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## **Haunted Mirror: British Gothic Masculinity in Transatlantic Cinema**



Presented to the School of Arts at the University of Kent, in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## **Abstract**

This project follows the ghost of Gothic British masculinity across the ocean in the period of classical cinema. It examines the ways in which British stars were offered as an alternative to the American ideal of muscular, anti-intellectual, tough male identity. British men on film allowed Hollywood a glimpse in a mirror, a dark, haunted mirror, where identity might be fractured, damaged, liberated, queered or feminised. In a period dominated by two world wars and a Great Depression, identities of all types were being challenged and filmmakers used Britishness to allow this tension to seep into cinema.

This project uses the lens of the Gothic as a method of uncovering the hidden history that is embedded in many films. The uncanny and the sublime, shadows and mirrors, portraits, decadent iconography and dark doubles all dominate in these cinematic texts. At a time when the Production Code made it necessary for subversive content to be well hidden, films contained embedded secret codes and invited possible alternative readings. Bringing together film scholarship with literary theorists this thesis offers fresh perspectives on historical cinematic meanings.

This study presents a detailed analysis of British male stardom as it emerged in the period of early talkies. It details the ways in which the male stars, Ronald Colman, Basil Rathbone and George Sanders were presented in fan publications. It presents the contradictions inherent in their fan discourse and allows for consideration of the queerness that American culture seemed to accept was part of British – and European – male identity.

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## **Notes**

Screenshots taken from films vary in quality because of the age of the movies. Some of the films have been difficult to find but I have done my best to provide the clearest images available. Sometimes this means that there are subtitles superimposed on the images or they vary in clarity, size or shape.

## **Introduction.**

### **1 The Ghost Goes West**

In the 1935 British comedy film, *The Ghost Goes West* (Clair), a Scottish ghost, Murdoch Glourie (Robert Donat), makes the journey across the Atlantic. An American businessman (Eugene Pallette) has bought the castle to which he is attached, to be rebuilt in Florida, 'stone by stone and panel by panel'. Accompanying them on that journey is the ghost's descendent and physical double Donald Glourie (also Donat), who is along to give advice on the reconstruction of the castle. On their arrival in the US, following a dramatic ghostly manifestation on board ship, the headlines proclaim an 'Invasion of Ghosts from the Old World'. In a resulting dual sequence, a still of the Capitol building in Washington DC, then a matching one of the Houses of Parliament in London are juxtaposed on screen. Two disembodied, male voices are imposed over the images. The American voice laments:

To import a ghost into our progressive country. To allow a spirit to invade the free air of the United States, which might be acceptable in the effete atmosphere of the British House of Lords but not here.

Then, as the next image takes its place, an English (not Scottish) accented male voice argues:

Yes, my noble Lords. The fairest flowers of Scottish architecture are being uprooted from their native soil to be replanted in an alien land where the spirit of Scotland has been prohibited for years [...] Not only our castles but also our ancestors who are being shipped over to please a millionaire who, apparently, has no ancestors of his own.

The last word is given to the US as the image slides back again:

Not enough, gentlemen, the importation of an alien building, but an alien ghost is also being imported. . . this relic of medieval superstition.

The scene that follows, however, belies this hostility, as it shows the streets of New York crowded with people eager to welcome the ghost. That night, on his regular midnight appearance, Murdoch finds himself caught up in a gangster shoot-out that is unrelated to the plot of the film. He wails 'I don't like America. It's worse than the day of the battle'. The

British are focused on history at the expense of progress, but express supercilious contempt in the wry joke about the puritanical new world prohibition of alcohol.<sup>1</sup> A play on words clearly implies that the British and the Americans are similarly haunted by ‘spirits’ and are split or doubled.

This film was made for London Films in the UK, but publicised as an international production (Street, 2002: 59). It was directed by a Frenchman (Clair) for a Hungarian producer (Alexander Korda) with a diverse European team (ibid). The tone of satire of British and American values probably gives us a European perspective on the complicated relationship of the transatlantic nations – mutual distrust invariably mingled with grudging admiration. The film suggests that Americans consider the British to be backward and superstitious, whilst the British suspect the Americans of being without breeding, uncultured and primitive. Each country believes the other to be incomprehensible and ‘alien’. The ‘freedom’ so valued by the Americans is shown to lead to gun crime and violence. Despite these differences, the movie reveals that the men of each country are drawn to the other with a mix of fascination and fear. This tension permeates this thesis, as I explore the Gothic British male’s function in cinema in the era of the early talkies.<sup>2</sup>

The use of the adjective ‘effete’ to describe the British parliamentary ‘atmosphere’ in this sequence is significant. The Senator’s speech does assume a male target, as such patriarchal language is standard. The adjective ‘effete’ suggests not only affectation and pretentiousness, but ‘poncey’, ‘flowery’, ‘twee’, ‘weakened’, ‘effeminate’, ‘unmanly’ and ‘womanish’ (Thesaurus.com). Stemming from the Latin origin ‘effetus’ (‘no longer fruitful’), the word has synonyms such as: ‘girlish’, ‘womanish’, ‘limp-wristed’ ‘milk-soppish’, ‘sissy’ ‘pansy-like’, ‘weak’, ‘soft’, ‘timid’ and ‘timorous’ (ibid). There is a clear indication that American perception of British maleness as Other, transgressive, liminal and queer.

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<sup>1</sup> Prohibition had entered into law under the Eighteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (Schrad, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> I focus on films from 1920s-40s, although sometimes it is necessary to add historical perspective by including other eras.



As Robert Donat's Donald Glourie looks at his double – shown in the screenshot on the cover of this document – he seems to be looking in a mirror, one that reflects an image from his past, one that has been repressed across the ages in a ghostly form. Donald is haunted by Murdoch, his 'costume' self. Contrasted with Donald's contemporary suit, Murdoch is dressed in a traditional highland kilt – a skirt for men – a lacy layered cravat, two decorative brooches, a *tam o' shanter*, a tartan scarf and frilled cuffs. As they face each other across an invisible barrier – death – their appearance expresses a sense of doubleness that focuses on a gendered difference. Impoverished Donald and his ancestor Murdoch are both trapped in the castle like helpless Gothic heroines, victims of the past curse of the Glouries waiting with passive reliance, for the wealthy American woman (Jean Parker as Peggy Martin) to rescue them.

Sarah Street has written that the journey that is central to the plot of *The Ghost Goes West* is symbolic of the way that, during the thirties, actors such as Robert Donat and many others were lured across the Atlantic to work in Hollywood (2002: 8).<sup>3</sup> Although she claims that the film represents the 'special relationship' between the US and UK, in 1935 the identities of the two nations were quite separate. By the late fifties, partly because of the cinematic 'transatlantic crossings' described by Street (2002), a closeness culturally, politically and ideologically had been formed. Although many filmmakers and artists did move across the ocean in the 1930s, the 'special relationship' was only at the foetal stage. I would like to take Street's analogy regarding *The Ghost Goes West* a step further. The film, I would argue, is a symbolic representation of the way that the Gothic, the *ghosts* of Britain and Ireland, moved across the ocean. A bridge was created between the two nations through the reformulating and retelling of the British Islands' supernatural stories. These stories were often, like Castle Glourie, dismantled and reassembled across the ocean first as plays, then on screen for the

<sup>3</sup> Robert Donat did not move to Hollywood following a legal dispute with Warner Bros in 1935, then with MGM in 1938, when he was not allowed artistic contribution as he had in the theatre and in the British system (Street, 2006: 62).

new technology and the new audience.<sup>4</sup> Duality and ambiguity too, are consistently present in the ways in which British and American male characters are both drawn together and set up in opposition in these early decades of cinema.

The phrase 'special relationship' was officially first used by Churchill in the 'sinews of power' speech he gave in Fulton, Missouri, in March 1946 (Brager, 2004: 140). He described the new post-war closeness between the nations in these terms:

Neither the sure prevention of war, nor the continuous rise of world organisation will be gained without what I have called the fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples. This means a special relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States. [...] Fraternal association requires not only the growing friendship and mutual understanding between our two vast but kindred Systems of society, but the continuance of the intimate relationship between our military advisers (ibid).

Crucially, Churchill is speaking at a time when there was still a British Empire, when the colonies constituted part of British political influence and the transatlantic balance of power was relatively equal. The semantic field here, 'kindred', 'fraternal', 'intimate' implies a close family relationship. Any consideration of America as a former part of the Empire or as a victim of colonisation has been tactfully erased in favour of this familial sibling closeness. Churchill and American president Franklin D Roosevelt had worked hard in the years of the war to create a mythos of relationship and kinship between their respective countries that would endure, more or less intact, through the twentieth century and into the next.

Fan magazines both in the US and UK would comment on the 'British invasion' of Hollywood cinema from 1929, through the early thirties.<sup>5</sup> Refined British voices were highly sought after with the advent of the talkies when 'things British suddenly looked especially attractive to Hollywood' (Glancy, 1999: 159). In the war years the British press waged a fierce campaign

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<sup>4</sup> Examples of films that were staged first include *Dracula* staged from 1897, (Wynne, 2017), *Frankenstein* staged from 1823 (Cox in Hogle, 2002: 126), *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde* from 1888 (Winter, 1995/2015: 174), *Jane Eyre* from 1848 (Stoneman, 2009: 147).

<sup>5</sup> For example: 'Broadway Invasion of Hollywood' *Screenland*, October 1929, 'Are the Stage Actors Stealing the Screen?' (Leonard Hall, *Photoplay*, April 1930).

directed at British actors and directors in America, suggesting they were 'traitors' (Glancy, 1999: 168). The truth was that the British government encouraged British filmmakers and stars to stay in Hollywood, although this was a well-kept secret at the time (ibid). Meanwhile, despite the bad press, the British in Hollywood were working hard for the war effort (ibid). A frustrated Basil Rathbone wrote to Noel Coward on December 18, 1942:

It's not been easy stuck out here at the moment of one's country's greatest hour in her history – ones [sic] application to return were turned down (twice) but perhaps some helpful work has been contributed in clothes and money and goodwill [...] Coleman [sic] and Bruce and I went on the War Bonds Tour - speaking 3 and 4 times a day, all over the country. And I believe one has been able, here, to favourably serve British interests - we have a very strong 'United Nations' (letter at Noel Coward Rooms).

Such personal appearances by film stars must have added to a sense of identification of American provincial audiences with Britain in the war years, consolidating a familiarity that had been set up by the 'British' films produced in the US.<sup>6</sup> An ambivalent cultural 'special relationship' was forged alongside the political, in a period that was dominated by change, world conflict and the 'golden age' of cinema. In the trauma of wars and an economic depression in the first part of the twentieth century, cinema became an escape. In Britain, admissions rose to an all-time high of 1.635 million per week in 1946 (Street, 2006: 17). In the same year, the US peak was also reached when weekly attendance rose to more than 90 million (Finler, 1998/2003: 378). In both countries, attendance was in decline by the end of the fifties (Richards, 1997: 149, Finler, 1998/2003:11). Because of the popularity, quality and quantity of their studios' output, American films dominated the transatlantic market during the years of cinema's greatest audiences (Richards and Sheridan, 1987/2016: 15).

The dismissal, in *The Ghost Goes West*, by the Americans, of the (male) British nation as 'effete', with all of its implications, gives us an understanding of why British masculinity became an Other, even an abjection, in Hollywood's fictions because of its queer challenge to the hegemonic type. The British double is the first (American male) self's attempt to 'rid

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<sup>6</sup> Mark Glancy defines 'British' films as films made by Hollywood studios with a distinctively British flavour, using British source material, workforce and/or setting (1999: 2).

himself of something he does not wish to recognise in himself' whilst also revealing a latent narcissism (Dryden, 2003: 17; Freud, 2003: 9).

The Britishness that is recreated again and again by the recycled familiar faces of the Californian-British expatriate acting community, particularly in the 1930-1940s, creates a Gothic double, a mirror image of the transatlantic nations that at times distorts and, at others, perfects, swinging from soft focus to distortion swiftly and confusingly, with a deeply uncanny and unsettling effect. Yet the resentments revealed in the satire of *The Ghost Goes West* underpin this national mutual fascination. The film was well received in both nations, with one contemporary account calling it,

A picture that definitely appeals to everybody. It is not a costume picture, it is not a so-called British picture. It is made strictly to appeal to an American audience (in Street, 2002: 58).

In contrast to the ideal of national restraint and the 'stiff upper lip' of British cinema as described by Jeffrey Richards (1997: 4), the Hollywood version of Britain would allow for emotional excess, supernatural interventions and unrestrained passions.

It is no surprise, in patriarchal culture, that films frequently centred on issues central to masculine identity. Although recent scholarship has discovered that there is a 'hidden history' of women working in the film industry uncredited (Armatage, 2008:462), the majority of influential producers and directors tended to be male and expressed what seem to be classically male concerns. There is, of course, no cycle of 'men's films' as there are 'women's films' because films - like everything else - had an assumed central focus in the white, heterosexual able-bodied man. The association of the British with queerness in Hollywood can therefore be seen as an inevitable expression of a historical acceptance of binaries:

The philosophical opposition between "heterosexual" and "homosexual," like so many other conventional binaries, has always been constructed on the foundation of another related opposition: the couple "inside" and "outside." [...] heterosexuality, for example, typically defines itself in critical opposition to that which it is not: homosexuality. [...] Inside/outside functions as the very figure for signification and

the mechanisms of meaning production. It has everything to do with the structures of alienation, splitting, and identification which together produce a self and an Other, a subject and an object, an unconscious and a conscious, an interiority and an exteriority (Fuss, 1991:1-2).

The British male figure that emerges in Hollywood in this period, expresses this sense of outsidership, exteriority, splitting and alienation. Not just alternative sexualities are implicit in the British man, but also disability or trauma (physical or mental), even non-white ethnicity. If we doubt that our default position is always male and heterosexual, we can also doubt its inherent whiteness, sanity, and able-body-ness. A crack appears in the assumption of patriarchal strength:

The homo in relation to the hetero, much like the feminine in relation to the masculine, operates as an indispensable interior exclusion – an outside, which is inside interiority making the articulation of the latter possible, a transgression of the border as such [...] Hetero and homosexuality are 'haunted by each other [...] [revealing] a fascination with the spectre of abjection, expressing a Gothic sense of queerness (Fuss, 1991: 3).

British masculinity, then, acts as simultaneously double of, and binary opposite to, American masculinity. It haunts its original, reminding it of its own repression. The concept of 'insider/outsider' is always indicative of fear and anxiety, with the liminal space acting as a borderland that reminds us of what has been rejected or lost.

This project involves a specific exploration of the ways in which Hollywood used British actors to express a doubled, alternative self. As the censors demanded that cinema showed 'American life' as morally upright (Miller, 1994: 295), the use of other nationalities to express what was undesirable or 'abnormal' seemed natural. This is, ironically, despite the lip-service paid by the Code to giving 'any nation' 'respectful treatment' and 'fair' representation (Miller, 1994: 297). My project is about the ways in which British actors took on Gothic roles in transatlantic cinema. Because of the dominance of Hollywood's output at this time, it is no surprise that my main focus is on British men in America's studio system, although I refer to some British films as they make a significant contrast and further illuminate the transatlantic relationship and the nature of transnational cinema. I consider

British cinema, under the influence of Hollywood, to be American in a way, much as many films in the American system can be perceived as British. Despite the tightest censorship and a frequently contradictory media discourse, an alternative to heterosexual 'muscular masculinity' is offered in American cinema by the British effete double who is transgressive and often queered.

The motif of the foreign homosexual versus the American heterosexual became part of the subtext of American films in the early talking period and as 'Britishness became associated with villainy' (Gates, 2006: 255), it also became associated with queerness. The British man has his type of masculinity compromised by feminine qualities or by the suggestion of non-heteronormative impulses. An expression of interest in art, literature or culture was seen as a sign of weakness in the common American perception of the ideal masculine (Hawkins, 1990: 13). British cinema, in contrast, took a less formulaic approach, often co-opting its Hollywood immigrants to return for roles that would break the mould of their American stereotypes. George Sanders and Basil Rathbone interrupted their Hollywood careers to play an idealistic, romantic, pioneering surgeon (*The Outsider*, Stein, 1939) and victimised Jew (*Loyalties*, Dean, 1933) respectively. British cinema allowed a space for fractured, neurotic or cerebral native masculinity even in tales of heroism such as *Millions Like Us* (Lauder and Gilliat 1942), domestic melodrama, as in *Waterloo Road* (Gilliat, 1945) or in the surreal and transatlantic themes of *A Matter of Life and Death* (Powell and Pressburger, 1946). In *The Ghost Goes West* the American millionaire takes the Scottish heirlooms and suits of armour and puts radios into them, thus transforming them into a modern consumer product that forms a hybrid of the two nations. History plus technology and consumerism equals transatlantic. History is feminine, (intellectual and therefore 'effete'), technology and business are masculine, so this too indicates a type of gendering of nations.

The myth around the American Dream, as it grew up in the twentieth century, was inextricably connected to masculine identity:

The founding fathers were not [...] gentlemen. Rather they were those who [...] tore violently a nation from the implacable and opulent wilderness – the rogues, adventurers, and land-boomers; the Indian fighters, traders, missionaries, explorers,

and hunters who killed and were killed until they had mastered the wilderness (Slotkin, 1972/2006: 4).

This disassociation from the concept of the gentleman, with its connotations of effeminess, is an overt rejection of old-world values. American heroes of the 1940s such as John Wayne, Clark Gable, Henry Fonda, Gary Cooper and Joel McCrea fit in with this concept of American frontiersman masculinity, as they were physically strong, dominant ‘dangerous men’ (LaSalle, 2002: vii). One commentator reinforced this idea, as he reflected on these male role models:

We Americans have always admired strength of character [...] But if we’re honest, we should admit that if we had our choice, we’d prefer strength of body: That would, we think, allow us the luxury to develop, fearlessly, strength of character [...] American boys are taught more about war, combat, fighting, and the ability to defend oneself than they’re taught about the language. The first gifts for boys are ordinarily sports equipment or physically challenging games and toys...[underlining] the value of being physically stronger for reasons of conquest rather than health (Spoto, 1979: 191).

John Wayne became particularly representative of an ideal, with his biographer describing him as ‘America’s idea of itself [...] a man big enough, expansive enough to serve as a metaphoric battlefield for America’s conflict of ideas’ (Eyman, 2015: 11). If Wayne was a creation of anyone, it was of director John Ford, and this iconic stereotype stemmed itself from a type of dubious doubling.

His grandson said that Ford was ‘aware of his own sensitivity and almost ashamed of it,’ that he ‘surrounded himself with John Wayne, Ward Bond, and those people because they represented the way he wanted to be.’ Ford’s biographer put it this way: ‘Without question he preferred the company of men, and male bonding reached inordinate proportions.’ It was left to Maureen O’Hara, one of Ford’s favourite actresses, to be more direct. In her 2004 memoir, she speculates that Ford was gay. (She claims she walked in on the director kissing a leading man.)

It is painful to read, now, about men who struggled as Ford apparently did; about how he would get so drunk that he would soil himself; about how between shoots he let himself go, watching TV in bed, wearing pajamas all day, his hair and fingernails

allowed to lengthen; about how ominously remote his marriage was (Metcalf, 2017: n.p.).

Whether these rumours about John Ford's sexuality are true or not, this offers a neat perspective on the evolution of American male heroism through the war years, when the violent, strong, silent hero conquered all. The British effete villain is the alter-ego of the all-American hero, but he is more liberated, less constricted, more fluid. This type of repression is not evident in his personae. After the Second World War came the signs of a fracturing of the American hero, seen most vividly in James Stewart's leading men. His mental breakdowns in post-war films *It's a Wonderful Life* (Capra, 1946) and *Harvey* (Koster, 1950) give indications of how he would be used by Alfred Hitchcock in the coming decade to express damaged – and queered - American masculinity.

From 1934 onwards, with the notable exception of Cary Grant and Ronald Colman, Hollywood's most popular British leading male actors were shifted into villainous roles or to maverick detective figures. Yet even the enduringly popular Grant and Colman would present feminised versions of masculinity that would contrast with American heroes. Grant, developing his persona mainly under Howard Hawks' direction, in his campy interactions with 'masculine' women in comedies such as *Sylvia Scarlett* (Cukor, 1935), *Bringing up Baby* (Hawks, 1938), *His Girl Friday* (Hawks, 1940),<sup>7</sup> would express a unique charisma. Unlike most American counterparts, he was able to convincingly put on drag as in *Bringing up Baby* and *I Was A Male War Bride* (Hawks, 1949). Although Grant would be a fascinating addition to this project, I have avoided him because there are currently important studies being done on his life, works and star discourse, and I wanted to focus on stars that have been academically neglected. I will be exploring the Gothic queerness of Ronald Colman in greater detail in chapters 1 and 2.

Whilst conventional heroic roles in 'British' Hollywood movies were frequently farmed out to

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<sup>7</sup> Katharine Hepburn and Rosalind Russell.



liminal non-British (arguably also quite feminised) players – such as Errol Flynn, Tyrone Power, Walter Pidgeon, Louis Hayward<sup>8</sup> - British villainy was on the rise in the 1930s and 40s, especially in the horror genre (Jancovich, 2013: 217).<sup>9</sup> Mark Jancovich has observed that,

The association between horror and Englishness was due to the psychological themes of dominance and dependence that preoccupied horror films of the period, themes that associated the horror villain with the spectre of old-world despotism to which the United States defined itself as a rejection (2013: 229).

This ‘old world despotism’ – and the effete-ness with which it was associated – was a crucial part of the feared, repressed past that haunted Hollywood cinema. During and after the war years, Nazis, mad doctors and monsters continued to be played on screen in Hollywood by a number of British players including George Sanders, Claude Rains, Lionel Atwill, Henry Daniell, George Zucco, Boris Karloff, Basil Rathbone, Charles Laughton and Tom Conway. Meanwhile, in the UK, British films of the 1930s and 1940s featured different types of leading men. Ivor Novello, Emlyn Williams, Eric Portman, Anton Walbrook, Dennis Price, James Mason, John Mills, Michael Redgrave, Trevor Howard and Stewart Granger were popular across the decades. At least six of these actors were indisputably gay or bisexual.<sup>10</sup> And they all conveyed a sensitivity or intelligence that was very different from that which was displayed in American heroes. The films produced in Britain emerged from a different cultural tradition to that described by Richard Slotkin. Masculinity in English literary conventional romance is freer, as ‘intellectual men may finally win the author’s heart and

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<sup>8</sup> Flynn was Australian but ‘sold’ as Irish (Schallert, 1935: 17), Power was American born from an Irish family (Guiles, 1979). Pidgeon was Canadian (Trojan, 1999: 75), Hayward was South African (Thackrey, 1985).

<sup>9</sup> I am using Mark Glancy’s term ‘British’ in this project to describe films made in California by American studios using British settings, stars or stories (Glancy, 1999: 2).

<sup>10</sup> Corin Redgrave, *Michael Redgrave, My Father*, (1995: 111), James Downs *Anton Walbrook: A life of Masks and Mirrors* (2020: 75), John Russell Stephens, *Emlyn Williams: The Making of a Dramatist* (2000: 147), Tony Earnshaw, ‘Eric Portman: Forgotten Movie Idol’ in *The Yorkshire Post*, 19 January, 2014), Ivor Novello in Huw Osborne, *Queer Wales* (2016: 135) Dennis Price in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online edition).

hand' (Hawkins, 1990: viii).

American 'British' cinema allowed largely immigrant audiences to adopt a version of British history as their own, thereby creating a white patriarchal history for the cultural melting pot of the US. As Antonia Lant has observed, 'no cinema has national identity; rather, it is secured cross-culturally, by comparison with other national outputs, secured as part of reciprocated exchange' (1991:3). This 'reciprocated exchange' is the symbolic Atlantic, the liminal space, the Gothic labyrinth and shadowlands. The ocean acts as a mirror that divides the inhabitants of the British islands from the American continent whilst also creating a sense of commonality in its geographical closeness to both countries. This liminal space is the domain in which this thesis resides.

## **2 Literature Review**

I have chosen to explore British masculinity in transatlantic cinema through the lens of the Gothic because it is a mode that interrogates identity and explores boundaries. The two nations, as I will show, reflect and haunt each other in representations of masculinity in cinematic popular culture. This literature review is divided into five sections: Gothic, Stars, Gender, Queer and Transatlantic cinema.

### **(i) Gothic**

Since the 1970s, the Gothic has proved to be a popular and useful emphasis in the study of the Humanities (Punter and Byron, 2004: xviii). Much has been written on the subject, and it would be impossible to reference it all here. David Punter and Glennis Byron summarise some of the critical trends as follows:

Clearly it is possible to speak of the Gothic as a historical phenomenon, originating (in a literary sense, but not necessarily in other senses) in the late eighteenth century. Equally, it seemed to many critics more useful to think of it in terms of a psychological argument, to do with the ways in which otherwise repressed fears are represented in textual form. A more radical claim would be that there are very few

actual literary texts that are 'Gothic', that the Gothic has more to do with particular moments, tropes, repeated motifs that can be found scattered, or disseminated through the modern western literary tradition (ibid).

For this study, I am choosing to focus on the trope of the British male figure, which acts as a symbol for all that is repressed in a narrative, especially in Hollywood under rigorous censorship. The British man represents repressed anxieties and is found in different types of films, not all of which would be considered classically Gothic in the pattern established in literature. The 'moment' that my work centres on is the period of the Hollywood studio era, an era that encompasses the Great Depression and the Second World War, a time of international and transatlantic crisis. As commentators have observed, the Gothic re-emerges cyclically at times of national and international stress (Hurley, 1997: 5). Fred Botting has recognised the significance of cinema in the development of the Gothic itself:

From the 1930s vampires, Jekylls and Hydes, Frankensteins and monsters have populated cinema and television screens in a variety of guises ranging from the seriously sinister to the comic and ridiculous. Their popularity, as well as the way they ambivalently reflect cultural anxieties, locates them firmly in the non-literary, cultural, tradition that conventionally remains the true locus of Gothic. On the screen as well as in certain novels, Gothic narratives display a more serious 'literary' or self-conscious aspect. In this respect they echo the concerns about narrative that are embedded in Gothic writing from its beginnings, concerns about the limits, effects and power of representation in the formation of identities, realities and institutions. Gothic devices are all signs of the superficiality, deception and duplicity of narratives and verbal or visual images (1996: 13-14).

The British Gothic man permeates the cinema as it is described by Botting here. He does enable the culture in Hollywood and British cinema to create identity and to establish the 'limits, effects and power' of screen masculinities (ibid). This concern with boundaries and limits is central to our understanding of Gothic figures, who are alternately – and sometimes simultaneously - spectral, Othered, doubled, uncanny and monstrous.

The spectre or ghost is both there and not there, it is 'an absent presence' (Smith, 2009: 147):

[The spectre is] a liminal being that inhabits and gives shape to many of the figurations of trauma that characterise the Gothic. The spectre is also a strangely historical entity that is haunted by the culture which produced it (ibid).

There is a sense in which the Gothic British male figure in film became an enigmatic historical 'spectre' that haunts the hero of cinematic narrative in this era. The Gothic expresses anxieties in poetic and metaphoric form, suggesting unknowability and the fragmentation of stable identities:

[T]he gothic trope of 'the double' not only includes the self in the mirror reflection but also makes for glimpses of the terrifying and unknowable person potentially lurking beneath the well-made masks of others (O'Donnell, 2016: 258).

The American hero is doubled in his British counterpart, he is mirrored and reflected back at himself in a new guise. Doubles are separate identities from the original one, but they are 'at the same time interrelated and interdependent' (Dryden, 2003: 17). It seems that that the surface self is not necessarily the authentic self. While propaganda in wartime insisted on the illusion of a combined unified national and international identity, Gothic tropes challenged and broke it down. Gothic fictions defy the oversimplification inherent in any cultural drive intended to create or sustain a sense of 'normal'. Barbara Creed has observed,

Whatever is expelled is constituted as an abject, that which 'disturbs identity, system, order'. . . A crucial aspect of the abject is, however, that it can never be fully removed or set apart from the subject or society; the abject both threatens and beckons. The abject constitutes the other side of seemingly stable subjectivity (Creed, 1986: 121).

It is the abject, the excluded and the Other that traditionally police the borders of the normative in Gothic fictions, hinting at the possibility of transgression and the illusory nature of hegemonic identities. The British man serves a similar purpose in this period of cinema. Whilst early twentieth century culture demonised and sometimes criminalised homosexuality, non-binary genders and non-white races, this societal tension seemed to be absent from film narratives. But through Gothic tropes, subtexts regarding these taboos can be identified. Gothic novels and films found ways of releasing what was repressed through words, symbolism and metaphor.

At the heart of the Gothic mode in cinema, and ever linked to the concept of the double, lies the unsettling concept of the uncanny. In his essay on the subject, Sigmund Freud writes about the way that the mirror image reveals another self, one that is distorted or doubled. He responds to the writings of fellow psychoanalyst Otto Rank with this:

He has gone into the connections the “double” has with reflections in mirrors, with shadows, guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and the fear of death [...] probably the ‘immortal soul’ was the first “double” of the body (Freud, 2003: 6).

Freud develops this idea to link the ‘double’ to the development of the conscience, an ‘ego-criticizing faculty,’ to an uncanny reminder of childhood and the past, dream states and the repetition-compulsion principle (Freud, 2003: 4). In other words, he considers the double glimpsed in the Gothic mirror to be an external image that represents an internal self that is divided, duplicated, or confused. It is the double that, in Gothic films and literature, adds to a sense of the uncanny, where something familiar becomes unfamiliar through a slight aberration from the intact original. The *unheimlich*, says Freud, is a sub-category of the *heimlich*, the homely, the familiar and comfortable (Freud, 2003: 2). And nothing encapsulates the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich* more successfully than the symbol of the mirror. The mirror hangs in every home, but its reflection does not always depict what is actually there. In its eerie repetition of an image, the mirror gives a sense of the movement of the *unheimlich* repetition-compulsion and the potential to return to the primitive self (Freud, 2003: 12).

The mirror allows "Man" to become an object for his own contemplation, but it also facilitates his sense of dominance over the world, because it offers to place him at the center and origin of meaning and creation. According to Melchior-Bonnet, "the specular encounter multiplies [Man's] strength by inviting him to both cast himself upon the world and study himself within it" (162) (Kellond, 2019: 16).

The use of ‘Man’ here is significant because in this study of Hollywood cinema, ‘Man’ is placed at the centre and masculinity is always centre stage in some form or another. In Hollywood, the Gothic British man often serves to challenge the ‘brave hero’ stereotype which, in a period dominated by world wars, took precedence. Through representations of

Britishness, however, a man could be seen to be damaged, Othered or feminised.<sup>11</sup> In its unsettling mirror, cinema manages to both promote gendered, sexual and national hierarchies and distort them.

Otto Rank noted the connections that could be perceived between cinema and psychoanalysis, two inventions that developed simultaneously through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that concerned themselves with narratives, with fantasy, dream states, personality and a symbolism of the unconscious (Royle, 2003: 79). As Ed Cameron has observed, the *doppelgänger* or double can take the form of the duplicated or divided self, but it might equally sit in a liminal space between the two (2016: 44). Similarly, Andrew Smith has argued that:

The Gothic's use of doubling is a clear indication of the internalisation of [evil]...the double is the realisation of the adult conscience, that the power to understand moral implications is constantly at war with childish narcissism (Smith cited in Latham, 2016: 17).

Smith's association of the double with morality and internal conflict offers a Freudian and Lacanian perspective, evoking the child's developmental mirror stage and the theory of the id, ego and superego (Lacan, 2006: 1; Freud, 1923: 26). As Jackie Stacey has observed, there is an 'emotional dimension' to the cinema that can express this complexity and seems particularly apt for a mode that is rooted in vivid images and its effect on the audience (1994: 92). Cinema, which itself doubles as both a highly visual and mobile art form *and* as popular entertainment, adds a new depth and immediacy of experience to the Gothic mode.

As other theorists have noted, film is itself liminal, 'a medium that offers a window into the lives of the dead' (Botting, 1996: 13-14). Images on the screen express a Derridean hauntology wherein is found 'the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present, nor absent, neither dead nor alive' (Davies, 2005: 373). The ghosts on the screen can haunt their viewers with

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<sup>11</sup> The trope of Britishness is only one of the ways in which Otherness is expressed, but it is widely used in films during the era of the Code.

images that are firmly embedded in the past, reflecting the ideas and expectations of a world view that has been long replaced.

Not only ghosts, but also monsters are created to give a sense of the abject Other. The associations of traditional monsters in film with Britishness is widely recognised. The distinctively British origins of Dracula, Dr Frankenstein and his creation, Mr Hyde, Jack the Ripper and the Wolfman so evocatively recreated in 1930s Hollywood allowed British masculinity itself to become associated with foggy urban and countryside landscapes. This hint at monstrosity in a foggy setting, where secrets can be kept, would follow the Gothic British man. Of monsters, Punter and Byron observe,

Etymologically speaking, the monster is something to be shown, something to demonstrate (Latin *mostrare*: to demonstrate) and warn (*monere*: to warn), warnings of divine anger and retribution. Limits and boundaries can therefore be reinstated as the monster is dispatched, good is distinguished from evil and self from other. Monsters, as the displaced embodiment of tendencies that are repressed or, in Julie Kristeva's sense of the term 'abjected' within a specific culture not only establish the boundaries of the human, but may also challenge them (2004: 264).

The Gothic British male figure encompasses this sense of monstrosity because in his doubled Othered space he represents an abjected form of manhood that challenges masculinity itself. He effectively *shows*, especially in his appearances in Hollywood, that repressed tendencies are the revenant that will eventually return.

The Gothic in film then concerns itself with duplicities, split identities, and the problems with a well-defined sense of self. 'Duplicity', significantly, finds its etymological origins in the Old French 'duplicite' or from the Latin 'duplic', which means 'twofold' or 'the state of being double' (online etymology dictionary). In its insistence on pushing boundaries, the Gothic mode raises questions about narrative itself, about fantasy and the purpose of the most illusory of all modes, 'realism.' It adds to the world of physical verisimilitude a new sort of realism, a truth about dreams, fears and fantasy.

## **(ii) Stars**

All work on stardom must be indebted to the work done by Richard Dyer. In *Stars* (1979), he establishes the idea that stars are constructs not people, representing 'a finite multiplicity of meaning' (3). His proposal that stars are doubled, as they are both ordinary and special, feeds into the sense of fragmenting identity and links to the Gothic mode (1979: 43). He argues that star images are linked to society's sense of what is normal (1979: 3):

Any dominant ideology in any society presents itself as the ideology of that society as a whole. Its work is to deny the legitimacy of alternative and oppositional ideologies and to construct out of its own contradictions a consensual ideology that will appear to be valid for all members of society. The operations of the dominant ideology are thus a ceaseless effort to mask or displace both its own contradictions and those contradictions to it that arise from alternative and oppositional ideologies. [...] These operations are always in process, an effort to secure an 'hegemony' that is always under threat from within and without (1979: 3).

In my focus on Gothic British male stardom, I can clearly locate a number of contradictory ideologies as there is an attempt consciously made to establish hegemony that is often subverted by the effete, intellectual or feminised British man. Dyer's suggestion that stars are 'representations of people' and a 'phenomenon of consumption' (1979: 22,10) that should be seen in the context of a type of industrial manufacturing, is also seen in the portrayal of British masculinity, where a distinctive type linked to nationality begins to emerge. Dyer's emphasis on the interaction of the audience with stars suggests that certain individual actors have a significance that illuminates aspects of the times in which they live and work (1979: 36). Stardom, like the Gothic, is a force that expresses hegemonic pressures, but because of the nature of its split identity, it is also often paradoxically expressive of a rebellion against these forces. Dyer himself puts it into Gothic terms of broken identities:

The sense of crisis as to what a person is seems to me to be central also to the star phenomenon, in that stars speak centrally to this crisis and seem to embody it or to condense it within themselves (1979: 183).

Stardom, then, echoes the concerns of the Gothic in its negotiation of identity, particularly with its focus on appearance and truth. Dyer's association of stardom with 'crisis' here also



reflects the Gothic concern with repressed, historical anxieties and doubled identities. The star's identity is split too: there is an authentic self, a screen self and another self that is created for publicity materials, especially fan publications. My methodology incorporates Dyer's approach of interrogating star discourse across a wide range of texts.

In *Heavenly Bodies* (1986/2004), Dyer explores the ways in which stars are produced and their relationship with their historical contexts (1986/2004: 2). He argues that a star is essentially a commodity and a star's image is 'always extensive, multimedia, intertextual' (1986/2004: 3).

Dyer's view of the star as representative of the individual in society echoes Freud's essay on uncanniness and the Gothic concept of doubling:

What is central is the idea of the separable, coherent quality, located 'inside' in consciousness and variously termed 'the self', 'the soul', 'the subject' and so on. This is counterposed to 'society', something seen and logically distinct from the individuals who compose it, and very often inimical to them. If in ideas of 'triumphant individualism' individuals are seen to determine society, in ideas of 'alienation' individuals are seen as cut adrift from and dominated, battered by the anonymity of society. Both views retain the notion of the individual as separate, irreducible, unique (Dyer, 1986/2004: 8).

For Dyer, stardom is emblematic of something that is intrinsic in our western perception of how the individual fits – or does not fit – into society. He argues that 'The private/public, individual/society dichotomy can be embodied by stars in various ways' (1986/2004: 13).

Dyer's historicised approach and his comprehensive analysis of individual star images is crucial to this project. His study of Paul Robeson as male 'crossover' star who is representative of blackness across the transatlantic nations is particularly interesting because Robeson is essentially dual in his Americanness and his blackness (1986/2004: 64). The discourse that surrounded him was also dual, as white and black communities constructed their own discourses surrounding his representation of these identities (1986/2004: 66). Dyer reveals that Robeson's masculinity is fascinatingly doubled, transgressive and fetishized in white discourse (1986/2004: 109). The emphasis on Robeson's beauty and physicality makes him, for Dyer, an interesting comparison with

Marilyn Monroe in terms of image (Dyer, 1986/2004: 64, 118-19). Dyer's work uncovers aspects of the transatlantic cultural connection through exploring Robeson's unique image, to reveal a 'hidden history' of a silent and marginalised male group (ibid). Dyer's consideration of Robeson's status as outsider and his objectified 'passive, emblematic beauty' reveals that effectively Robeson is treated like a female star (1986/2004: 120, 113).

Dyer argues:

Pin-ups of white men are awkward things [...] they exemplify a set of dichotomies – they are to be looked at, but it is not the male role to be looked at; they are the passive objects of the gaze, but men are supposed to be the active subjects of the gaze, and so on (1986/2004: 113).

This complex understanding of identity is central to my interpretation of how British male stars were effectively Othered and gothicised in cinema. Dyer's chapter on the media gendering of Robeson led me to look at British stars who were also feminised and Othered, and to try to locate the ways in which they were represented for cinema audiences and fan magazine readers. In my work, I have employed Dyer's analytical approach to analyse the representation of contrasting British stars, Ronald Colman, Basil Rathbone and George Sanders. I selected the men in this study because they represent, as I will show, a number of different Gothic types and they are given fan magazine coverage for an extended period, which shows they were the focus of studio publicity and popular interest.

Following Richard Dyer, there have been a number of useful, interrogative and exploratory studies of important female stars. The most significant of these for this thesis have been done by Adrienne McLean (2005) and Tamar Jeffers McDonald (2013) in their work on Rita Hayworth and Doris Day respectively. The gendered approach of these studies has illuminated many contextual and historically significant sociological and societal pressures and influences. Their use of ephemera in conjunction with the film text to break down and explain mythologies behind star personalities has impacted my approach to British Gothic masculinity. My aim was to use a similar intertextual approach and an interrogative reading of films to expose contradictions. My use of the Gothic lens enables me to question what has come before and to consider in some detail the indications of 'sexualised secrets' that are

used to define star appeal and the ‘multiplicity’ of a star image (Jeffers McDonald, 2013: 13-14). The use of ephemeral fan magazines adds to the study of films to ‘extend [...] beyond the film text to the wider moviegoing experience’ (Jeffers McDonald and Lanckman, 2019: 2). Both Day and Hayworth are studied as representative of their gender under patriarchal norms and their sexualisation takes precedence in these studies of their star image. This is something that I attempted to apply to the transgressive masculine figures in my chapters, who are also commodities and sexualised, albeit in a different way.

From the perspective of the wider issue of gendering in cinema, feminist studies of classical cinema proliferate, in work by Molly Haskell (1973), Mary-Ann Doane (1987, 1991) and in Helen Hanson’s (2007) more recent work on Gothic heroines. Perhaps inevitably because of its hierarchical position in this period of censorship, analyses of masculinity in Hollywood have been rarer. There have been some generalised responses such as *DangerousMen: Pre-Code Hollywood and the Birth of the Modern Man* (LaSalle, 2002), with more useful analysis emerging in *Big Bad Wolves: Masculinity in the American Film* (Mellen, 1978), *You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies and Men* (Kirkham and Thumim, 1993), *Detecting Men: Masculinity and the Hollywood Detective Film* (Gates, 2006) and *Bringing Up Daddy: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Post-War Hollywood* (Bruzzi, 2005), which engage with popular Hollywood ‘types’ of masculinity. Richard Dyer’s exploration of the figure of the ‘sad young man’ and his work on the iconography of *film noir* (2001), together with Drew Todd’s essay on ‘Art Deco Dandyism’ in 1930s Hollywood’ (2005), have helpfully nudged at issues related to the queer British male. Works on individual male stars, however, comparative to those on women, have only recently been published. Mark Glancy’s book about Cary Grant (2020) and Gillian Kelly writing about Robert Taylor (2019) have recently addressed male stardom related to sexuality and gendering. Their balanced approach to considering star image across a career that considers archives, fan publication discourse and readings of film to explore masculine stereotypes has been extremely useful. It has been my intention to explore the fan magazine – and sometimes wider – discourse, combined with exploratory readings of films. Fan magazines were culturally important in cinematic culture and play a

crucial part in the analyses of star images:

They (fan magazines) sought to entice readers to see the latest films of their favourite stars but also served as a means of keeping in touch with them, maintaining a relationship when the movies were over. [...] unlike the films, they lasted, were available to be pored over again and again (Jeffers McDonald, 2013: 35).

