film's conclusion.

7. I am not proposing a precise comparison between *Them!* and *Aliens* (1986), but there are several echoes of the earlier text in Cameron's 1986 film. These include a Newt/Ellinson girl parallel, the non-human colonies, the queens, the stress on containment, the permeability of animal and human bodies, and the egg-chamber scenes. The extent to which *Aliens* is based on a self-conscious adaptation of *Them!* is moot, but perhaps some likeness of Pat Medford may have found its way into Lt. Ripley. The original *Alien* also has much in common with the narrative of *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* (1958), and the extent to which more contemporary science fiction movies borrow from 1950s films should not be underestimated. For a consideration of some of the problems encountered when such borrowings are publicly acknowledged, see French's discussion of *The Terminator* (1984) (1996: 15-22).

8. This image has yet another conservative reference, for the blonde Mrs. Lodge bears a remarkable resemblance to the womanly ideal depicted in Nazi cinema. While pro-Nazi films tend to concentrate on idealised masculine images, as in *Hitlerjunge Quex* (1933) and *Olympia* (1938), David Welsh notes that the stoical blonde woman is also important: she is the proper Nazi mother and wife who delivers her male loved-ones to the war effort with noble resolve (1983: 229-230). Mrs. Lodge likewise offers hers to capitalist patriarchy.

9. Tears are the only form of bodily fluid Mrs. Lodge is allowed and, as these are shed in the defence of the symbolic, the film never represents them as abject or defiled. Kristeva notes that the depiction of tears (as well as the ear and the maternal breast) are seen by as acceptable manifestations of the virginal body (1986: 108).

10. Brundtzen's work on the sexism of *Alien/s* remains problematic. She does not place the films into any genre context (for example, the term "science fiction" is not mentioned) and contends that the Alien queen "quite literally embodies women's reproductive powers" (1987: 14). She rejects any positive feminist reading of the Ripley/Newt relationship as sentimentalised, refuses the possibility of gender ambiguity, and criticises the movies for proposing but not resolving issues of gender (1987: 11-12). Remarkably Brundtzen asserts: "*Aliens* would be a more feminist film perhaps if Ripley were a man" (1987: 17), although how this could be achieved I find difficult to imagine. As a counterpoint, Thomas Vaughn maintains that these films should be discussed via their wealth of gender *confusion*

rather than capitulation, warning against criticism that sees characters purely "defined in essentialist terms, biological woman pitted against co-opted, technocratic woman" (1995: 428).

11. Neither should we unquestioningly accept the apparent sex of such an alien body. For instance, in *The Snow Creature* (1954) a dangerous, semi-human beast is captured in the Himalayas and sent to Los Angeles by an American scientist. This Creature has been stealing human women for unexplained but presumably fatally sexual purposes, and is thus constructed as a violent male. In an attempt to make the Creature appear as hirsute as possible, the tall slim actor playing the role is clad in a furry costume. Despite the height and hairiness of this figure, the result is far from convincingly masculine. The costume bestows a round shapeliness to the hips which, when combined with the slim waist of the actor, provides a sexually ambiguous image. When read along with other gendered issues in the narrative, this produces the kind of possibility Harry Benshoff refers to as the "blurring or 'queering' of the usual explanatory binaries" used to encompass sex (1997: 129).

12. In describing the breeding cycle in the first three *Alien* films, Vaughn observes that "[w]hen enough of these creatures are present to form a nest, one takes the role of egg-layer" (1995: 430) Yet in *Alien*[3] (1992) Ripley asserts that the creature within her is an "egglayer", thus singling out herself as a special kind of human host. While Brundtzen also lists the reproductive phases of the Aliens, she uses expressly female anatomical imagery and words such as "embryo" and "Caesarean birth" (1987: 12). The entire nature of the breeding cycle changes profoundly in *Alien Resurrection* (1997), where Ripley's relationship with Alien fecundity is pushed to its most grotesque as well as its most transformational level. See Catherine Constable for a discussion of the abject and reproduction in this latest of the *Alien* series (1999: 190ff).

13. It is telling that when all else fails the military claim jurisdiction over the populace by declaring martial law, a dubious dominion that brings with it more intimidation than reassurance. The general public listen to the news and stop their daily activities to watch the military take over the streets. Enacting Cold War civil defence strategies, people are exhorted to "Stay in your homes!" Despite dire warnings, and unlike the public hysteria in movies such as *It Came from Beneath the Sea*, people in *Them!* never panic. They are depicted as mute observers who watch as stringent (and ominous) methods are use to reinstate their control.

14. This wound seems to evoke the symbolism noted by Margaret Tarratt in *The Thing* (1951) (1986: 265). See Chapter Nine for a discussion of Tarratt's observation.

CONCLUSION

1. The problems of the nuclear age are not restricted to the 1950s, and are important themes in science fiction texts of many kinds over the past fifty years. Nevertheless, the popular cultural legacy of the atomic bomb (particularly those dropped in Japan) cannot be underestimated during the post-war decades. The work of Paul Boyer (1985) is particularly informative about these processes.

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