The most helpful studies that inform my work on gendered stardom come from the studies of women in the 1940-50s (already mentioned) and some extremely enlightening accounts of pre-code male stardom, especially Miriam Hansen's *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (1991) and Gaylyn Studlar's *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age* (1996).

### **(iii) Gender**

In her book, Miriam Hansen focuses on theories of gendered spectatorship and sets them in a historical context. In her chapter about Rudolph Valentino as 'a figure and function of female spectatorship', she discovers that, in contemporary discourse, the star acts as a sort of barometer for gendered tensions in the early to mid-1920s (1991: 253). Although it was considered that women were his main audience, Valentino's appearance in physical culture magazines in the 1920s made him a focus also for gay erotic gaze (1991: 263). Whilst male writers in the popular press scathingly accused him of being, at various times, henpecked husband, emasculated immigrant gigolo and a 'Pink Powder Puff', his popularity with moviegoers did not diminish (1991: 262). As an early and most striking example of an Othered male star, Rudolph Valentino is an antecedent of the British Gothic male figure that I focus on in my study. He too represents a liminal type of masculinity and, in his final film, *Son of the Sheik* (George Fitzmaurice, 1926), he is doubled, as the Sheik and Ahmed his son. Hansen argues that,

his appeal eluded the heterosexual polarity of male and female [...] As could be seen in the nativist-racist slurs, the opposition of male and female was overlaid with an equally rigid opposition of American and un-American, which in him was coupled with binary terms such as natural versus artificial, authentic self versus mask (1991: 262).

Like the men in my thesis, Valentino is framed as un-American and therefore unmanly. He is

also doubled in his media image, as stars such as Ivor Novello and Ramon Novarro were proclaimed the 'new Valentino' (Noble, 1951: 96). Before the arrival of talkies, British stars took a number of different types of roles, and their distinctiveness as 'British' did not evolve until they had the opportunity to speak.<sup>12</sup> The cult that surrounded Valentino and the response to his death reveals the ways in which cinema audiences rebelled from the hegemonic in their desire for gender and sexual role models (Hansen, 1991: 10). Whilst media responses to him were unenthusiastic, film audiences never waned in their adoration (ibid). His combination of attractiveness and un-Americanness seemed to be an appealing package for his fans (ibid). This baffled authoritarian commentators as 'male beauty' was seen as 'an oxymoron tolerated at best in socially marginal characters and professions, in artists, fashion workers, intellectuals and bohemians' (Hansen, 1991: 268). This condemnation of the feminisation of masculine appearance that was so appealing to women revealed a conflict within society, as the mainstream media voiced opinions that were contradicted by trends in popular tastes.

In her 1996 book, Gaylyn Studlar explores the construction of cinematic masculinity in the 1910s and 1920s as it evolves in reaction to changes in society, which she perceives as a performance or 'masquerade' (Studlar, 1996: 4). She focuses on four male stars who embody the ways in which masculinity was being reconfigured in the 1910-20s.<sup>13</sup> Studlar explores male stardom of the silent era in relation to a number of cultural intertexts to illuminate the debates around gender and sexuality:

Their shared revelation of *transformative masculinity*, of a paradigm of gender construction that in many different guises or 'masquerades' foregrounds masculinity as a process, a liminal construction and even a performance (Studlar, 1996: 4, original italics).

There was, she argues, an Anglo-American perception that boyhood was under threat, with the loss of an 'outdoors' childhood in an increasingly industrialised society and under the

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<sup>12</sup> In silent films, Ronald Colman and Clive Brook often appeared as European. Colman played Captain Severini in *The White Sister* (Fitzmaurice, 1923), Bucelli in *Romola* (King, 1924). After talkies became popular, English voices seemed to set British stars as separate from other Europeans, fan magazines hailed theatrical British actors as the next fashion.

<sup>13</sup> Douglas Fairbanks, John Barrymore, Rudolph Valentino and Lon Chaney.

apparently emasculating influence of mothers (1996: 24). Studlar's transatlantic historical perspective of the foregrounding of debates around the Boy Reform movement creates an important backdrop to my project, as she shows that the feminine was becoming 'the enemy to boyish masculinity' (Studlar, 1996: 29):

Feminization and overcivilization became the conflated antagonists to traditional masculinity aligned with a 'masculine primitive' and defined in terms of physical strength, moral action, individualistic independence, and outdoors-centred interests (Studlar, 1996: 30).

Studlar's study of Douglas Fairbanks, as an expression of a transformative masculinity that progresses from (English style) 'mollycoddle' to American man, reinforces many of the arguments I make in this thesis. In his star discourse and films Fairbanks is an individual who is used to play out a number of contentious conflicts around masculinity and the promotion of boyish manhood (Studlar, 1996: 24). Studlar notes that, in his 1920 film *The Mollycoddle*, he plays a character whose European upbringing has made him 'a morning-coated, monocled mollycoddle', who is discovered by a group of Americans who declare that he is 'contrary to the constitution of the United States' (1996: 71). Studlar's research also reveals the way that 'the masquerade of costume films' in the silent era allowed for the objectification of the male body for female spectators (1996: 116):

Antiquated settings and the Victorian-influenced rhetoric of romantic idealism worked to prevent such vehicles for female (and potentially homoerotic male) fantasy from becoming too disturbingly sexual (ibid).

This acknowledgement of the complication of the 'gaze' and the different standards for costume or historical film, has informed my own perception of the ways in which film narratives worked. Contemporary media anxiety bubbled over with the horrifying possibility that women might prefer effeminate men 'to real men' (Studlar, 1996: 110). Her acknowledgement of the potential for homoerotic response to costume drama is significant and is a theme that I develop later.

Studlar's case study of John Barrymore, and his function as theatre star 'matinee idol' and 'soft focus boy' shows his popularity as an expression of female consumer power (1996: 94) which started in the theatre where 'matinee girl' audiences objectified male bodies in 1910-20s (1996: 95).

Matinee idols like Barrymore were woman-made objects who were not likely to be

transformed into men by action, either on or off the boards. No matter how they proclaimed their manhood, they remained ambiguously gendered, passive objects of women's interest (1996: 111).

Gaylyn Studlar adds a sense of how the concept of masculinity evolved as 'women as consumers were altering masculinity', and women might prefer effeminate men 'to real men' (1996: 92,110). The feminised immigrant man was seen as a threat to the heroic masculine American hero, and Studlar notes that the Anglo-Saxon actors like Ronald Colman were originally recruited to play 'swarthy, passionate foreigners' (1996: 194, 154). In my exploration of Colman's masculinity, I use this as a starting point, although, as I trace British masculinity through the decades that follow the 1920s, there is an inevitable evolution of this with the arrival of talking pictures. In Colman's case, changes in his persona in fan magazines and the shift in types of roles taken on after the advent of talkies, were largely related to his voice and the ways that his star discourse in later decades emphasised his Englishness.

Hansen and Studlar challenge the idea of the 'male gaze' as dominant in early cinema where it seems to be the 'female gaze' that dictated the popularity of many stars (Hansen, 1991: 252). I have taken this established account of the complexity of the gaze and the gendering of star discourse across a diverse range of texts as a basis for my approach to the male stars in this project. The exploration of the 1920s 'woman-made man' and the gendered appeal of different actors shows that the construction of masculinity in Hollywood was less rigid than a narrow focus on 'dangerous' or heroic masculinity (Studlar,1996: 8). Although the stars that are the focus of my study are mainly working in a period of tighter censorship, this understanding of gendering and the 'gaze' is important for a clear understanding of the developments in cinema after this time. The 'woman-made man' could also be considered the 'gay-made man', especially in relation to androgynous or muscular men such as Rudolph Valentino, Ramon Novarro or Douglas Fairbanks.

Recently published works on individual male stars, such as Michael Williams' account of Ivor Novello as 'England's Apollo' and Emily Chow-Kambitsch's analysis of Roman Novarro,

reveal a type of deification of the feminised, objectified male body (both in Jeffers McDonald and Lanckman, 2019). In his exploration of the way in which Novello was represented as Greek god Apollo, Williams tracks the ways that fan magazines employed the symbolism of classical mythologies as a way they 'sold' stars to audiences in the 1920s (2019: 129).<sup>14</sup> His consideration of Novello as a transatlantic star with a feminised and ethnic dimension makes a fascinating comparison to Chow-Kambitch's view of Novarro, Dyer's work on Paul Robeson and the aforementioned studies by Hansen and Studlar. Williams notes the way in which 'the star becomes the living art object' in 1920s fan magazines (2019: 129). Similarly, Chow-Kambitsch explores the feminisation of Roman Novarro, as Valentino-style Latin lover, whose body was fetishised and objectified, especially, as she notes, in *Ben Hur* (Fred Niblo, B Reeves-Easton, 1925), where the objectification expresses a Christian physical symbolism (2019:147).

Novello and Novarro could be seen as each other's exoticised transatlantic double. The cult of the male body is something that 'muscular' masculinity in the Teddy Roosevelt 'strenuous life' mode (Studlar, 1996: 26) had in common with later gay culture, and this attribution of godlike status to the masculine physique is a shared dominant aesthetic. Both of these male stars led a homosexual lifestyle under the threat of illegality, and both men suffered for it.

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<sup>14</sup> Apollo the sun god was bisexual in his dalliances. He was the lover of the Macedonian Prince Hyakinthos, who died catching a thrown discus, then turned by the god into the hyacinth flower. The Pseudo-Apollodorus also said Apollo had been with Thracian singer Thamyris in the first man-on-man relationship in history. Apollo also was in a relationship with Hymen, the god of marriage (Calimach, Lev and Carter, 2002: 4). *Ben Hur*, 1925, was the homosocial story of the friendship between two boys/men in Biblical times, when, on film at least, men wore revealing skirts and sandals.



Novello was tried, found guilty and imprisoned (ostensibly for ‘misusing wartime petrol coupons’) and Novarro was murdered as a direct result of his sexuality (Mann, 2002: 1; Soares, 2002: xiii). Novello and Novarro, with their echoing Italian names and dark looks were very much part of the film culture in which European characters could express passions that their American counterparts could not (Sklar, 1975/1994: 95-99). Although he tried to make the move across the Atlantic, Novello’s appeal as ‘British Valentino’ (Street, 1997: 121) did not impress revered director DW Griffith and his Hollywood career was short-lived (Street, 2006: 385).

Gillian Kelly’s book *Robert Taylor: Male Beauty, Masculinity and Stardom in Hollywood* explores the representation of a popular male American star of the 1930-1940s (2019). Taylor, largely forgotten now but at one time hugely popular, is examined in terms of manliness and Americanness (Kelly, 2019: 41). Kelly’s focus on the objectification of Taylor’s body and his function as a commodity aimed at female audiences (2019: 61) echoes Dyer’s chapter on Robeson and the work on the deified commodification of Novello and Novarro. Again, in my view, the female and the gay male gaze must have been inevitably interchangeable, although this is not made explicit in these studies. Kelly notes that in *A Yank at Oxford*, (Jack Conway, 1938), Robert Taylor’s all-American student, Lee Sheridan, is set up to contrast with Waverley (Robert Coote), the quintessential British effete man (2019: 85). This is an interesting observation because the late thirties, as I will show, is the period in which British male stars start to be defined in these terms in contrast with American male stars like Taylor.

In his essay, ‘Dandyism and Masculinity in Art Deco Hollywood’, Drew Todd identifies a version of the effete British man that was popular in the days of the early talkies. British actors in this period often appeared as effete, witty heroes in popular melodramas and comedies.<sup>15</sup> This type of leading man, personified by Herbert Marshall, Leslie Howard, Basil

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<sup>15</sup>*Its Love I’m After* (Mayo, 1937), *The Last of Mrs Cheyney* (Franklin 1929), *Breakfast for Two* (Santell, 1937) *Trouble in Paradise* (Lubitsch, 1932).

Rathbone and Ronald Colman in their 1930s lounge lizard days, was the 'art deco dandy' who,

had as much in common with women as he does with men. He fluctuates ambiguously between sexual identities: On the one hand, he is hyperbolically heterosexual, with a voracious appetite for women: on the other hand, he is effete and always primed. His meticulous, stylized appearance and personality transgress classical notions of masculinity (Todd, 2005: 170).

The British male figure in 1930s Hollywood, then, was allowed more gendered fluidity and freedom than his native counterpart. The popularity of genres that allowed Gothic British masculinity to display itself most flamboyantly, such as the 'costumes and classics' cycle (Glancy, 1999: 98) and 'merrie England' films (Roddick, 1983: 235-248), brought the marginal into the mainstream. There has been a general consensus among film historians that in costume films of all types, there was a greater acceptance of transgression, perhaps because the costumes signified that 'they were set in the distant past' (Glancy, 1999: 43).

The popular non-villainous Hollywood Gothic British male figure, the rule's most fluid exception, is the transatlantic detective. The detective, however, is drawn to transgression, situating himself in the borderland of the dark criminal underworld, therefore contaminating himself through association. The fictional detective's antecedents lie in the Gothic tradition of Edgar Allen Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle, whose heroes, through 'specific techniques of reasoning and utilisation of scientific methodology [...] look beyond madness and mystery to arrive at logical conclusions for observed phenomena' (Miranda, 2017: 1). In *Detecting Men: Masculinity and the Hollywood Detective Film* (2006), Philippa Gates considers British detectives such as Sherlock Holmes and the Saint as a type that is distinctly un-American (2006: 55). Outsiderness was key to the success of this Hollywood British detective figure, and an effete concern for clothes, books, music and antiques was part of their personae. As in the British detective tradition, the hero's intelligence and ambivalence were brought to the new context of the American urban environment, where 'British sleuths' were 'made somewhat streetwise' (Gates, 2006: 69). Gates observes that,

[t]he Anglicised detective could - as James Bond still does for contemporary audiences - allow an indulgence in, and an identification with, a type of masculinity that embodied suavity and culture, lived a lavish lifestyle, and bent the law without 'tarnishing' American values or conceptions of heroic masculinity (2006: 75).

These hybridised detectives were Gothically positioned in a liminal space as good/evil, masculine/feminine, hero/anti-hero and even, at times, British/American. Much more in keeping with the British intellectual hero than the American quest for a muscular ideal, their American double is to be found in Humphrey Bogart's hard bitten Sam Spade or Rick Blaine, where intelligence is linked with world weariness and cynicism.<sup>16</sup> The world of the British (amateur) detective is also usually a homosocial one: Holmes' primary relationship is with Watson, the Falcon's with Goldie, Bulldog Drummond's with Algernon, whilst the independent Saint smoothly runs rings around a series of Irish policemen. Meeting places for these crime fighters are gentleman's clubs, police stations and dominantly male bars. The detective is also free from long lasting heterosexual ties, as his associations with women are usually brief and superficial.

#### **(iv) Queer**

Masculine stardom is given a different perspective by cinema's queer theorists. Vito Russo's seminal work *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, published in 1981, began the scrutiny of the male queer in Hollywood film. He describes the evolution of the figure of the feminised, comic 'sissy' from the early days of cinema through the classical era. The issue of feminisation is, Russo notes, 'rooted in sexism':

Weakness in men rather than strength in women has consistently been seen as the connection between sex role behavior and deviant sexuality. And while sissy men have always signalled a rank betrayal of the myth of male superiority, tomboy women have seemed to reinforce that myth and have often been indulged in acting it out (Russo, 1981: 5).

Russo's suggestion that the 'inspired lunacy' of the 'professional sissies' was lost in the 1940s with the pressure of censors and wartime (ibid). Losing his innocence, the gay male 'had become distanced from the humorous and had become a little deadly' (Russo, 1981: 59). The

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<sup>16</sup> *The Maltese Falcon* (Huston, 1941) *Casablanca* (Curtiz, 1942).

replacing of comic 'fairies' of the 1930s, such as Franklin Pangbourne, Grady Sutton and Edward Everett Horton, with anglicised villains like Clifton Webb and George Sanders made queerness more sinister on screen (Russo, 1981: 6)<sup>17</sup>. Russo argued that 'attitudes toward queerness were shifting because men were going off to war. All male behaviour suddenly seemed to be strongly suspect' (Russo, 1981: 59). Russo perceptively notes that the harmless American sissy had been replaced with the murderous (Gothic) Englishman as war became the dominant societal force (ibid). Vito Russo's work acts as a foundation for this project, as I develop these ideas in an exploration of the ways the British man is represented in cinema.

In his 1998 book *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film*, Harry Benshoff builds on the concept of queermonstrosity, bringing together Russo's concept of the closet with the Gothic imagery of monstrosity in what he calls 'homo-horror' films (15). He argues that,

for many people in our shared English-language culture, homosexuality is a monstrous condition [...] [and so] for the better half of the twentieth century, homosexuals, like vampires, have rarely cast a reflection in the social looking glass of popular culture (1998: 1-2).

Benshoff's appropriation of the vampire and mirror metaphor here underscores this queer/Gothic relationship. According to Benshoff both movie monsters and homosexuals have existed chiefly in shadowy closets, and when they do emerge from these prescribed places into the sunlit world, they cause panic and fear (1998: 2). However, I would argue that homosexuality is not as hidden or closeted as Benshoff and Russo have argued, or limited to 'queer flashes' (Doherty, 1999: 120). Richard Barrios in *Screened Out: Playing Gay From Edison to Stonewall* (2003) agrees with Russo that representation of queerness became less benign in the 1940s but he takes the argument further by asserting that,

[g]ays onscreen in that era were exactly like gays in real life: constantly present, fully integrated into the dominant hetero world, yet knowable only to those who would know them. They were simultaneously visible and hidden (Barrios, 2003: 147).

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<sup>17</sup> Although Webb was not British, he was definitely seen as 'anglophile' (Russo, 1981:6). His accent was also noticeably anglicised.

Barrios' assertion is that queerness was woven into the fabric of films, even after 1934 and the strengthening of censorship. This confirms my belief that queerness could not be excised from popular culture, however rigorous the censorship.

Judith Butler has argued that gender is not, in fact, binary at all:

There is only one: the feminine, the "masculine" not being a gender. For the masculine is not the masculine, but the general [...] There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results (1999: 27).

If sexuality and gender binaries are falsely imposed by culture on society, as Butler convincingly argues, then, no matter how enthusiastic the censorship, there will be signs of this in films, even those made after 1934. Any feminising of the male or masculinising of the female is therefore significant. Life and humanity rarely fit snugly into any ideology without a fight. As Richard Dyer observes,

we are led to treat heterosexuality and homosexuality as sharply opposed categories of persons when in reality both heterosexual and homosexual responses and behaviour are to some extent experienced by everybody in their life (1995: 16).

It is my contention that film even under censorship, reflects the true diversity of this, even if much was repressed and diverted through code into subtext.

In order to expose the paradoxically visible yet hidden queer aesthetic that haunts cinema in this early period, I have turned to theorists of literary Gothic, who offer systems of analysis of cinematic and narrative tropes. They tend to build on the writings of Michel Foucault, whose 'Repressive Hypothesis' argued that sexuality, even in Victorian culture, was a largely social construct and that, far from being repressed, different sexualities had long been appropriated by specialised discourse, usually medical and legal (1978/1998: 21). For, as Foucault suggests:

What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum* while exploiting it as *the* secret (1978/1998: 35, original italics).

Foucault argued that censorship had the effect of codifying 'a whole rhetoric of allusion and metaphor' (1978/1998: 17). Rather than closeted and hidden, I would argue that cinema of 1930s-1950s contain a rich seam of allusion and metaphor that, to this day, has barely been considered.

If, as Judith Butler has theorised, western society expects a 'performance' of binary gender that proves the lie of the 'naturalness' of 'compulsive heterosexuality', then true and varied sexualities must be present in the 'rhetoric of allusion and metaphor' (1999: 24; Foucault, 1978/1998: 7). If women are the Other of the masculine, then the feminised man must also be part of that othering within the constructs of misogyny (Butler, 1999: 13). However, the male body is represented with greater freedom because it is placed in a position of privilege, as Butler says, 'in its conflation with the universal it is unmarked' (1999: 17), which implies that the male body might contain a wide variety of meanings. This might counter the apparent historical silence around homosexuality. As Sedgwick has observed this silence is 'rendered as pointed and performative as speech, in relations around the closet' (1990/2008: 4). In classic cinema, as in classic literature, alternative readings offer a new perspective on hidden histories.

The relationship between the Gothic and the Queer as a signifier of outsidersness has been located historically and culturally by George Haggerty:

The connections between the history of sexuality (and the growth of sexology) and the gothic are not merely coincidental. They haunt each other with similarities that are more intimately involved than has usually been claimed (Haggerty, 2006: 51).

Within the context of the history of sexuality, the first part of the twentieth century, wracked by two homosocial world wars, resulted in a societal shift in perceptions of homosexuality and non-hegemonic gender. Recent histories of gay communities by George Chauncey (1994), Lilian Faderman and Stuart Timmons (2006) and Stephen Bourne (2017) reveal that a gay identity was strengthening and becoming visible in the first half of the twentieth

century. Following the 1948 publication of Alfred Kinsey's study of male sexual behaviour it became clear that homosexual experiences were more common than had been thought (McWhirter and Sanders, 1990: 93), Classical film in its most heavily censored period does not directly address issues related to homosexuality and gender, but films of this era are bursting with quasi-romantic male bonding. If sexuality exists, not as a matter of neat binaries but in nature as a varied set of unclassifiable set of thoughts, desires and behaviours, then it must develop its own code and life in film and related texts. In *The Matter of Images*, Richard Dyer has helpfully located a number of codes in *film noir*:

The ideological pairing of male homosexuality with luxury and decadence (with connotations of impotence and sterility) is of a piece with the commonplace linking of women with luxury (women as expensive things to win and keep, women as bearers of their husbands' wealth) and decadence (women as beings without sexuality save for the presence of men). The feeling that gay men are like women yet not women produces the 'perverse' tone of this mode of iconographic representation. (1995: 65).

There is a clear connection to be made here between such iconographic representation and the perception of 'effete' Britishness. Such iconography spilled over from films into fan magazines, as gendered language and imagery became coded into the print and image combination that made up the discourse of stardom and became part of the selling of films and stars to the consumer. Dyer explores the significance of the cinematic iconography, reaching deep into the text to examine what lies beneath the superficial heterosexual plot (ibid). I try to employ a similar critical approach as my quest takes me to an acknowledgement of culturally important male figures such as Noel Coward and the feminising of the British man in a dressing gown or in period costume. My thesis takes me to scenes of men meeting in isolated or foggy places, or facing each other in rivalry with phallic guns, swords, or in a physical tussle.

Both the Gothic and the British in Hollywood, then, were historically suggestive of a variety of sexualities in direct contravention of the Production Code's rhetoric. In my consideration of Ronald Colman, Basil Rathbone and George Sanders, I am drawn to explore their star images as they are related to Gothic tropes. It has been my intention to uncover the 'hidden histories' that are revealed through the presence of the British Gothic male, and for this I have conducted

my own 'reparative readings' of aspects of film texts (Sedgwick, 1985/2016: 19). Sedgwick argues that there is in a majority of texts, a continuum of relationships between men which starts at the homosocial and graduates to the homosexual, with homophobia and misogyny acting as a bonding mechanism in male interactions with each other (1990/2008: 2-3). She argues that this continuum of male bonding is 'absolutely necessary to the continuation of patriarchy' and part of its structure (1990/2008: 3-5). Drawing on Rene Girard's (1976) work on homosocial erotic triangles, she adds:

We can go further than that, to say that in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (including homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power: a relationship founded on an inherent and potentially active structural congruence. For historical reasons, this special relationship may take the form of ideological homophobia, ideological homosexuality or some highly conflicted but intensively structured combination of the two (1990/2008: 25).

Echoing Churchill's speech about the transatlantic connection here, Sedgwick uses the phrase 'special relationship' to describe the complex interaction between male same-sex social relationships and the structures of patriarchal power (ibid).<sup>18</sup> This might explain why, in films and fan magazines, there is an assumption that homosocial structures and intimacy can exist alongside traditional heterosexual relationships. Perhaps the most famous example of this is in popular fan magazine culture is found in the way that articles about Cary Grant and Randolph Scott in the 1930s describe their 'bachelor lifestyle' in a way that, through *double entendre*, to a knowing reader seems to hint that their homosocial domestic arrangement might also be homosexual (Glancy, 2020: 107). In keeping with Sedgwick's argument, the 'special relationship' between homophobia and homosexuality is well- documented in medical science, with one clinical study concluding that '[h]omophobia is apparently associated with homosexual arousal that the homophobic individual is either unaware of or denies' (Adams, Wright and Lohr, 1996:

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<sup>18</sup> Christopher Craft, in his essay on Dracula refers to these structures as types of 'heterosexual displacements' (1984:110).



440).

Sedgwick locates narrative structures in literature that, like Dyer's iconography, indicate queerness. For example, she argues that cuckolding is 'a sexual act, performed on a man, by another man [...] it [...] emphasises heterosexual love chiefly as a strategy of homosocial desire' (1990/2008: 49). She explains,

Homophobia directed by men against men is misogynistic, and perhaps transhistorically so. (By misogynistic I mean not only that it is oppressive of the so-called feminine in men, but that it is oppressive of women) (1990/2008: 20).

Stories involving rivalry of two men for one woman, therefore, hint at male homosocial - or homosexual - desire (1990/2008: 25). The 'transactional' woman becomes a conduit for same-sex desire amongst men (ibid). Furthermore, it is often the case in any fiction that if we remove the compulsory heterosexual pursuit and 'pay-off', we are left with some interestingly suggestive relationships between men. Sedgwick argues that the 'bond of rivalry' which

links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved [...] the bonds of 'rivalry' and 'love', differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent (1990/2008: 21).

In this thesis, I apply Sedgwick's narrative theories to film. There are many 'transactional women' in classical cinema, and the homosocial is frequently emphasised alongside cursory heterosexual plots in a way that might indicate homosexual alternatives.

Sedgwick and Haggerty note that alternative sexualities are at their most vivid in Gothic fictions, which often explore the 'sex-gender system' or 'articulate more complex sexualities' (Sedgwick, 1985/2016: 28, Haggerty, 2006: 19). In the Gothic mode, the Queer does not just appear as a background or marginal presence. Gothic narratives move the marginal to the centre of the reader/audience's attention. Through character and charisma, individual

British male stars add interest to a narrative that is often enigmatic and invariably intriguing. I believe my work upholds Haggerty's argument that the Gothic proves that stable identity is always an illusion, suggesting that the concept of 'normal' is artificially imposed (ibid).

### **(v) Transatlantic Cinema**

Following the foundational work of John Hill, Charles Barr, Jeffrey Richards and Andrew Higson on British national cinema, there has been an increasing sense of film as expressive of *transnational* identity. Andrew Higson argues for the concept of 'post-national' cinema, pointing out that 'British national cinema appears increasingly heterogenous, eccentric, even unhomely', expressing 'the contingency and fragility of the national, and the fractured and shifting nature of identity' (2000: 45). The emphasis in scholarship on transatlantic film has traditionally been on British cinema and its reception abroad. Sarah Street initiated a transnational approach by documenting the way that British products were distributed, exhibited and received in the US (2002). In an essay on 'Star Trading' she specified what she considers to be 'transatlantic appeal' of male stars, observing that Hollywood's 'preferred' idea of British masculinity came to be represented by actors like James Mason, with his 'combination of sadism, sexual attractiveness, cool intellectualism and bravado' (2006: 67). She observes that,

Hollywood had an insatiable appetite for British culture, buying the rights to novels and plays and having no qualms about producing films with large British casts, set in British locations created on Hollywood lots. For some actors this created an unreal feeling, of being at home but not at home. Robert Donat likened Hollywood to an Ideal Homes exhibition, a giant film set where nobody lives (Street, 2006: 61).

Street's reiteration here of the way that Hollywood created a sense of 'un'-homeliness echoes Higson's assertion about the fragility of national identity and Freud's uncanny (Higson, 2000: 45). A Gothic uncanniness then, lies at the heart of the transatlantic trade in stars, with Donat's comment about the artificiality of his American experience contrasting with entertaining anecdotes about the old-school-tie, cricket playing England-in-America ex-

patriate community described in Sheridan Morley's *The Brits in Hollywood: Tales from the Hollywood Raj* (1983).

The 'trade' in stars between the US and UK was never fully reciprocal, however, as the 'poor relation' British film industry was not, for many years, on an equal footing with its more prosperous counterpart (Richards, 2000: 25-6). There was no corresponding American expatriate film-making circle in London, at least not until after the Second World War, and even then, it never seems to have the same sense of distinctive cohesive cultural community. When American writers, directors, producers and actors made the move in the post-war period, it was largely to escape the scrutiny of Senator McCarthy and the House of Un-American Activities Committee (Prime, 2008: 480). Others made their home in Europe, where filmmaking started to boom again after the war because of cheaper locations and technology, and British and American artists chose to live in Switzerland to avoid high rates of taxes in the US and UK.<sup>19</sup>

For the transatlantic part of this project, however, focusing mainly on the British in Hollywood, the groundwork has been done largely by Mark Glancy. His two books *When Hollywood Loved Britain: The Hollywood 'British' Film 1939-1945* (1999) and *Hollywood and the Americanization of Britain: From the 1920s to the Present* (2013) explore the transatlantic relationship, revealing neatly, in two companion studies, a type of doubling of British and American influences. The titles indicate the nature of a relationship that invariably had Hollywood, with its access to funding and technology, as the dominant partner. I use Britishness in Hollywood as a starting point, as it is the American industry that is the driving force in transatlantic cinema history.

For this thesis, the first of these books is the most important, although many of the key points of its companion, *Hollywood and the Americanization of Britain*, have aided my understanding of how British media and film audiences perceived compatriot male stars working in the American industry. The transatlantic journey of the Gothic through stories

<sup>19</sup> David Niven, Charles Chaplin, Noel Coward, Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton, Peter Ustinov and others (Lord, 2003: 265).

and individuals is clear in the pathways identified by Glancy in his historical research.

Glancy notes, like Higson, that 'the history of British cinema need not be solely concerned with British films and filmmakers' (2013: 4). Glancy proves beyond a doubt that there was a strong awareness of Britishness running through early Hollywood cinema and that British culture in return felt itself evolve under the potent influence of American film.

Mark Glancy emphasises British anxieties about the apparent attempt of American films to 'sell' audiences on a glamorous fantasy of America itself. (Glancy, 2013: 23). Importantly, he notes that,

the rise of Hollywood also played into a narrative of national decline in Britain. This came into sharp focus after the First World War and as the United States emerged as an undoubted world power. [...] Hollywood served as a useful target for the resentments that stemmed from the USA's displacement of Britain at the centre of the world stage (2013: 6).

Glancy's research into popular perceptions of Americanness in Britain as linked to the growing popularity of cinema is crucial foundation for this thesis, as is his uncovering of the 'issue of Americanisation through films' (ibid) which revealed that, for the English media particularly, the US was not 'Britain's cultural 'other' [...] but represented the recognisable and seemingly unstoppable forces of modernity' (2013: 18). This sense of the political timing where America's rise on the world stage coincides with the British Empire's demise is crucial. Transatlantic shared experiences, such as two wars and a Great Depression, also complicate the situation as the two countries began to identify closely with each other.

It is *When Hollywood Loved Britain* (1999), Mark Glancy's first book, that partly inspired this project, because of the scope and the impressive use of detailed research employed in describing the complexity of relations between Britain and America. Glancy's consideration of the complexity of 'cultural transmission [...] The concept of consumers selecting what they want and need and using it for their own purposes', explains the ways in which Hollywood cinema interacted with Britain and concepts of Britishness (1999: 27). American audiences expressed fascination with Britishness, as British audiences became effectively Americanised

(1999: 83; 2013: 6). During the Second World War, Hollywood became reliant on British audiences for their profits as other foreign markets closed down and European nations fell to the Nazis (Glancy, 1999: 6). At this time there was a fashion for films with British stories, which drew on the community of British players and creatives in Hollywood studios (Glancy, 1999: 1).

This peaked in the early years of the Second World War, when 'the migration from Britain to Hollywood seemed to have become an exodus' (Glancy, 1999: 156). This was a heyday for the fashion of British culture in the American cinema, expressing the political alliance that would dominate the world stage in the decades to follow.

Glancy explains the complexity of the transatlantic relationship from the American viewpoint:

During the 1930s and the 1940s, many Americans still considered England to be part of their heritage and, in the days before transatlantic journeys became common, their perspective on their country was a backward-looking one. Thus, many 'British' films dramatized the glories and achievements that were part of a shared Anglo-American heritage. Another aspect of this backward looking view, however, is that the films often focus on the rigidity of the class system, social snobbery and Anglo-American differences. While Britain was never portrayed in an altogether unfavourable light, and Anglophobia exists only as an undercurrent in 'British' films, the American perspective on Britain conveyed a grateful awareness of the distance of both time and space. American audiences could revel in images of the old country, and at the same time be grateful that their forefathers had embarked for a new and more egalitarian world (1999: 4-5).

The ambivalence described by Glancy here is particularly evident in the screen roles and star images of the British men in this project. There is a clear fascination with British male voices, effete charm and intellectualism, that is in conflict with also a distrust of the same un-American qualities. It cannot be a coincidence that so many British villains that take centre stage from the 1930s and 1940s onwards have upper class accents, are 'gentlemen' or are public school and university educated, as Mark Jancovich also has noted (Glancy, 1999: 161, Jancovich, 2013: 229).

Mark Glancy observes that, whilst American audiences did not usually receive British films well, the 'tourist's view' of Britain that was projected by the Hollywood-British ('British')

films proved immensely popular in both countries (1999: 4: 75). This recognition of both Anglophilia and Anglophobia, highlights the ambivalence that was at the heart of the transatlantic relationship in the 1930-40s (Glancy, 1999: 6, 2013: 5). In the refracted lens of the fraternal mirror, Britain saw a brighter, cleaner, more plentiful, less deprived future. America too saw a version of itself that was rooted in a well-ordered tradition, where the rural and the urban were richly evocative of a golden past. Both nations were attracted by the transcendent self that was glimpsed in the Hollywood mirror. Yet the evocative settings in Hollywood 'British' films were largely studio based. Painted backdrops recreated the rural idyll of sheep grazing in meadows and distant soft rolling hills. Manor houses with upstairs-downstairs distinctions were recreated (and maintained), as were the Victorian gaslit streets of London. When outside locations were required, the California cliffs were, as George Cukor observed, 'better, whiter and cliffier' than the originals in Dover (Glancy, 1999:67). The artificiality of Hollywood's 'Britishness' is a hybridised, ambivalent fantasy of two nations. Glancy's analysis of individual transatlantic cinematic interactions illuminates relations between the nations. In the deliberately transatlantic film *A Yank at Oxford*, Glancy reveals problems with the production, which struggled 'with getting the balance of sympathies correct' (1999: 83):

It was feared that American audiences would find the Oxford students 'namby pamby' and that 'the flower of British aristocracy is likely to come across as a pansy'. The other problem was that the American character seemed to be a 'heel', and that somehow his transformation indicates that American values are somehow inferior. 'Can't we play tribute to English tradition without kicking America into the gutter?', one writer asked (ibid).

Here the spectre of effete-ness versus crass modernity once more raises its head as the nations are doubled with each other. This recognition of such national differences makes a useful starting point for this project, which leads me down the suitably overgrown and tangled Gothic pathway.

Glancy notes that Ronald Colman was the most popular and well-established British star of his generation, who survived from silent film to talkies mainly because he was 'uniquely well-

spoken' (1999: 160). It was Colman who, in the early days of sound, epitomised the English gentleman, becoming 'the standard bearer for a type of role that was particularly British' (1999: 160). Although Colman represented heroic Britishness, his shadow selves, Basil Rathbone and George Sanders, also blessed with extraordinarily beautiful British voices, were often cast as 'ungentlemanly gentlemen' (1999: 161). In my exploration of the Gothic male, I choose to focus on these three men as examples of the different ways in which British masculinity was represented in cinema of this era.

### **3 Structure**

In chapter 1 of this thesis I focus on a small group of actors working in Hollywood in the thirties and forties, who had seen action in the London Scottish Regiment in the First World War. I link the war experience of these actors to the uncanny film, *Random Harvest* (Leroy, 1942).

In chapter 2, I look in detail at Ronald Colman as a longstanding star who across the decades represented a type of effete, homosocially-focused British male figure and who at times took the function of the gothic heroine in narratives. I analyse his presentation in fan magazines and his roles in films.

In chapter 3, I consider the discourse around Basil Rathbone, whose private-life media representation hinted at emasculation, and whose involvement with Nigel Bruce as Holmes and Watson formed the most well-known homosocial relationship of the era. In his alternate frequent portrayal of villains, he seems to express a queered, intelligent masculinity that directly countered the American or old-world gentlemanly virtues of the males with whom he was doubled.

In my fourth chapter I analyse the star image and films of George Sanders, considering the ways in which he was represented in fan magazines and on screen as a misogynist, whose queerness on screen seemed to be contradicted in his personal life. The story of his relationship, on and off screen, with his living 'double,' his brother, Tom Conway, who also appeared in films in the 1940s and 1950s, adds a dimension of mirroring and distortion to

his persona.

In my conclusion, I return to Britain and *Dead of Night* (1945), a film that dwells on a recurring nightmare of post-war British masculinities that is explosive and startling in its expression of the return of the repressed and the uncanniness of life after war.



## Chapter 1: *Random Harvest* and *The Ladies from Hell*

### 1 Hollywood Veterans

Cambrai has fallen! Great St. Quentin too!  
On thirty-five-mile front they've broken through  
Haig's "Kilties," called by Hun: "Ladies from Hell,"  
Push now to end what's been begun so well!  
(*The Gates of Janus*, William Carter, New York, 1919).

In the memoirs of his Hollywood years, *Bring on the Empty Horses*, British actor David Niven recalled spending Christmas, in the late 1930s, at the home of Ronald Colman and his wife Benita Hume:

After dinner the women withdrew, and, over port and brandy, the older men reminisced while the younger ones, Brian Aherne, George Sanders, Douglas Fairbanks Jr and myself remained respectfully silent because, mostly, they talked about the Great War: Colman had been gassed in it, Rathbone has won the military cross, Nigel Bruce had absorbed eleven machine-gun bullets in his behind and Herbert Marshall had lost a leg (1975/1995: 179).

Niven's account of the British contingent in Hollywood reveals a divide between the older and younger group of actors at this point partly because of their war experience. Three of the four older men mentioned here by Niven had seen action with the London Scottish Regiment, along with fellow thespian, Londoner, Claude Rains. Rains, Colman, Rathbone and Marshall were all veterans of the First World War and were damaged in some substantial way by the experience. Niven paid attention because he had military training and, famously, he would be one of the first British actors to join up in the second war (Lord, 2003: 51, 128).

Claude Rains, victim of a gas attack and a shell explosion, had ended up in hospital with his vocal cords paralysed and he was permanently blinded in one eye (Skal and Rains, 2008: 35). Ronald Colman was not gassed in the war, as Niven claimed, but on Halloween night at Messines in 1914, he was hit by a bullet in his leg, which resulted in a lifelong limp (Colman, 1975: 12). Herbert Marshall received a sniper's bullet in the knee at Arras and had to have his leg amputated (O'Brien, 2018: xiii). Basil Rathbone did indeed win the Military Cross for bravery (Druxman, 1976: 34).

During the First World War, kilted Scottish regiments - including the territorial London Scottish - acquired the nickname 'The Ladies from Hell'. The origins of the name were generally rumoured to be a German invention. Herbert Marshall told one interviewer:

I was a lady from hell [...] The London Scottish, a kilted infantry regiment. You remember the Germans dubbed us 'ladies from hell.' That was a very good phrase (*The Oregonian*, August 1936).

Claude Rains' biographers describe how the unusual uniform influenced his decision to join the regiment,

I saw this soldier in his magnificent kilt. [...] I wanted to look just like that [. . .] it was the actor in me (Skal and Rains, 2008: 34).

The kilt is a reminder of the performativity not only of soldierliness, but also of Scottishness. These actors all had a Scottish parent, which made them eligible to join the regiment. As Rains' comment reveals, unlike most plain army uniforms, the kilt looked ornamental and impressive. The reality of wearing a kilt in the damp, muddy conditions of the Front, however, was extremely unpleasant. In her biography of her father, Ronald, Juliet Colman wrote about the hardships he had endured during the war:

Their feet were numbed by the well-shrunken boots, and the pressing weight of their packs only made matters worse. The greatcoats were only slightly less damp, but it was the edges of their woollen kilts that were the most torturous. Drying out as men marched, they scratched against the knees like sandpaper, making them raw (Colman, 1975: 11).

Photographs of the London Scottish regiment taken during their march through France and Belgium in the years of the war, show crowds of villagers and children come to marvel at the unprecedented sight of these men in skirts.<sup>20</sup> The nickname, 'ladies from hell' was in all probability originally bestowed on the kilted regiments not by the Germans but by the British press, in attempt to explain both Scots fierceness in war and to undermine the concept of the

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<sup>20</sup> "bshistorian" (2008: n.p.) has a full exploration of contemporary sources, considering how the name 'ladies from hell' came into common usage.

kilt as a skirt (bshistorian, 2008: n.p.). The dramatic success of the London Scottish in battle at Messines in 1914 would have been a warning to allies and enemies alike not to take the kilts as a sign of feminine weakness (Lloyd, 2001: 44). The associations of the kilt with masculinity, virility and fierceness had not travelled much beyond Scotland's borders although the fact is that in the Great War kilted regiments had a reputation for bravery and success in battle (Lloyd, 2001: 7). To the population of France or Belgium, even in other parts of Britain, the association of the 'skirt' was, as always with traditional feminine values such as softness, decorativeness, gentleness and passivity. In a similar spirit, Scottish soldiers were also called 'Devils in Skirts' and '*demoiselles soldats*'<sup>21</sup> (Declercq and Walker 2017: n.p.).

The title 'Ladies from Hell' is a useful starting point for my consideration of this group of British male actors in Hollywood because it highlights the juxtaposition between types of masculinity that is seen clearly in wartime. One of the inevitable issues with a system of categorising gender on a binary scale is the promotion of a typical or hegemonic masculine type 'to which males are generally encouraged to aspire' (McVeigh and Cooper, 2013: 2). Social historians who have considered this have considered hegemonic masculinity to be of a type that is seen as a military ideal,

by the interrelationship of stoicism, phallogocentricity, and the domination of weaker individuals, competitiveness and heroic achievement. Further, military organisations endorse and reinforce these particular models of masculinity through rituals, pageantry and commemorations which represent the public endorsement of such values and their institutionalisation in national culture (ibid).

Of course, the ideal of military masculinity is in itself a myth. The fragile myth itself dissolves and is not often perceived to exist in actual veterans of war. It is accepted that war has the 'capacity to 'unman' through physical or psychological injury: trauma, shellshock, disability or wounding' (McVeigh and Cooper, 2013: 4). Before battle, soldiers are motivated, encouraged, possibly bullied into performing a brave, soldierly form of masculinity and

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<sup>21</sup> 'Young lady soldiers'.

committing acts of bravery. Traditionally in transatlantic culture, the Fallen are idealised and memorialised whilst the wounded living are considered problematic:

This [...] cult of remembrance has both added layers of meaning to the figure of the veteran, and depending on his national, historical context, has made of him a saint or saviour (and sometimes a villain or victim). However, the fallen have tended to take precedence over the survivors in terms of this public remembering and valuing military contributions. The commemoration of the dead has taken precedence, in public culture, over the care of the injured. [...] however, the veteran can also serve to undermine apparently stable discourses concerning national institutions and national character. The veteran possesses the ability to unsettle, or to refuse reassurance (McVeigh and Cooper, 2013: 7).

Part of the unsettling effect of the veteran is closely knit to the concept of damage and disability. Post traumatic psychological symptoms and physical disability that might be a constant reminder of war and potential Otherness are feared in a society that fetishizes the hegemonic. The veteran, and society in general, are aware of the duality inherent in the return from a war experience that has caused deep psychological or physical wounding. The disabled, physically or psychologically damaged former soldier is the shadowy double of the brave soldier in uniform. At the heart of the issue of the veteran's return to society and normal life, then, is the Gothic question of dual identity.

Basil Rathbone expressed an uncanny sense of doubling even before joining up, in this account from his autobiography,

The very idea of soldiering appalled me . . . Most probably somewhere in Germany there was a young man, with much the same ideas as I had, and one of us was quite possibly destined to shoot and kill the other (1962/1995: 12).

In a personal letter home following the death of his brother John, Rathbone revealed his close identification with his brother following his sibling's death,

I'm even sure it was supposed to be me, and he somehow contrived in his wretched Johnny fashion to get in my way just as he always would when he was small (Jessen, 2021: n.p.).

Identification with lost friends or family members often leads to a type of survivor's guilt, or at least a sense of responsibility to make one's life count. It is in trauma that another self is

often formed (Malabou, 2012:4), and there was arguably no greater generational trauma than the Great War. Reflecting on the period immediately following the war, Herbert, known as 'Bart', Marshall commented,

Those first few months were the darkest [...] the most bitter of my life. I thought I was permanently handicapped in my profession. There are not many roles written for lame men (O'Brien, 2018: 16).

Marshall refers to himself here as 'lame', a general term, avoiding reference to amputation.

In the early decades of 'Bart' Marshall's career, he is documented as not wanting to talk about his war experience in fan publications and in the press.<sup>22</sup> Articles about him would briefly mention his war experiences in one or two sentences and admit he was 'wounded'.<sup>23</sup>

Fan magazines would suppress or skim over the idea that he was a 'cripple', whilst also layering extra sympathy on him because of his sensitivity due to his 'suffering'<sup>24</sup> There was a nervousness in many of these articles about how to discuss a man hailed by Elinor Glyn as a great 'screen lover' (1934:41) and writers demanded sympathy for him, even when his gentlemanly façade slipped during his very public affair with Gloria Swanson following the birth of his daughter.<sup>25</sup> Although early in his career, Marshall could play the sexually aware – even the 'bad boy' partner, (as in *Trouble in Paradise* (Lubitsch, 1932), *Evenings for Sale*

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<sup>22</sup> Marshall won't talk about his ghastly war experience, which left him with a bad leg. Look sharply when you see him on the screen and you can detect a slight limp, which only adds to his charm. His nice English face gives no evidence that he still suffers and that every once in a while another operation is necessary' (*Photoplay* 'Folks - That's Romance!' Ruth Biery, Sept, 1932: 51).

<sup>23</sup> 'upon his return from the front, wounded and scarred' (*Picture Play*, August 1934: 12). 'He was at length terribly wounded and struggled through long months of pain, between life and death' (*Modern Screen* 'Will He be the Greatest Screen Lover?' Elinor Glyn:41).

<sup>24</sup> his present limp is evidence of the suffering he endured' (*Picture Play* August 1934: 12). Norma Shearer: 'He is both manly and wistful. He wins the sympathy of women because his face expresses tenderness and silent suffering' ('Actresses Clamor for THIS MAN!' *Photoplay*, July 1934: 33) 'Eric Blore, Sir Cedrick Hardwicke, Ronald Colman, Charles Laughton (of course he could make swell faces at the enemy) all are World War veterans past the age limit. Herbert Marshall, a veteran of the First World War, was left a cripple and is now unfit to fight' (Cal York, *Photoplay* October 1940: 81). A report on his fight with J Monk Saunders: 'Some people strenuously object to Marshall being struck by anybody because of his infirmity due to the loss of his leg during the war' (*Picture Play* Jan 1935: 67). 'No, Mr M is not a cripple as you have heard' (*Screenland*, Oct, 1936: 74).

<sup>25</sup> Many gossip items, including: *Modern Screen* Sept 1934:38 and Sept 1934:13, *Screen* Mar 1936: 22 Marshall and Swanson go to la Morocco. *Picture-play* July, 1934: 17. 'Those plaintive, adoring glances that HM casts at her cause talk'.

(Walker, 1932), *The Solitaire Man* (Conway, 1933), often, in partnership with strongfemale leads, he would play the hapless cuckold.<sup>26</sup> This suggests that in his film roles, as in fan magazine articles, there is an increasing awareness of Marshall's possible 'incompleteness', that, on film translates as emasculation and impotence.

When the Second World War broke out, however, Marshall finally started to discuss his amputation, eventually visiting amputees in hospital and taking on the function of a role model (O'Brien, 2018: 217). One young amputee recalled his visit:

Herbert Marshall gave back my life. When I found out I had a metal claw instead of a hand, I was completely broken. What employer would hire me? How could I ever face my friends again and bear their pitying glances? I tell you I wished the jerries had done a good job instead of just shooting up part of me. Mr Marshall talked real sense to us. He followed it up with demonstrations, actually showing us what he could do. Before he left, we were convinced that if he had been able to lead a normal life, we could do the same (O'Brien, 2018: 218).

As the war progressed and his bland but pleasant looks faded, Marshall would play emasculated, impotent, asexual or disabled men. In *The Moon and Sixpence* (Lewin, 1942) and *The Razor's Edge* (Goulding, 1946), Marshall would take on the function of Somerset Maugham's apparently sexless narrators, but, in keeping with the novelist's sexual preferences, his characters' interest lay clearly in the male protagonists (George Sanders and Tyrone Power respectively). Disability would creep into his roles, most memorably in the mystical blind 'observer' of high romance, war veteran Major John Hillgrove in *The Enchanted Cottage*, (Cromwell, 1945), and as Bette Davis' victimised invalid husband Horace Giddens in *The Little Foxes* (Wyler, 1941). Marshall's biographer, Scott O'Brien noted that Marshall's appearance in the two male roles in the two versions of *The Letter* (also by Maugham) – the adulterous lover (deLimur, 1929) – and the cuckolded and duped husband (Wyler, 1940) revealed his 'range as an actor' (O'Brien, 2018: 54). In actual fact, the movement from dangerous man to victim shows little of Marshall's range but can be seen as a reflection

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<sup>26</sup> *The Painted Veil* (Greta Garbo, Boleslawski, 1934), *Riptide* (Norma Shearer, Goulding, 1934), *The Blonde Venus* (Marlene Dietrich, Von Sternberg, 1932), *Angel* (also Dietrich, Lubitsch, 1937) *The Letter* (Bette Davis, Wyler, 1940).

of changes in his star persona in the brief decade of his first fame.

Ronald Colman's daughter remembered her father as hating the very idea of war (Colman, 1975: 13). Claude Rains, on the other hand, argued after his service was over that he wanted to continue in the army to have 'a man's life', telling a friend that, after war, 'I'd feel like a cissy if I went back to the theatre', yet he was persuaded to return to his acting career, where there was a shortage of men (Skal and Rains, 2008: 38). Rains' perception of the theatre/army dichotomy is particularly interesting, as it is so gendered. He actually made the journey from joining the regiment because of the 'magnificent' uniform, to wanting to be a soldier as a career. He is the only one of these men to consider continuing in the Forces and yet he is the one who admitted that the element of dressing up and performance were most important to him at first. Perhaps the experience of war actually in binary terms 'manned' him rather than 'unmanned' him, or the element of 'performance' necessary in soldier life was one that he had become comfortable with. Although he was reassured by the masculine world of the army and welcomed aspects of this, yet his most natural 'home' was the feminised sphere of the West End theatre, in which he had worked from the age of 12 (Skal and Rains, 2008 :12).

Although Claude Rains' presence in fan magazines was less substantial than his London Scottish colleagues, his arrival in Hollywood in 1934 led to a flurry of interest where he was greeted as 'An Invisible Man Invisible' (*Motion Picture Magazine*, January 1934: 73) or 'He's No longer Invisible' (*Photoplay*, April 1934: 77). Rains – appropriately enough for an 'invisible' man, proved elusive to fan magazine writers. He was 'one of those naturally mysterious people' (ibid), whose very film roles seem to declare a theme of loss. Motifs of post war trauma and damage dominated Rains' early Hollywood films as *The Man Who Reclaimed His Head* (Ludwig, 1934) followed *The Invisible Man* (Whale, 1933).<sup>27</sup> He was

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<sup>27</sup> *The Man Who Reclaimed His Head* is the story of Paul Verin a veteran of the First World War, who murders his corrupt boss Henry Dumont (Lionel Atwill) when he finds him trying to rape his daughter. He carries the man's head in a bag. Jack Griffin in *The Invisible Man*, swathed in bandages, is taken for a war veteran and his psychosis can be seen as the result of war trauma.

also the first of the British stars to welcome American citizenship, quickly changing his allegiance and buying a Pennsylvania farm, which would allow him to avoid fan magazine interviews (*Photoplay*, June 1937: 90; Skal and Rains, 2008: 90).

Rains became associated with villainous roles, although, as can be seen in his ambivalent role as Captain Louis Renault in *Casablanca* (Curtiz, 1942), at his best he can express a complex morality. *Hollywood* magazine's 1941 article 'Vivid Villainy' declared that 'Mr Rains is definitely on the subtle side' (Franchey, December, 1941: 44). An intangible subtlety or ghostliness permeates Rains' star persona. His mild-mannered screen roles would encompass, not only the 'invisible man' and the 'phantom of the opera', but an unscrupulous lawyer with a separate, evil 'mirror self', as well as, within more realist genres, a plethora of amoral, asexual politicians, spies, patriarchs and psychiatrists.<sup>28</sup> It is unsurprising that he managed to play both an angel and a devil.<sup>29</sup> Rains also played Napoleon (twice), Julius Caesar and Herod with uncomfortable charm and powerful dignity and presence.<sup>30</sup> Like Herbert Marshall, he often found himself the victim of strong women – Bette Davis most notably in *Deception* (Rapper, 1946) and *Mr Skeffington* (Rapper, 1944), and, like Rathbone, he made a magnificently camp costume villain (*Anthony Adverse*, Leroy, 1936, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, Curtiz, 1938). Claude Rains, in an era of typecasting, had a complex and elastic persona that allowed him to portray a split and fragmenting type of Gothic masculinity – both passive and active – across a variety of genres and decades. For

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<sup>28</sup> *Crime without Passion* (Hecht, MacArthur, 1934), *Phantom of the Opera* (Lubin, 1943), *The Man Who Reclaimed His Head* (Ludwig, 1934), *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* (Capra, 1939), *Notorious* (Hitchcock, 1946), *The Wolf Man* (Wagner, 1941), *King's Row* (Wood, 1942), *Now Voyager* (Rapper, 1942).

<sup>29</sup> He played an angel in *Here Comes Mr Jordan* (Hall, 1941), the devil in *Angel on My Shoulder* (Mayo, 1946).

<sup>30</sup> Napoleon in *Hearts Divided* (Borzage, 1936), *Juarez* (Dieterle, 1939), *Caesar and Cleopatra* (Pascal, 1945), *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (Stevens, 1965).



fan magazines he was an enigma. One article claimed that ‘No player in Hollywood is so little known as Rains’ (*Motion Picture Magazine*, Hal Hall, January, 1934: 73) and this would change little as the years passed as fan magazines seemed to lose interest in his elusive personal life and mentions of him, like those of Marshall, fizzled out.

The ladies/hell juxtaposition was also rooted in a concept of binary gender, again expressing the contradictions inherent in wartime masculinities. The assumption that a feminised or theatrical man might not perform soldierly duties as well as a physically muscular, conventionally hegemonic man is problematic when we consider that in all wars all types of men (and latterly women) are expected to perform the same tasks. Inevitably, of course, it was not only the ‘manly’ muscular men who went into battle. The screen’s bumbling Dr Watson, Nigel Bruce, and screen ‘cissies’ like Eric Blore and Ernest Thesiger all saw action in the First World War (Bourne, 2017:172). Thesiger most incongruously took up needlepoint on the Front as a distraction, recollecting, ‘My dear, the noise and the people!’ (Bourne, 2017:173). He pursued the same pastime on film sets over the course of his career (ibid). In his autobiography, Thesiger recalled his regiment of choice,

I thought a kilt would suit me, so I applied at the London Scottish Headquarters, but my Scottish accent, assumed for the occasion, was apparently not convincing, and I was referred to another London regiment (Thesiger, 1927: 112)

Although these actors could never have played dashing heroic soldiers in their Hollywood careers because they were the wrong *type*, they ironically would have been able to draw on experience if they had been. Performance of military masculinity was not expected of them, so they helped to create other possible masculinities. In a tribute to Franklin Pangborn, American comic actor and portrayer of the ‘pansy’ in pre-Code films, one writer observed the same pattern,

It is not surprising to anyone who knows the truth about the military, as opposed to the Pentagon version, that Pangborn was wounded in the Argonne in World War 1, while such he-men as John Wayne and Ronnie Reagan performed their heroic military acts exclusively on camera (Barrios, 2003: 115).

As Stephen Bourne has demonstrated in his book *Fighting Proud: The Untold Story of the Gay Men Who Served in Two World Wars* (2017), gay men played a crucial part in both wars and liberation would move forward as a result of wartime mobilization (Bourne, 2017: 1).

## **2 The Rhythms of Coward: 'Watching Myself Go By.'**

Listening it struck me that he had done what no other actor or playwright of our time had done; invented, not only a new acting style, but a new life. Not merely a new character, the result of grease and skill, but the instant projection of a new kind of human being, which had never before existed in print or paint (Kenneth Tynan in Payn, 1994: 388).

Claude Rains was right that the world of the theatre after the Great War, was indeed 'cissified' and at this point in history might well have seemed trivial and effeminate to the returning soldier (Skal and Rains, 2008: 38). The post-war London theatre scene was dominated by the irrepressible personalities of Noel Coward and Ivor Novello, both writers and musicians as well as actors, both gay, widely perceived as 'rival talents' (Hoare, 1995: 55). These charismatic men self-consciously performed a type of effete male glamour that raised them out of their lower middle-class roots and into a dandified sophistication. One social historian has argued,

Novello's membership of a new rank of London based *jeunes-hommes* in the 1920s, or the 'society homosexual' as he put it, which also included the likes of Noel Coward and Beverley Nichols, enabled them to live in relatively open gaiety (in its broadest sense) through the adoption of a kind of semi-aristocratic persona (Williams, 2001: 41).

Theatrical culture in the post-Oscar Wilde London of the 1920s was rooted in a homosexual, or camp aesthetic, it was an 'ambivalent era' of '[a]llusions, hints and coded sensibilities' (Eyre and Wright, 2000: 2,110). Flamboyant characters of different sexualities formed part of the theatrical world. Alan Sinfield suggests that 'theatre and illicit sexual activity are likely to occupy the same inner-city territory' and that in this context homosexuality was an

‘open secret’ (1991:44, 49). N Carter ‘Tod’ Slaughter at the Elephant and Castle theatre had recreated a sort of Victorian camp-Gothic, and, although he was heterosexual, his flamboyant persona was far from the Hollywood ‘muscular’ masculine ideal, as can be seen in his films.<sup>31</sup>

In the theatres of the West End from the mid-twenties, Coward’s clever sexual comedies sat alongside melodramas that described repressed social and codified libidinal transgressions written by popular closeted homosexual authors as Somerset Maugham and Terence Rattigan (Eyre and Wright, 2000: 105). Other writers like RC Sheriff and John Galsworthy dealt in issues of homosocial post-war trauma and social issues in their plays (Poplawski, 2003: 448). Theatre historians see this culture as a Wildean legacy:

Gay men took over writing [...] from the position of semi-outsider. [...] Every playwright of any consequence staked his claim for decadent sophistication. All of them wrote about the English upper classes and did so with a truly Wildean ambivalence. All chain-smoked, most sported long cigarette holders and many wore dressing gowns of some-or-another sumptuous fabric. Somerset Maugham sharpened his ungenerous wit; Noel Coward pretended to lounge about in bed all day; Terence Rattigan disguised himself as a Brylcreem man; Ivor Novello turned his profile to the camera; Rodney Ackland stuffed the bills under the sofa and Binkie Beaumont reigned supreme (Eyre and Wright, 2000: 105).

Film producer Michael Relph described how this theatrical culture affected the British film industry:

In those days film directors like Anthony Asquith and Brian Desmond Hurst, as well as Noel Coward and Ivor Novello, were protected by the theatrical world. There wasn’t any harassment of gay people in our profession (Bourne, 2017: 160).

One only needs to read theatrical, literary and film star biographies from this era to understand that Coward was possibly the most influential transatlantic figure of his time. In

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<sup>31</sup>Tod Slaughter starred in memorable melodramas such as *Maria Marten or the Murder in the Red Barn* (Rozmer, 1935), *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (King, 1936), *The Crimes of Stephen Hawke* (King, 1936).

the footnotes to her essay on the relationship between Radclyffe Hall and Coward, Terry Castle commented:

Noel Coward's immense influence on Anglo-American cultural life in the twentieth century and the exemplary role in the formation of what is now sometimes called gay sensibility have yet to be fully documented (1996: 111).

In my view, Coward's influence extended beyond the formation of 'gay sensibility' to permeate mainstream masculinity. Noel Coward was a truly influential transatlantic male figure and the most fashionable playwright of his time (Hoare, 1995:139). Sinfield notes that Coward's knowing use of references to gay subculture would have split his audiences:

He was exploiting the split between the two audiences – between the uninitiated and those in the know. His project was to create a *knowing subculture* of privileged insiders *in defiance* of the respectable playgoer whose exclusion was both a necessary defensive maneuver and part of the joke (1991: 53, italics in original).

As a 'semi uncloseted gay man' in the teens and twenties when homosexual acts were outlawed (Payn 1994: 2), perhaps Coward should have been shadowy, liminal, reviled and Othered. Yet the truth is that, in his wide social circle, Coward sat at the centre like the flame, whilst the moths fluttered around or, as one writer put it, he 'collected people' (Day, 2007: 3). In the UK, he moved in elevated circles and had lasting friendships within the royal family and important political figures including the Queen Mother, Lord Mountbatten and Winston Churchill (Payn, 1994: 155; Day, 2009: 348; Hoare, 1995: 298). In New York he was accepted as an honorary member of the Algonquin Round Table, mixing with the American intellectual elite (Payn, 1994: 159). Coward also maintained for many decades' close friendships with Hollywood's royalty, including Douglas Fairbanks Jr, David Niven, Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, Clifton Webb, and Joan Crawford (variously dated letters at Noel Coward Rooms). A truly transatlantic celebrity, Noel was widely feted, becoming 'America's true definition of a 'class act'' (Payn, 1994: 113).

Noel Coward had close friendships with each of the 'ladies from hell', as is evidenced in his biographies and the letters in his archives. Ronald Colman and George Sanders were both

married to Benita Hume, a close friend of Coward's and on her death, Sanders wrote saying that he and Benita considered Coward to be 'gallant and wonderful' in his acts of kindness, signing off 'love George' (1967 letter at Noel Coward Rooms).<sup>32</sup>

One fan magazine reports Ronald Colman as admitting to sharing a love of funfairs with Coward:

Whenever Noel Coward is in Hollywood, we always give one evening to the Venice Pier at Santa Monica, where [...] we 'do' the merry-go-rounds, shooting galleries, ferris wheels and so on (Gladys Hall, *Photoplay*, 1939:77).

Coward had a close friendship with Herbert Marshall, with whom he worked in London's post-war theatres (O'Brien, 2018: 28-30). In a production of *The Young Idea* in the 1920s, Coward was 'appointed mechanic,' (Lesley, 1977: 69), helping Marshall with his prosthetic leg:

Marshall having to drop his trousers while Noel, with a spanner, tightened a loose screw; or loosened it if Noel had tightened the knee unbendably tight. Their humor centered exclusively below the waist (ibid).

Claude Rains was also part of that world. His biographer tells a story of young Rains, in 1920, asking Coward for help with his love life when his second wife, Marie Hemingway, was unfaithful to him (Skal and Rains, 2008:43). 'In the manner of Cyrano de Bergerac', Coward wrote to Marie breaking off the relationship, 'a wonderful thing to do' Rains later commented (ibid).

The 'ladies from hell' – and George Sanders – the subjects of this thesis – can all be seen in relation to a type of masculine style that was perfected by Coward from the 1920s onwards. As I have already explained, effeminess was associated with British masculinity in Hollywoodfilm, and Coward was the yardstick for this style, which was decorative and feminine within the boundaries of what might be acceptable for a man.

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<sup>32</sup> Sanders' biographer noted that Coward said of him, 'Just look at that fellow [...] he has more talents than any of us, but he doesn't do anything with them!' (Vanderbeets, 1991:xii).

Robert F Kiernan observed that Coward,

shaped not only the theatrical stage but the stage of life [...] His exaggeratedly clipped speech and his breezily insouciant manner were imitated both onscreen and off ... Coward's manner of calling the most solemn endeavors "lots of fun" and of peppering every sentence with the adjective [*sic*] "terribly" became endemic in fashionable speech, and all sorts of men transformed themselves into Noel Coward look-alikes, slick and satiny ... His wearing of crewneck pullovers was much initiated after his success in *The Vortex*, and his sumptuous dressing gowns worn over trousers, shirt and tie, became acceptable attire in drawing rooms. His bow ties, his brown dinner-jacket suits, and the white silk scarves he affected with navy blue casual clothes has immeasurable influence among the sartorially conscious (1986: 14).

His early association with the elaborately decorative dressing gown both on stage and in the media (Day, 2009: 25), suggested an effeminate yet sexual man who offered an alluring potentiality for transgression. Coward's split persona, a carefully constructed veneer, masking and smoke screening his true self, is most definitively Gothic.

Despite many offers to work in Hollywood, Coward never seriously considered making the move to the United States, famously preferring 'a cup of cocoa' (Morley, 1983: 76). Reflecting on one West coast visit, Coward mused, 'I felt as though I had been whirled through all the side-shows of some gigantic pleasure park at breakneck speed' (ibid). Although Hollywood was relatively liberal in the 1920s and 30s, to maintain appearances gay men and women chose to enter into 'lavender marriages' or became part of an 'open secret' community like the ones that revolved around George Cukor and Cole Porter (Faderman and Timmons, 2006:45). There was an ambivalent attitude towards male homosexuality, as it was 'held in major contempt', yet was also 'the most exclusive club' (Faderman and Timmons, 2006: 56).

Coward, accepted by all, knew George Cukor and Cole Porter well, socialising with them when he was in Los Angeles (Hoare, 1995: 270, 163). His position was privileged, and the type of stylish, witty feminised masculinity associated with him became well disseminated in Hollywood as much as the West End, although he admitted to friends that he had to adjust his style - tone down his performance of himself - when he was in Hollywood to be less

flamboyant (Faderman and Timmons, 2006: 56). This would have been difficult for Coward, who really had created a subculture to suit himself in the London theatrical world.

Mainstream nightclubs in Los Angeles, such as the Mocambo, the Trocadero, and Ciro's would 'permit gay customers to cruise there as long as they behaved with discretion: no touching, no flamboyant clothes, no effeminate gestures' (Faderman and Timmons, 2006: 45). George Chauncey has argued,

Thus while many fairies created a place for themselves in working-class culture by constructing a highly effeminate persona, many other gay men created a place in middle-class culture by constructing a persona of highly mannered – and ambiguous - sophistication. One element of this persona was the pronounced Anglophilia (which, more precisely, was a reverence of the elegance and wit ascribed to the English gentry) that became a significant tendency in portions of middle-class gay male culture (1994: 106).

For this type of ambiguous, sophisticated masculinity, surely Noel Coward was the chief role model.

For Ronald Colman, 'Bart' Marshall, Basil Rathbone and Claude Rains, all probably heterosexual, the journey to Hollywood following their return from the Front, begun in the British theatre, progressed to stages in the United States. Rains, Rathbone, Colman and Marshall all not only worked in the theatre - and some films - in this atmosphere, but, as I have shown, they also worked with – and were all friends with – Noel Coward. The rebuilding of self after the devastation of war, the renewed performance of masculinity, would have been part of their experience, under the influence of Coward, but also of the older generation of actors. Each of the 'ladies from hell' had an older male mentor who passed on the tradition of British theatrical masculinity during their crucial period of learning on the British stage.<sup>33</sup> These actors carried the tradition of a sort of British theatrical male persona that does not prohibit expressions of emotion or passion but encompasses

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<sup>33</sup> Marshall was given a chance after the war by 'Tod' Slaughter (O'Brien, 2018:17), Gerald Du Maurier gave Colman an opportunity when he was young ('Ronald Colman 'Romantic Recluse: The Private Life of a Public Hero: Part One', Gladys Hall *Photoplay*, February, 1939: 66-67, 77-78,), Rathbone started out with Frank Benson's company (Rathbone, 1962/1995: 38), and Rains with Herbert Beerbohm Tree (Skal and Rains, 2008:11).

feminine qualities without embarrassment. It contains, often, elements that represent 'effete' British manhood rather than American muscular masculinity, elements of the 'art deco dandy', English gentlemanliness, Wildean extroversion. Different nations have different masculine styles, and inevitably these evolve over the years.

In Hollywood during the teens and twenties, the dominance of New Womanhood had led to some fragmentation in the concept of masculinity (Studlar, 1996: 57). Arguably the opposite of the simplistic boyish 'childish masculinity' would be a feminised, stylish, creative Cowardian sophisticated style. Studlar notes the apparently 'woman-led' changes in masculine types in the twenties:

In a period associated with rapid and radical change on many cultural fronts, popular magazines, literature, and film constantly reiterated images of masquerade, of game-playing and disguise, especially in reference to gender roles and sexual relations. To many the creation of masculinity and femininity constituted a 'mad masquerade' whose impetus was modernity (Studlar, 1996: 4).

The 'mad masquerade' of performed masculinity – and masculinity recreated from a variety of different gendered behaviours and styles, paves the way for the popularity of the 'theatrical' British man typified by Coward, Novello and many others. As Judith Butler has proposed, gender is inherently problematic in that it is a social construction, traditionally tied to biological attributes:

Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of "men" will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that "women" will interpret only female bodies. Further, even if the sexes appear to be unproblematically binary in their morphology and constitution (which will become a question), there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two (1999: 7).

Butler's questioning of the hegemony of gender in this century allows us the opportunity to explore film representations of gender as significant performances. Gendering was used as a way of expressing transgression as well as conformity, which often proved elusive to pin



down especially by censors. Transgression of gender norms could be coded and disguised within cinematic narrative: through motifs, costume, voice, or *mise en scene*.

It might seem paradoxical that this study of Gothic transatlantic masculinities finds a central influence in an unlikely figure such as Noel Coward, with his association with light comedy. The origin of the aristocratic sexually ambivalent masculine aesthetic reaches back in time to the emergence of the literary genre with its roots in the work of historical male writers such as Horace Walpole, Matthew Lewis and Stephen Maturin. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in her influential study of ‘the homosocial continuum’ and ‘homosexual panic’ explains that in the nineteenth and twentieth century there was an understanding of the Gothic as an exploration of what is non-hegemonic and ‘perverse’ (1990/2008:90). She refers to the ‘allure of decadence’ in the Gothic (*ibid*), an allure that is evident in the works of Oscar Wilde and Noel Coward and in their corresponding public personae.

British critic Kenneth Tynan commented:

Coward invented the concept of cool and may have had emotional reasons for doing so. In any event, he made camp elegant and wore a mask of amused indifference [...] to disguise any emotions he preferred not to reveal’ (in Payn, 1994:246).

Coward observed, ‘(o)ne’s real inside self is a private place and should always stay like that... I have taken a lot of trouble with my private face’ (Payn, 1994: 241). In Coward’s *Design For Living*, Leo says, ‘It’s all a question of masks [...] Brittle, painted masks. We all wear them as a form of protection; modern life forces us to’ (Payn, 1994: 246).

Noel Coward was an expert performer of a type of masculinity that was feminised, strong, funny, gregarious and, in every sense, as Tynan observed, particularly perhaps in theatrical circles, ‘cool’. Iconic transatlantic star, Cary Grant, openly admitted to deliberately imitating Coward’s sophisticated persona and was a close friend (Glancy, 2020: 65-66). Clifton Webb modelled himself on Coward, considering himself to be the ‘American version’ of his British friend (Payn, 1994: 116). Contextualising Coward’s influence, film historian David Thomson observed,

it's hard to think that Cary Grant or James Mason could have carried on as they do but for Coward's example and legacy. It may be argued that Grant and Mason – and others, not least Olivier – actually played the Coward type more intriguingly than the Master ever managed [...] Coward more than anyone created (as author as much as actor) the manner of speaking that left us to read between the lines [...] it affects ideas of what a man, or a gentleman is [...] and you will find the rhythms of Noel Coward, as well as the same awkward fascination with gayness (Thomson, 1975/2002: 184).

This 'reading between the lines' would be an important part of the persona of British men in cinema. Somehow the British accent with a rich intonation lent itself to an expression of something that hinted at what the censors would not allow, as can be seen in the suggestively clear subtext of many of the films of the 'ladies from hell' and George Sanders. They represent an exotic, British, Cowardesque male persona that is dominantly homosocial - often seen in domestic set-ups with other men, whether it is with butlers, valets, in barracks or with brothers or in court.

The 'ladies from hell' all played both heroic and villainous roles with a sharpness and intelligence that they all shared. In expressing non-normative maleness, their roles often contain the Gothic motifs of male performativity, doubling and split or conflicted identity, themes that these actors carry with them through their careers in film and in their star discourse.

In the next section, I use the 1942 film *Random Harvest* (LeRoy) and the Gothic concept of the uncanny to expose issues relating to war in 'British' cinema.

### **3 *Random Harvest*, The Uncanny and the Great War**

Forty-two minutes into the two-hour running time of *Random Harvest*, a young newly married couple arrive at the door of their rented Devonshire cottage. The camera follows them on their slow movement up the path to the door of their house. The man opens the squeaking gate. He says, 'I must oil that hinge'. Holding back an overhanging branch of blossom for his wife, he says 'I must cut that back'. She responds, 'Oh no darling. It's so pretty'. They stand on the path together and in a middle shot, framed by white blossom, the man turns to the woman, holds up the key and says, 'Home'. She repeats

'Home'. The door swings open to reveal a wide, light, inviting hallway decorated with Victorian furniture and a vase of flowers.



Figure 1. Paula and Smithy's country cottage.



Figure 2. 'Home'

This 'cottage' is very much, in its wide spaces and large rooms, constructed along American, spacious lines of 'homeliness'. Real Devonshire cottages do not have white picket fences and large airy hallways. The idyllic framing of these images by white blossoms and the large heavy studded door evokes an idealised, hybridised British-American domestic fantasy. The man's appropriation of the practical aspects of creating a home in the garden, taking responsibility for the gate, the tree, the key, adds a sense of traditional gendered roles, as does his dark formal hat and suit and her long white organza dress and halo-like hat.

This sequence is repeated at the end of the film, when we find the hero at the end of his journey of self-discovery. The man, amnesiac Smithy/Charles Rainier has finally started to recover his memories of his life with Paula. He enters the gate alone. As he closes it, it squeaks, and his facial expression registers a memory.



Figure 3. Rainier's return to the cottage.

The audience here is party to Smithy's *déjà vu*, sharing his sense of the uncanny. Similarly, as he lifts the blossom, he turns and looks at the branch in a moment of remembering.



Figure 4. 'I must cut that back'.

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Figure 5: Rainier remembers.

As Smithy slowly puts the key into the lock and the door swings open to reveal the welcoming interior, identical to the original, he hears Paula's voice, saying his name. There is a moment of stillness. Then he turns and recognising her finally, smiling in close-up, he says 'Paula!' In his utterance of her name, we know that his past has been restored. He finally sees her for who she is. Their true identities, buried for the second part of the film, are rediscovered through the utterance of their 'real' (although paradoxically also pseudonymous) names. In this scene Charles Rainier finally meets his double, John Smith, who had been submerged within his unconscious. As Nicholas Royle observes, 'The ghost or double is *déjà vu*: it is to be oneself already seen, watched over [...] This 'stranger within' has no name or finally assigned place' (Royle, 2003: 183).

*Random Harvest* is set just as the First World War draws to an end. An amnesiac soldier, known as 'John Smith', (Ronald Colman) recuperating at Melbridge County Asylum in the British Midlands, escapes on Armistice Day into the village. There he is found and rescued by actress and singer Paula Ridgeway (Greer Garson), who nurses him through the flu and keeps him hidden in her rooms in the local pub. They become close, and, fearful of the possibility of 'Smithy' being taken back to the asylum, the couple take a train to a Devonshire village. There they get married, have a baby, and Smithy, who has begun to write for magazines, is offered an interview for a job at a newspaper in Liverpool. He reluctantly leaves his new family, checks into a hotel, then sets out for the newspaper offices. On his way to the interview he slips in the mud in front of a taxi-cab and is knocked unconscious. When

he awakes, he only remembers active service and his life before the war but has no recollection of his time as Smithy. He is Charles Rainier, part of a rich industrial family whose home is Random Hall, Surrey so he goes there to take his pre-war place in his family.

In the second part of the film, Rainier tries to lead a normal life but is increasingly aware that something very important is missing. He becomes engaged to Kitty, his step niece, but it is called off when she realises that he does not love her. There is a moment in a restaurant, when he hears the voice of Dr Benet, his asylum doctor, and he tells Kitty:

It seemed to remind me of something. Something I didn't quite have time to get a grip on. That happens to me sometimes. A sort of wisp of memory that can't be caught before it fades away.

In time, he marries his secretary Margaret as a business arrangement, feeling that he is incapable of real emotion. Margaret, however, is really the ever-faithful Paula, who has found him and is desperately hoping he will remember her. When this does not seem to happen, his disheartened wife decides to go travelling. When she has left, he visits Melbridge to resolve a dispute at his recently acquired factory there. In Melbridge, he begins to remember his past as 'Smithy'. He returns to the Devonshire village and the cottage that had been his home. As he pushes the door open, his memories come back and Paula is there, as she has stopped off on her way to South America. The two are reunited when Smithy recognises her and says her name: 'Paula'.

The doubled protagonist, Smithy/Charles has two homes, two wives (apparently), two lives in distinctly different social spheres, two professions. Split into a two-tiered self by the trauma of war, Smithy/Charles has lost his memory not once but twice, just as the trauma of war is itself repeated within a generation. The film is itself haunted by this doubleness, through the narrative device of amnesia - 'rare in life but common in movies' - (David Bordwell, 2017: n.p.), acting as a focus for revisiting and recreating, questioning the very concept of an individual masculine identity which has been shaken up by the psychic

wounding of war. As Alison McKee has observed, this is a film that uses personal narrative to reflect history, particularly gendered history (2010: n.p.).

This is a film in which the domestic is disrupted not only by war, but by the scarring left by war. Smithy/Charles, the 'hero', like a pale version of the classic Gothic heroine, is rescued by Paula from stasis, inertia and a half life. His task is to free himself from the prison in which he is caught, but his escape is only possible when she is there. This cottage, this 'home' haunts him and his quest is to find it because this is where he knows who he is. The key as a symbol of both his masculine virility, in its phallic form, which also manages to evoke the Gothic heroine. The hero is trapped within his own post war trauma in a sort of forever-uncanny nightmare that will centre on this idea of home and this one woman. His life for the second part of the film will be full of *déjà vu* and the return of the repressed.

Of all of Hollywood's escapist wartime films, *Random Harvest* is the most unsettlingly uncanny. Sigmund Freud in defining *The Uncanny*, expands on its close links to the home:

(T)he 'uncanny' is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar. The German word *unheimlich* is obviously the opposite of *heimlich*, *heimlich* meaning 'familiar', 'native', 'belonging to the home'; and we are tempted to conclude that what is 'uncanny' is frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar [...] something has to be added to the novel and unfamiliar if it is to become uncanny (Freud, 2003: 125).

The search for home and the restoration of identity lies at the heart of this film, and this is expressed through a filmic discourse of uncanniness, creating an unsettling effect on the audience and, finding the first war in the midst of the second, a sense of *déjà vu*. The uncanny is:

a crisis of the proper and natural, it disturbs any straightforward sense of what is inside and what is outside. The uncanny has to do with the strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality (Royle, 2003: 2).

*Random Harvest* was a successful film both in the US and the UK on its release in 1942 (Glancy, 1999: 1, 26). An MGM prestige production, based on popular British novelist James

Hilton's 1941 bestseller, the film made total earnings of \$8,147.0000 with a profit for the studio of \$4,384,0000 (Glancy, 1999: 71). According to Joel W Finler, the film was rated number 35 amongst profitable films in the decade across the Hollywood studios (1998/2003: 125). Although eclipsed at awards ceremonies, and perhaps in history by the more direct propaganda of *Mrs Miniver*, also produced by MGM that year, it was *Random Harvest* that was the second most popular film of the war years, after *Gone with The Wind*, in the UK (McFarlane, 1989: 268).

*Random Harvest* offered a sense of the return of the Historical Repressed in its First World War narrative, its sense of *déjà vu* and emphasis on the search for home and peace. The very melodrama of the film offers an uncanniness that is rarely found outside of tales of horror and the supernatural. The film is haunted by the past and is a prime example of what Laura Mulvey considers to be film's mystic purpose and potential power, linked to the concepts of both remembering and forgetting:

(F)ilm as fossilised trace of the past leads the cinema into the realms of culture and history, its own aesthetic attributes lead to considerations of time itself. Here, the halted, slowed or repeated celluloid image hints at the human mind's difficulty with time and our closeness to death, to the past as loss, as a jumbled accumulation of ruin and trace that survives the inexorable process of time's passing and human forgetting [...] bringing the past into the present (2004: 144, 147).

In 1942, the darkest year of the Second World War (Grenville, 1994: 295), a return to the Great War might well have evoked a very real sense of terror and displacement for an audience. *Random Harvest* brings the past into the present most viscerally through a depiction of one man's post-war experience and a woman's response to it. This film can be seen today as a memorial in the way that it explores the individual psyche and search for restoration of self. There is a realism in the way that the film creates a dream fantasy of British life and a sense of 'emotional memory' of post-war damage (Krapp, 2004: 67). Jay Winter, in his examination of war poetry, has observed that discourse about the First World War was deeply rooted in 'the language of never again' (1995/2015: 151). This makes the return to war offered in cinema ever more traumatic for those who suffered the losses and



brokenness of the first, with the acceptance of the vanity of the hope that the sacrifices might not have been in vain, melting away. *Random Harvest* strikes a chord with its carefully staged *mise en scene* of liminality, in its returns and repetitions and overwhelming sense of *déjà vu*, with its theme of remembering, almost remembering and forgetting.

Within the movie structure, there is a careful arrangement of parallel scenes, sequences, sounds and symbols, as the second part stands like a mirror of the first, offering a distorted image of the narrative that went before. Unusually for melodramas of the era, there is no actual flashback sequence in this film's narrative structure, and yet it constantly recalls and is haunted by its own past. As in the first part of the film, Smithy is haunted by the ghosts of war which were too terrible to remember, so in the second part he is haunted by the happier life and self that he created with Paula's help in the opening section. In the next phase I will analyse the film in relation to Gothic elements: (i) Liminal spaces: Windows and Doors, (ii) The Domestic Uncanny (iii) O Perfect Love! Deja-vu.

### **(i) Liminal Spaces: Windows and Doors**

The film narrative opens in a liminal historical space. As history waits on the brink of peace after the trauma of war, in November 1918, so a victim of injuries in the trenches, known as John Smith, sits in the asylum looking out of the large windows, wondering who he is and where he belongs. In the opening sequence the doors and windows are impenetrable and are barriers from the outside world. A pathway framed with dark leaves foreshadows the blossom that will surround the doorway of the Devonshire cottage. The asylum, in its Gothic, overgrown, forbidding aesthetic, is a most *unheimlich* home.

The sequence begins with a dolly shot that leads the viewer closer along an overgrown path towards a heavy door. As the camera moves slowly forward, a voice (James Hilton, author of the novel) introduces the setting:

Our story takes you down this shadowed path. To a remote and guarded building in the English Midlands. Melbridge County Asylum. Grimly proud of its new military wing which barely suffices in this Autumn of 1918, to house the shattered minds of the war that was to end all wars.



Figure 6. Melbridge County Asylum.

As the camera arrives at the door, we see the name of the building carved into a pillar. The words merge with a superimposed shot of the heavy wrought iron, laying one image over the other so the words *Melbridge County Asylum* are double exposed:



Figure 7.

This dual signage echoes the other types of duality in this film, creating a most uncanny sense of *déjà vu*, 'the impression that the present reality has a double' created by film, the 'world of doubles' (Royle, 2003 :182-3, 78).

The majority of the interior shots of the asylum show human interactions to be in the shadow of the large, barred windows. We first see Smithy standing in front of these windows, and we hear him ask to be allowed out of 'this place', he is clearly trapped and imprisoned. Later in

the film the night watchman explains why: 'You never knows with these loonies. Quiet as mice for weeks then up and at you with an axe'. John Smith is quiet, nervous, he speaks with a stammer, and his face is often partially shadowed.



Figure 8. Smithy's first appearance.



Figure 9. At the window.



Figure 10. Dr Benet encourages his patient.

Established in this opening to the movie, Smithy/Charles frequently appears standing or sitting in front of windows, wistful for something that is only just beyond his grasp. Julianne Pidduck comments that 'the recurring moment of the woman at the window captures a particular quality of feminine stillness, constraint and longing' (1998: 381). His feminisation as the 'madwoman' locked away in the asylum expresses another aspect of what McKee refers to as the 'dislocation of gender' that permeates the film (McKee, 2010: n.p.).

Here the film makes a crucial amendment to the novel, where the dual identity of the woman who is Paula and Margaret is only revealed on the final page, with the narrator, Harrison's perspective reflecting that of the reader as the half-suspected surprise is revealed (1941/2013: 197). In the film, necessarily, the audience is party to the secret of her identity. This adds to the emotional impact of the narrative, as our connection to the character comes about at least in part because we are involved in her story. As Steve Neale writes, in his exploration of tears produced by melodrama, the storyline offers us a sense of delay, powerlessness, separation, loss and polarised emotions (1986:9-11). For a woman watching this in 1942, with knowledge of how war affects individuals, the unlikely narrative technique of amnesia, stands for something even more poignant. It is preparation for post-war marriages where individuals have changed beyond recognition in a sort of alteration of self through the response to trauma.

Whilst Smithy/Charles is associated with windows, Paula/Margaret is, in contrast, associated with doors. First seen in the doorway of the tobacconist shop in Melbridge, she then finds Smithy outside in a doorway. When he leaves her to go to Liverpool, she is bedridden after a difficult birth and she is framed, as he says goodbye, by the doorway to their bedroom. The camera lingers on the closed door after her husband has left for his fateful journey. When she reappears in the narrative as Margaret, we are first shown a parallel shot of a closed door. The viewer at this point experiences a sense of expectation,

uneasiness and hopefulness, subconsciously taking on board the association of Paula with doors. Then she enters. Her disappearance and reappearance are framed by the shots of closed doors, one just closed, the other opening. Paula's significance for Smithy/Charles as a portal to completion is painfully evident. He holds the key but she is the door. Although Charles Rainier does not possess an actual key in the book, the metaphorical link between opening a door and finding memory is made when Freeman, a friend of Charles', tells Harrison:

My expectation all along had been that his full memory would eventually return – a little bit here a little bit there—till finally, like a key turning in a lock, or like the last few pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, the whole thing would slip into position (Hilton, 1941/2013:25).

Here the film makes another crucial amendment to the novel. The narrator, Harrison's, perspective reflects that of the reader when the half-suspected surprise is revealed in a climactic reunion and resolution.



Figure 11. Smithy entrusts his family to the nurse's care.



Figure 12. The cottage door closes on Paula.



Figure 13: The closed office door.



Figure 14.

Dr Benet, Smithy's former psychiatrist, uses the imagery of doors in the mind when advising Paula on her marriage to Charles:

Paula, two years ago you walked into his office. If the sight of you did not restore his memory what could words do? When you came to me at Melbridge shortly after he disappeared, I told you I was sure he hadn't deserted you knowingly. I told you a door in his mind had opened but another had closed. I warned you that even if you found him, the chances were, he wouldn't recognise you.

Later in the film, however, this is contradicted when Rainier tells Margaret that he did have a sense of recognition when he first saw her:

Margaret: You're staring at me you know.

Charles: I'm sorry. It struck me that your hair is bright red in the sunshine.

Margaret: Is that all? You were looking at me so intensely.

Charles: Oh, everyone has these feelings of having lived through certain moments before.

Margaret: Do you mean you had the feeling that you have known me before?

Charles: I had. For a moment. As a matter of fact, I felt it quite strongly the day you came into my office.

The viewer realises that Smithy/Charles lives in a state of constant *déjà vu*, of almost remembering, a sort of half-life where he is constantly on the brink of a discovery. From the point of view of his subjectivity we become aware of his uncanny existence.

## **(ii) Prisoners of the Past: The Domestic Uncanny**

Following his break-up with Kitty, Charles goes to Liverpool and Margaret follows him, hoping that his memories are returning. In the Liverpool hotel, she finds him again looking out of a window. He turns and shares with her his feelings of hopelessness. In the poignant scene that follows, he looks at Smithy's old suitcase and dismisses it.



Figure 15. Rainier in Liverpool.

John Smith? Highly unimaginative incognito. What could be more anonymous than these poor rags? [...] There's a finality about that most unrewarding find. Like a door

slammed and bolted. Now I shall learn to accept myself for what I am. A psychological defective. As Kitty saw me. As you must see me. You must keep my secret Miss Hanson.

In the same sequence, however, Paula/Margaret is placed in the *mise-en-scene*, next to an open door in her own moment of remembering as she examines the cuffs of Smithy's shirt. This evokes for her and the viewer the parallel scene in the cottage where Paula, still weak from a difficult birth, looks at the cuffs and comments 'well, I don't suppose Keats was too dressy'.



Figure 16. Smithy's frayed cuffs.



Figure 17. 'I don't suppose Keats was too dressy'.

These scenes play with the concept of homeliness and the uncanny, as the past disrupts the present with a domestic concern that spans the decades. As with Smithy's concern for the gate and the tree, the role is, atypically (for Paula/Margaret at least, whose talents and capabilities are never seen as domestic), a gendered one. Whilst this might be seen as expressing a longing for a return to traditional roles, the rest of the narrative, with its



glorification of Paula/Margaret's patience, self-sacrifice, diplomacy, intelligence and emotional awareness and acceptance of Smithy/Charles' trauma, does not imply such limitations can be imposed on one so strong. The moment does, however, catch the intimacy of their marriage as she expresses her love for him in a practical way.

If Paula/Margaret is the door through which Charles Rainier can discover his past and therefore his completion, then, we are made aware, he has the key. In the film, in contrast with the book, the key is literal and symbolic. The key to the cottage becomes a central motif in the second part of the film, as we have seen in the scenes already mentioned. Again, the key symbol places Smithy/Charles as Gothic heroine in the textual narrative. Tamar Jeffers McDonald associates this with the need for the female protagonist to unlock what is forbidden: 'that one locked room' (2020: 41). In the novel, Charles tells Harrison, 'there were different rooms in my mind, and as soon as the light came on in one, it went off in the other' (Hilton, 1941/2013:12). The unlocking is both psychological and literal for him, as we have already seen. Jeffers McDonald links the key symbol with the 'Other Woman' or the 'Shadow Male', and Smithy, who is both male and female in a sense, is seeking both of these (2020: 43).

Not including the scenes at the cottage already discussed, the narrative slows three times to allow Charles - and the viewer - to focus on the key, elaborate and Gothic in appearance, with all of its phallic power and potential, to unlock what cannot be accessed. When asked by his family, on his return to Random Hall, what the key opens, Charles replies thoughtlessly, 'If I knew that, I would know where I belong'. There is a vagueness to his remembering here. He cannot remember what the key opens, but he does recognise its importance for him personally.

After Charles has agreed, in an attempt to move on from his past, to marry Kitty, he returns to his office and takes out the key. He now keeps it on a chain in the inside pocket of his waistcoat, as he does his watch. As he looks at the ornate, old-fashioned object, we are

admitted into his 'zone of audition,' hearing the ghostly sounds of his uncanny remembering of Armistice night as he sadly contemplates the key (Hanson, 2017: 63).



Figure 18: Key to the cottage and to the past.

The key does become like a watch for Charles, but instead of reminding him of the future and of things he intends to do, it reminds him of his mysterious past and things he has done but has lost. This is another uncannily domestic symbol of time. Margaret is also aware of the key, as we see after their marriage when we see them at the ballet. The orchestral music of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* merges with the overlapping mingling of popular First World War songs as heard by Smithy on the Armistice, as Margaret watches Charles absent-mindedly, yet onanistically, take out the key and rub it.



Figure 19. *Swan Lake*.



Figure 20.

The key becomes a powerful symbol of *déjà vu* and the uncanny return of the repressed in the second part of the film, culminating in the final scene and Charles' opening of the cottage door. It can be seen too as a Freudian symbol where blindness represents castration (Freud, 2003: 140). Charles, caught in amnesia, is blind to his own past, to his lost memories, but he is also no longer sexually potent. His attempt to respond to Kitty's pursuit of him is inadequate. She finally admits her own feelings of uncanniness (she was 'nearly the one'), that it was in moments of intimacy that he was most absent:

You looked at me today as if I were a stranger. An intrusive stranger. Trying to take the place of someone else. I know it sounds...but sometimes...when we've been closest, I've had a curious feeling that I remind you of someone else. Someone you once knew. Someone you love as you will never love me. I'm nearly the one, Charles.

In proposing to Margaret, Charles makes it clear that he can only offer her 'sincere friendship', insisting 'I won't ask any more from you'. In the scene after the party at Random Hall, it is made clear that, although Charles admires Margaret's beauty, they are awkward and uncomfortable in each other's company and he remains formal in his attitude towards her. He is unable in his cataleptic present, to recover his past sexual feeling. Smithy/Charles' lack of desire for sex with Margaret is seen in the unhomeliness of the high ceilings and oak panelled walls of Random Hall, like a mausoleum, decorated with portraits of his dead ancestors. Freud observes 'to many people the idea of being buried alive while appearing to be dead is the most uncanny thing of all' but Smithy is buried alive whilst appearing to be functioning, which further complicates the uncanniness of his situation (Freud, 2003: 14).

Smithy's position as 'undead' is established early on in the Melbridge Arms, when 'the Biffer' served him with a whisky which could 'bring anyone back from the dead'. Although his sexual power returned under Paula's influence following that, Charles's refusal of sex after the return of his memory is part of his state of burial alive or catalepsy (Freud, 2003: 150). He has been dismembered in a way by his experiences of trauma, of loss and rediscovery of self 'the uncanny effect of epilepsy and madness' (Freud, 2003: 150). Freud observes, 'dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist, feet which dance by themselves – all these have something peculiarly uncanny about them' (Freud, 2003: 150). These feelings of not just loss of memory but physical lack which 'recalls the helplessness we experience in certain dream states' (Freud, 2003: 144) can be seen in Charles' impotence.

The phallic meaning of the key is also clear. In unlocking the door of his memories and finding Paula, he will no longer be impotent in either a symbolic or literal sense. As it does for the Gothic heroine he so resembles, the key offers him a possible escape, an identity that is independent from his family ties and expectations, which is symbolised by the forbidding portrait of his dead father. For the Gothic heroine the family portrait demands a re-evaluation of destiny in relation to gendered expectations, and this can be applied to Charles for whom work in the family firm is a duty not a choice.

### **(iii) O Perfect Love! *Deja-vu* and Almost Remembering**

In keeping with its function as an undisputed 'weepee', the ending of *Random Harvest* seems to do everything in its power to evoke an emotional response. A large part of this is elicited through the manipulation of sound and image. As in the earlier scene where Charles responds to the psychiatrist's voice, the use of non-diegetic sound adds to the uncanniness of Smithy's emotional dismemberment. The sounds of the Armistice, the shouting and singing are distorted in Charles' head into a noise that is 'chaotic, frightening and oppressive' (Hanson, 2017: 62). In contrast, the church organ playing the wedding hymn 'O Perfect

Love!’ has a contrasting emotional effect. The aural quotation of the hymn that seemed to sum up their relationship is used on four key occasions. A choral version of the song, and its first verse, is laid over the opening credits, where the film’s credits are placed on white blossoms. The accompanying lyrics project the ideal of ‘the love which knows no ending, whom thou in sacred vow dost join in one’ (Gurney in 1906: 821).

This immediately foregrounds the romance between Paula and Smithy as the main narrative thrust, which indeed it is for the first third of the movie. This section sees Smithy escape from the asylum to find Paula, his saviour. It culminates in their wedding and their arrival at the cottage, wreathed in white blossoms, presumably for the consummation of the marriage. Paul Mazey’s research into the use of choral music without words in film to create a sense of mysticism clearly applies in the opening (2020: 115). When the lyrics are brought in they add a sense of seriousness and solemnity (Mazey, 2020: 116).

In the wedding day sequence, the sweetness of the choral music is disrupted by the enthusiastic, eccentric organist singing along slightly out of tune as the couple meet in front of the altar, watched by the community. This has the effect of adding a comic moment to a scene that might otherwise have been cloying in its emotion.

In the parallel scene in the second part of the film, where Charles and Kitty are choosing their wedding music in church, the hymn, again sung by the organist, offers a painful memory of Smithy’s first wedding in Devon. Music becomes memory as Charles enters into a cataleptic trance: we are transported back in Charles’ reverie of *déjà vu*, ‘a kind of memory without memory, a kind of forgetting without forgetting’ (Krapp, 2004: x). We are reminded of Smithy’s happiest day:



Figure 21. Smithy and Paula's wedding day.

But the second version, in colours, costume and flowers and shading, is a greyer paler version of the first. In the half re-visitation, Charles has no wide smile for Kitty as he had for her double, Paula. In the second scene he actually looks like a ghost of his former self.



Figure 22: Rainier waits for Kitty.

The viewer has the knowledge that the first wedding day had been a moment of true happiness and recuperation for Smithy, but that, as Charles, he is lost and bewildered. Even his smile does not reappear in this form until the final moments of the film. In this repeated moment there is a 'brief period of absence' as he is uncannily 'under the control of his unconscious' (Royle, 2003: 150). It is the music combined with the setting that has put Charles into a state of almost remembering, which is recognised by Kitty, who breaks off the engagement.

Although the majority of the film is centred on Charles' remembering and almost remembering, as in the scene with the suitcase, Paula/Margaret also has painful moments of return to her past. Her parallel marriage of convenience to the man she had originally married for love, buried in the lonely Random Hall clearly causes her pain. This is at its most poignant in the sequence in which Charles gives Margaret an emerald necklace that once belonged to the Empress Marie Louise. For Paula/Margaret this brings back the gift of beads that Smithy gave her after the birth of their son. Her emotions are aroused and she finds Smithy's beads and stares at them longingly. In the original conversation he had told her that the beads were the colour of her eyes. 'You're an awfully pretty colour scheme darling'. Showing the beads to Charles, desperate to remind him, she holds the beads up to her eyes: 'He said they were the colour of my eyes. They are, aren't they?' In a reversal of the previous scene where Smithy/Charles was alone in the church, it is the first scene that is dappled with light and pale coloured costumes and furniture. The mirror scene in Random Hall expresses a wider range of blacks and whites, as the characters' formal evening clothes foreground their social position, as does the finery of the room itself.



Figure 23. 'You're an awfully pretty colour scheme darling'.



Figure 24. 'He said they were the colour of my eyes'.

Charles' lack of recognition is a moment of deep sadness. He smiles sympathetically, thinking she is missing her dead husband and says:

Charles: Oh Margaret, isn't there something morbid in burying one's heart with the dead?

Margaret: Isn't that a strange thing for you to say?

Charles: Is it?

Margaret: You haven't even a memory

Charles: No

Margaret: The best of you. Your capacity for loving, your joy in living is buried in a little space of time you've forgotten.

The green beads and the queen's emerald become a symbol of uncanniness for Smithy and Paula, living together but as a displaced version of themselves, not in their actual home but in a much larger, more ornate home that is, above all, lonely. Smithy notes ironically that the cheap green beads 'have a value' that the emeralds do not. This mirror existence, this domestic Upside Down, must be the most haunted of houses, the most uncanny of domestic situations. Smithy and Paula, in this domestic context, are buried alive in their arrangement, the 'business merger' of Charles and Margaret Rainier's marriage.

Smithy's masculinity has been disrupted by the trauma of war. The 'small space' of his 'capacity for happiness' actually occurs during his period of most intense Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, in a space in which his true identity as Charles Rainier had been lost because of his experiences in the trenches. It was in this blank space that he found another double for Charles Rainier, and this shadow self in fact became his real identity, that which becomes the object of his quest throughout the film. The film is not denying the trauma of war, or



glorifying war, but it is most optimistically hoping that adversity might result in a new regrouping of self that could be radically different from the old *status quo*. This is true perhaps particularly in terms of class. The Devonshire cottage is always represented as superior to Random Hall, which is described twice in dialogue as 'lonely'. It is a space of repression and inactivity for Charles Rainier. The cottage, in its light bright space and large rooms, is the house 'that protects the dreamer' whereas Random Hall, shown in an initial shot with its name carved into the door, with its high latticed windows, is aligned with the asylum. As Annette Kuhn observes: 'there is an elective affinity between place and memory [...] Places are the containers of memory: simply being in a place can trigger or produce memories' (2002: 16). Therefore, Charles Rainier's pre-war established self and his pre-war established home are no longer his correct self or his most 'homely' home. War has, in fact, rendered his past self and his past home uncanny.

Perhaps the way *Random Harvest* resonated with audiences during the war years in Britain can, at least in part, be explained by its uncanniness, its creation of a personal, national, transatlantic, historical uncanny that reflected the experiences of many. Mary Ann Doane has noted the divided perspective of female viewers, identifying both with male and female characters (1987: 16). In *Random Harvest* where the hero takes on the function in the plot of the Gothic heroine, the viewer inevitably identifies with him and with Paula/Margaret.

*Random Harvest* has long been overlooked by cinema historians, but it is a film with a particular historical resonance (McFarlane, 1989: 268). Its very uncanniness makes it slippery to write about and its 'melodramatic' excess of emotion has long made it unfashionable. However, to ignore such a popular film from a time when cinemagoing was one of the most popular pastimes in the UK and US would be a mistake. The film points to the uncanniness of experience regardless of gender, but suggests that women have the power to heal and mend men in a post-war society. This hyper-genderism takes to an extreme the popular image of women as emotionally supportive and self-sacrificial, whilst it demasculinises and interrogates the concept of the male as brave decisive conquering hero.

The film, as far as I can see, has never been defined as a Gothic film. In fact, one academic, Alison McKee denies emphatically that the film can be categorised as either 'gothic or mock gothic' (2010: n.p.). This proves how genre is linked to rigid gendering. If Smithy were a female protagonist, the film would be defined unquestionably as a Gothic romance in the classic mode. He would be the helpless heroine, trapped in an asylum and later in domestic role, haunted most uncannily by an inscrutable past, trying to discover the truth in a text littered with symbolism of contrasting domestic liminal spaces, imprisonment, keys, family portraits.

One of the oddest paradoxes about *Random Harvest* is the issue of the performance of its leading man. As some critics pointed out at the time, Colman was really far too old, at fifty-one, to portray a character who in the novel is injured in the Great War aged twenty-three. And yet, when we watch the film, it is his central performance that brings a realism to the story. In *Random Harvest*, Ronald Colman gives an understated performance as Smithy/Charles. So much is conveyed through close-ups of his facial expressions, which are truly extraordinary in the ways in which they convey emotional pain and dismemberment:

The narration of the film has a subtle and shifting relationship to characterisation and one that is consistent with Smithy's situation as an amnesiac [...] There is an interplay between the framing of the shots, which centre on Smithy, and on Colman's performance through facial expression, control of voice and gesture (Hanson, 2017: 61).

It might be that this performance, impressive and moving by modern standards, was not in keeping with the fashion of the times, just as this type of feminised man could rarely be the hero in a Hollywood story. The popularity of the movie implies that this idea touched a nerve in the US and UK during the war years, however. In 1943, when Colman was nominated for Best Actor *Random Harvest*, the Academy Award went to James Cagney's larger-than-life portrayal of George M Cohan in *Yankee Doodle Dandy*,<sup>36</sup> Despite the popular response to Colman's role, the fashion of the time at the Academy, it may be concluded, was for a sort of

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<sup>36</sup> This film also used the First World War as a way of discussing the second, although in a less subtle way.

brash, theatrical type of propaganda, and for energetic overblown unequivocal performance of masculinity. Arguably, the Academy, ever a law unto itself, was not in touch with popular tastes. Colman was to wait until 1947 to receive his Best Actor Oscar, for his much more excessive yet still sensitive and conflicted performance, in *A Double Life* (Cukor).

Much of transatlantic cinema history has largely left out Ronald Colman, and yet across three decades he was one of the most popular stars in Britain and America and seems to have been the only Hollywood leading man to seamlessly make the transition from silent movies to talkies, whilst retaining his function as male lead (Glancy, 1999: 160). On screen, he projected 'a noble mixture of decency, integrity, quiet strength and trustworthiness' (Norman, 1979: 181). In his native city of London, an application for a blue plaque to be erected at his former home was turned down by English Heritage in 2018, on the basis that he had not contributed enough to British culture (BBC.co.uk). Neither was he ever honoured in any way by the British government despite his popularity across four decades and his Oscar-winning career. Barry Norman observed 'in the 1950s when Britain was handing out titles to actors on a fairly lavish scale, nobody ever offered one to him' (1979:186). This seems particularly harsh considering that homes of his contemporaries, such as Charles Laughton, Boris Karloff and Robert Donat, all have commemorative English Heritage blue plaques, and other Hollywood actors such as C Aubrey Smith, Charlie Chaplin, Cedric Hardwick, Bob Hope and (American born) Douglas Fairbanks Junior received knighthoods in their lifetimes. Although Colman made California his home, he never became a naturalised American, remaining dual in nationhood even when it meant he was paying taxes to two governments and the state (Norman, 1979: 186). Although he always felt British, working tirelessly raising money for British war charities, he had not had happy times in England and found a home and success in California (ibid). Colman's place as Hollywood's most honoured Englishman (ibid) tapped into the duality and inner conflict of a man who could neither renounce his nationality nor take on that of his adopted homeland.

It is unsurprising that Colman should give a convincing performance in the role in *Random Harvest* of a First World War veteran, because, as I have shown, he was drawing on his own experience. He had joined up the day after the war began in 1914 when he was (like the Rainier of Hilton's novel) twenty-three. He saw action with the London Scottish regiment and was wounded at the bloody battle of Messines three months later. His daughter wrote in his biography:

He had been away from England for only two months. It did not seem possible that he was still only twenty-three years old. He never felt that young again. He was filled with incredulity at being alive and with a sad bitterness given him by the reality of war (Colman, 1975: 12-13).

This 'sad bitterness' can be seen in Smithy/Charles, with a sense of innocence lost and incredulity at being alive. Whilst in Hollywood in the 1940s, soldierly masculinity was presented as proactive, strong and daring (Hyam, 1990: 72), Colman draws on his own character to present Smithy as nervous and gentle. Whilst the Smithy/Charles character in the novel is repressed and shielded by his protective 'stiff upper lip', Colman's performance exceeds this characterisation with nuanced responses mainly to be found in his face and in the undulations of his voice. This characterisation disrupts the 'reciprocal relationship between militarism and masculinity' that I will expand on later (McVeigh and Cooper, 2013: 3). George Orwell had written about the Great War,

As the war fell back into the past, my particular generation, those who had been 'just too young', became conscious of the vastness of the experience they had missed. You felt yourself a little less than a man because you had missed it (Orwell, 1998: 270).

Orwell took it upon himself to speak for a generation of men in his nation, using the Great War not just as a cultural marker, but as a reference by which to locate masculinity. It is assumed that soldiers are strong, courageous, proactive, dutiful and effective. It is difficult to think of many films that deal as effectively with this crisis in masculinity in the 1940s as *Random Harvest*. Perhaps unexpectedly, the gender bending of Gothic conventions in the movie works to tell a deeper truth.

Ronald Colman's performance stands the test of time not because he is feminised but because he is authentic. His face conveys the psychological damage of a man who understands what war is and that the soldier is much more than a 'national avatar' (McVeigh and Cooper, 2013: 3). Each gesture, each flinch, conveys a wealth of meaning. To see Ronald Colman in *Random Harvest* is to see a 'testament performance' (Cinquegrani, 2018: 14). The movie and the performance stand as a transatlantic monument to the generation of men who were damaged in the First and Second World Wars, and as a moment in history that forever disrupted the hegemony of gender.

In the next chapter I will explore the fan magazine discourse that surrounded Colman, exploring some of the ways in which the type of character he played on screen represented a transgressive version of masculinity. I will consider his persona as represented in the fan publications available online, and in selected film roles.

## Chapter 2: Ronald Colman: Masquerader

Ronald Colman

My dad served with Ronald Colman in the Great War  
And laughed at his daydream of Hollywood stardom.  
London-Scottish kilts looked frumpish after battle,  
Blood, mud and shit bespattering handsome knees.  
My dad lost all his teeth before he was twenty  
And envied Ronald Colman's spectacular smile.  
He watched him trimming his moustache in cold tea  
At a cracked mirror, a thin black line his trademark.  
Wounded at Messines – shrapnel in his ankle –  
He tried in his films to cover up his limp – *Beau Geste*, *Lost Horizon* – my dad would go to see them all.  
Did he share a last Woodbine with Ronald Colman  
Standing on the firestep, about to go their separate  
Ways, over the top, into No Man's Land, and fame?  
(Michael Longley)

### 1 Fan Magazines: Exposing Ronald

In exploring Ronald Colman's intertextual persona in fan magazines and films, we can see fan interactions that attempt to uncover his 'true' identity across films and media discourse. Beginning in the twenties, Colman's duality is represented as 'star discourse [...] worked to extend the contract between the spectator/consumer and the cinema at large' (de Cordova, 1990: 113). The discourse that surrounded Colman in fan publications in this period reflected the paradox that was evident in both his 'screen lover' persona and his representation as a star whose personal relationships were primarily with men. Romances concocted by the studio, although mentioned in magazines, seemed unconvincing, because there was no photographic evidence. The dominant discourse about Colman in this first decade of his fame was that he was a 'mystery', a 'sphinx', an 'enigma'<sup>34</sup>. Journalists express frustration that when he is interviewed, he gives very little away, complaining that he might be 'rude' or 'high hat' (McKegg, January 1927; Reid, April, 1929).

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<sup>34</sup> Some examples are: 'Ronald Talks at Last', Ruth Waterbury, *Photoplay*, October 1925. 'The Rival Nordic Lovers', Dorothy Spensley, *Photoplay* 1925. 'The Three Sphinxes' William H McKegg, *Picture Play*, July 1929. 'Why is Ronald Colman so aloof?' William H McKegg, *Picture-play*, January 1927. 'Ronald, as He is'. By Margaret Reid, *Picture Play*, April 1929. 'They Say' by Marion of Hollywood, *Screenland*, May 1928. *Screenland* October 1930. *Silver Screen* September 1931.

There are two distinct threads in Ronald Colman's films and the discourse surrounding him following his arrival in Hollywood in 1920. The first, his initial representation in newspapers and fan magazines was as the Latin lover, John Gilbert's greatest rival, Vilma Banky's romantic partner,<sup>35</sup> emphasising his Latin looks and heterosexual romantic potential. David Niven observed that it was his dark eyes that made him ideally suited to the filming techniques of the 1920s (Niven, 1975: 178). The second thread, and his more durable persona was that which was rooted in the quiet, gentlemanly, self-sacrificial Englishman, eponymous hero of *Beau Geste* (1926).<sup>36</sup> The film's lack of heterosexual romance and focus on the romantic portrayal of male bonding and love between brothers, however, added a new dimension to Colman's 'lover' persona.

Photographs of Colman in fan magazines before 1930 are largely copies of the unsmiling publicity stills distributed by the Goldwyn studio. This set him in contrast to established romantic star, Douglas Fairbanks, who was known for his smile (Studlar, 1996: 16). Colman's silent roles had been, initially at least, as Byronic screen lover of Vilma Banky, and as a possible successor to the Valentino crown (Robinson, 1968: 161).

Magazines also offered him as John Gilbert's rival, locating him in all-male social groups as the only details they could acquire about him were about his friendships with other men.

Magazines reported, from 1924 and well into the next decade that he and Richard Barthelmess and William Powell formed their own 'three musketeers', in a grouping that mirrored the three brothers of *Beau Geste*.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps inevitably in this 'sophisticated' period

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<sup>35</sup> Colman's partnership with Vilma Banky was mentioned in *Screenland*, April 1927, April 1928, and in *Picture-Play*, August 1926. Colman was linked with John Gilbert: *Picture-Play* 1925 in the letters page, and as Gilbert's successor (September 1925:8). *Photoplay* promoted a series of features on 'Gilbert v Colman', from August 1925: 28.

<sup>36</sup> *Picture-Play*, January 1927, called him 'aloof', 'enigmatic', 'look up 'gentleman in your dictionary' (43). *Screenland*, December 1929, claimed Colman is 'the eloquent lover, the elegant buccaneer, the sophisticated man [...] like Garbo, more spiritual than sensuous' (21).

<sup>37</sup> Spensley, *Photoplay* 1925. *Picture Play* letters' pages regularly from Sept 1925-March 1928. Colman 'entertains' his friends' (*Screenland*, June 1931:39). Colman comforted Powell (*Screenland* December 1938: 68). Colman described as 'a confirmed bachelor' with 'a few close friends' (*Picture-Play* August 1926: 32).

some inferences could be made about his sexuality and discourse surrounding him is often related to gender, as if the magazines were struggling to define him.

Most articles published about Colman in the early 1920s particularly, are clearly cribbed from publicity biographies and are written in a third person style with no direct quotations from Colman himself. They did not record a particular meeting but wove the narrative around details of his life. This contrasts sharply with the dominant note of articles in which eager stars were interviewed over and over, often even allowing writers and photographers to visit and photograph their houses. Although from the late 1920s, Colman gave interviews more frequently, a camera is never let into Colman's home during this period in the magazines in my sample.

In a *Photoplay* article from December 1924, 'Ladies Man Who is Regular,' Arthur Brenton describes Colman quite wryly,

All the girls in Hollywood are mad about him. He is besieged at dances by the most alluring beauties of the screen. At 'cat parties' his name ranks with reducing and bobbed hair as a chief topic of conversation. Ingenues and famous scenario writers alike grow ecstatic about his technique at love-making and his irresistible way of holding a lady's hand and his good looks [...]

The men like him. And when men like a man, in spite of the above mentioned handicaps, he is bound to be regular (66).

There is a note of mockery, as female fads are trivialised and Colman is seen as an object of female desire, a fleeting fashion. Seeing popularity with women as a 'handicap' implies hostility from men. Even the sentence that admits 'the men like him' slyly questions Colman's 'regularity', clearly indicating that he is somehow transgressive. The gendering draws on misogyny and homophobia, codedly questioning Colman's 'regularity' or heterosexuality'. Later the writer notes that he is,

Serious, quiet, fond of books and pipe, likes sports and politics.

Yet no less than George Fitzmaurice declares he registers as much romance as any man on the screen. And in his love scenes his hands are almost as expressive as Sazu Pitts, [sic] which is saying a lot in Hollywood (ibid).



Here, Colman is given traditional masculine interests of sports and politics (presumably from the studio publicity) with a passive, effeminate, fondness for books. His very intelligence is suspect here, in conflict with the anti-intellectual 'cult of the body', the most desirable 'muscular masculinity' (Studlar, 1996: 29). The male writer's focus on Colman's hands, comparing them to ZaSu Pitts' acting, succeeds in demeaning Pitts whilst simultaneously feminising Colman. The fetishization of his feminine hands contains a note of tongue-in-cheek mockery and ridicule. This article appears two years before the release of *Beau Geste* so this theme is not directly related to the film, yet the discourse in the magazines is already tentatively questioning Colman's sexuality and his quiet lifestyle. As George Chauncey observed,

To be called a 'man' or a 'regular guy' was both the highest compliment in the world and the most common. But the very repetitiveness of such praise implied that men were in danger of being called something else: unmanly, a mollycoddle, a sissy, even a pansy. . . whereas manhood could be achieved, it could also be lost; it was not simply a quality that resulted naturally and inevitably from one's sex (1994: 80).

*Picture-Play* in August 1926, the month of the film's release, said he 'identified as a confirmed bachelor [...] He numbers among his close friends, men like Richard Barthelmess, William Powell and Charles Lane' (*Picture Play*, Aug 1926:128). This reinforced the ambivalence surrounding him as the term 'confirmed bachelor' was a phrase that was widely used to indicate homosexuality throughout the twentieth century (Adams, 2000: 208).

Six months before the release of *Beau Geste*, in the column 'The Sketchbook' an unnamed interviewer (I am assuming male) describes a meeting with Colman at the studio in the presence of the Goldwyn press agent. The conversation turns to the subject of Valentino:

Mr Colman said he was a splendid actor. I said he was in a precarious position. Then the pa (press agent) said he attributed Valentino's slip to the fact that men didn't particularly care for him. 'Now' he went on with a proud papa inclination of the head toward Mr Colman 'Mr Colman here has a very large following among men.'

Mr Colman squirmed uncomfortably in Henry King's swivel chair. Right there is where I think he wished the pa had been called to the phone.

'Yes', went on the pa, 'he gets a lot of mail from men and boys,'

The swivel chair squeaked nervously.

‘Do you get more letters from men than women?’ I asked.

‘No, I don’t’ said Mr Colman, completely wrecking that man-from-the-open-spaces effect, for which I liked him all the better. Says he doesn’t miss the theatre (*Picture-Play*, February 1926: 28).

The innuendo here about what it might mean to have more male followers than female is reinforced by the description of Colman’s ‘nervous’, embarrassed, defensive response. The writer takes this to be a rejection of the actor’s possible queerness. The comment about Colman ‘not missing’ the theatre can also be read as an indirect rejection of possible homosexuality, as, as we have already noted, theatrical men were generally seen as suspect, and non-hetero-normative. Colman’s reluctance to be interviewed is clear as is his submission to the ordeal but his need to be guided by a ‘father figure’ publicity agent also emasculates and infantilises him. The representation of Publicity Agent as ‘pa’ in the text adds to this idea. Other articles in this era refer to him in feminine terms as the ‘male Garbo’ or ‘Madame X’.<sup>38</sup> This - and other - associations with Valentino, the ‘pink powder puff’ also aligns him with a masculinity that transgressed from the muscular ideal (Hansen, 1991: 263).

In ‘Why is Ronald Colman So Aloof?’ published after the release of *Beau Geste*, William McKegg draws on both the tone and themes of the film (*Picture Play* January 1927: 43). The article, again taken from publicity statements rather than an actual meeting, describes his ‘intimate friendship’ with ‘Dick’ Barthelmess, dramatising incidents from Colman’s youth that make him a doomed romantic tragic figure in the style of *Beau Geste* (ibid). The theme continues, describing the damage he suffered during the war and the description of a close male friend who was killed in wartime, creating an image of a man whose relationships are

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<sup>38</sup>‘Colman Analysed’ by James Oppenheim, ‘As Garbo among the women, so Ronald Colman among the men’ (*Picture-Play*, December 1929: 20-21). ‘Exposing Ronald’ Katharine Albert. ‘We rip the veil from the grand old legend that Ronnie Colman is a male Madam X, silent and aloof on a mountain top’ (*Photoplay*, February 1930: 63) ‘He has been known as the ‘male Garbo’ of Hollywood’ (‘The Talk of Hollywood’, *Motion Picture Magazine*, April 1936: 48) ‘There is a male star in Hollywood whose private life is even more mysterious than that of Garbo’s and it has never brought him a dollar’s worth of publicity’ ‘I’m No Male Garbo.’ (*Motion Picture*, August 1938:32)

almost exclusively with men, and whose friendships are romantic (ibid). Without added comment, McKegg tells the readers that Colman shares his house with a man, fellow actor Charles Lane (something mentioned in other articles published at this point). On the last page of the article the tone shifts, becoming directly accusatory as the writer describes Colman reading poetry by Lord Byron, Percy Shelley and historical novels (about the Romantic poets) by his fireside. The implication is that Colman is studying the masculinity of Byron through feminised popular novelisations in order to perfect his performance of 'romantic' Gothic Byronic masculinity. Here, the text implies, he is, like Valentino, Barrymore and others, a 'woman-made man', a type of man - usually a matinee idol - desired by women but ridiculed in the male press (Studlar, 1996: 102). McKegg's final line is the most audacious, however, drawing on contemporary prejudices to declare:

However, won't you fans clap your hands and let the poor fellow see that there are others who still believe in fairies in spite of all reality? (*Picture-Play*, January 1927: 111).

This final sentence of the article was categorically saying, albeit in code, that Ronald Colman was homosexual. The association of gayness with the figure of the 'fairy' is well documented as the term originated from the early twentieth century to describe the flamboyant men and drag queens, 'the more visible representatives of gay life' (Chauncey, 1994: 2). Although the fairies of folklore were genderless, their association with lightness, butterfly wings and popular culture's identification of the fairy as female, as seen most dominantly in JM Barrie's *Peter Pan*, made them an icon for a feminised man. This is in itself problematic because gender is an 'imitation with no original', a form of drag, so the 'fairy' figure expresses something that is difficult to define (Butler, 1999: 307). As Peter Pan observed, in their liminality 'fairies are indeed strange', in an era when the words 'queer' and 'strange' were defining terms for whatever was non- hegemonic (Barrie, 1904/1911: Chapter xiii).

In contrast, in a further expression of the duality - even paradox - of Ronald Colman's representation, another tranche of articles from the same period, give a very different impression of him. Much more accepting of Colman's type of charm and masculinity, they

wax lyrical on his attractiveness. Ruth Waterbury gushed in her first article for *Photoplay*, 'Ronald Talks at Last':

I made Ronald talk. Life will never be the same again. From now on I shall know that I am one of those fatal women. A Circe. One of those gals with Lure. I never dreamed it before. After all these years of keeping quiet and sitting back, to find out that I have what Madam Glyn calls IT. Gosh! I made Ronald Colman talk.

It was this way. Nobody knew about Ronald Colman and everybody seemed to care. From men and women alike came the tide of interest in him. Everybody was, and is, asking questions about him, and nobody had the answers. (*Photoplay*, October 1925: 29).

It appeared, in magazines in the 1920s, that it was the female writers who assumed that Colman was heterosexual, drawn by his good looks and 'screen lover' persona. In an article from 1928, 'Parting is Such Sweet Sorrow', Helen Louise Walker reports the break-up of Colman's screen partnership with Vilma Banky. She describes him in costume on the set,

Mr Colman, resplendent in pink velvet and gold braid, with ribbons at his knees and on his shoes, his hair falling in romantic ringlets over his brow, paced up and down, trying to preserve his delicately sad, passionate expression until such time as the fire should behave itself ...called for lunch...whereupon, Mr Colman assumed the normal expression of a man struggling with a too tight collar....he went to remove some of his trappings and then rejoined me in a borrowed office, wearing an unromantic raincoat over his rose velvet splendor.

His voice is unusually rich and smooth and his manner is cultivated and charming (*Picture Play*, May 1928:34).

Here the costume and performance are highlighted. The pink velvet, gold braid, ribbons, ringlets, delicately sad expression feminise the man, possibly creating an image of a 'nance,' 'pansy' or of 'matinee idol masculinity' (Studlar, 1996: 127). Yet, the unphased female writer notes his unease, his eagerness to cover it all with an 'unromantic raincoat'. This has a similar effect to the previous features about Colman, which draw attention to his femininity and masculinity in tandem. The writer does not find this feminised costuming unattractive, giving readers another taste of the 'type of masculinity constructed for women' as being less rigid than the hegemonic ideal (Studlar, 1996: 7). She does not seem to share the unease of the male writers. Colman's femininity is masculinized, not hidden, but absorbed in his whole person, and it makes him more, not less attractive.

In 'Ronald, As He is' by Margaret Reid, there is an apparently deliberate attempt to rewrite previous accounts. She explains his living arrangements and describes his home:

Inside it is completely masculine, its massive furniture designed for a man's comfort. In one wing of the house lives Charles Lane, the English actor, Colman's friend ever since they met during the making of 'The Dark Angel' [...] Women call him 'charming' and men call him 'a hell of a fellow'. There is also a funny, old-fashioned word which describes him, a word that is almost in discard around the studios.

Look up 'gentleman' in your dictionary (*Picture Play* April 1929: 34).

This focus on Colman's rare type of gentlemanliness reveals a lack of patience with the usual types of men in film and fan discourse, playing on the popular idea that some femininity was desirable in a man. By clarifying that Colman and Lane lived in separate wings of a 'masculine' house and defining him as in male terms 'a hell of a fellow', the writer takes pains to suggest that the gentleness of Colman's charm does not necessarily make him a 'soft' man. Juliet Colman explained that the older Charles Lane had invited Colman to be his lodger in his early years in Hollywood, and that as Colman's success grew and Lane worked less, Colman had a house on his grounds converted so that Lane could live there and he could 'return the favor' (Colman, 1975: 73). They remained friends until Lane's death (Colman, 1975: 114). As Studlar has shown, even in hegemonic masculinity, 'feminine traits were not completely rejected' as a 'touch of femininity, or feminine purity...gentleness, tenderness' were seen as positive qualities (Studlar, 1996: 33). This exhumation of the previously popular figure of the gentleman, in keeping with Colman's nationality and quiet courtesy, started to solidify in the magazines into a positive type which, following the advent of talking pictures, became much admired.

From 1925, fan magazines had set up Colman as a rival to established screen star John Gilbert. This notion was launched in *Picture-Play*<sup>39</sup> in 1925 by Dorothy Spensley's article, 'The Rival Nordic Lovers' where she argues that Colman is the cool, enigmatic 'sphinx', to Gilbert's temperamental 'vesuvius' (28-9). The discourse is continued throughout the years

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<sup>39</sup> Monthly magazine, *Picture-Play Magazine*, changed in May 1927, when it shortened its title, removing the hyphen, taking its final name *Picture Play* (Slide, 2010: 241).

in magazine letters pages particularly, with fans arguing for one or the other, or insisting on the superiority of others such as Ramon Novarro. During a period when Colman was not giving many interviews, this kept him at the forefront of a fan discourse whilst his films were becoming increasingly successful. One letter from 1927 draws on this difference in a letter entitled 'She's through with John Gilbert':

How much longer are they going to allow that woman chaser, John Gilbert, to appear on the screen? After reading the story about him and Greta Garbo, I have decided that John Gilbert is too much of an egotist for me. In view of the fact that he has a lovely wife and child, he has a lot of nerve playing on the sympathy of the public now. He was at one time my favorite, but that affair with Greta Garbo finished him for me.

It seems he has so much love to waste it is not wanted. Have you ever heard of him mentioning his love for his child? You never hear of Ronald Colman telling every feeling of his to the whole world. He has too much sense. Irene Hart, 2520 St Charles Place, Cincinnati, Ohio (*Picture Play*, June 1927: 8).

Here the lack of gossip about Colman and even his resistance to publicity contribute to his attraction for fans tiring of Hollywood scandal. Other letters from this period reinforce an attraction to Colman's reticent 'coolness' and defend him as controlled yet sensitive, 'it is not Ronald Colman's style to emote openly [...] But how effective his calmness is!' (*Picture-Play*, June 1927: 12). Another correspondent in the same issue says, 'He is so splendidly human, so genuine, so simple and sincere' (ibid). Another fan, delighting in Colman's 'frosty lovemaking,' declaring 'who in real life wants to be pawed over in the John Gilbert fashion?' (*Picture Play*, November 1927: 10). Somehow, unlike Gilbert, Valentino and Novarro, Colman had managed to capture the soulful, Byronic ideal of the Latin lover without excessive over-playing, giving an impression of 'realism'. His appearance in *Beau Geste*, his most popular silent film role, however, made his appeal as a sensitive, self-sacrificing gentleman less dependent on his function in a type of screen romance that would soon be defunct as fashions moved away from the sentimental dramas that had entertained audiences in the pre-talkie period (Walker, 1978: 198).

Ultimately the sphinx proved more durable than the volcano. Whilst studio producers gave John Gilbert a talkie debut that varied little from his silent roles (*His Glorious Night*,

Barrymore, 1929), Colman played gentleman investigator Bulldog Drummond, which showcased his most thrilling feature: his voice.

Fan magazine narratives about Ronald Colman changed after the release of his first talkie, becoming almost entirely overwhelmingly positive. He could smile at last in photographs. In December 1930, *Silver Screen* magazine explained,

Goldwyn wanted to make Colman a ‘romantic personality.’ He wasn’t allowed to smile. Actually, he has a nice, quiet sense of humor.

Colman always felt that the prohibited smile also prohibited something in his inner nature, but in the silent era there was never a still of Colman that wasn’t solemn (Barbara Tanner, *Silver Screen*, December 1930:10).

Although still seen as a homosocial star, especially in the first half of the decade, he was often placed in context with other British stars. British gentlemanliness had become his defining quality. In 1931 Elinor Glyn declared Colman ‘completely fascinating’, the ‘most attractive man in Hollywood’, the male equivalent of Greta Garbo:

(H)e seems to suggest strength of character and balance and the possession of a dignity and reserve in private life.

He holds all the female public because he suggests romance, and romance coupled with dependability – which gives a glow of satisfaction to many disappointed, disillusioned women who have believed in, but never encountered, a faithful lover [...] He makes the men in the audience feel that he is a good fellow and really a man [...] Ronald Colman’s voice is one of his greatest assets. It is deep and pleasing and cannot at any time have been a shock to any of his admirers. It has tones in it which thrill women when he is making love (February, 1931: 31-32).

Colman became the central figure in the new fashion for British voices and stories. Mark Glancy has observed that he was ‘uniquely well-spoken’, epitomizing the gentlemanly type as he ‘starred in many of the most successful ‘British’ films of the 1930s (1999: 160).

Fan magazine writers enthusiastically re-wrote the uncertain discourse around Colman from the 1920s, to confirm his attractiveness. Colman’s witty repartee, charm and humour captured audiences in the prestige Goldwyn production. Reviews trumpeted Colman’s talkie debut. *Picture-Play*’s Norbert Lusk enthused:

Talking Pictures are not as they were last month or even week. They didn't have Ronald Colman then but they have him now! By reason of his appearance in 'Bulldog Drummond' the entire aspect of the talkies has changed. For there hasn't been a picture quite its equal, nor a silent player more completely vitalised and remade by speech. Mr Colman shines with the effulgence of a constellation instead of the dim, single star he used to be. You will look vainly for more satisfying entertainment than he and 'Bulldog Drummond' provide, for it is perfect. Think of it! The fretful critic disarmed for once!

While it is Mr Colman's voice that is largely responsible for this seeming miracle, the voice itself is not one that rends the screen with organ tones. Far from it. It is a 'mental' voice, if you know what I mean. A voice that reflects an alert mind and a humorous, sophisticated point of view rather than an actor's skill in making points for his own enjoyment. In short, Mr Colman becomes, through the medium of speech, a human being instead of the often immobile and rather worried hero which silence imposed in the past (Oct 1929: 66).

Delight Evans gushed:

Bow-wow! [...] It is Ronald Colman's first talking picture. He becomes, as far as I'm concerned, the miracle man of the movies. The Colman charm was always something to make me a little feverish but now that he talks – well, let it go. What are mere words when confronted with a great emotional crisis? (*Screenland*, July 1929: 43).

*Screenland* in 1931 invites readers to 'Just Call Him Ronnie!' (February 1931: 6) and magazine writers started to do just that. In columns and features the reinvented 'Ronnie Colman' was mentioned across the magazines. Interviews were published that purported to be accounts of Colman's thoughts and opinions. In February 1930 *Photoplay* declared that Colman was 'Exposed – and liking it!' in an article entitled 'Exposing Ronald' by Katherine Albert. To be able to interview Colman was a matter for some excitement:

We rip the veil off the grand old legend that Ronnie Colman is a male Madame X, silent and aloof on a mountain top. This is a hot expose and should be done in headlines! (*Photoplay*, February 1930:63)

The fan magazines all proclaimed the same story: 'Ronald Colman Confesses!' (*Screenland*, September 1930: 32), 'Ronald Colman Reveals His Greatest Secret' (*Motion Picture*, March 1933: 49).<sup>40</sup> The narrative was clear: Colman was finally welcoming his public and telling the

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<sup>40</sup> Also, 'Ronald Colman's Private Life' Grace Mack, (*Motion Picture*, November, 1935: 38). 'Colman Talks!' Ben Maddox, (*Screenland*, January 1936: 18). 'The Private Life of Ronald Colman Revealed' Harry Lang, (*Motion Picture*, April 1936: 32). 'Ronald Colman Gives the Lowdown on Himself' Gladys Hall, (*Motion Picture*, June 1937: 30). 'The Original Clam of Hollywood' Dan Camp (*Motion Picture*, August 1938: 32). 'Romantic Recluse: The Private Life of a Public Hero' by Gladys Hall (*Photoplay* Feb 1939:66).



truth about private matters, and his reticence at times could be excused because of his Englishness.

In articles from this era, Colman's reserve and desire for privacy are praised, his Britishness foregrounded, and he is seen as an extension of the roles he played in film. In 1935 Faith Service, pseudonym of a prolific writer also known as Gladys Hall (Slide, 2010: 35) explicitly brought together his fictional and public selves,

Ronnie is like a man out of one of the very best English novels. He talks like a man in a book. And he is more exactly like his screen self in real life than any other actor I know. He has that same remote smile, that look of one who remembers something lost, and rather sad, a long while ago, and who regrets that loss but is resigned to it.

He is utterly without pose. He hasn't one single mannerism or affectation. He never dramatizes himself (*Modern Screen*, Feb 1935: 43-44).

Here 'there was an inevitable conflation or intermingling of the screen persona with the actor' (Studlar, 1996: 2) and this is something that studios were eager to maintain as box office receipts for Colman's films were consistently high (Norman, 1979:181). Interviewers reported that he was a 'business-man', concerned with making sensible investments, a 'beauty lover' who cared about 'books and music and funny things like sunsets and the sea' (*Movie Classic*, October 1931: 50). They always commented on his desire for privacy, with statements such as 'I object to most publicity. I have a fondness for dignity' (ibid). From the mid-1930s the discourse evolved as it became known that he was involved romantically with British actress Benita Hume. Until this point, writers agreed that his relationships were largely with other men,

There never has been a word of scandal spoken against Ronnie Colman. No one has ever known him to pay marked attention to any woman (*Screenland*, September 1930: 32-33).

In July 1934, *Movie Classic* magazine, in a feature called 'Why the Yen For British Men?' the writer declared that Colman,

for the eighth year retains his garland as the king of romantic charm. [...] It's far more than a 'yen' for British men – it's an avalanche of applause and appreciation and genuine liking (*Movie Classic*, July 1934: 30).

The fashion for British men could be seen in the number of fan magazine pages given over to new arrivals such as Herbert Marshall, Leslie Howard, Charles Laughton, and Basil Rathbone, and in the focus of letters pages. Newcomers from the UK were often compared to Colman as the highest honour.<sup>41</sup> One magazine published a ‘reader’s’ letter in 1933, headed, ‘American Idols Lack Polish’, which declares,

It is a singular fact that three of the best actors in the talkies today are Englishmen – Ronald Colman, Herbert Marshall and Leslie Howard. They are a caustic challenge to our Gable, Powell and Cooper.

Isn’t it a fact that our own American male idols mirror too much of this ‘rough and tough’ element and lack some of those finer qualities that register with women as ‘perfect gentlemen’?

[...] I admire all our American movie heroes... but couldn’t they seep up a tiny bit of this Colman-Marshall-Howard charm and polish? Or is that English trait ‘born and not made’? Annette Victorin, Cicero ill. (*Modern Screen*, May 1933:10).

Another letters page took this idea a step further by declaring, ‘Most He-Men Are Ridiculous!’:

They may be colorful, but painted in broad, harsh stripes like barbers’ poles – and just as stimulating—they leave him absolutely palpitating for a few less simple Simon and more companionable specimens of homo sapiens (the ‘sap’ it seems is all that’s left).

[...] but what a relief when Leslie Howard or Ronald Colman strolls across the screen! They make most of our young men look like a flock of high school boys who have just put on their first pair of long pants! And how easily they convey the impression that (actually!) they really do read a book occasionally; and are not afraid to show interest in some other art beside the prize ring. ME McKeldon Smith, South Bristol (*Motion Picture*, October 1933: 6).

The trend for the British gentleman was a sign of a transition as the ‘woman-made’ man became closer to the British Colman type. In the throes of the fever for this new, more cerebral type of hero, there were some (usually male) voices of dissent. Even British documentarian John Grierson warned Hollywood, in the midst of its fad, not to ‘Colmanise

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<sup>41</sup> Some examples include: Brian Aherne (*Screenland*, July 1932: 61), Robert Donat (*Photoplay*, December 1934:40), David Manners (*New Movie Magazine*, September 1933:67).

its Cagneys' (Sarris, 1968/1996: 11). However, another view prevailed in the fan magazines, as another letter eulogised,

Ronald Colman has done more for the public than any other star. Men admire him for his common sense; women for his gentle breeding and manly handsomeness; college boys and girls for his ingenuity and the indisputable fact that he is the last word in etiquette. And everyone is proud to say he is going to a movie - provided the picture is a Colman picture. This Britisher is too intelligent to make a faux pas in morality so has brought up the morale of Hollywood. And his voice? Prose uttered by him has the rhythm of poetry. Just to hear his diction is worth the price of a movie ticket. Charity L Donigan, Columbus, Ohio (*Motion Picture*, January 1938: 18).

In the fan magazines of the Code era, Colman might not seem to be a transgressive type, but represented a moral force, becoming a positive inspiration for a moral life. In the evolution of talking motion pictures too, Colman's voice, the first of many British voices, was influential:

Art can have no nationality – it is too vast to be restrained. That is my answer to the shouting against foreign stars [...] English actors have improved American diction [...] voices like those of Ronald Colman, Herbert Marshall and Basil Rathbone have won our envy and spurred us on to improving our own speech (*Motion Picture*, February 1938: 17).

Colman allegedly told one interviewer, 'Yes, I suppose I was the first English actor to come to Hollywood, with the exception, of course, of the eternal Chaplin' (*Screenland*, October 1936: 92). His longevity in Hollywood was frequently discussed through the 1930s and 1940s. In 1937, a columnist in *Motion Picture* magazine announced rather precipitously,

We who like our men strong but tender, cling to our old favorites like the Englishmen to their traditions. Ronald Colman, at the top, our perennial favorite, has been awarded the most coveted role of the year, that of Rhett Butler in 'Gone with The Wind' (*Motion Picture*, January 1937: 21).

This was an odd mistake, seeing as Colman played almost exclusively Englishmen after 1930 and had, when asked about the Rhett Butler role apparently expressed doubt because he could not do a Southern accent (*Motion Picture*, June 1937: 71). Whilst it seemed that for some fans there was nothing he couldn't do, others expressed misgivings when he played

non-British roles (such as in *Arrowsmith*, Ford, 1932)<sup>42</sup> or roles that focused on negative qualities such as the story of a married lawyer's affair, *Cynara* (Vidor, 1931).<sup>43</sup>

Interviewers often highlighted Ronald Colman's conservatism. Ironically enough considering the success they brought, in one interview following his success in *Bulldog Drummond* (Jones, 1929), Colman dismissed the talkies as a fad.<sup>44</sup> Years later he talked about this with some embarrassment.<sup>45</sup> His conservatism aligned him often with a kind of Victorian masculinity with one writer insisting that he 'prefers lamplight to electricity, that's why he has it in his beach house' (*Screenland*, September 1930: 112). He 'is an Englishman, smokes a pipe, likes solitude, likes to read, likes tennis, wears white flannels in summer' (*Screenland*, September 1930: 32-33). The same article quoted him as saying,

Acting is an illusion and the actor should, to my way of thinking, be an illusion too. He is not himself when he is acting. If he is a good actor he tries to do the things as the man in the story would do them, not as he himself would handle the situation. The public admires the man in the picture. If it knew the actor as a man it might not like him at all. [...]

What difference does it make whether they do or don't know anything about him? The man should be separated from the artist.

An actor therefore could never live up to what the public imagines him to be, and it can't help but be disappointed when it sees a flesh and blood individual (*Screenland*, September 1930:122).

The voice attributed to Ronald Colman here acknowledges the duality that was inherent in his performance of roles and the fan magazine itself as a purveyor of an image that was also a performance. His contention that the readers do not know him is a direct contradiction of the articles that claimed to forge a relationship between Colman and his audience. He resists the idea of himself as a commodity despite the ways in which the narrative of his fan

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<sup>42</sup> 'Mr Colman as a middle-western American youth? Please Mr Goldwyn!' *Motion Picture magazine* letters page, letter 'Why are Stars Miscast?' June 1933: 8).

<sup>43</sup> Fans 'were simply not ready for their handsome hero to be an adulterer' (Colman, 1975:117).

<sup>44</sup> 'He dislikes talking pictures, and hopes they will die the quick death of a fad', Margaret Reid 'Ronald as he is' (*Picture Play*, April 1929: 110).

<sup>45</sup> Colman was 'frankly dubious' about talking pictures. 'A Tale of Three Cities', (*Movie Classic*, November 1935: 40).

magazine and cinematic persona interacted during this decade. Whilst articles, gossip columns and features painted a picture of the ‘warmth and romanticism’ of an ideal type of Britishness, the films themselves also often presented a ‘shadow self’ to stand in contrast with Colman’s perceived amiability. Another article reported Colman’s awareness of his own duality:

I am not much of a hand at analysing myself. But I have heard of ‘split personalities.’ Perhaps in my case the split comes between my screen self and my real self. I have never thought of this before but it now occurs to me that I may have become an actor so that I could pretend to be the sort of fellow I cannot be in real life.

To try to explain why the sword swallowing hero I like to play on the screen is different from my unexciting self is, for me, a task almost too difficult to attempt. ‘T’ is a subject about which I know very little (*Photoplay*, February 1939: 77).

In an era when Colman’s roles were often dual, this discourse invites an examination of the ‘other’ man that lies beneath the charming exterior. Whilst textually very little was printed to indicate that Colman had a dark side, there were photographs published that showed him as split and the dark side emerged in his film roles. In *Hollywood* magazine in June 1934 a feature article about special effects called ‘The Camera Does Lie!’ included a photograph from *The Masquerader*. ‘Ronald Colman meets Ronald Colman on a flight of stairs’ (*Hollywood*, June 1934: 90).



Figure 1: Ronald Colman meets Ronald Colman on the stairs.

*Silver Screen* in October 1935 noted that Colman had long courted the role of Sydney Carton in *A Tale of Two Cities*, a famous ‘doubled’ role.

No other actor on either stage or screen so perfectly typifies the famous Dickens character! You might search the world over, and still not find anyone so completely fitted to play the gallant Englishman (*Silver Screen*, October 1935: 28).

Yet, although Carton becomes heroic, he begins the film as a drunken, cynical, amoral lawyer’s clerk. In keeping with the discourse surrounding Colman in this era, this negative aspect of the character is conveniently suppressed. In *Screenland* of October 1935, a mirror shot of Colman, dressed as Sydney Carton shows him looking thoughtfully at his own reflection:



Figure 2.

A publicity still from the same film echoes the narrative of Colman and Carton.



Figure 3. Carton looks at Colman.

Here, Carton looks at himself in a theatre mirror and sees Ronald Colman. Dapper modern Colman is a mirror image of his 'costumed' self.

In *Motion Picture* magazine in October 1937, there is a page featuring Colman in the double role of Rudolph Rassendyll and Prince Rudolph in *The Prisoner of Zenda*, headed, 'King and Commoner' (*Motion Picture*, October 1937:36).



Figure 4. Colman's dual roles in *The Prisoner of Zenda*.

Ronald Colman's duality had now shifted from fan magazine discourse into his films. The implications were clear that the - perhaps suspiciously - homosocial Ronald Colman was not quite as perfect a gentleman as the fan magazines seemed to imply. His films hinted at repression and suppression of masculine qualities that were transgressive. As one male western fan put it: 'What is an English society drama full of Ronald Colmans and Clive Brooks compared to real men in real American drama?' (Donald Westcott, *Silver Screen*, December 1930: 42). Colman's film roles in the 1930s created masculinities that were not exactly conforming to the hegemonic ideal or even to the conformist 'English gentleman' stereotype, until they exploded in his first fully villainous role in *A Double Life* in 1947. Although this was his last starring role in a film, his television work would allow him to explore the duality that emerged in this part of his career.<sup>46</sup>

## **2 Ronald on Screen**

Ronald Colman on screen was the very personification of a smooth, attractive ladies' man. With his lithe body and trademark moustache he could convey gentleness, humour, strength and depth of feeling. In many of his films, he is a homosocial man, most at home in gentleman's clubs and cricket matches. He is gothicised, as the fan magazine images imply, through doubling, splitting, fracturing and queering. As the fan magazines reveal, women found British effete masculinity to be attractive and appealing. The queer persona that can be detected in Ronnie's film roles is never campy or effeminate – which in all probability is the reason it slid under the censors' radar. In my reading of his films, I have located a number of ways in which the Queer manifests in Colman's films. Mainly this is found in the precedence given to homosocial settings and relationships combined with unconvincing (or missing) heterosexual romance. Secondly, in the use of such visual clues as the use of the double, the mirror, baroque surroundings and feminised clothes. In *(i) The Beautiful*

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<sup>46</sup> Colman had the opportunity to explore a mirror or shadow self in a number of his television appearances: Four Star Playhouse episode: 'The Man Who Walked Out on Himself' 1953. Also, 'Ladies in His Mind' Studio 57, 1956. Both CBS, syndicated.



*Gesture* I look at Colman's role as 'Beau' Geste in the 1926 silent film of the classic novel, a coded male-male romance. In (ii) *Costume Colman* I give a reading of *Clive of India*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *The Prisoner of Zenda*, in an attempt to explore the ways in which British masculinity in period stories allowed for greater transgression from the strictures of muscular masculinity. The final section (iii) *Living in the Lost Horizon* is a consideration of the ways in which the movie *Lost Horizon* expresses an attractive 'Other' world where old style Hollywood queerness, personified in Edward Everett Horton, lives happily in an exotic, idealised western fantasy of the East where the wisdom of Colman's war damaged Englishman Conway offers freedom. The conclusion of this chapter leads to Colman's final film role *A Double Life* (Cukor, 1947), where he is free to express his duality fully as the split, haunted, tortured protagonist actor Anthony John.

### **(i) The Beautiful Gesture and The Shadow Man**

It has been widely assumed in cinema histories that representation of homosexuality in early cinema was coded as feminine, as 'played usually for laughs' (Doherty, 1999: 120).

Maybe in the later thirties the homosexual was played straight, but in the pre-Code era, he, and she, was played queer ..... The screen homosexual was called the nance, the poof, the fairy, or the queer. He was a flouncing twit, the supporting character whose mere presence sparked a snicker associated with the upper ranks of the British class system and the backstage worlds of theatre and high fashion, the mincing gestures and perfumed wardrobe of the nance had been staples of vaudeville sketches, legitimate theatre, and the silent screen in the 1920s (Doherty, 1999: 121).

This assumption makes it possible to overlook much that is non-heterosexual in cinema of the twenties and later, functioning as a smokescreen to examples of the homosocial that clearly tip over into the homoerotic. Here the cultural assumption of 'obligatory heterosexuality' acts to disguise a queerness that is not the result of camp portrayals of the 'fairy' or 'cissy' (Sedgwick, 1990/2008: 3). Krafft-Ebbing's contention that male and female homosexuals were 'creatures of inverted gender, men trapped in women's bodies and vice versa' limits homosexuality to 'effeminate' masculinity (Barrios, 2003: 8). As I will show,

there are homo-erotic characters and themes that are expressed through British actors who are not effeminate in this way, but who are effete and sophisticated in the Noel Coward style.

*Beau Geste* (Brenon, 1926) has a *mise-en-scene* with a distinct homo-erotic aesthetic that is highly romanticised and appreciated by audiences. Its male characters are not in any way effeminate, but its homosocial contexts allow for a sense of male-male romance. The narrative proffers 'male-male desire' as the 'glue rather than the solvent of a hierarchical male disciplinary order' (Sedgwick, 1990/2016: 94).

*Beau Geste* was a Paramount prestige production, directed by Anglo-Irishman Herbert Brenon. Unusually for the time it cost over a million dollars to make but was enormously successful, boosting Colman's fan mail to put him on second only to John Gilbert (Quirk, 1977: 97). PC Wren's novel about three brothers joining the French Foreign Legion, published in 1925, had been a best seller, fitting in with the trend for rugged 'boys' adventures' which were popular in the UK and US at the time of the transatlantic 'Boy Crisis' (Studlar, 1996: 77). Although there were no Academy Awards in 1926, the film was highly acclaimed, winning the *Photoplay* Medal of Honor award for the best film of the year.<sup>47</sup> *The New York Times* polled 280 screen critics, who proclaimed it the best film of 1927 with 235 votes, beating other highly thought of movies including *The Big Parade* and *Ben Hur*).<sup>48</sup> The notoriously acerbic critic, Caroline Lejeune of the British paper, the *Manchester Guardian*, hailed Brenon as a genius, declaring the film had 'an astonishing and consistent fineness' (April 9, 1927: 17).

The marketing of the film emphasised its masculine appeal. An elaborate publicity campaign involved actors dressed in legionnaire uniform attending showings. The lack of respect shown to the uniform caused the French consul some upset (*New York Times*, Oct 10, 1926: 29). The movie was described in the American press in highly gendered terms as a movie

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<sup>47</sup> 'Classic Hollywood: Film academy to screen *Photoplay* Magazine Medal of Honor winners' Susan King, *Los Angeles Times*. June 13, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> *New York Times*, February 5, 1928: 112.

that only men would appreciate. It was described as ‘sternly virile’, (*LA Times*, November 25, 1926: A11), as ‘one of the biggest and most virile stories that has ever been screened’ with ‘a stronger appeal, perhaps, to men than women,’ calling it ‘one of cinema’s greatest achievements’ (*LA Sunday Times*, November 7, 1926:6). The *Variety* review declares ‘it is a man’s picture much more so than *The Big Parade*,’ continuing, ‘The story revolves around three brothers and their love for each other. And a great looking trio...’ again expressing doubt as to whether women would appreciate it, whilst hinting at male appreciation of other men’s pleasing appearance (*Variety*, Sept 1, 1926: 14). Reviewers also openly comment on the good looks of the male cast alongside the references to the ‘masculinity’ of the film and its possible unsuitability for a female audience (*Variety*, Sept 1, 1926:14; *LA Times*, November 7, 1926: H2). These reviews hint at a male audience’s enjoyment of the spectacle of good-looking men in close relationship with each other as in itself a homosocial activity that might exclude women (ibid). Caroline Lejeune describes the narrative as the story of a

light-hearted stand for all that is decent in soldiering and honest in comradeship, of their queer tenderness for one another in the face of danger, and of the old traditions that make death proud and holocaust the last splendour of a king (*The Manchester Guardian*, Nov 13, 1926: 9).

The ‘queer’ nature of the ‘tenderness’ between the men constitutes an important part of their honour, as the critic reveals here, and does not contradict it in any way. The film proclaims itself a story of ‘splendid manhood’ and encourages comparisons of the Geste brothers with Viking warriors, whilst also allowing them displays of homoerotic affection.

In the UK, British newspaper magnate Lord Beaverbrook praised the film for ‘its powerful and moving balance in favour of Great Britain’ (*New York Times*, November 19, 1926: 3). Others hailed it as a mainly ‘British’ production even though it was made in Hollywood (CA Lejeune, *The Manchester Guardian*, Nov 13, 1926: 9). One critic, admiring the ‘thoroughly masculine adventure story,’ wrote:

‘Thy love was wonderful to me, passing the love of women’ is the burden of PC Wren’s novel. Apparently, the public thinks, in sympathy with David, that the devotion of

man to man is more moving than man's love for woman. Anyhow 'Beau Geste' has destroyed the fable that best-sellers are always about sex (*Observer*, Nov 7, 1926: 15).

The British themselves then, with their homosocial public-school tradition, recognised this all-male romance as home-grown. The Biblical quote here from 2 Samuel 1: 26, serves to create a sense of reverence for the way that the film portrays the male-male romance (1990: 309). The Biblical David and Jonathan were not actually brothers, so this also adds a dimension that loosens the idea of the relationship as fraternal. The dismissal of the film as most definitely *not* being 'about sex' shows the extent to which the quite blatant homoeroticism of the film seemed to go undetected – or at least unspoken. In actual fact there is a sexual undercurrent in the movie that might be more easily detected by a modern audience that does not even rely on contemporary coding. Presumably fears about the film not being liked by women proved groundless, as the film sold out and had record breaking runs in a number of theatres across both countries (Quirk, 1977: 97).

The advertising poster for the film creates an aesthetic of same-sex romance rather than the adventure of the French Foreign Legion life, using the veneer of the 'love between brothers' to disguise the homo-eroticism of the image that was blatantly used to sell the movie. Against a desert background and the walls of the fort, two pairs of men are seen. In the foreground one man holds the other in an embrace, looking at him lovingly. The man on the floor is dying and the image evokes a sort of Shakespearean tragedy. Behind them, another pair of men watch them voyeuristically, one man holding the other, with a hand on the shoulder and another on the other man's arm.



Figure 5.

The warm red sky denoting heat, and the grouping of uniformed men give a sense of repressed passion and doubling rather than virile heterosexuality, expressive of what Sedgwick recognises as the ‘paranoid-associated homophilic alibi, ‘I do not love him: I *am* him” (1985/2016: 162). The image sells the idea of same-sex passion rather than manly adventure, violence or conflict. The selection of this scene for the poster is interesting. It is, in effect a ‘spoiler’, as it shows one brother dying in the arms of the other, the dramatic climax that is situated close to the end of the film. As with other films taken from best-sellers there might have been an assumption that many in the audience would be familiar with the story, and that the popularity of the story centred on this aspect. There is no doubt looking at this image that the film is about male-male love.

Reinforcing the hyper-romanticised tone of the advertising poster, the film begins with the following quotation:

The love of a man for a woman waxes and wanes like the moon . . . but the love of brother for brother is steadfast as the stars and endures like the Word of the Prophet.

This nearly all-male film, largely set in the desert in the French Foreign Legion, ‘the ranks of the self-condemned’ concentrates on relations between men, delighting in homo-erotic

spectacle. The theme of the conflict between appearance and reality is also reflected in Lady Patricia's replacement of the precious jewel and the dead bodies arranged at Zinderneuf. Male bodies take centre stage in the narrative. Questions about what is real abound in a story that delights in the physicality of the soldiers holding each other, tickling each other, linking arms. The concept of a fraternal affection that might be a *replacement* for heterosexual love is introduced here and is traced throughout the movie in tender, joyfully or even sadistically sexual physical moments between men. If we disregard the literalness of the Geste boys' brotherhood, then the theme of love between men takes on a different meaning. The use of the surname 'Geste', French for gesture makes it possible for the audience to see the brotherhood of the men as allegorical rather than literal. To be clear, I am not suggesting that this is a story about incest, but that the apparent 'brotherhood' of the men is a cover for a story of same-sex romance.

In a key scene the three brothers find themselves reunited in the Legion barracks. As John (Ralph Forbes) moves to greet them, Digby (Neil Hamilton), with Beau's (Colman) help, throws John down on the bunk and straddles him. The camera moves in as the two uniformed brothers tickle the new arrival. In the vigorous tussle, with clear erotic overtones as the men wrestle, their bodies joined, they fall off the bed and onto the floor, in a movement that clearly references a sexual encounter.



*Figure 6. Beau Geste: Brothers reunion in the bunkhouse.*



Figure 7.

Like voyeurs drawn by the spectacle, the two Americans Buddy (Donald Stuart) and Hank (Victor McLaglen), who themselves form an inseparable couple in the story, watch them and are finally introduced by John to the brothers.

In William Wellman's 1939 remake, which apparently aimed to faithfully recreate the silent original film scene by scene (Turim, 1989/2015: 184), the scenes that in the 1926 silent film seem to represent sexual sadism between the men and the erotic scenes between the brothers are underplayed or left out. In this reunion sequence, John (Ray Milland) greets his brothers in the barracks, jokingly pushing Digby (Robert Preston) down onto the bed twice, with just a movement of the arm. There is no physical body-to-body contact between the men.

Later in the 1926 movie, in a night-time sequence, sly Baldoni (William Powell), caught trying to steal Beau's jewel, is set upon by the men and handcuffed to a table. In a series of mid shots and close ups we see a large crowd of men gather around him, all eagerly laying their hands on his neck, his head, his body, in a frenzy of tickling, poking and choking. Baldoni's face is seen surrounded by men's hands, and his eyes are full of terror. The laying on of many hands on the one man, his 'punishment' for breaking the law of trying to steal another comrade's possessions, is a clear portrayal of a brutal and violent sexuality, possibly gang rape. Even Beau cannot save him, so the brothers watch helpless until the captain

interrupts the torture. In the 1939 version, significantly, this scene is cut short. The men of the barracks get as far as putting the culprit on the table before they are interrupted.



Figure 8. The attack on Boldoni.



Figure 9.

This emphasis of the sadistic sexual context of the Legion continues through the characterisation of sergeant LeJaune (Wallace Beery). LeJaune's cruelty is highlighted when he discovers two deserters, whips them and sends them back into the desert to die. The whip, like the handcuffs in the scene of Baldoni's torture, has associations of sexual sadism and phallic power. We see him whip the men with more than 15 lashes, as the camera gives not just the brothers' perspective, but the deserters' point of view. In the 1939 version of the film, Lejaune does not use a whip at all, but he coldly sends the deserters out to the desert to die.





Figure 10. LeJaune disciplines his men.

LeJaune's wielding of the whip expresses a type of physical and sexual violation, domination and misuse of power. In contrast, the relationship between Beau and John shows a tenderness and emotion that is poignant and romantic. At the final battle at Zinderneuf, Beau is shot. When LeJaune attempts to steal the jewel one last time the brothers defeat and kill him. The two brothers are the last men left living in the fort. We see John takes the injured Beau in his arms, drawing him closer to his body. The scene that follows is redolent of other scenes in romantic movies familiar to audiences at the time. As John cradles his brother, Beau runs his hands through John's hair, cradling and stroking his face and gazing at him intently until they seem to be on the verge of kissing:



Figure 11: Beau's death scene.



Figure 12.



Figure 13.



Figure 14.

As Beau weakens, his head slumps and he dies. At the climax of this sequence, Beau's head falls onto John's shoulders. In this section the director makes use of conventions of silent cinema to create a sense of intimacy between the men that can be read as erotic. In romantic

melodrama audiences were accustomed to seeing faces and hands brought together in close ups like this. Screen couples such as Greta Garbo and John Gilbert and Ronald Colman and Vilma Banky are often to be found in intimate close-ups similar to the ones in Beau's death scene. The intense facial expressions and tight proximity of faces are unmistakable in conveying sexual passions.



Figure 15. Garbo and Gilbert.



Figure 16: Colman and Banky.

In contrast, in the 1939 version, Beau dies in John's arms but the physical distance between the men loses the erotic undercurrent. The death occurs in medium shot and there are no hands visible. John's knee is placed between them as a barrier to greater intimacy. John's hands only touch Beau's face when he lays his head on the floor after death.



Figure 17. *Beau Geste* 1939 remake: the death of Beau.

Despite the remake's touted intention to recreate the lauded original, it seems to be the queer elements of the film that were left out. Audiences and critics in 1939, however subliminally they might have understood this, clearly did not approve (Thompson, 1983: 187). As was sometimes done, the earlier version of *Beau Geste* was screened before the Wellman version was shown at some theatres, and many critics reacted by proclaiming the superiority of the first film (ibid). Wellman's decision to cut these elements might have been a reaction to the stricter Production Code which prohibited showing 'sexual perversion [...] any reference to it is forbidden' (Miller, 1994: 296). Wellman, himself a veteran of the French Foreign Legion, was the director of silent classic *Wings* (1927), the film that is most famous today for showing a romantic relationship between men and perhaps the screen's first same-sex kiss. This tells the story of two friends Jack Powell (Buddy Rogers) and David Armstrong (Richard Arlen) who become pilots in the First World War and are ostensibly rivals for the love of Sylvia Lewis (Jobyna Ralston) in a classic homosocial triangle (Sedgwick, 1985/2016: 21). In the scene that evokes the death of Beau, Jack holds dying David in a tight, romantic embrace that culminates in a kiss.



Figure 18. *Wings*.

Wellman had not shied away from the intensity of this romantic relationship between men in the 1920s, but 1939 was a very different period with the Production Code in full force. These differences between the two versions can be seen as another example of where excessively emotional scenes, frequently used in silent film, tended to be toned down as the arrival of sound seemed to demand less overplayed emotion (Jacobs, 2008: 270). If this is the case, though, it is evidence that this film is, in its original form, a love story rather than a 'boys' adventure'. Whatever the reason for cutting these elements in 1939's *Beau Geste*, it testifies to the qualities of the original movie, which retains the power to move an audience.

In the 1926 version another scene that is left out of the remake shows John, after his brother's death, distraught, lying full length on his brother's corpse, one man positioned on top of the other in an embrace, John's head on his dead brother's chest.



Figure 19. John grieves for Beau.

This scene evokes one of the most daring film techniques of the time, the horizontal love scene. This blatant representation of sexual relations, with one body stretched on the other, was to be outlawed by the censors in 1934 (Berchtold, 1934:50). In employing this technique, following on from the close-up clinch, there is a clearly implied male-male love scene. Fan magazines of the thirties often discussed censorship in their pages, and one article, with some wistfulness bemoaned ‘The Censors Call It Sin’ (*Photoplay*, September 1937: 20). The writer laments the loss of the horizontal love scene, declaring that ‘sex was always horizontal in the days when Ronald Colman and Lily Damita turned on the pash’, complaining that now, due to censorship, ‘only upright love scenes’ were permitted.



Figure 20.

The two pages of photographs illustrated this, acting as a reminder of silent cinema’s sometimes exotic and stylised representation of sex. In the intertextual experience of cinema-going in the twenties through to the forties, these evocative images and conventions would have been familiar to audiences. This familiar silent film trope is used in these intense, lyrical final scenes between John and his dead brother Beau in *Beau Geste*.

Although there seems to be no printed evidence of a contemporary awareness of the queerness of the film, in 1991 R Dixon Smith protested defensively,

It was a very masculine film, made in an era when the screen could depict close companionship between men without fear of misunderstanding. Coursing through the pictures of Wellman, Howard Hawks and John Ford is the common theme of men thrown together in battle, and the strong bonds they develop for one another (Smith,1991:221).

Lawrence Quirk in the same decade admitted that the film could be seen as ‘the manifestation of a homosexual myth gone wild’ (1994: 98). Here the allegation that ‘male homosexuality was never touched on’ in the classical era is disproved (Miller, 1994:81). It takes very little for a modern audience to see that here there is a homo-eroticsub-text to this story of love between men that is idealised in this movie.

## **(ii) Colman in Costume**

David O Selznick opened the floodgates for ‘British’ costume dramas following his production of *David Copperfield* (Cukor, 1934), and English actors were required to take on roles of literary and historical characters (Glancy, 1999: 74). As Hollywood’s most famous English leading man, Ronald Colman must have seemed like the obvious choice for some desirable heroic parts.

In 1935, Colman made two costume films: *Clive of India* (Boleslawski) for Twentieth Century and *A Tale of Two Cities* (Conway) for Selznick playing the lead roles of Robert Clive and Sydney Carton respectively. The first was the story of historical British figure Robert Clive and the second an adaptation of the Dickens novel set in revolutionary France. In these films, Colman appeared without his trademark moustache and was to be seen for the first time since his silent days, dressed in velvet, silk, satins, tights, lace and wigs. As has been noted, censors in this era seemed less quick to pick up on transgressive or queer elements in

costume dramas, where the unfamiliar historical culture seemed to disguise transgressive themes and possibilities (Studlar, 1996: 115).

*Clive of India* is the biopic of British historical figure Robert Clive. Clive became a successful figure by solidifying British interests in India, making the British Empire rich by defeating the French and manipulating the Indian rulers. In interviews for fan magazines, Colman expressed admiration for Clive, considering him a 'great man' (Robert Fendler, *Movie Classic*, March 1935: 36). Colman and Clive were considered to be similar not just because of their shared nationality:

These Englishmen do not wear their heart's colours on their sleeves, but RC carried a shrapnel scar on his ankle that testifies that he, with Clive, has done his bit for his country (*Movie Classic*, March 1935: 76, abbreviation in original).

This unquestioning admiration of colonialism contrasts sharply with modern historical accounts, which consider Clive an 'unstable sociopath' who 'plundered India' (William Dalrymple, 2019: 5). The publicity materials and the film in 1935 present Robert Clive as unequivocally heroic but for a modern audience the fervently colonial Clive is unpredictable, egotistical, ambitious and violent. He is an unreliable husband and a man who politically breaks the rules to get his own way.

Robert Clive is seen primarily in homosocial contexts throughout the movie, and his primary relationship is with his friend Edmund (Francis Lister). In an early sequence, we see him take the necklace his friend is wearing in his hands and say, 'I often look at this portrait.' This immediately implies a past physical intimacy between the two men, as Edmund is still wearing the locket and it usually lies beneath his clothes. The necklace contains a portrait of Edmund's sister, Margaret (Loretta Young). Clive's declaration that he will marry her, sets up an erotic triangle that will thread through the film. His reason for wanting to marry Edmund's sister so suddenly, in this odd way, might be to keep his friend close rather than an overwhelming attraction to a (very small) painted miniature.



Clive's dual relationships with Edmund and Margaret illustrates the character's apparent bisexuality. Edmund arranges the marriage and brings his sister to India, on a journey that takes a year. He also maintains his position as the friend closest to Clive, following him as he moves from East India Company into the army and through the ranks. Always beside Clive as his right-hand man, Edmund is the only person from whom he takes advice. Edmund is always the one to reach out and comfort Clive, in one scene physically reaching out and touching him.



Figure 21. Edmund comforts Clive.

Margaret<sup>49</sup> in contrast with Edmund is vacuous and feminine, happy to travel for a year to marry a man she does not know but frightened to meet him once she gets there because she is concerned that he will not like her. Even when they are married, she does not want Clive to travel back to India without her, apparently not trusting him. When he returns to India Margaret follows him on the arduous journey although it means leaving her sickly new baby, who dies in her absence. Margaret is portrayed as the naïve and 'childish woman' between Clive and Edmund, a female mediator for their more adult relationship (Sedgwick, 1985/2016: 178). She is one man's sister, and the other's wife in the homosocial triangle (ibid). Although this film is ostensibly about Clive's domestic life as well as his political rise, there is a strong

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<sup>49</sup> The casting of Loretta Young in homosocial dramas with Colman in the early thirties can be seen as significant in the light of her function in Hollywood as an extreme of femininity. She rarely plays feisty dominant women of the type portrayed by Barbara Stanwyck, Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, Greta Garbo, but usually takes roles of women who are dominated by men. Or, as in *The Bishop's Wife*, a 'mediator' between men in the homosocial triangle.

sense of homosocial that borders on homoerotic, with a comparatively frank portrayal of male-male sexual interests. Relations between men are depicted as many layered and complex.

When Clive is finally put on trial in the house of Commons, and his wife has left him, Edmund remains faithful. When he realises that Margaret has gone, Clive and Edmund talk together about the situation. Clive looks into space and sadly says, 'I am alone'. Then, realizing what he has said in front of his most faithful friend and follower, he puts an arm out to Edmund. 'I'm ungrateful. I have one friend'. He slowly looks round at him and says, 'You were the first Edmund and you're the last.' Robert's connection to Edmund is the first and most lasting relationship, and Edmund never leaves him. Edmund never expresses interest in a heterosexual involvement for himself but his devotion to Robert Clive drives the narrative of his life.



Figure 22. 'You were the first Edmund and you're the last'.

In two key sequences, Colman's Robert Clive shamelessly uses his sexuality in the homosocial atmosphere of the power struggle in India, to achieve his political goals.

Following an attack by the French, Clive becomes frustrated by the incompetent leadership in the British army. When the British are under siege in Trichinopoly, Clive sneaks out through the enemy lines to confront the British council under Governor Pigot (Montagu Love). In the sequence where he confronts the council about his plan to conquer the French, we see Clive come in from the rain, water dripping from his tricorne hat, facing the room full

of men, sitting at an elaborate dining table. The contrast between their hedonism and upper-class flamboyance and bedraggled, hardworking Clive/Colman sets up the sequence where Clive lays himself bare, literally and metaphorically.



Figure 23. Clive confronts the council.



Figure 24.

Clive apparently has no time to go and change his clothes in private, so he does so in a three-minute sequence. As Clive starts to talk, he peels off his wet clothes, watched by the crowd of men. Whilst someone protests ‘This, Sir, is *not* a bedroom,’ Clive continues. The camera shows in medium shot, Clive taking off his clothes one by one as he talks to the Governor. The fussiness of the Governor’s clothes, silks, satins and lace, and the revelation of Clive’s body are juxtaposed with the effect of highlighting Clive’s openness, honesty and attractiveness. Released in the years of Colman’s ‘revelations’ in interviews in the fan magazines at the time, Clive or Colman is conducting a complementary unveiling of his body. He makes himself the spectacle for a room of watching and fascinated men as he did for the

male viewers of *Beau Geste*. The camera lingers on Colman's body throughout the scene as he conducts his manly striptease.



Figure 25. 'necessity is anybody's bedroom'.

The camera pulls back from the two men for a shot in which we see all of the men gathering around, watching. Clive Coyle asserts, 'necessity is anybody's bedroom'. The men are the *voyeurs* but Clive has brought the intimacy implicit in the mention of the 'bedroom' to them. The homosocial context has become overtly erotic.



Figure 26. Voyeurs.



Figure 27.



Figure 28.

Robert Clive's willingness to use his own body to get what he wants is reinforced in a second key scene. In this later sequence Clive persuades the clearly queer-coded Admiral Watson (Ferdinand Munier) to sign a treaty with Mir Jaffar following the Black Hole of Calcutta. The admiral arrives as Mir Jaffar drives off. He jokingly asks Clive who it is who had just left:

Watson: A woman? You'll get yourself into trouble!

Clive: Ah, we all do.

Watson: (*Thoughtlessly*) Yes (*hurriedly correcting himself*) er, No! I mean, *I* don't! [...] There's something queer about you today. Want something?

Clive sits on the table in front of the admiral, looks in his eyes, and speaks in a gentle, even seductive tone of voice. He suggestively offers the end of the hookah pipe to the bewildered admiral. The admiral takes some time to realise what Clive wants. At one point he observes 'You're being too dem polite. Quarrel with your wife or what?'



Figure 29 'There's something queer about you today'.

The portly, effeminate admiral, with his denial of interest in women and his transparent attraction to Clive is evidently excited by the younger man's attention. Language such as 'queer' and the suggestion implicit in the dialogue that Clive might be seeking sex with a man after a quarrel with his wife, indicates a transgression of the masculine norms. The narrative focus on this interaction hints at a possible sexual exchange between men in power.

Also in 1935, Colman starred in the film version of *A Tale of Two Cities*. The role of Sydney Carton had been one that Colman had wanted to play since his silent movie days,<sup>50</sup> but with the experience of *The Masquerader* (Wallace, 1933) fresh in his mind, he resisted the idea of its being a dual role (Colman, 1975: 179).<sup>51</sup> David O Selznick described the decision to cast the role of Sydney Carton separately from that of his double Charles Darnay:

Dickens stresses a strong resemblance between Carton and Darnay – in fact, he makes them facial doubles. In a picture, the only way this effect could be obtained would be to have both roles played by the same man [...] This matter was discussed at length ... and we finally decided that there was nothing inherent to the basic story elements that made it necessary for Carton and Darnay to look exactly alike. (Colman, 1975: 179).

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<sup>50</sup>There's an amusing anecdote RC tells upon himself. Seven years ago, he gave an interview in which he prophesied the failure of talking pictures. He was very definite about it. Sound would never capture public fancy. Yet, IF, a large IF it did, there was one role Colman wanted to play - Sydney Carton' (*Hollywood*, October 1935:54).

<sup>51</sup>Filming the dual role in *The Masquerader* had been a low point in Colman's career and led to a lifelong rift with former mentor Sam Goldwyn (Quirk, 1977: 153).

Whilst Sydney Carton is ultimately the hero of the story, he is also embittered and cynical, even a high functioning alcoholic. The opening of the film sets up the issue of dual identity and the split self by adapting Dickens' famous opening sentence:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us . . . in short, it was a period very like the present.<sup>52</sup>

The actual effect of casting different men as Darnay and Carton is to create an emphasis on the relationship between the two men. They form the 'erotic triangle' in their mirrored love for Lucie Manette (Elizabeth Allen). But, as in other films of the era, including *Clive of India* the speed with which the men fall in love with the woman seems to reveal the shallowness of their emotion. Darnay and Carton retain a badge of love for Lucie as a bond that keeps them together. When Carton takes on the identity of Darnay he sacrifices all for not only his female love, but also for his male rival. It is another expression of the 'I do not love him: I *am* him' dilemma (Sedgwick, 1985/2016: 162). At their first meeting, they are placed together in shots as mirror images, first facing each other, then both of them facing Lucie, who is off camera:



Figure 30. Carton and Darnay meet in court.

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<sup>52</sup> It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way – in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on it being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only (*A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens, 1859/1935:9).



Figure 31. Carton and Darnay share a loving gaze.

The two men placed in the centre of the frame, sharing a gaze, here evoke Sedgwick's 'homosocial triangle' in 'erotic rivalry' (1985/2016:162). Carton is placed in the frame between Lucie and Darnay when they first meet, forming a physical triangle:



Figure 32. Carton watches Darnay and Lucie.

In a later sequence, Darnay and Carton dine together. Carton's expression of sudden and irrational hatred for Darnay at the end of the evening is surprising in its passion. He moves from looking at Darnay across the table to staring at himself in the mirror. He talks to his own reflection:



Figure 33. Carton talks to his reflection.



Carton: Why treat the fellow like that? Is it because he shows you what you have fallen away from? What you might have been? . . . Change places with him? Would you have been looked at by those blue eyes as he was? Ah, come on Carton. You're jealous? Have it out in plain words, you hate the fellow.

Carton has started to see himself in Darnay, who shows him what he might have been. His fiery rudeness to Darnay might be seen as misplaced expression of passion.

When Darnay is taken by the revolutionaries and condemned to death, Carton takes his place briefly in the Manette family, but he is not happy in this position. In an act of self-sacrificial courage, he finds his way into the prison where Darnay is held to engineer his rival's escape. Carton surprises Darnay in his prison cell, asking him to write something for him. Darnay obediently writes, as Carton puts chloroform on a handkerchief and brings it closer and closer to Darnay's face. Darnay protests 'What's that? Something queer. Queer smelling.' Whilst the words Carton dictates for Darnay to write are on the subject of his devotion to Lucie, in the *mise-en-scene* the two men come closer together, until the final struggle. Carton finally holds Darnay in his arms, as he goes limp.



Figure 34.  
Carton comes to Darnay in prison.



Figure 35.



Figure 36.

Just before his execution, Carton admits to his young friend Isabel the reasons for his sacrifice.

Isabel: You are going to die in his place. Why?

Sydney Carton: He is my friend.

Isabel: You seem unafraid.

Carton: Perhaps I am. Perhaps in death I have something I never had in life. A sanctuary in the hearts of those I care for.

Carton's unrequited love might be for Lucie Manette or for Charles Darnay, or for both of them. In his sacrifice, however, it is Darnay with whom he identifies and whose name he takes for *his* ultimate tragic, 'beautiful' gesture.

There is no shortage of beautiful gestures in the fantasy lands of Ruritania and Shangri-La, the setting for two of Colman's most successful films of the late 1930s. They are both exotic lands, towards the distant East, and both offer a uniquely homosocial paradise taken from popular novels. Ronald Colman is the heroic adventurer and political, colonial 'Great Man' in both and they both place him in a firmly homosocial context.

*The Prisoner of Zenda* had already been made into two silent films, before David O Selznick, seeing its relevance in the era of the abdication crisis, chose to remake it in 1937, helmed by Jack Conway. It was released the year before Michael Curtiz's acclaimed *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and presents a similar swashbuckling world of all-male political groupings, one representing positive qualities, the other corruption, with women acting as go-betweens for the men and their dealings with each other. This transactional-woman triangular narrative structure, with its mirrored masculinities, invariably ends with the main male protagonists locked in a highly physical, energetic swordfight. The film was a box office and critical success. One reviewer entered into the spirit of the story:

With all the Graustarkian punctilio this corner can muster up, we rise, click our heels, toast the Selznick International production of *The Prisoner of Zenda* and smash the glass. Here is a proper swashbuckling adventure, set in that vast mythical land (of which Zenda is a province) where honor is brighter, villainy unregenerate and beauty incomparable. Here is pomp and circumstance so intricately woven into the story that every measured pace of it simply bristles with excitement [...] Here is the most pleasing film that has come along in ages (*New York Times*, September 3, 1937:12).

As in *The Masquerader*, Colman plays the part of two men of differing class who are cousins. Whilst the English cousin, Rassendyll, is honourable and politically liberal, falling in love with Flavia, Rudolf V is drunken, selfish and shows no interest in his beautiful fiancée. There are two Colmans and as in the previous film, the honourable one gets to play the part of the dissipated yet powerful one. In the world of Ruritanian politics, men interact with men and are divided into two groups. One group surrounds the king (Fritz and Zapt), the other group in the novel, 'the Six' follow his rival and half-brother, Black Michael (Raymond Massey).

The fashion for Ruritanian stories was at its height between the wars, with operettas and novels using the Balkan setting in what Vesna Goldsworthy calls a 'narrative colonisation' (Goldsworthy, 1998). Beginning in the 1890s with two key texts, *The Prisoner of Zenda*, 1894 by Anthony Hope and *Dracula* in 1897 by Bram Stoker, a fashion was born in fantasy and romance novels to set (male dominated) stories in the not too distant European East (ibid).

Popular novels set in fictitious Balkan kingdoms contrast 'Englishness' and 'Europeanness,' as well as 'Englishness' and 'Balkanness.' To be English means to be superior to both, as 'Balkanness' is shown to be only the most extreme, often childish form of European 'Otherness' (Goldsworthy, 1998: 76).

In this 1937 Hollywood re-telling there is a continuation of these themes as the industry's most famous - and attractive - Englishman, Ronald Colman, played the dual role, proving the point that 'even the lowliest English gentleman is better at performing royal duties than other Europeans' (ibid).

Ruritania was a homosocial paradise of courtly intrigue, male bonding and swordfights. Jeffrey Richards describes the setting as lands of 'high mountains, deep forests and medieval castles' (*Looking for Ruritania*, 2012: n.p.). The fear of the Other that is expressed in these narratives of the English adventurer displaced to an alternative land that is somehow both masculine fantasy and threat. Goldsworthy comments that,

Probably the most used words of Balkan origin in the English language – 'bugger,' 'balkanisation' and 'vampire' – all reflect, in a sense, the fear of the Other, the threat of possible invasion and corruption (Goldsworthy, 1998: 81).

As *Dracula* in its many retellings began to make the figure of the vampiric monster a type of anti-hero of popular culture, so the (fewer) versions of *The Prisoner of Zenda* express a fascination with male-male intimacy that can be explored in the campest of settings. This is the 'bugger' aspect of what the British take away from the Balkan setting: not a vampire but definitely a corrupting Other. One commentator observes,

Ruritania is not a utopia, in which everything is better or a dystopia, in which things are worse, but a heterotopia in which everything is different yet the same (Daly, 2020: 6).

'Different yet the same' sums up this uncanny world, run by men who play games with each other and are rivals for the heroines in any number of classic homoerotic triangular relationships. The world of Ruritanian cities, Zenda and Strelsau, is dominated by men in unusually decorative uniform. This elaborate uniformity itself denotes the feminine or at very least questionable gendering. The film begins by introducing the three main actors and

their characters visually on introductory title cards. Colman with a crown, Madeleine Carroll with a rose, and Fairbanks with a dagger in a wall. The opening title card sets the scene of a fantasy land where the rose and the waltz are firmly set:

Toward the close of the last century, when History still wore a Rose and Politics had not yet outgrown the Waltz, a Great Royal Scandal was whispered.

The waltz of the carefully choreographed sword fights brings to mind Galsworthy's point that Ruritanians are in some sense 'childish' as they fight out their intrigues in elaborate swordplay and their political intrigues are of the playground. From the first meeting of Rassendyll with the courtiers, men are watching men. Zapt (C Aubrey Smith) and Fritz (David Niven) discover Rassendyll in the forest. The forest, like the fog, is a place where illicit activities might take place.<sup>53</sup> The meeting is a low shot from behind the legs of the two Ruritanian men, drawing attention to their long boots and tight trousers whilst the sleeping Englishman is styled in classically British clothing. Richards comments on clothes in these narratives:

If you're a Ruritanian native, a courtier, you would wear a colourful uniform with gold braid, a plumed hat and a lot of medals [...] and epaulettes, absolutely, yes (*Looking for Ruritania*, 2012: n.p.).

But the 'English knight errant' would wear a 'tweed suit, inverness cape and a homberg hat. And [...] a sword stick. In case you encountered footpads or garrotters in the back streets of Strelsau' (ibid).

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<sup>53</sup> In *The Masquerader*, *Raffles* (Fitzmaurice, 1930), and the *Bulldog Drummond* films men tended to encounter each other in foggy places.



Figure 37. Rassendyll on holiday.

The contrast between Englishman and European King is most evident in the ‘mirroring’ shot when the two doubles are introduced, and Rassendyll’s ‘English’ clothing places him in clear contrast to Rudolf V’s feminine styling, with Tyrolean hat, tight trousers, long boots and fur collar.



Figure 38. Rasendyll and King Rudolf meet.

The King and Black Michael both wear a monocle, although Rassendyll, when playing the part of the kidnapped king, generally does not. This is a coded reference to the sexuality of these men, as the monocle, along with the rose, was seen as the sign of gender and sexual fluidity (Chauncey, 1994: 3). When Rassendyll puts on the King’s coronation dress uniform, he smiles at himself in the mirror, which is placed next to a portrait of the king, both in elaborate frames, pleased with his ability to become his cousin:



Figure 39.

He shifts from English to European masculinity seemingly with enjoyment. The splitting of Colman is now into King and counterfeit King, with the emphasis on the deliberate performativity of the main part of his role. He is, as Rupert Hentzau (Douglas Fairbanks Jr) says, the ‘play actor’. Colman the actor plays Rassendyll the ‘play actor’ and the helpless ruler of Ruritania. He is performing again a split – possibly bisexual - masculinity. The function in the plot of the King is to be rescued from his prison, like any fairytale princess. He is presented as almost entirely passive throughout the narrative, whereas Rassendyll-as-King is active and courageous, in battle with other men and in heterosexual love. Colman-as-King is often seen lying down, sometimes unconscious, often ill, expressing dysfunctional masculinity. Colman-as-Rassendyll-as-King, however, rewrites Ruritanian kingship in the image of the English gentleman, thus reflecting the self-conscious rewriting of Colman’s image in the fan magazines of the era as conservative and heterosexual. The Princess Flavia (Carroll) notices immediately that the king has changed in the coronation, when Rassendyll shows he is attracted to her which leads Colonel Zapt to remark that she might be disappointed by the real King after being courted by Rassendyll. Rudolf had never expressed attraction to Flavia and seems to have been close only to his loyal attendants Zapt and Fritz, neither of whom express any interest in women, dedicating themselves only to him.<sup>54</sup> The homosocial world of Ruritanian politics, the ‘waltz’ of relations between men, hints at close male attachments within groups.

<sup>54</sup> In the book, Fritz has an intense love affair with Helga (Hope, 1894/2020: 79).

Rudolf V's retirement to the hunting lodge in the woods, indicates that secrets kept amongst men, as the fog in the urban park did in *Bulldog Drummond* and *The Masquerader*. Rupert's greeting to Rassendyll hints at this alternative 'sport':

Hentzau: I bring you your brother's humble greetings and his *sincere* wish that you *enjoy* [ meaningful pause] good boar hunting here in Zenda. And his respects, of course, to your two principal boars [*looks suggestively at Zapt and Fritz*].

This 1937 film version of the story clearly owes a considerable debt to the 1922 Rex Ingram version, especially in the styling of the actors in the double role (in the silent version played by Lewis Stone). The silent film emphasizes the relationship between Rassendyll and Flavia (Alice Terry) by having them exchange rings in their final scene together. In the 1937 version, however, the ring that is key to the emotional resolution of the story is the ring that passes between Rassendyll and Rudolf V. It is Colonel Zapt (Robert Edison) who, when he decides Rassendyll will play the part of the King, removes the ring from his ring finger on the right hand to give it to Rassendyll. Then, in the final scene between the doubles, Rassendyll places the ring back on the King's right-hand ring finger slowly and solemnly.



Figure 40. Rassendyll and the King.

Once the ring is on his finger, Rudolf looks at it in a way that seems particularly feminine, as Rassendyll looks on like a proud fiancé.





Figure 41.

Whilst Colman is seen in this characterization as both masculine and feminine, both active and passive, here the two are united in male-male ceremonial binding. A theme of pageantry and pomp are part of the Ruritanian fantasy (*Looking for Ruritania*, 2012: n.p.). Earlier in the film, at the coronation Rassendyll-as-King is set up as double to other characters. As he faces Michael, the two men appear symmetrically opposed in the frame. Like Darnay and Carton, they look at each other across a room full of other men, dressed ceremonially (In *A Tale of Two Cities* in a courtroom). Inevitably enough, Rassendyll is in white and Black Michael wears the colour that makes him the classic gothic 'dark double' or alter-ego.



Figure 42. Rassendyll and Black Michael at the coronation.

Following some words of greeting, Rassendyll takes Michael's arm and is walked down the aisle towards his coronation, in a scene that again does not appear in the 1922 film, but that clearly echoes a wedding, with Colman as bride. The camera draws back to show a procession of men in uniform following the couple up the aisle. In the traditional wedding service, it is

the woman and her attendants who would process in this way, but this moment shows the two men who are diametrically narratively opposed, are also bound together in a form of rivalry that enables them to give each other their full attention. This reinforces the lack of seriousness of courtly enmities in the Ruritanian fantasy, the 'waltz'. Following the coronation, Rassendyll lets Michael know that he is aware of his plans to stop him from being crowned. He says, 'I had a queer feeling that something would go wrong', whilst Michael bristles, understanding the subtext of his pretend-brother's words. At the end of that conversation, Rassendyll meaningfully puts his monocle on to look at Michael, as if outing his 'queerness'.



Figure 43. The procession.

In the 1922 version of *The Prisoner of Zenda* in the coronation scene, more emphasis is given to Rassendyll's (Lewis Stone) romantic reaction to the Princess (Alice Terry) and there is no procession. In 1937, the Princess herself becomes a double for the pretend king, as they are shown travelling in the royal coach in a symmetrical shot. The man here, with more jewellery, fur and finery is more feminine and decorative than the woman.



Figure 44. Rassendyll in disguise as the King and the Princess Flavia.

Flavia's main rival for Rassendyll-King's attention, however, is his arch-enemy, 'one of the best villains ever written', Rupert Hentzau (Fairbanks, 1988: 271-2). Douglas Fairbanks Senior advised his son to take the part,

That part is known to be actor-proof! Nobody has ever played Rupert and failed to steal the show, on either stage or screen! It is so actor-proof, in fact, that Rin-Tin-Tin could play the part and walk away with it! (ibid)

Rupert Hentzau's attractiveness as a villain originates in Anthony Hope's description from the point of view of Rassendyll in the novel, describing Hentzau as 'a handsome villain', commenting:

For my part, if a man must be a knave, I would have him a debonair knave, and I liked Rupert Hentzau better than his long faced, close-eyed companions. It makes your sin no worse, as I conceive, to do it a la mode and stylishly (Hope, 1894/2020: 114).

Fairbanks's style was a deliberate echo of Colman's. In their final swordfight the wordplay and swordplay interact to give a sense of intimacy between the two men. As in the original novel, part of the pleasure is to be found in the attractiveness - and similarity - of hero and villain.



Figure 45. Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. as Rupert of Hentzau, publicity stills.



Figure 46. Crossed swords.

In the fight that forms the dramatic climax of the film, the two men meet in the dungeon of Zenda castle and in a dynamic fight, move upstairs to the drawbridge and castle door. Colman wears a tight ribbed wool polo neck, whilst Fairbanks, Jr. is in black satin crew neck. Both have curls and a moustache. Although there are guns and daggers in the story, the men play act their final scene together as a beautifully choreographed ‘waltz’ of a swordfight, their phallic instruments crossed in energetic embrace. It is not difficult to perceive the imagery of the swashbuckling swordfight as a homoerotic interaction. Hentzau, by this stage in the film, has become the rejected lover. His attempt to seduce Rassendyll into joining him was unsuccessful. He argues,

Rassendyll, you’re a man after my own heart. Now frankly you and I are the only ones worthwhile saving out of this whole affair. Now aren’t we?

But when Rassendyll laughs at him, Hentzau throws the dagger in the manner of an upset jealous, jilted lover. The two men are caught in relationship with each other, as Sedgwick describes it, as an element of ‘paranoid Gothic’ when ‘a male hero is in a close, usually murderous relation to another male figure’ in an expression of ‘an eroticized paranoid double’ (1985/2016: 186, 107).

The sword fight and its accompanying (and unnecessary) banter displays a union between ‘two potent male figures locked in an epistemologically indissoluble clench of will and desire’ (Sedgwick, 1985/2016: 187). Each man has a clear opportunity to kill the other and chooses not to. Hentzau draws attention to Rassendyll’s performative function, beginning the sequence with ‘well, if it isn’t the play actor’ and ending with ‘au revoir play actor’ as he jumps into the moat. At the beginning of the sequence, Rupert has a gun, but allows himself to be talked out of using it as Rassendyll flirtatiously asks for a cigarette and a light. The phallic gun is replaced by the cigarette and then the sword, echoing the familiar cinematic post-coital tradition.



Figure 47. Dramatic climax of *The Prisoner of Zenda*. Rassendyll and Hentzau.

As they move, they talk with an odd sort of intimacy, as Hentzau brags about his lack of gentlemanly principles and Rassendyll tells him about his experiences ‘on the playing-fields of Eton’ and in ‘her majesty’s Coldstream Guards.’ These institutions are no more than British ‘real Ruritania’s’, the homosocial worlds in which both characters are most comfortable. In a coded conversation, sexual desire passes between them through mention of the princess as transactional woman. Hentzau says,

Your golden-haired goddess will look good in black, Rassendyll. I'll console her for you. Kiss away her tears.

Following this, the exchange becomes increasingly physical and the two men become indistinct from each other. At one point the camera follows their shadows. In this shadow fight both men seem to have angel wings, they have become one being split into two - or, including shadows - four. Rassendyll observes, 'Bad tempered fellow, aren't you?' then, tacitly admitting to their attraction by adding - 'underneath the charm.'



Figure 48. The swordfight.

The crossing of swords and increasing energy of their movement, as one than another gets the upper hand, results in a physical tussle, where Rupert pins Rassendyll to the floor.



Figure 49.



figure 50

The final physical and horizontal movement of the final sequence is in sharp contrast to the final scene between Rassendyll and the princess, where they barely touch but he kneels to receive her hand on his head as if she were a priest blessing him. The final fight with Rupert (from which, despite their declarations of murderous intent, they both emerge largely unhurt, takes place in Zenda castle's winding gothic staircases and medieval corridors, secretrooms, winding staircases and dark dungeons that symbolize transgressive desire. In contrast, Rassendyll finds Flavia in a light, bright airy high-ceilinged room where she talks to him of duty and self- sacrifice. The duality of his bisexuality is reflected in the atmospheric staging of these meetings. The attraction to the male is gothic and dark, yet physical and stirring, whilst the attraction to the female is spiritual, a sort of courtly love that does not require physical consummation.



Figure 51. Rassendyll says farewell to the Princess.

This contrast between the physical contact between men and the lack of contact between women and men is another aspect of the homosocial connection that underlies the narrative. As in other of Colman's movies, relations between men are more natural, intense and even physical than their relationships with women. In the fantasy land of military men, Ruritania, women are the final objects of the adventure, but they offer a less satisfying erotic connection than is formed between men. The homosocial context with all of its layers of male-male relations offers a wealth of imagery and 'Ruritanian campness' that manages to suggest off screen queerness, whilst also masculinizing the queer Other.

### **(iii) Living in The Lost Horizon**

Ronald Colman's cycle of 1930s films about romantic – usually colonial- Englishmen comes to a climax in 1937 in Frank Capra's version of *Lost Horizon*. The film was an adaptation of British writer James Hilton's first bestseller, written in 1933, which used a fantasy land to express a weariness with war and to propose the construction of a new world order. It creates a fantasy land that has as much of a cultural resonance as Ruritania, in the East-meets-West Utopia of Shangri-La. Capra and his writers were very aware of the alarming changes in the situation in Europe since the rise of fascism in Germany, so the film added to the legend that had been begun in Hilton's post the First World War novel's vision of peace. It was a hugely ambitious project, involving a budget of over \$2 million dollars, a vast cast and a team of highly skilled technicians (Craven, 2018: 176).

Shangri-La, the setting, has been assimilated into popular culture as, according to the Oxford English Dictionary,

A Tibetan utopian James Hilton's novel *Lost Horizon* (1933), frequently used as the type of an earthly paradise or a place of retreat from the worries of modern civilization (Thompson, Fowler and Fowler, 1996:1331).

Perhaps it does not need to be added that the setting of Shangri-La is both colonial and patriarchal, that the narrative makes assumptions about western men and their right to rule



over 'natives' and women. The story clearly sets up the West, its art, literature, music and antiques as superior and there is a clear hierarchy that puts western men at the top, with women and 'natives' lower down the order. Within the narrative, male self-discovery is foregrounded and homosocial relationships take precedence. Unusually for films starring Colman in his heyday, there is a supernatural aspect to the story, as the city offers long life and healing from all disease.

Capra's Shangri-La, from our first glimpse, gives an example of the Gothic sublime. Shots that set up the arrival of the strangers into the valley create a backdrop of juxtaposed Himalayan majesty and modernist architecture of the lamasery sitting before a reflective pool.



Figure 52.  
Shangri-La



Figure 53. The lamasery.

The sense of awe felt by the characters is shared by the audience. It recalls the words of Edmund Burke on the Sublime:

The passion caused by the great and sublime in *nature*, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror (Burke,1757/1844: 72).

There is both a sense of familiarity and unfamiliarity, again recalling a sense of the uncanny, echoing Freud's words,

As, for instance, when one is lost in high altitudes, caught, we will suppose, by the mountain mist, and when every endeavour to find the marked or familiar path ends again and again in a return to one and the same spot, recognisable by some particular landmark (2016:11).

And, as so often with the sublime, there is a sense created within the narrative of the film, of an uncanny rediscovery of how humanity might fit into a wider context. Yet inside the lamasery is a Cowardian world furnished in antiques where men in decadent dressing gowns discuss great philosophies and ideas. The East offers a sublime setting, then, for masculine western aestheticism, where a man might be accepted and grow.

The film follows two pairs of men, exploring the effect on them of the soothing atmosphere of Shangri-La. Robert Conway and his brother George (John Howard) are set up in contrast with each other. George is impetuous and impatient whilst Robert is calm. Both are well educated Englishmen working in the diplomatic service in the East. The other two men are

teacher/paleontologist Lovett or 'Lovey' (Edward Everett Horton) and plumber turned con-man Barnard /'Barney' (Thomas Mitchell). Relationships between the two male couples are highlighted in the film, with Shangri-La functioning as a benevolent backdrop for their progression.

As George and Robert Conway become increasingly antagonistic to one another, Lovett and Barnard become closer. From the first, Lovett feels the uncanniness of Shangri-La, writing in his diary that the place is 'too mysterious', but he comes to find that the mystery is something that offers him acceptance and an opening of a closet that had held him. Barnard, however, used the word 'magic', seeing the possibility immediately of something that the real world could not offer. As the confident Barnard pursues Lovett, Lovett transforms from a nervous and jumpy repressed homosexual into a free-spirited man who is comfortable in his own skin. Their relationship acts as a foil to the crumbling, troubled alliance between George and Robert as one of them perceives only evil in Shangri-La whilst the other feels that he has found his home. This contrast reveals the world of possibilities that exist in the duality of the *unheimlich/heimlich*.

Dialogue between Lovey and Barney soon after their arrival at the lamasery clearly implies their growing interest in each other. Following their first meal at the lamasery, Barnard invites Lovett to join him,

Barnard: How about you Lovey? Come on. Let's you and I play a game of ... honeymoon bridge.

Lovett: Be quiet I'm thinking

Barnard: Thinking? Or double solitaire.

Lovett: As it happens, I'm very good at double solitaire.

Barnard: Come on then, Toots.

Barney recognises Lovett's sexuality from the start, feminising him with terms of affection, 'Lovey', 'Sister' and 'Toots.' Barney's proficiency at 'double solitaire' seems to have a sexual undercurrent as it indicates intimacy, a game meant just for two. Although, unlike Lovett, he does not show the easily recognizable signs of 'pansy' homosexuality, (thereby presumably avoiding the censure of the censors), Barnard is clearly coded as gay – but not effeminate.

Later in the film he calls a male servant 'Handsome' and when his companions persuade him to drop his mask and tell them something about himself, he says he will 'let down his hair', a term commonly used in the thirties by gay men to mean telling the truth about their sexuality (Chauncey, 1994:6). In a later scene Barney asks Lovett if he has ever been arrested by the police - he could be referring to the illegality of homosexual practices back in 'civilisation', as Lovey's fussy, effeminate portrayal by popular 'fussbudget' actor Everett Horton codedly made his gayness clear. It is no surprise in the final stages of the film that Lovey and Barney want to stay in Shangri-La where they are accepted rather than return to the world they had known before. The mystery and uncanniness of the place has been revealed as essentially benign. This is reinforced by the *mise-en-scene* in the ways that male characters are costumed.



Figure 54. Lovey and Barney.

'Look what they put me in!' cries Lovey in despair, when he emerges in what seems to be a quilted dress, but Barney is unphased. He too is in Eastern clothes, although he wears trousers and a silk shirt. When they leave the lamasery dining room to play 'double solitaire', they are framed in the doorway, a pair who are no longer 'solitary', their bodies close together as they talk.



Figure 55

The relationship between Robert and George is set up in contrast to this as problematic, to illustrate that Shangri-La causes confusion to some masculine types. In a parallel scene to the one between Lovey and Barney after the first dinner, Robert and George sit on a dark patio and discuss the situation. George is edgy and uncomfortable, whilst Robert is thoughtful. They are dressed in a similarly complimentary way, as with the other same-sex couple.



Figure 56. George and Robert.

Robert: George. Cigarette?

George: Thanks. I suppose all of this comes under the heading of adventure?

Robert (*laughs*) Well, there's been plenty of it the last few days (*lights George's cigarette*)

George: It's far from over from what I can see. This place gives me the creeps. Hidden away like this, no contact with civilisation. Why you don't seem concerned at all.

Robert: Oh, I'm feeling far too peaceful to be concerned about anything. I think I'm going to like it here.

George: You talk as though you intended staying.

Robert: Something happened to me when we arrived here George and, well, did you ever...

George: (*becoming emotional*) What are you talking about?

Robert: I don't know...

George: You're a strange bird. No wonder Gainswood calls you the man who always wanted to see what was on the other side of the hill.

Robert: Don't you ever want to see what's on the other side of the hill?

George: (*gets up embarrassed and walks away*) What else could there be except another hill? It's not even that I'm not curious. But at the moment it seems to me that we ought to be concerned about getting home. I'd give anything to be in London right now.



Figure 57. The brothers discuss Shangri-La.

The way the brotherhood between the two characters is depicted is interesting. The question of what Robert might be referring to when he talks about the 'other side of the hill' might be seen as a sexual invitation - had they not been brothers. This has been altered from the novel, where the men are close friends rather than relations (Hilton, 1933/2015: 19).<sup>55</sup> In the novel, Conway's travelling companion is a character called Mallinson, who, like George, has the function in the plot as cynic and 'other half' from whom Conway inexplicably cannot be separated. In the novel Hugh Conway travels with his friend Mallinson, to whom he is 'strongly and somewhat unaccountably attached' (Masuzawa, 1999: 554). In the novel, Mallinson and Conway form a homosocial triangle with one transactional woman, a local girl, who is translated into two European women for the film, thereby avoiding the possibility of mixed-race romance. The reasons for Conway's trauma is made more explicit in the book, as Mallinson says to him, 'They said you'd been blown up in the War, and you'd been queer at times ever since', whilst Conway admits to the High Lama,

There's not a great deal of mystery about it. That part of me which seems old to you was worn out by intense and premature experience. My years from nineteen to

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<sup>55</sup> Mallinson is the name of Conway's young companion in the novel. 'Conway had six months of his company and had grown to like him' (Hilton, 1933/2015: 19).

twenty-two were a supreme education, no doubt, but rather exhausting (Hilton, 1933/2015:159).

The central desire for peace in *Lost Horizon*, then, can be traced to war trauma. This is evident in an early scene on the plane when drunken Robert tells a bemused and horrified George of his dreams for world peace but admits he would be 'slapped straight in the asylum' if his views became known. George's attitude reveals that he is very much of the mindset that would brand Robert as a madman for his pacifism.

Robert's relationship with Shangri-La is from the start a harmonious one. Whilst Lovett and Barnard change over time as they discard the trappings of the civilized world, Robert is comfortable in the hidden city from the start. He feels it is where he belongs; he feels a sense of uncanniness, a sort of *déjà vu* 'that the present reality has a double' and that this double comes from his subconscious (Royle, 2003: 183). Chang (HB Warner) reinforces this when he expresses surprise at Conway's reaction to Shangri-La, because 'you have dreamed and written so much about better worlds. Or is it that you fail to recognise one of your own dreams when you see it?'

The High Lama also says this is where he belongs:

You may not know it, but I've been an admirer of yours for a great many years. Oh, not of Conway the Empire builder and public hero. I wanted to meet the Conway who in one of his books said, 'there are moments in every man's life when he glimpses the eternal.' That Conway seemed to belong here.

Throughout the film Conway seems to be remembering or half remembering something that makes Shangri-La familiar. He tries to explain it to Sondra,

Robert: I can't quite explain it but everything is somehow... familiar. The very air I breathe. The lamasery with its feet rooted in the good earth and this fertile valley while its head explores the eternal. All the beautiful things I see. Those cherry blossoms. You. All seem somehow familiar. [...]

Sondra: Perhaps because you've always been a part of Shangri-La without knowing it.

Robert: I wonder.

Sondra: I'm sure of it. Just as there's a wish for Shangri-La in everyone's heart.

Robert: You know, when we were on that plane, I was fascinated by the way its shadow followed it. That silly shadow. Racing along over mountains and valleys

covering 10 times the distance of the plane. And still, always there to greet us with outstretched arms when we landed. And I've been thinking that somehow you're that plane and I'm that silly shadow. And all my life I've been rushing up and down hills, leaping rivers, crashing over obstacles, never dreaming that one day that beautiful thing in flight would land on this earth and in my arms.

Robert Conway is drawn to this place where there was no crime or punishment, where there is moderation in all things. He is fascinated by Chang's explanation:

We rule...with moderate strictness and in return we are satisfied with moderate obedience. As a result our people are moderately honest, moderately ... er chaste. And, er, somewhat more than moderately happy.

It seems as if the film is self-consciously promoting the setting of Shangri-La as particularly ideal for a variety of types of western men. Whilst it suits Lovey and Barney, clearly at the end of the homosocial spectrum where homosexuality is possible, it also suits Robert Conway, whose heterosexuality is of a conventional English type. He asks Chang how the inhabitants of the valley handle romantic involvements:

Robert: You have no disputes over women?

Chang (*stammers*): Only very rarely. You see, it would not be considered good manners to take a woman that another man wanted.

Robert: Suppose somebody wanted her so badly that he didn't give a hang if it was good manners or not?

Chang (*looks confused*): Well, in that event, it would be good manners on the part of the other man . . . er...to let him have her.

Robert: Well, that's very convenient. I think I'd like that.

*Robert sees Sondra.*

Robert: Some man had better get ready to be very courteous to me.

The assumption throughout this dialogue is that women are possessions of men and have no say in who they belong to. Even the character of Sondra, who seems to be strong and opinionated when we see her, accepts that she is not the heir to her 'father's role as High Lama, but she needs a man to take on this function.

As the story progresses, we see Conway, like Lovett and Barnard usually wearing Eastern clothes whilst George is seen alongside him in his original Western garb.





Figure 58. The disagreement.

George does not listen to Robert but persuades him to leave the valley even when he makes it clear that this will break his brother's heart. George insists the place is evil, and declares, he wishes he could fly over Shangri-La and 'drop a bomb on it'. The message of the film, the appeal for peace at this point in history is an interesting one. George, the antagonist, is also the war monger. He cannot cope with the freedom offered in Shangri-La, finally going mad and committing suicide in the Himalayas.

The film uncannily both predicts and dreads the next war in its wistful desire for peace, harmony, for a world in which excess and crime are unheard of. But the opening words of the film have already given us its coda, in a rhetorical question and the turning pages of a book,

In these days of wars and rumours of wars – haven't you ever dreamed of a place where there was peace and security, where living was not a struggle but a lasting delight?

(page turns) Of course you have. So has every man since time began. Always the same dream. Sometimes he calls it Utopia – sometimes the fountain of youth – sometimes merely 'that little chicken farm'

(page turns) One man had such a dream and saw it come true. He was Robert Conway – England's 'Man of the East' – soldier, diplomat, public hero.

But Shangri-La's lack of passion and excess implies a life half lived. One critic wrote of the novel that '(a)mnesia, hypnotic somnolence and the state of being slightly drugged are the defining themes of *Lost Horizon*' (Masuzawa, 1999: 551). This sense of an uncanny lack of life is seen in a de-masculinisation of the men and a promotion of a popular idea of Eastern mysticism and an idealization of colonialism (ibid).

As Ruritania reveals above all the supposed superiority of the British culture, showing the Balkan Europe to be childish and simplistic (Goldsworthy: 1998:76), so Shangri-La gives a classic view of the East as essentially dual. Tomoko Masuzawa wrote of the novel's influence on the 'Mythos Tibet':

Such a fantastically positive, idealized notion of a foreign society – which, for that very reason, is made to serve as a mirror image of, and possibly a panacea to, many of the ills of contemporary Western or Western-dominated nations—could be just as detrimental to the welfare of the people associated with those fantasies (Tibetans in this case) and ultimately just as irresponsible and offensive as the other, perhaps more familiar, thoroughly negative images of the non-West as benighted nations of despots, savages and cannibals (Masuzawa, 1999: 542).

The mystery of the exoticized Other is evident in the portrayal of Shangri-La as a peaceful patriarchal and hierarchical structure, where locals seem to form the picturesque backdrop that works with the mountains and lamasery for the real drama involving the European/American interlopers. This too is a type of 'imaginative colonisation' as Conway, the archetypal Hollywood Englishman in the form of Ronald Colman, is destined to be the next patriarchal ruler and 'Father' of the city. It is taken for granted that this place is an especially masculine dream, as the opening words had hinted this is for the 'everyman' of the inter war period, 'wars and rumours of wars' are unsettling, especially for the post First World War generation of men like Colman/Conway.

As Nazism built its hold in Europe, writer James Hilton looked towards the exoticized East for spiritual regeneration and peace, an escape from 'the fiendish efficiency of the progressive West' to the 'languid wisdom of the timeless East' (Masuzawa, 1999: 545). Hollywood, later in the same decade, itself colonized the idea, infusing it with a visual uncanniness that merged western and eastern imagery. Seen in retrospect as a popular, 'lighter, sunnier' version of *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad, 1899), *Lost Horizon* looked into the heart of the human - (male) - condition and offered a peaceful life that avoided excess (Masuzawa, 1999:546). Whilst Kurtz in Conrad's novel saw only 'horror', Robert Conway saw a long life lived, ruling in wisdom in a half-existence that might not offer intense joy but which also - most importantly - swerved conflict and war. As life had been lived with too

much intensity during the war years, the male protagonist of *Lost Horizon* looked to British colonies' appropriation of convenient aspects of the East to deal with shell-shock. As in *Random Harvest*, Hilton's later exploration of post war male trauma, Hollywood saw Ronald Colman, with his faraway eyes and sense of having experienced pain, as the conveyor of the uncanniness of this story.

The name of the lead character was changed from Hugh to Robert Conway - possibly to promote the part as being close to Ronald Colman's own character. His daughter observed,

It was Ronald Colman stepping into his own image. Not only did Robert Conway fit the public image of Colman, he was also the embodiment of a great deal of Colman's character: his idealism, mystique, intelligence, stubbornness... They had a great deal more in common than the initials of their names. Ronnie effortlessly expanded the role of Conway by opening doors within himself (Colman, 1975: 168).

This strong identification of Colman with the role was reinforced in advertisements and fan magazines. Capra himself said that 'I could see only one person in the role of Conway and that was Colman' which might explain why the name of the protagonist was changed from Hugh in the novel to Robert (Colman, 1975: 169). In an article in *Motion Picture* magazine, Gladys Hall wrote 'I knew that, as I watched him in *Lost Horizon* I was not watching Ronald Colman playing Robert Conway (initials the same) but Ronald Colman playing himself' (*Motion Picture*, June 1937: 31). She reports Colman as saying,

I wish I might find a Shangri-La . . . Wherever love, work, health and peace of mind are found there is your Shangri-La. I wish I could be taken there, forcibly, as in *Lost Horizon* (ibid).

A long way from Shangri-La, the final act of Ronald Colman's career brought him his most acclaimed performance in modern day *noir*, *A Double Life* (Cukor, 1947). In this film, in his role as actor Anthony John, Colman finally broke away from his English gentleman persona to play a Broadway actor possessed by the jealous spirit of Othello. Colman's character's identity crisis is shown through duplication, as his face appears in mirrors, advertising

posters and in a portrait. The first time we see him, he follows one image of himself – the advertising poster for his play which is being carried through the theatre door – and comes to rest in front of a portrait of him that hangs in the lobby. He is double framed.



Figure 59. Anthony John, double framed, *A Double Life*.

When he contemplates playing the part of Othello, he stands before a mirror and places the earring on his ear to see how it looks, in a distinctly feminine gesture. Later, in a moment of identity insecurity, dishevelled in a very unColmanesque way, he pulls down his tie as the viewer catches a glimpse of his reflection in a mirror.



Figure 60. Preparing to play Othello.



Figure 61. The trance before the murder.

The film's advertising poster presented two Colmans, one as Othello, one as Anthony John, the moody, craggy faces of a man who is dual by being both black and white:



figure 62

Colman as Othello appears in black shadow to emphasise his role as racial Other, whilst the gold of his earring, together with a beard draws attention to a gender that is tantalisingly non-binary. The fragmenting and splitting of Anthony John's identity has been interpreted as an expression of director George Cukor's Jewish queerness, and a representation of the way he 'passed' as both heterosexual and 'white' (Helford, 2013:116). As the themes that had bubbled below Colman's screen persona exploded and overflowed, however, there seemed to be no protest in the fan magazines, but general approval. It was *A Double Life* that would deservedly bring Colman his only Oscar (Quirk, 1977: 238).

Fan magazines in the late 1940s were concentrating on the younger stars, but Louella Parsons described in some detail the lavish party given for Colman's Oscar by his agent Nat Wolfe and his wife Edna Best (*Modern Screen*, June 1948:7). In the same edition an article purporting to be by Prince Michael Romanoff 'Prince of all Restaurateurs', extolled Colman's long career, his 'quiet, exemplary sort of British life':

Ronnie has avoided newspapermen and headlines as a fox avoids the hounds; he never double dates with Peter Lawford or Linda Christian; he has never been involved in a paternity case except with his wife (14).

*A Double Life* was Colman's last leading role in film, although his radio and television career would give him some interesting and varied roles.

### **3 Conclusion: The Mirror Man**

Colman's significance in creating Hollywood Englishness is undeniable. From the moment he opened his mouth in *Bulldog Drummond*, he gave America the English hero they had been waiting for. One British article mused on his voice:

Regarding American criticism of some English voices, he (Ronald Neame, film producer) had long discussions with Greer Garson, Ronald Colman and Herbert Marshall, whose speaking is liked by Americans. These artists have evolved what they termed a 'mid-Atlantic' language, which is described as 'essentially as spoken by cultured Englishmen except that more emphasis is given to vowels (*The Guardian*, Thursday, December 21, 1944).

After his death of acute emphysema in 1958, aged 67, Ronald Colman was described as 'veteran British-born actor who has been among the top film stars for three decades', and the weakness in his lungs was attributed to 'fibrosis of the lung dating back to a pneumonia attack during World War 1' (*Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 1958: 1). In the end, as for many damaged survivors, it was his Great War experience that brought about his death.

One of Colman's British obituaries called him 'The Most British of the Film Stars' and acknowledged both his unfashionableness and his significance in terms of the international perception of Britishness:

Not all stars are great actors, and Ronald Colman could not be described as a great actor. His range was limited. To the cynical view some of his younger compatriots his style might seem to have come perilously near to being an Americanised caricature of the typical Englishman. It was, however, a style that epitomised elegance, calmness, understatement, and good manners, and it was the achievement of Ronald Colman, more than of anyone else, that on the screens of the world, Britishness should be regarded as being typified by such qualities (*Manchester Guardian*, May 28, 1958:3).

These obituaries admitted Colman's importance and acknowledged his significance as the archetypal romantic English gentleman of the screen, who pioneered a particular style that was to become a pattern to be emulated. Yet, as I have shown, beneath this gentlemanly exterior lay a less than homogenic identity, as 'Ronnie' Colman expressed a masculinity that could be attractive, damaged or feminised. If he expressed Otherness and queerness, it was of a type that was not 'sissy' or 'nance', but had its own strength and power. Colman's persona in Hollywood, as chief representative of an effete and gentlemanly nation, allowed for the possibility of suffering and of deviation from gendered and sexual norms. The explicit Gothic masculine that emerged in *A Double Life*, would also appear in his TV and radio work, most memorably in *The Man Who Walked Out on Himself* (Florey, 1957), where Cameron's (Colman) moralistic, autonomous reflection shows distinct disapproval when he chooses to walk out on his wife for a young mistress. The name and the debonair charm of the character clearly evoke the real Colman, whilst the tongue-in-cheek comic 'split' references his performance as Anthony John. The Gothic duality encapsulated in a number of images reproduced in this chapter, of a traumatised, dissociated Ronald Colman-looking-at-Ronald-Colman, was a motif that emerged over and over. Colman may have been the gentleman of the cinema, but in his haunted mirror, he was damaged and transgressive.

In the next chapter, I will be exploring the cinematic representations of his fellow 'lady from hell', Ronald's friend and colleague, Basil Rathbone.

### Chapter 3 Glamorous Masculinity, Double Dealing Villainy: Basil Rathbone

Prince Hal. Oh, that magical Prince Hal, the most beautiful male I have ever laid eyes upon. His profile was that of a god, his figure pure Olympiad, his voice the most beautiful instrument I had yet heard, and even his name suggested the utmost in glamorous masculinity – Basil Rathbone (Laurence Olivier, autobiography).

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, I rode down some children and killed them. I have beaten little Freddie Bartholemew. In *Anna Karenina* I gave Greta Garbo the heave-o out of the house. In another picture I made friends with a very nice old lady, and then, having won her confidence, stole all of her paintings and murdered her, to boot. In still another picture as the butler of a huge home, I made all other servants pay me ten percent out of their meager wages and when one old chap begged me not to take the percentage, because his wife had to go to hospital for an operation, I said, falsetto-key ‘That does not interest me. Hand over the money’. I have been a cad and a bounder, a sinister, skulking villain who has forced unwelcome attentions upon Garbo, Colbert, Sigrid Gurie, Loretta Young, Olivia DeHavilland. I am public enemy No 1, an offense to decent nostrils, and I am fed up with it. I’d like to lead a respectable life on the screen. (Basil Rathbone in *Photoplay*, August 1938:28).

South African born Englishman, Basil Rathbone, followed the path – like his fellow ‘ladies from hell’ - of travelling to Hollywood films via ‘legitimate’ theatre (Rathbone, 1962/1995: 40-41). Even before the First World War, Rathbone had been a leading light in his cousin, Sir Frank Benson’s company (Rathbone, 1962/1995: 39). Following the war, he played the Stratford-upon-Avon Summer Festival (1919), taking on a number of juvenile leads (Jessen, n.d.: n.p). In 1920 he had tremendous success in *Peter Ibbetson* at the Savoy theatre in London’s West End, where ‘in one night I was launched from obscurity into the limelight of unlimited adulation’ (Rathbone, 1962/1995: 44). Rathbone went on to conquer Broadway in 1923 in Ferenc Molnar’s ‘adult fairy-tale’ *The Swan*, becoming a transatlantic stage star (Rathbone, 1962/1995: 71).

Basil Rathbone on screen, however, despite his stage origins, was no mere leading man. Whilst matinee idols like former compatriots Ronald Colman and Herbert Marshall found themselves defined and confined by their own good looks, Rathbone was to become most inescapably dual in his typecasting. He would become known as Hollywood’s most iconic Sherlock Holmes and as cinema’s most intelligent and ruthless Gothic villain. In these two guises Rathbone would appear over and over again in the forty-year span of his career. In this chapter, I will explore the fan magazine discourse that surrounded Rathbone and some of his key roles in film.

#### 1 Fan Magazine Basil: Two Profiles Stuck Together



In the early talkie period, Rathbone appeared in roles similar to those played by Herbert Marshall and Ronald Colman, in drawing room melodramas and Wildean comedies.<sup>56</sup> A 1939 article, 'He Resents Being Typed', gives an account of Rathbone's view of this phase of his career:

Several years ago I came to pictures after appearing as the gay and amorous military attaché in the stage play *The Command to Love* and the producers could only see me in bedroom farces and frothy comedies. I was heartbroken, so went back to the theatre where I created a number of interesting roles in London and New York. Then when I return to Hollywood, four years later, behold I am a menace, a villain!  
(*Picture Play*, July 1936: 54)

This Jekyll-like transition demonstrated Rathbone's versatility. Although good looking, Rathbone's face was not the fashionable style in Hollywood. Fan magazines would comment on his striking facial features, particularly his 'dark, intense' eyes and his classical profile.<sup>57</sup> One reported in November 1936 that,

Basil Rathbone has such a two-sided face that when he plays heavies they always shoot him from the hard side, and when he plays romantic heroes they shoot from the other in all profiles (*The New Movie Magazine*, November, 1938: 98).

This concept that Basil's face has a 'hard' or 'soft' side is intriguing. Although many stars' faces famously had a more photogenic side, this attribution of binary morality to sides of the face takes the idea further. In another interview, and in his autobiography, Rathbone told the story of how Mrs Patrick Campbell, the British stage star once referred to him as 'two profiles stuck together', then qualifying it she added 'I take it back. You look like a folded umbrella taking an elocution lesson' (*Photoplay*, October 1952: 6; Rathbone, 1962/1995: 92). His patrician features were unusual in the world of Hollywood but following his memorable performance as Mr Murdstone in *David Copperfield* (Cukor, 1935), doors opened.

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<sup>56</sup> Examples include: *The Last of Mrs Cheyney* (Franklin, 1929), *A Notorious Affair* (Bacon, 1930), *The Flirting Widow* (Seiter, 1930), *The Lady of Scandal* (Franklin, 1930).

<sup>57</sup> Some examples: Rathbone's 'dark eyes' he is the 'romantic type' (*Motion Picture Magazine*, July 1936: 74). 'His glowing dark eyes and his intensity' (*Picture Play* July 1936: 54). 'Over six feet tall, with flashing black eyes and a real profile', (*Screenland*, November 1929: 32).

There was much excitement - and some trepidation - about the cinematic possibilities of talking pictures in the 1920s, when Rathbone first arrived in Hollywood (Sarris, 1968/1996: 6). This was a period when many trained stage actors moved west and some sense of rivalry was created between the old guard and the new arrivals (*Photoplay*, April 1930: 45). Snobbery about high and low culture permeated assumptions that theatre actors raised the standards of film acting and added class (*Photoplay*, April 1939: 55). Rathbone's stage success made him one of the most high-profile of the immigrants. In 1926, *Photoplay* reported that Rathbone was,

one of the highest paid of the stage players now in pictures. His salary is reputed to be \$2500 weekly. It is very much of a question whether he will stay in Hollywood permanently because there is genuine demand for his services before the footlights at a high salary (July 1926: 52).

Magazines trumpeted the 'Broadway Invasion of Hollywood', and asked, 'Are the Stage actors Stealing the Screen?', concluding:

What does the record book say?

It shows - in plain black figures - that the stage actors have been winning along the line [...]

They have the edge these stage people who crossed the desert to find the pot of gold. And they're winning bout by bout, for two potent reasons.

One is social. One is business.

Hundreds of young stage actors came whooping in. In their jeans were six-month contracts, and in the fading theater that's not an engagement - it's a career. They looked about. Beaches, bungalows, golf courses and sunshine met their delighted eyes. No more stuffy New York apartments! Homes of their own, with posies in the front yard and tennis courts in the rear [...]

Basil Rathbone is at the center of a social swirl that's 'a bit more tailcoat' (*Photoplay*, April 1930: 45).

Magazine writers enthusiastically praised Rathbone's talents, using his stage stardom to raise his profile. Initially he was sold, like Colman, as an exotic 'Great Lover' like those of the silent screen, as an extract from an article entitled 'Don Juan from Broadway: A 'Great Lover' of the stage Succumbs to the Screen' reveals:

Perhaps the talkie invasion has brought Hollywood no more interesting figure than the man who has been known for eight years as the 'Great Lover' of the stage.

Gilbert, Valentino, Novarro et al have all had their adherents among the followers of the screen. Stage devotees, however, have been unswervingly loyal to one man, Basil Rathbone.

Over six feet tall, with flashing black eyes and a real profile, Basil Rathbone has brought 'oohs' and 'ahhh's from his audience [...]

The silent pictures didn't intrigue Rathbone at all. Contracts from movie producers were sent back untouched. He continued to give his service as a lover exclusively to the stage.

Talkies came, however, and the highly capable Basil, with many others, succumbed. (*Screenland*, November, 1929).

When in the late thirties, producer David O Selznick brought Hitchcock, Laurence Olivier, Vivien Leigh and others to Hollywood, one *Photoplay* writer declared, 'New British Invasion hits Hollywood; sound stages reek with 'raw-hahs' as England's lads and lassies take over with a bang' (*Photoplay*, April 1939: 55). The association of Britishness with a certain sort of theatricality and high culture was partly what Selznick had been looking for to add cultural weight to his series of films based on literary classics.<sup>58</sup> Basil Rathbone was cast as the villain in each one, following his success as evil stepfather Mr Murdstone in *David Copperfield* (Cukor, 1935).

Although in a later period, Basil's wife would take centre stage in his fan magazine discourse, early in his career, *Hollywood* magazine had used Rathbone's willingness to collaborate with magazines to appear three times in its 'stars' own stories' feature. Four articles appeared, supposedly penned by Basil himself, one about his war experiences, another about his favourite dog, and another which described his experiences of playing Romeo.<sup>59</sup> These magazine accounts of his experiences served to increase interest in his own narrative. They emphasise his humanity, his domesticity, his life and theatrical experience. This focus on Rathbone would not last. The frequent appearance of Ouida Rathbone in fan magazines, and the ways in which the narrative about Basil kept being pushed back to her, seemed to diminish his star persona. His appearance with her in *her* photoshoots showed a man domesticated and controlled by his wife.

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<sup>58</sup> *David Copperfield* (Cukor, 1934), *Anna Karenina* (Brown, 1935), *A Tale of Two Cities* (Conway, 1935).

<sup>59</sup> *Hollywood* 'Stars' Own Stories': August 1935 'Parade of Shadows' (32), Nov 1936 'He was my Friend' (29), May 1936, 'Juliet's I have Known' (32).

Magazines would consider Basil in terms of his interest in clothes and fashions. A feature page on male fashion for beret wearing in *Picture Play* in November 1929 reported that Rathbone had had his beret imported from Paris:



figure 1

Most of the men featured on this page - Morgan Farley,<sup>60</sup> Conrad Nagel<sup>61</sup> and Edmund Lowe<sup>62</sup> - might have been seen as 'queer' or 'sensitive' types of men. Charles King, who was to become a character actor in westerns, had still only appeared in bit parts in some silent films and his masculine type was, at this point, undefined.<sup>63</sup> Rathbone's beret does not seem in this photograph to be visibly of any better quality than those of the other men but the narrative fits with the idea that he is 'a bit more tailcoat'. Offering these hats, usually worn by women, as a 'fad for golfers or college freshmen' seems to be hinting at a type of masculinity that might be deviant. Golf is a less strenuous sport than many, and the reference to 'college

<sup>60</sup> Morgan Farley was involved in the gay rights movement. Information on the website of the International Gay Information Center, NYC.

<sup>61</sup> Conrad Nagel took on roles as sensitive men, beginning with Laurie in *Little Women* (Knowles, 1918). His filmography contains very few, if any, 'alpha males'.

<sup>62</sup> Edmund Lowe was a popular supporting player in silent and early talking films. His marriage to Lilyan Tashman is one of a number that came to be considered posthumously a 'lavender' marriage (Fleming, 2005: 104).

<sup>63</sup> Katchmer, 2009: 189

freshmen' implies extreme youth. Rathbone's insistence on an imported Parisian beret makes him seem pretentious and dandified.

In the same year, the young dashing Rathbone was hailed as a style setter amongst Hollywood men:

Something is going to happen to the formal style of dress of men in Hollywood. It's in the air. The tuxedo and the full dress coat are beginning to pall upon the well-attired heroes of pictures when they are socially active. A hot summer in Southern California with wilting collars and shirts, has led to an open advocacy of the change and surprisingly as it may seem, Basil Rathbone and Ivan Lebedeff, two of the strictest adherents to Prince of Wales styles, are among leaders in the proposal. An agreement is being reached by these actors and an associated group for the discarding of conventional garb for the white Eton or pea jacket, at dinner dances. This jacket is like a full-dress coat, sans tails, and if adopted will cause an upheaval in movieland traditions. Also, like the toreador trousers of some years ago, it probably will be adopted by all the young sheiks, with results both grotesque and amusing. (*Picture Play*, 1929: 100).

Again, the wry comment aimed at 'all the young sheiks' was part of a much wider discourse about men in Hollywood, using a term associated with Rudolph Valentino, whose death three years before had clearly not been forgotten. The ironic tone of the piece and the hint at the end of the paragraph that this new way of dressing is in some sense vulgar, seems to rebound on Rathbone as a 'strict adherent' to style.

This is taken further in a feature article about 'tailor to the stars' Billy Watson, 'Suiting the Boys' (*Silver Screen*, February 1931: 58). The writer wryly notices that the suit-maker, in a queer touch, has a large painting of Rathbone above his desk (ibid). Rathbone proves to be one of Wilson's best customers (ibid). The journalist was shocked 'more or less in a coma induced by Mr Rathbone's extravagances', claiming that he had 'paid into the coffers of Watson and Son over \$7,000 for suits and overcoats alone. Not to mention his purchases of sundry shirts, hats and shoes, from other Hollywood Haberdasheries' (ibid). The tailor, with a portrait of Basil, his best customer, over his desk, is apparently displaying his homosexual attachment.

The fan magazine discourse that revolved around Basil Rathbone most consistently through the years, however, was about his attachment to his wife. Whilst other actors – and publicity

agents – tried hard to convince their public that the stars were, in some sense, ‘available’, Rathbone’s wife Ouida Bergère would nearly always be at the forefront of any story about her husband.

In 1926, Basil married American socialite divorcee Ouida Bergère.<sup>64</sup> Ouida had been married to director George Fitzmaurice and had worked briefly as an actress and screenwriter in Hollywood but gave it up supposedly to concentrate on Basil’s career (Rathbone, 1962/1995: 52). It is not known how much Rathbone knew about his wife’s real origins, but she had been born Eunie Branch in Little Rock, Arkansas, far from the glamorous European origin story she had formed for herself (Jessen, 2013: n.p.). Ouida always lived beyond her means, giving lavish parties and spending phenomenal amounts of money on luxuries.<sup>65</sup> According to the popular legend, Rathbone could never retire because of his wife’s expensive tastes (Jessen, 2013: n.p.). The Rathbones worked hard to give the media the impression that theirs was a long and happy marriage, although the truth was much less straightforward.<sup>66</sup>

There was an attempt by fan magazines early on in Basil’s career to build him up as a matinee idol in pin-up features. In this example from *Screenland*, July 1930, Rathbone appears in a moody, languid pose:

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<sup>64</sup> Rathbone had been married in England in 1916. His wife was Marion Foreman, an actress. With her he had a son, Rodion, born in 1917 (Jessen, 2019: n.p.).

<sup>65</sup> One comment on Rendell’s Rathbone blog commented, ‘I know many actors struggle, and not just late in life. My mother was an actress, I do know about the unpredictability it entails. Olivier worked bad films to pay for his kids’ education; Basil worked appalling films to put food on the table and support his wife and daughter who was ill. There is a difference. He was forced to borrow in order to live when he couldn’t get work. My father gave him money which he knew he would never get back and the loan was a pretence to help Basil’s pride’ (HRD, September 3, 2012: n.p.).

<sup>66</sup> Although they have not been published, there are letters in existence that prove that, in 1939, Rathbone had an intense and serious affair with Ida Lupino. When he was about to leave his wife, Ouida took an overdose of pills, so he did not go (Jessen, email, November 2020).

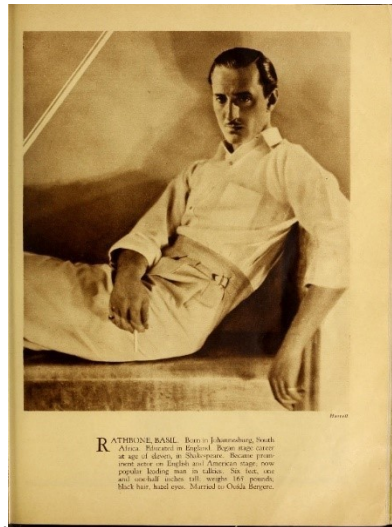


Figure 2. *Screenland*, July 1930.

The caption reads, ‘Six feet, one and one-half inches tall, weight, 165 pounds, black hair, hazel eyes. Married to Ouida Bergère’. This can give no other effect than of that of a label of ownership. Over successive years, Ouida’s ownership would become more and more unavoidable in the story of Basil. Once he started taking on villainous roles, however, Rathbone’s star status seemed to be diminished. Gossip columnist Ruth Waterbury silkily insinuated of Ouida that there was a reason for,

the downfall of her hope of becoming the outstanding social leader. Basil Rathbone is a charming, high salaried, educated, cultured gentleman and Ouida is a hostess of extraordinary charm and originality and talent. But Basil isn’t a star (*Photoplay*, August 1940: 18).

This is contradicted elsewhere, of course, notably in letters pages where fans enthused, as here in a letter entitled ‘Basil No Bad Man’:

It seems to me Hollywood is making a mistake in continually casting Basil Rathbone as a screen menace. The fact that he is such a good actor is certainly no reason for typing him. Although he has played every role from Pilate to a modern butler, his characters have all been black souled scoundrels. On the stage he played Romeo and Robert Browning, but when he went to Hollywood he was cast as the stony hearted Mr Murdstone in *David Copperfield*. And then, when *Romeo and Juliet* was filmed, was Mr Rathbone cast in the role he so well portrayed on the stage? No indeed! He was cast as Tybalt, the villain of course.

Since Mr Rathbone is really so attractive looking, and has such a charming manner and engaging voice, it is a shame that he isn’t given a role worthy of his talents—I am speaking of the hero’s part. Catherine Heathwole, Washington DC. (*Photoplay*, October 1936: 107).

Another letters page correspondent argued ‘Hollywood is gradually making one of the world’s most gifted romantic actors into the screen’s most hated bogeyman’ (Margaret A Connell, Des Moines, Iowa, *Motion Picture*, May 1937: 68). One columnist would begrudgingly maintain that Rathbone had ‘sex appeal for widows’, a patronizing comment that indicated that Basil’s admirers might be older, which again reveals the way that his looks were not of the type favoured in Hollywood (*Screenland*, April, 1938: 40). The confusion over Rathbone’s unexpected attractiveness comes about because he does not conform to the masculine ideal. The attraction of the Byronic villain is invariably confused by his ability to present and be amoral and cruel, and the female voice here longs to see her hero fit back into the leading man roles that he had taken when on stage.

As the 1930s progressed and Basil notched up an impressive list of screen villains, it is possible that his increasing feminisation in his films (which I will be exploring later) and his ongoing association with a stronger wife, made Ouida’s possessiveness a significant part of his fan discourse. Gossip columnists disapproved of Ouida’s ubiquity; for one film with a particularly stunning female star she ‘just about moved in on set [...] She always followed the procedure when there was a beautiful woman about’ (*Motion Picture*, May 1931: 30).

Another columnist wryly hinted that Rathbone might do better without her,

Basil Rathbone is a handsome and charming man. Ouida Bergère is his wife and part of her duties seems to be watching Basil. She spends the best part of every day on the set. Latest reports are that Basil is none too thrilled over this connubial diligence. (*Photoplay*, March 1930:115).

One gossip column reported that Rathbone wanted to buy out his contract at Universal as ‘he is unhappy with the parts he is being given. Ouida Bergère disapproved of the script for *The Command to Love*. She wrote what she believed was a better version’ (*Photoplay*, October 1930: 126):

Then hand in hand, she and husband Basil stormed the Universal fortress and demanded that her script be substituted for the Glazer one. A thoroughly unorthodox procedure. Universal, although eager to secure Rathbone’s services demurred. Rathbone insisted ‘love me love my wife.’ As we go to press it’s still raging. Someone



ought to whisper to Mr Rathbone that it is wise to keep one's career and one's domestic affairs in their separate spheres (ibid).

This 'love me love my wife', 'hand in hand' narrative had the effect of making the Rathbones appear foolish and arrogant, with Basil himself seeming to be taking the backseat to Ouida.

The couple became notorious for their elaborate extravagant parties, which built on the reputation Ouida had started as a New York hostess.

Mrs Basil Rathbone (Ouida Bergère) is rapidly becoming one of Hollywood's most prominent hostesses. A week never goes by without the Rathbone home being the scene of at least two elaborate parties (*The New Movie Magazine*, June 1930: 21).

Invariably star-studded events, Rathbone parties were often also costume masquerades with extravagant food and drink and even pyrotechnical special effects. In the summer of 1929, the magazines reported on the Rathbone's fourth wedding anniversary party, which was held at the Beverley Hills Hotel, 'quite the most gorgeous masquerade party ever held in Hollywood' (*Screenland*, August 1929: 26). Fan magazines carried photographs of every possible star at this party, and 'at the centre' were the Rathbones. 'She is a Spanish Grand Dame, he is in a turban type headdress', '(p)art of the masquerade involves taking on stereotypes Basil Rathbone looked just too sheikishly handsome in a sort of Russian peasant costume' (*Screenland*, August 1929: 6; *Picture Play*, August 1929: 22-23). In the accompanying photographs taken at this party, Rathbone stands at his wife's side as her consort. He seems to be a man whose function is to be at his wife's side wearing frills, satins and silks, as if he were an extension of herself. He also seems to be associating himself with an exotic racial Other, even at this stage in his career.



Figure 3. *Picture Play*, August 1929.

*Picture Play's* 'At Pleasure's Beck and Call', dedicates two full pages to photographs from the same Rathbone party (August 1929: 22-3). Rathbone stands awkwardly posing for photographs with Irving Thalberg and Norma Shearer and Ouida. It is no coincidence that there were always fan magazine photographers at these parties, they were always invited to come and photographs were taken so that Ouida could be seen surrounded by famous people (Jessen, 2016: n.p.). In these photographs, Rathbone appears in a feminine costume, in skirt-like cropped trousers tied with a silk sash, puffed sleeves and fur hat. Ouida's 'Spanish Grande Dame' in the necessary finery is layered in much fabric and decorated with jewellery. Here it is notable that the other – much more famous - couple photographed with them, the Thalbergs, appear in twinned masculine uniform, which indicates their effortless power. The contrast makes the Rathbones seem showy and insubstantial and - possibly at this stage in their career – a little desperate.

Other than the occasional mentions in gossip column throwaway comment photographs, Rathbone parties fell from fan magazine favour in this sample until the 1940s, when there seemed to be a revival of interest in them. He was making 4-5 films a year, including the hugely successful Sherlock Holmes series. In this era, *Photoplay*, which had been critical of Ouida on her arrival in Hollywood (as documented above), began to shower positive publicity on her. In August 1936 they devoted an article to 'Mrs Rathbone's Tea Service' (75), followed by the obsequious 'Love life of a Villain', which was mostly devoted to her

(August 1938: 15). In September 1939 'Who's Hollywood's Smartest Hostess', July 1939, 'The Rathbones are Entertaining' was an account of one of her parties. They added her to the list of 'the nicest women in Hollywood' declaring that she 'does more and with less fanfare than a lot of others' (June 1941: 108). This 'less fanfare' comment is quite extraordinary - and is possibly tongue in cheek - as Ouida's good works and skills as a hostess were constantly being fanfared across all of the fan magazines. No other star's non- acting partner seems to get this sort of attention. In August 1939, in fact, she had appeared in a *Silver Screen* article 'Secrets of a Hollywood Hostess,' where she blatantly appeared in four photographs on one page, with the various celebrities who attended her party. On the page opposite there is a large photograph of her and Basil again in feminine fancy dress (24-25):



Figure 4. Silver Screen, August 1939.

Some of these articles verge on the parodic in their expression of Bergère's need for attention. Presumably, though, the fan magazines found that to gain access to her star-studded parties, it was wise to keep Ouida on side.

*Time* magazine described Ouida's parties as 'a fulmination of her blood, a bounding along the veins, which eventually detonates in something pyrotechnic, exotic, ingenious and rare.' ('Folies Bergère', February 26, 1940: 15). In 'Secrets of a Hollywood Hostess', the writer reports that she 'reluctantly gives a report of her heartaches, worries and precautions in arranging an affair in Hollywood' (*Picture-Play*, August 1939: 77). Ouida's alleged 'reluctance' to organise a party can only be seen ironically in the light of her shameless self-promotion. In one of Ouida's star-studded events, she recreated 'A Night in St Moritz' complete with Alpine Village:

a glistening skating rink, a thrill-a-minute toboggan slide and perilous ski-jumps are not sights which regularly greet the eyes of Movietown citizens...with little trouble, she had enlisted the support of five major film studios, a costumer, a publicist, several florists and dozens of society and movie women who worked like fury for a month (*Modern Screen*, March 1940: 41).

One magazine writer claims 'we call her the rainmaker', again suggesting her need to create spectacle (*Modern Screen*, July 1940: 85). The motif of extravagance that had lurked beneath the stories about her parties, had become explicit. One account of the Alpine Village affair, which took place just a year before America entered the war, paints a picture of Ouida counting money:

'\$9,980... \$9,990... \$10,000' gurgled Ouida (Mrs Basil) Rathbone, as she patted the last ten-spot into place. 'Wasn't it a lovely evening?' Mrs Rathbone is guilty of an understatement. It had been a *terrific* evening. But her comment was none the less praiseworthy because the pile of greenbacks she happily fondled was not slated for her personal moneybags. Instead, her arithmetic completed, she wrapped the bills neatly and without a whimper, turned them over to Ann Lehr. Ann Lehr is Hollywood's Lady Bountiful and the head of an organization which administers aid to the town's needy (*Modern Screen*, March 1940: 41).

Somehow this vivid description of Ouida's 'gurgling' delight as she 'fondles' the money seems to eclipse the charitable uses of the funds. References to her 'own personal moneybags' add to a sense of entitlement. In the following month the same magazine printed a photograph of the Rathbones with the caption 'Basil Rathbone and his button-nosed Ouida arrive at a preview, accompanied by Mrs Rathbone's rich-looking jewels, mink and velvet' (*Modern Screen*, April 1940: 52). This clearly implies that the couple is showy and materialistic.

They also found themselves satirised in *Ghost Breakers* when Bob Hope's character, nervous in an 'old dark house', quips, on hearing thunder outside, 'Basil Rathbone must be giving a party' (Marshall, 1940). The Rathbones had become a standing joke.

Although there are few accounts of Ouida being actually employed during her marriage, one columnist reports that she had been employed as 'advisor for party sequences' on one of Rathbone's movies, *Rhythm on the River* (Schirtzinger, 1940) (*Modern Screen*, September 1930: 38). One fan magazine announced: 'Last year's most notable party thrower, Mrs Basil Rathbone, is no longer giving her elaborate affairs. She is devoting all her energies to war relief, although, as we have already seen, this usually involved organizing large parties so little had really changed' (*Modern Screen*, September 1940: 38).

With the new focus on the hardship that was inevitable in wartimes, fan magazines began to produce articles about homemaking and economising. Ironically, they turned to Ouida, Hollywood's most lavish party giver. Bergère's husband barely gets mentioned in 'To Make you Happier: How to be a Good Hostess and How to Be A Good Guest' (Adele Whiteley Fletcher, *Photoplay*, August 1941) or in 'How to be a Social Success by Ouida Bergère' (*Photoplay*, March 1942). Perhaps the most surprising feature of all, considering Mrs Rathbone's legendary expensive tastes were her suggested 'frugal recipes' 'for wartime living' (*Photoplay*, October 1944). Even in the most decadent corner of Hollywood, it seemed belts should be seen to be tightened for the war effort. Rathbone's appearance in photographs of Ouida in these articles, by her side or pouring the tea, makes him seem like a man who takes the back seat in his personal life.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Silver Screen*, August 1939, shows Basil pouring tea for Ouida in an article about her: 'Secrets of a Hollywood Hostess', (24). Also, he seems to be her assistant in a series of photographs in *Screenland* October 1944: 53.

*Photoplay's* 'Love Life of a Villain' used Basil to build up his wife's profile. They quote him calling her his 'secret', hyperbolically attributing her with tremendous power over him: 'without her I would be nothing. Without her I would be miserable. With her I am the happiest man in the world' (August 1938: 15). He describes his first meeting with her at a time when he still felt traumatized by his war experiences:

I suppose when you meet death daily for a long time you give up trying to order things. I came out of the war comparatively untouched. That is, I wasn't shell shocked or scarred up. But I had lost all sense of life's realities... Somehow I expected to be taken care of, as I had been in the army. I shrank from decisions. I never went after things I wanted. I hated any kind of battle or argument. I just wanted to be alone – to vegetate. I was completely negative. [...] I was still in this semi-helpless negative state when I married Ouida. She made me positive.' 'I'll never forget when I first saw her. Everything about her was definite. The way she looked, the way she talked she was completely opposite to me. I was indefinite. I fell in love with her on the spot. I have never fallen out of love (ibid).

The article revealed a man, traumatised by war experience, who had found a woman to heal and restore him. He explained that, 'for twelve years her career has been ... him ...' (ibid). The purpose of the article celebrating Ouida seemed to be partly to announce that she wanted to work again, now that she had made him a success: he was 'done' (ibid). '(H)e revealed how a woman had launched that career, steered it and secured it – at the sacrifice of her own' (ibid). Bergère was now preparing to relaunch herself into the world of work and Basil was preparing the way for her (ibid). This article is extraordinary in the way that it exposes Ouida's control over her husband. He is spoken of as a formless being before he met her. With utter abject self-abasement, she is the one he gives credit to for 'making' him. And, this article argues, now he is 'done', her work is complete. They have become the very template of the most famous Gothic story: he is her creature, she is his creator.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the Rathbone party discourse is the way that it spilled out into the real world. During the late thirties, a company called 'Movieland Tours' sold holidays in Hollywood that included meeting the stars, even promising visits to their houses. In a move that seems to substantiate the rumour that the Rathbones were always trying to get more money to fund their lifestyle, one tour advertisement that appeared in *Motion Picture* magazine April 1937 advertised 'Hollywood! Here we come! Spend your vacation on

OUR MOVIELAND TOURS and meet the STARS! You will be guests at Basil Rathbone's cocktail party held at his home (right) the Sunday you arrive'.

**PARAMOUNT PRESENTS**  
**MOVIELAND TOURS**  
 Meet the STARS!

The Gleasons (below) entertain you at their home (left) for another star cocktail party

Paramount and the Gleasons invite you to be guests on Movieland Tour

You will be guests at Basil Rathbone's cocktail party—held at his home (right) the Sunday you arrive in Hollywood

**Hollywood! Here We Come!**  
 Spend Your Vacation on OUR MOVIELAND TOUR—and Meet the STARS!

THE Movieland Tours of 1937 are on their way! And they'll be a glamorous, thrilling two weeks of sight-seeing that will be long remembered by those who participate! And all capped by an inside tour of the most famous spots in the world's most romantic city—HOLLYWOOD!

For a sum as small as \$5 you can reserve your place in the lucky group of fans who, for the price of railroad fare and excursions for any transportation desired, will be given a month's ride through the great American West and be taken through Hollywood's studios.

All you have to do to join this splendid party is to mail in your reservation and MOTION PICTURE will do the rest. The Northern Pacific takes you through the Bad Lands, the Rockies, the majestic Mt. Rainier National Park, Seattle, the great Pacific Northwest, the fascinating city of San Francisco with its golden gate and Christmas—and then Hollywood where you come face to face with the stars, share in their fun and watch them work before the camera.

On the way to Hollywood you travel on private trains, serviced de luxe for you especially. You can participate in sight-seeing trips on the Bay Bridge, mountainous parties at big hotels—then those long-awaited for days in the heart of Hollywood while you hobnob with your favorite stars.

THE first tour leaves Chicago over the Northern Pacific, July 11. The second tour leaves Chicago August 6. With identical entertainment plans arranged for star home parties on both trips only your convenience need dictate your choice of an acceptable date for your vacation.

Arrival of the first tour arrives in Hollywood Sunday, July 18. You will be quartered during your stay in the Hotel Clark, located in the heart of downtown Los Angeles' theatrical and shopping district close by Pershing Square, the city's best-known metropolitan park. The hotel is famed for its evening—Sunday morning is yours to enjoy as you wish whether it be a boat trip to Catalina, a motor ride along the ocean front, a visit of Balboa or Santa Monica, or a desert dash to Palm Springs. In the early afternoon there will be a tour of Hollywood.

In the late afternoon Basil Rathbone, the famous English star who did such a fine job of being in *Romeo and Juliet*, cordially invites you to a cocktail party at his beautiful home. Friends of celebrities will be there to help entertain you. On Sunday evening you are to be guests at the Gramercy Club Theatre, one of the show places of the nation. You'll see one of the new pictures.

Monday you will be taken to the Paramount studios (in the heart of Hollywood) for lunch and a [Continued on page 96]

**USE THIS COUPON**  
 Mr. W. F. Hagaman, Movieland Tour Manager,  
 Motion Picture Magazine,  
 200 North Michigan Boulevard,  
 Chicago, Illinois.

Whose obligation is my part, and me your complete, illustrated booklet describing the Movieland Tour.

I enclose \$\_\_\_\_\_ Please enter my reservation for \_\_\_\_\_

per week, to insure a place for me on tour No. \_\_\_\_\_

(A deposit of \$5 per person will hold my reservation. Please specify whether for tour No. 1, leaving Chicago July 11, or tour No. 2, leaving Chicago August 6.)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 5. Motion Picture, May 1937.

Another, from May 1937, 'All Aboard for Hollywood!' says, 'you will be feted by Basil Rathbone at his home' (13). There is a photograph of Basil with his dog in a large garden. The advertisement again invites readers to USE THIS COUPON to order the brochure, offering a rare opportunity to connect with the stars in person, and Rathbone's persona as host is used as a selling point. The possibility of experiencing the most famous hosts and the most extravagant home in Hollywood was offered tantalisingly to the fans.

Ouida would (inevitably enough) eventually enter the debate about Basil's style in an article entitled 'Why Change Your Man?' complaining about the lack of interest Basil takes in the gifts she gives him of dressing gowns.

'Basil' said Ouida, nimbly juggling tea-pot, lemon-or-cream, and conversation, 'is an ungrateful wretch. Every time there is the slightest excuse for it – birthdays, Christmas, travelling – I buy him a handsome dressing-gown. Really, he is magnificent in a good dressing gown.'

But do you know what he does with them? Leaves them hanging, still in the original tissue wrapping, in his wardrobe! .... guest for dinner....tired...Did he come downstairs regal in the magenta poplin from Sulka? He did not. The creature burst upon my vision in an old theatre wrapper, smeared with greasepaint over a pair of cotton pyjamas! ...Woman should learn the art of compromise (*Picture Play*, July 1938: 24).

This article both gives and takes away from Rathbone's purported manliness, as the controlling 'masculine' wife dresses her husband up like a doll in the article of clothing for men that really is closest to a dress. As I will show later in this chapter, Basil would be frequently seen in his movies in similar garments. She manages to reveal extravagant tastes and to show herself as being at the root of Rathbone's supposed sartorial concerns. The final line can only be ironic, as she does not actually suggest a possible compromise.

Another feature commented on the ringlets he wore for the part of Pontius Pilate in *Last Days of Pompeii* (*Screenland*, December 1935).



Figure 6. *Screenland*, December 1935.

Here Rathbone appears amongst 'men's men' Johnny Weissmuller, Clark Gable, Lionel Atwill and George Huston, and his blond curls stand out as less masculine than any of the others' longer, darker hair styles. During this period, Rathbone's roles in costume films lead



to his frequently feminised appearance in terms of hair, make-up and behaviour. This is most startlingly seen in this *Modern Screen* feature on *A Tale of Two Cities* from December 1935 where Rathbone appears as the Marquis de St Evremonde, with blond curls and beauty spot, more feminine than the female stars on the same page, and a stark comparison with Ronald Colman who retains his masculinity in this company, despite the wig:



Figure 7. *Modern Screen*, December 1935.

Away from his spouse, when Basil Rathbone gave interviews to magazines, he was pleasantly garrulous and forthcoming, and he would be asked about his screen villainy. Following his success in *David Copperfield* as Mr Murdstone, there was a spate of mentions across the magazines about how much he hated playing the part, especially having to beat child actor Freddie Bartholemew.<sup>66</sup>

‘When I saw the first rushes, I wanted to give it up. To this day I don’t know how they made me look so cruel. I hated the thought that I could look so cruel. I hated the whole damned thing from start to finish!’ He spoke with a kind of fierce intensity that seemed to relieve him of all his pent-up loathing. ‘I even hated George Cukor at times – childishly, illogically – for the things he made me do. And this I want to say. Whatever credit’s due belongs not to me, but to him (*Motion Picture*, August 1935: 73).

<sup>66</sup> Including: ‘He Resents Being Typed: Can Basil Rathbone Escape Playing Villains?’ by Maude Cheatham (*Silver Screen*, July 1936: 54); ‘Love Life of a Villain’, Kirtley Baskette, (*Photoplay*, August 1938: 15); ‘It’s Cheers for Rathbone Now’ Paula Harrison, (*Motion Picture*, August 1935: 32) ‘Hissed to the Heights - That’s Rathbone (Villainy has brought him worldwide Fame)’ Leonard Soule, *Motion Picture*, July 1936: 37).

These contentions came alongside photographs and gossip columns that told stories of his love for children and dogs.<sup>67</sup> One 1938 *Screenland* article explicitly referenced Rathbone's duality as the writer claimed to have 'unmasked' the screen's suavest villain to reveal the perfect host (July 1938:64). The first page of 'The Host of Hollywood' showed Rathbone in two villainous parts from films, set in contrast with a larger image of him as genial host, presumably in his own home.



Figure 8. *Screenland*, July, 1938.

In a different 'exclusive' piece about the same meeting, Pine waxed lyrical at Rathbone's appearance as 'sports-coated, flannelled, sun-bronzed, he erupted into the room with a sort of zumph!' (*Picture Play*, September 1937: 56). Pine reported Rathbone's views on his screen roles and his association with the 'heavy':

No, your true heavy belonged to the dim dark days of the drama. He was wont to tie the curly haired hero in the path of a buzz saw or upon the railway tracks, where the

<sup>67</sup> 'It is a common sight in that neighborhood to see Mr Rathbone with his car full of scrawny kids driving up to the planetarium. After a lecture on the stars he brings them back down for a swim in his pool [...] and as much food as they can tuck away in their little stomachs' (*Screenland* May 1936: 76). 'Basil refused, and the script was rewritten so that someone else drew the assignment. 'I'll menace the heroine and I'll torture the hero' said Basil 'but black as I am, I won't poison a dog.' (*Modern Screen*, July 1936: 114).

last express would make mashed potatoes of him. He was really a very villainous member of the community. Not a nice fellow at all. He was black all the way through. Well, the drama eventually got over it. But the word 'heavy' remains to this day thanks to pictures. But pictures are getting over it. Pictures are rapidly progressing to the point where there will be no leading man, no leading woman, no heavy all going through their paces according to their pattern. Pictures are getting to the point where these three behave like real characters in everyday life. They acknowledge no pattern. They behave as you and I would (ibid).

Perhaps Rathbone's attempt to bring humanity to villainous parts, where the villain can also be the hero, reveals audiences all to be secretly 'of the devil's party.'<sup>68</sup> At one point he really was one of Hollywood's most hardworking villains. In *Motion Picture* magazine, writer Dorothy Spensley admiringly quipped in a feature 'That Nasty Man',

Who said crime doesn't pay? When studios order up 'one Rathbone' for villainy they net good dividends for themselves and the screen's consummate menace [...] There is a theory among Hollywood movie moguls that if they can cast Basil Rathbone in their costume films, success will automatically follow (*Motion Picture*, March 1938: 33).

In the period following the Second World War, Rathbone was rarely mentioned in the fan publications in my sample. The last Sherlock Holmes movie came out in 1945 and the world seemed to move on. Rathbone's movie career would enter, with others of his generation, into the lurid world of schlock horror, appearing in *A Comedy of Terrors* (Tourneur, 1963) with Vincent Price, Boris Karloff and Peter Lorre, and such dubious classics as *The Ghost in the Invisible Bikini* (Weis, 1966). The best of his later revisitings of the past occurred in *The Court Jester* (Frank and Panama, 1955) when he was pitted against Danny Kaye, in a revenant of his old familiar role as swashbuckling villain, with added comic camp.

## **2 Screen Basil**

### **(i) Rathbone's Robes**

Basil Rathbone, trained in the British theatrical tradition, was always comfortable in costume and makeup, not just at his wife's behest. His frequent appearance in costume and

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<sup>68</sup> William Blake claimed that John Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, showed himself to be 'of the devil's party without knowing it,' through the creation of a sympathetic villain in Satan (Blake, 1868:6).

horror movies meant that his appearance could change from film to film. His masculinity was not hegemonic, as we have already seen through his portrayal in the fan media. In the years of his greatest success, 1938-1940, eight of the twelve films he made were costume pictures and in six he played the villain.

As we have already seen, costume dramas offered the opportunity for male bodies to be displayed in different ways. Hero and villain would mirror each other's style in wigs, satins, lace, tights and tunic. The dressing gown, or robe, continued this feminised masculine beyond the costume film, allowing a man's body to be more extravagantly adorned and displayed. Like the kilt, it lay a question mark over the gender and sexuality of the wearer without directly addressing the subject.

As I have shown in Chapter 1, the influence of Noel Coward on theatrical masculinity had a particular resonance in the first half of the twentieth century. Any casual observer of Hollywood movies would notice that, in the 1920s-1930s, there was a vogue for men to wear dressing gowns or robes, often in satins and silks. Rathbone's appearance in *The Last of Mrs Cheyney* (1929) was publicised in one magazine by a shot taken from the movie in which he and fellow English actor, Herbert Bunston, suitors for Mrs Cheyney's (Norma Shearer's) affections, face each other across a door frame like mirror images (*Screenland*, October 1929: 70). Rathbone is in an elaborate silk patterned robe, Bunston wears a robe in a darker colour. Rathbone's robe is in a luminescent fabric, which creates the effect of the feminine. Their 'mirror image' is enhanced by the edge of the door that is seen between them and their heads are bent towards each other intimately. As the plot of the film implies, this is a homosocial triangle in which Mrs Cheyney can be seen as a transactional woman (Sedgwick 1985/2016: 178)



Figure 9. *Screenland*, October, 1929.

The character of Lord Dilling in *The Last of Mrs Cheyney* allows the young Rathbone to offer up his most stylised Noel Coward impersonation in a filmed play that aspires (and fails) to imitate Coward’s wit and dramatic instinct. The playboy figure in the silk dressing gown was an image forever associated with Coward. As his biographer commented,

*The Vortex* saw the debut of the dressing-gowned Noel Coward, symbol of the Jazz Age. The loose attire of a dressing gown – a Coward trademark - suggested loose living [...] In affecting anything other than the normal mode of masculine dress, Noel was opening himself up to criticism. Those who knew about such matters whispered about his sexuality; those who did not, excused it as the garb of theatrical folk, who were ‘different’ (Hoare, 1995: 140).

Coward later recalled,

I was unwise enough to be photographed in bed wearing a Chinese dressing gown and an expression of advanced degeneracy. This last was accidental and was caused by blinking at the flashlight, but it emblazoned my unquestionable decadence firmly in the minds of all who saw it. It even brought forth a letter of indignation from a retired Brigadier General in Gloucestershire (Day, 2009:25).

Over the years Coward’s brand was associated with ‘[t]he sparkling quips, the clipped delivery, the silk dressing-gown, the cigarette holder, the elegant languor of a moneyed world

where it's always cocktail hour.<sup>69</sup> The long, flowing robe, in silk, satin or velvet, often decorated with elaborate patterns, was without question the closest a man could come to wearing a beautiful dress. The man, it indicated, could become a richly decorated spectacle like a woman, but this was male-male drag which implied that there was a type of masculine where expressions of self did not have to follow the rigidly ascribed codes of male dress.



Figure 10. Noel Coward's dressing gowns.

Winston Churchill was even photographed in a similar gown on Christmas Day 1943, in a meeting with Dwight Eisenhower in Tunisia (abc.net, 2015).



Figure 11. Churchill and Eisenhower, Christmas Day 1943.

These photographs fascinate because they show a transatlantic group of men, all dressed alike in various types of uniform for an important political meeting. But rather than wear the suit and pork pie hat he was famous for, Churchill appears in an ostentatious, printed silk

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<sup>69</sup> Senter, n.d. 'The First Noel' on Noelcoward.com: n.p.

dressing gown over a casual shirt and trousers. The effect is primarily of making him stand out from the group of sombre-looking, serious military men. Where he usually looks smaller and fatter, now he is just more colourful and exotic, and in keeping with his persona, more eccentric in a particularly British way.

In one fan magazine article, Basil is described as wearing a robe covering his costume for the part of Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliet* (Cukor, 1936). The writer indicates that the dressing gown or robe was a British import to the film colony:

the aristocratic Mr Rathbone...

Beneath a London-tailored lounging robe he was colourfully arrayed in the costume of Tybalt. But even the high laced shoes, the flashes of the black and silver costume or the artistically curled 'hair pieces' about his face could not detract from the quiet authority and self-confidence of his personality. The British are invariably armored with dignity and independence (*Photoplay*, July 1936: 54).

For a brief period in the thirties on film, robes would be worn either over pyjamas or over day clothes as a sign that a man was 'at home.' The robe would be used through the 1930s contemporary set movies particularly, to express a man's domestic environment or to create a sense of decadence or comedy. Cary Grant most incongruously wore a woman's robe in *Bringing up Baby* (Hawks, 1938) to create a comic effect that emerged out of juxtaposing his type of manhood with extreme femininity. An unusually villainous Clark Gable wore one in *Night Nurse* (Wellman, 1931) to create a sense of decadence and evil, and as an indication that he was more than a mere chauffeur in the household. He had been dressed -and was being kept – by a woman, his lover.



Figure 12. Cary Grant. *Bringing Up Baby*, 1938.



Figure 13. Clark Gable and Barbara Stanwyck, *Night Nurse*, 1931.

As the thirties gave way to the forties in Hollywood cinema, however, the robe began to have a feminising effect on the stars who wore them and in movies dressing gowns were often used to signify a character's Otherness. Although in the fifties and sixties Cary Grant would reclaim classy dressing and colourful robes for men in Hollywood film, the forties were a time when a man styled in a dressing gown seemed to be implying a decadence that might have been considered particularly unmanly in a period of wartime austerity. This can be seen particularly through the ways in which Clifton Webb was styled, as 'anglophile cissy' in *Laura* (Preminger, 1944) and *The Razor's Edge* (Goulding, 1946).





Figure 14. Clifton Webb and Gene Tierney, *The Razor's Edge*, 1946.

This perception of male queerness associated with this article of dress permeated popular culture and one critic, writing in 1954 about the living arrangements of superheroes, proffered as evidence of potential homosexuality the fact that 'Batman is sometimes seen in a dressing gown' (Wertham, 1954: 12).

In over 70% of the films Basil Rathbone made in Hollywood, he would appear - however briefly - in a dressing gown or some sort of comparable elaborate period costume resembling one. Rathbone's duality can be seen, then, as linked to a type of gendering that does not fit in with heteronormativity. His villains are dual because they are not entirely masculine, they carry within them femininity too and this deviance from an apparently strict norm might be the reasons why they must be perceived as evil.

Period films also allowed directors to place Rathbone in wigs and silk and velvet embroidered robes and togas. He would play Pontius Pilate and Caiaphas in homosocial Biblical epics *The Last Days of Pompeii* (Schoedsack and Cooper, 1935) and *Pontius Pilate* (Callegari and Rapper, 1962) respectively, clad in biblical robes that resemble dressing gowns:



Figure 15. *The Last Days of Pompeii*, 1935. Rathbone and Preston Foster.



Figure 16. *Pontius Pilate*, 1962.

Amongst other qualities, decadent moral laziness is expressed by Rathbone's dressing-gown in *Rhythm on the River* (Schertzinger, 1940), criminal (perhaps semitic) corruption in *Heartbeat* (Wood, 1946), impotence and cruelty in *Anna Karenina* (Brown, 1935), and a homosocially ambivalent sexuality in *The Black Cat* (Rogell, 1941).



Figure 17. *Rhythm on the River*, 1940. Rathbone with Bing Crosby.



Figure 18. *Heartbeat*, 1946, with Ginger Rogers.



Figure 19. *Anna Karenina*, with Greta Garbo.



Figure 20 *The Black Cat*, 1941.

Rathbone's robe in *The Last of Mrs Cheyney* quite literally outshines that of Norma Shearer who was clad in monochrome. In this image from the film, his body language is prim and feminine, hands clasped over his knees, whilst she leans forward purposefully:



Figure 21. *The Last of Mrs Cheyney*, 1929, with Norma Shearer.

As Marquis de St Evremonde in *A Tale of Two Cities* (Conway, 1935), Rathbone's character symbolizes all of the decadence and cruelty of the French aristocracy, gendered as a liminal man who has taken on female qualities. Same-sex drag, seen in period costuming or in dressing gowns, here in both, deliberately blurs conventional gender lines in order to critique it. Catherine Williamson has pointed out that 'same-sex drag, like cross-sex drag, is effected through clothing and performance but without actually donning the gender-coded garb of the other sex', so it raises questions within the text about gender and sexuality (1997:6). The association too of the British actor playing 'gay villain' is a well-established convention that, as we have seen found its place in costume melodramas of the 1930s and has continued into the present (Jancovich, 2013: 214). Although Evremonde is only on screen for ten minutes of the film, he spends a third of that time getting ready for bed. His bedroom is elaborately and richly decorated with frills and fripperies, in baroque chintzy style, an extension of his clothing, a sort of architectural drag. He is surrounded by male servants who are preparing him for bed. They pluck his eyebrows, spray him with perfume, pull back the bedcovers and put out the candles.



Figure 22. *A Tale of Two Cities*, 1935. As Marquis de St Evremonde



*figure 23*

Before he gets into bed a servant undresses him, pulling off his shiny silken robe. One man undressing another invariably dangles the possibility of same-sex domestic relationships. Once in bed, Everemonde is murdered by the father of the child he had run down in his carriage, stabbed with a blade that can be seen as a type of phallic retribution. Pam Cook's assertion that costume films 'suggest that identity itself is fluid and unstable, like the costume genre itself, a hybrid state or form' is evident here and elsewhere in Rathbone's appearances in costume (1998: 31).

The Othering of Basil Rathbone on screen is complex and nuanced, even in some very straightforward seeming roles. As I have already pointed out, like other actors who were veterans of the First World War, he rarely appeared in roles that drew on his experiences of war, with the notable – and very poignant exception – of *The Dawn Patrol* (Goulding, 1938). The roles he would be famous for were mainly, apart from Sherlock Holmes, intelligent,

scheming villains with a touch of queerness. In the next part of this chapter I will explore Rathbone's Gothic function in transatlantic cinema as racial Other and as queer villain.

## **(ii) The Racial Other: The Class Act and Cowboys in Kimonos**

Basil Rathbone would, twice in the 1930s, be called on to play characters on screen that expressed the racial 'Other.' These two films and the characters played by Rathbone could not be more different although both can be said to fall in the Gothic mode. The first was in British film *Loyalties* (Dean, 1930) and the second *The Adventures of Marco Polo* (Mayo, 1938).

After temporarily leaving Hollywood in 1933, Basil Rathbone made a film in Britain that would finally showcase his ability to convey a depth of emotion and yet steeliness that would become his signature style. It would establish him as an actor who could express 'Otherness' with sympathy and dignity. Later in his career his frequent outsider roles meant he was usually a blackhearted villain, but *Loyalties*, (Dean, 1933) was different. The film, taken from a play by John Galsworthy, deals with the issue of anti-semitism in British high society after the First World War.

In his autobiography, Rathbone briefly mentions his role in this film:

The visit home was made worthwhile professionally by a motion picture I made of Galsworthy's play *Loyalties* in which I play deLevis, the Jew, under the direction of Mr Basil Dean. The picture and my performance in it received considerable commendation, and I shall always consider it to be one of my most fortunate experiences (Rathbone, 1962/1995: 71).

In a retrospective article about Rathbone's life and work published in *Bright Lights Film Journal* in 2013, Eddie Selover reflected on *Loyalties*,

Playing a character of some depth, Rathbone suddenly unfurls onscreen and becomes an actor for the first time (2013: n.p.).

Although by modern standards, *Loyalties* is wordy and play-like, it is richly textured and sharply critical of the middle upper-class largely homosocial world that it explores. The conflict between deLevis (Rathbone) and Dancy (Miles Mander) plays out as a drama of prejudice and masculine rivalry.

Central to the conflict between Dancy and deLevis is their financial difference. Dancy seems to consider that because of his race and class deLevis is somehow less deserving of money than he is but deLevis is clearly ambitious and successful. Financial exchanges between the two are at the heart of the drama. They begin in the distant past of the play, when Dancy the year before, had given deLevis his racehorse, Rosemary, because he could no longer afford to feed her and keep her. In 1933 it might take £320 a year to feed and train and care for a racehorse, (the equivalent to £26,600 today) so deLevis is doing Dancy a favour by taking the horse off his hands (online calculator). The £10 bet that Dancy forces deLevis to take was worth £700 in modern currency. Furthermore, in 1933 when the average working wage in the UK was £250 pa, the £1000 at the centre of the drama would have been equivalent to £70,000 today (ibid). When we consider these amounts of money, it seems all the more remarkable that the upper-class social group are so critical of deLevis for pursuing the thief.

The film opens on a road to the Newmarket races, where Dancy, driving recklessly, tries to force deLevis's driver off the road. On their arrival at their destination, deLevis cheerily greets Dancy and Mabel cheerfully despite this but they deliberately ignore him. Another guest, Meg (Heather Thatcher) asks deLevis why there is animosity between him and Dancy and he replies quietly and simply, 'He doesn't like me'.

At the racecourse, Dancy shiftily watches as de Levis puts the money from the sale of the racehorse into his wallet. The men are doubled in the sequence's consecutive shots as they are dressed in similar suits with bags across their bodies and bowler hats and ties and moustaches. Rather than portray deLevis as a monster, an interloper, he appears in these scenes as both Dancy's double and his victim.



Figure 24. *Loyalties*, 1933. Miles Mander and Rathbone as Dancy and deLevis.

When Dancy and deLevis meet in Dancy's flat in the midst of the court case, the two men are placed together in the shot, sometimes with Mabel between them, which visually creates a classic homosocial triangle. The strength of feeling between the two men in these scenes, hints at something that is repressed between them and this is emphasised by this triangular shape. Mabel is the only one who is not party to the truth about the theft, but the men have perfect understanding of the situation.



Figure 25. The transactional woman, Mabel (Joan Wyndham).

At the party, the *mise-en-scene* and the dialogue reveal that deLevis is the outsider and he knows it. He stands back and watches their parlour games with a quizzical expression, and when asked he admits he has no time for games. Again, doubled in a two-shot sequence, deLevis and Dancy face each other both in dinner jackets as deLevis passes his opponent the money for the bet he had reluctantly agreed to and just lost. He had bet Dancy he couldn't jump onto the bookcase.





Figure 26. The bet.

DeLevis: Here you are. £10. I wouldn't do it for 20.  
Dancy: You couldn't do it for 50.



Figure 27

Their faces come close together for this dialogue, again their physical appearances create a symmetry. They are similar heights, dressed identically, and the backlighting illuminates their profiles from a central spot. Their profiles seem to fit together perfectly, as their faces come closer together there is an illusion of sameness or unity.

On the evening of the party, the group smirk and exchange glances when deLevis excuses himself and goes to bed early. As he watches from the landing, the atmosphere in the room lightens. One guest comments that losing 'the tenner' must have 'hurt' deLevis, Dancy replies, 'Damned Israelite. Grinning while we make fools of ourselves.' As they laughingly vocalise their prejudices, the camera shows deLevis' point of view – from above. He turns and goes into his room, excluded from the group.



Figure 28. de Levis watches from above.

Dialogue in scenes from which Rathbone's character is excluded continues to reveal the depth of these characters' anti-semitic feeling. He is referred to as 'pushy', 'son of a carpet salesman' and 'damned Jew'. Even the servants in the house look down on deLevis and speak to him insolently. Meg mocks him for being so untrusting as to lock his bedroom door, adding 'How quaint! Just like an hotel! Does he put his boots out?' Of course, there is irony here as the theft of his money shows that he was right to distrust his company. In this private house he has had his privacy violated and his belongings stolen, and all present are implicated in the crime through complicity.

Whilst deLevis is doubled with Dancy, he is also set apart from the whole group of men. This is clearest when he is preparing for bed. The camera lingers on deLevis' ablutions, we see him in states of undress and in a silk patterned dressing gown. He is placed separately from the others, alone and vulnerable.



Figure 29. DeLevis' ablutions.

When deLevis comes to tell the others about the crime, he is shown in stark contrast with the other men. They are dressed in dark colours, and he shines in a light, resplendent soft fabric

dressing gown. The men react in disgust, showing no sympathy for his situation. Watching him walk away, Winsor (Algernon West) says contemptuously, 'Did you ever see such a dressing gown?' The General (Alan Napier) answers emphatically 'Never!'



Figure 30. Meeting on the stairs.



Figure 31. The dressing gown.

When the General goes to reason with deLevis in his room, he is filing his nails. The men say nothing, but they watch him incredulously. It is understood that deLevis' feminine costume and concern for his appearance is unmanly and feminine. His determination to seek justice or get his money back is also considered ungentlemanly and unseemly.



Figure 32. The General (Alan Napier) argues for 'decency'.

Following a revival of the play in 2006, the performance of one particular actor raised some questions for the modern critic: 'camp deLevis raises the interesting question of whether he is an outsider among this establishment set of married couples in more ways than one...' (Marlowe, 2006: 509). This potential queer subtext adds another layer to Rathbone's performance and its expression of racial Otherness and its consequences.

As the court case progresses, anti-semitic views are expressed freely. 'They stick together why shouldn't we?' Meg complains. She is disgruntled because there are two Jews on the jury and she asks the barrister, Jacob Twisden (Laurence Hanray) if they can object. The lawyer drily points out that if he objected, deLevis could arguably object to the other ten jury members, who were gentiles. DeLevis does not cast racial slurs against the others but is clearly damaged by them. As he says to Mabel,

Mrs Dancy, according to your husband, I'm not a gentleman. I'm only ... a damned Jew.

Dancy's propensity for 'jumping' - a fitting metaphor for his inconsistency - is emphasised as is his love of frivolity and his immorality and snobbishness, but DeLevis is guarded and controlled.

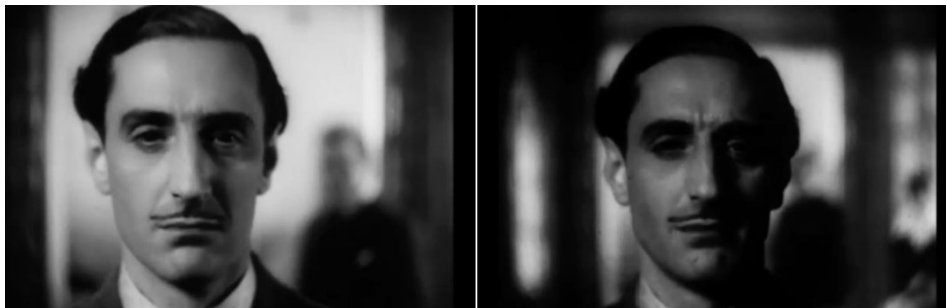
DeLevis is the antithesis of the racist stereotype of the 'grasping' Jew. He rejects the considerable damages that he is awarded by the court. His insistence on pursuing justice and not letting the matter go does not seem unreasonable to the audience as it does to the characters.

DeLevis: Do you think it too plebeian of me, General Canynge? A thousand pounds? [...] Why, you seem to think ... well, what was I to do? Take it lying down and let whoever it was clear off? (*silence*)  
I suppose it's natural to want my money back?  
(*The General coughs and looks at his hands*)  
Winsor: Of course, deLevis.

The film, like the play, levels a scathing attack on the English elite, which close ranks even to protect a liar, thief and cheat. DeLevis points out the unfairness:

DeLevis: 'You think I've no feelings. But I've felt the atmosphere here, I can tell you general. If I were in Dancy's shoes and he were in mine, your tone would be very different.'  
General: This is a private house, Mr deLevis. I suggest that something is due to our host and to the er... (*coughs*) *esprit de corps* that exists among gentlemen  
DeLevis: Since when was a thief a gentleman? As thick as thieves. A good motto isn't it?

In the closing scene, Dancy's friend Major Colford (Philip Strange) turns on deLevis, shouting 'You drove him to this, damn you. What made you?' The Jew bows gracefully and answers, 'They attack our race. And so...Loyalties. Aren't they what we all live by?' The film ends with a slow close up of deLevis's face following these lines, with the light gradually darkening and his eyes slowly closing. This lingering concluding shot seems both to reveal deLevis' relief that his ordeal is over, and an acknowledgement that he is doomed to live in the shadow of society, no matter how successful or rich he becomes. The shadow that falls on him is the shadow of prejudice and hatred. This is clearly not Dancy's story but deLevis'.



*figure 33*



*figure 34*

In the US, *Loyalties* was not publicised and was not mentioned in any of the fan magazines in my sample. *Film Daily*, however, described it as a ‘good British production of Galsworthy classic appealing mainly to the class trade,’ adding that ‘Basil Dean has done quite well in talkerising the John Galsworthy play’:

Because of the nature of the theme and the British treatment of the production, the picture will find its greatest appreciation among the more intelligent audiences. Basil Rathbone plays the part of the Jewish young man who fights for his principles against a group of English clubmen (October 26, 1934: 15).

The *New York Daily News* in the review, ‘Galsworthy’s *Loyalties* Makes Interesting Film’, argues the film ‘takes a vicious though subtle stab at religious intolerance .... we see a bigotry that hides under social amenities and behind honeyed words’ (Wanda Hale, 1934: 63). The writer considers the film ‘an important and absorbing piece of cinematic business’ commenting on Rathbone’s sympathetic portrayal of deLevis:

deLevis, after all is said and done, emerges a figure at once victorious, compassionate, tolerant and vividly human. The picture stands out as the kind of which we might very well do with more’ (ibid).

In contrast to the newspaper reviews, weekly trade journal *Harrison’s Reports*, in keeping with the prevalent attitudes towards British films at the time, was scathing about the movie:

Poor! Not only is the story unsuited for motion picture, but the production is bad. The sound is poor – the English accents will be difficult for American audiences to understand and the editing is choppy. Since the characters are all unsympathetic, there is no human appeal in the story: all that one feels is resentment and antagonism towards the different people for the obnoxious traits they show. And to add to all this, there is the feeling of racial prejudice of the Christian towards the Jew. Although one feels that Basil Rathbone, in the role of the wealthy Jew, is justified in

asking for his money back, which had been stolen from him, one cannot help resenting the fact that, in his desire to expose the man who had stolen his money, he was ruining the lives of two persons. And one can only have contempt for the thief, who, although a man of position and reputation, stole the money and then continued to insult Rathbone, instead of treating him courteously (November 1934: 175).

This review reveals its own prejudice by judging the characters on the basis of race hierarchy rather than the evidence of the film. The writer sees deLevis as responsible for the ruin of lives, not Dancy, although it was he who had committed the crime thus ruining his life, Mabel's and deLevis' too. To blame the victim for pursuing justice for a crime committed against him is absolutely morally unjustifiable. The writer here is clearly dealing with his/her own prejudice and in actual fact, by any standards, *Loyalties* is well-made and the editing is very smooth. The film's editor, Thorold Dickinson, and the assistant director, Carol Reed, would more than adequately prove their mettle later in their careers.

British reviewers also employ stereotypes in their consideration of the film. The *Guardian* describes the film as the story of 'the suppressed but occasionally explosive conflict between the pushing Jew and the English gentleman' (November, 1922: 9). Galsworthy's interest in tragedy of the 'common man' led some writers to assume that Dancy was the central character and was a good man who 'because of events outside his control, is brought into jeopardy (Scrimgeour, 1964: 68). Some critics maintained that Galsworthy's original play had dealt with a difficult topic in a 'balanced' way (*The Guardian*, Feb 1934:10). Others perceived DeLevis to be an 'undesirable guest' or a 'pushy Jew' despite the lack of evidence for this. In other reviews the character of deLevis was anti-semitically generalised as a sort of 'modern Shylock' (*Current Opinion*, December, 1922: 750). DeLevis, however, is nothing like Shylock. He does not want his 'pound of flesh' as revenge, he just wants his stolen money back. Shylock's argument 'if you prick me, do I not bleed' is echoed in deLevis' protestations at his own treatment however, and like Shylock, deLevis is the victim of a racist society (*The Merchant of Venice*, 111: 1: 49).

In his autobiography, Basil Dean reflected that the film was very successful in the UK (1973: 183). However, he noted that certain 'Jewish theatre owners' had boycotted the film because of its subject matter, but he does not comment on this further or express surprise,

which seems surprising in itself (ibid). The film actually is sympathetic to deLevis, as I have shown. It is difficult to find much written about *Loyalties* in recent years, as it seems to be a largely forgotten film, the play is rarely performed, and John Galsworthy has fallen out of fashion.

As a film, *Loyalties* is most interesting because it could never have been made in Hollywood at this time. Although the American film industry was dominated by a community of entrepreneurial immigrant Jews, anti-semitism was a subject rarely touched upon in studio output. This strange silence around the subject was such that, although the rights to Galsworthy's story had been held in Hollywood for some years, the film could not be made because Galsworthy himself would not agree to the suggested ludicrous amendment of making the deLevis character a Scotsman (*The Baltimore Sun*, April 1933: 37).

Hollywood's portrayal of the racial Other, in contrast to that presented in *Loyalties*, continued to be largely a sort of crude creation. For this reason, Samuel Goldwyn's 1935 film *The Adventures of Marco Polo* (Mayo, 1938),<sup>70</sup> is difficult to watch today. It is a film that embraces colonialism, assumes white supremacy through stereotyping and demonising the racial 'Other'. Basil Rathbone plays the part of 'Saracen' Ahmed, the only central Muslim character in a film that does follow the Hollywood conventions of vilifying the Arab community by 'representing them as money hungry, dangerous men' (Aguayo 2009:43). In his portrayal of classic Gothic villain Ahmed, Rathbone displays the villain's excesses and spiritual corruption. Placed in a homosocial context, surrounded by male servants and with very little contact with the women of the palace, Ahmed is a classic expression of cultural anxieties about the Racial and sexual Other (Michalek, 1989: 4). Where deLevis is drawn in a realistic mode, the world of *Marco Polo* is rooted in Gothic excess and cultural paranoia.

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<sup>70</sup> Critical response to *Marco Polo* was generally positive. *Variety* noting that it was particularly popular in Omaha and Seattle and on Broadway over Easter weekend it made \$90,000



In the role of Ahmed, Basil Rathbone is draped in rich fabrics (in Eastern style wrapover dressing gowns), wears dark make-up and turbans to become ‘that silk wearing Saracen’.<sup>71</sup>



Figure 35. Rathbone as Ahmed, *The Adventures of Marco Polo*, 1938.

The clothes and styling of Ahmed is significant as his type of masculinity is repeatedly highlighted and interrogated. He is perceived as both queer and dangerous. His delight in cruelty is seen as natural for a man who seeks glamorous costumes, keeps a male masseur and seems intimate with a small group of guards. He keeps vultures and hungry lions to kill his enemies.

Following their first meeting, Ahmed offers to show Marco (Gary Cooper) the ‘pleasures of our palace’. He takes him to his ‘fortress within a fortress’ which is reached across a drawbridge. With thinly disguised sado-masochism he warns Marco and his servant about his vultures, commenting that he tortures ‘guests’ who will not talk by putting them in with the birds ‘to relax’. Ahmed demonstrates his power by having an intruder dropped into his pit of lions. With lions below and vultures above Ahmed is showing that he is harnessing the forces of nature to torture and kill. Ahmed’s racial Otherness is evidently what makes him somehow powerful and threatening, but he also has an unmistakable queerness which seems to be enhanced by his elaborate costumes. More than any other character, Ahmed changes clothes during the film as if to show that decoration and performance are somehow more important to him than to the others.

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<sup>71</sup> He is queered here from the start.

Ahmed introduces Marco Polo to his two 'faithful assistants' Bayan (Stanley Fields) and Toctai (Harold Huber). When he introduces Toctai his voice changes as he talks about a facial disfigurement he has, touching his face tentatively, although it becomes evident that he had been responsible for Toctai's injury. Toctai's faithfulness to Ahmed implies that theirs is a sado-masochistic relationship. Toctai, Bayan and Ahmed form a villainous team, but they also offer moments of comedy in a film that never quite decides on its own tone.

Bayan is charged with watching Marco. He follows him in the evening and sees him teaching the Princess (Sigrid Guthrie) the 'western custom' of kissing.



Figure 36. Marco teaches the Princess western ways.

Bayan excitedly runs to his master, who he finds in his quarters being massaged. Unable to describe the kiss adequately, he says 'I will show you excellency', goes to Toctai and kisses him.



Figure 37. The same-sex kiss.

Kisses between men were prohibited by the Code, so this scene stands out as a historical oddity.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, the queerness of this scene is enhanced as it takes place in Ahmed's quarters, in a sequence where he is half naked, slathered in oil, being massaged by a male servant.



Figure 38.

Although Ahmed is seen trying to marry the Princess, he is clearly motivated by ambition and all his expressions of passion are saved for his final showdown with Marco. In their wedding scenes he is costumed in resplendent materials in order to enhance his femininised masculinity. For his first appearance in this costume he is unveiled on a plinth, with the light shining on him makes him appear like a shining statue. Ahmed's robe shines far brighter than the Princess's wedding dress.

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<sup>72</sup> Included under the rule 'SEX PERVERSION or any inference to it is forbidden' (Miller, 1994: 296).



Figure 39. The wedding dress.



Figure 40. Ahmed and the Princess.

In the climactic fight scene, Marco and Ahmed attack each other with knives. They fall to the ground and Ahmed tries to throw Marco into the pit of lions. The men wrestle in a sequence that shows them from overhead as well as a side view, the men's bodies are intertwined.



Figure 41. The fight.



Figure 42.



Figure 43.

This fight scene, dynamically filmed, shows all angles of the men's scuffle and ends with Cooper pushing Rathbone into the lions' den below. The tussle between the men has them mainly horizontal, with one and then the other on top. The sexual implications are clear, and the ambivalent gendering of Ahmed's costume adds to the impression of an illicit encounter between the two men.

Critics considered the film's lack of concern for historical accuracy balanced by its spectacle:

While faithfully portraying the atmosphere and customs of the period, Goldwyn has made no pretense to historical accuracy in his lavish production. He has, instead, presented the entertaining side of a spectacular historical figure (*LA Times*, April 14, 1938:11).

A British journalist asked the question, 'Who cares for historical accuracy in films of this kind?' (*Manchester Guardian*, Dec 6, 1938: 13). One review, however, saw the ridiculousness of the movie and resurrected the screenplay writer's own words against him:

It was Robert E Sherwood, vitriolic cinema critic at the then comic *Life*, who enriched his reputation as a rising young humorist by calling Valentino's *The Sheik* 'an average Western with the cowboys wearing kimonos.' It is the same Robert E Sherwood, yet a different as well as a more famous one, who wrote the screenplay of what he in those gay days might have called 'Kublai Khan Rides Again'.

The result is one of the most extraordinary and unintentional stimulants to laughter ever known to cinema-goers. It combines spectacle with absurdity, and has such a defiance of period in manner and speech, and so reckless a disregard of probability and the original facts as to enable the most uninstructed to derive cinematic enjoyment. In fact, the less sensitive the greater the pleasure. For there can be small satisfaction in all this medley of extravagant nonsense for anyone of extreme sensibility or with a regard for the truth (Carroll, *Variety*, September 1938:4).

Definition of this genre as a 'western with the cowboys wearing kimonos' is an acknowledgement of the non-hegemonic gendering of many of the characters. That is the point, in fact. The racial Other who is suspect because of both 'foreignness' and sexual deviance is most elaborately feminised and queered. Even the hero is dressed in a way that indicates his homosocial priorities. Cooper in this film, dressed in ethnic costume, seems incongruous and unconvincing, and whilst Rathbone carries off the antagonist role, there is little in the script for him to work with.

### **(iii) Queer Basil: Swashbucklers, Cutlasses and Dandies**

In the classic mode of queer Gothic, we invariably see 'male-male relations' that are so central to the plot that 'their significance might sometimes be missed' (Haggerty, 2006: 109):

The figure of two men locked in a physical and psychological bond - whether friendship or rivalry - so intense that they are spiritually a single being is everywhere in gothic fiction (ibid).

This duality and symbolic spiritual union are seen nowhere in the classical era more viscerally than in the climactic swordfight of the 'swashbuckler' genre. The two men meet in a swordfight, where one of them must die. When the hero kills the villain, he might be said to be removing the closest rival for his heart, so that he will be free to enter into a heterosexual union.

This type of outlaw narrative seemed to be most popular in the era following the tightening of the Code, when 'perversion' was banned and evil-doers had to be punished (Miller, 1994:52). Costume swashbuckling films offered a movement away from hegemonic gendering, offering an opportunity to see male bodies dressed in tight, tactile fabrics and long boots, rebelling against the present authority:

The disparity between the kind of elaborate moral justification required by the Code and the actual behaviour and motivations of pirates amounted to a rather broad wink aimed toward the public, many of whom understood full well that what was thus being made both acceptable and appealing was the persona of the outlaw reconceived as a bold adventurer. This is the stuff of both juvenile male fantasy (of whatever orientation) and adult camp. (2014:8).

Basil Rathbone would become famous for his part in some stylised villainy in three swashbuckling classics. These three films are *Captain Blood* (Curtiz, 1935), *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (Curtiz, 1939) and *The Mark of Zorro*, (Mamoulian, 1940), two of which starred Errol Flynn, one (the last) Tyrone Power. The heroes would be set up in opposition to the villain (Rathbone) in a binary that would form the most powerful narrative thrust in each film.

Through costuming and disguise, the hero of these three films expresses an exaggerated form of active masculinity that is not unambivalently hegemonic. As Raymond Knapp has noted, a 'costume' film centring on an outlaw hero, such as a pirate,

provides welcome opportunities to enact a flamboyantly gaudy version of masculinity through makeup, dressing up, acting up, and otherwise indulging in the theatrical. It in effect creates a mask for entertainment purposes and so invests the masked persona - a persona incorporating elements of the evoked stereotype, the character who adopts that role, and the performer who performs the character who adopts the stereotyped role - with a great deal of sympathy even though pirates are understood to be inherently unworthy of approbation (Knapp, 2014: 21).

In a sense in these stories, the villain can be seen as the hero and the hero as the villain as authority itself comes under suspicion and good and evil seem to work independently. The

doubling and splitting of the characters, and the wielding of the phallic sword, make it possible to interpret these narratives, regardless of the presence of the notional romantic interest in the form of the heroine, as coded explorations of male-male desire.

Peter Blood (Errol Flynn) is seen as a man who prioritises his male friendships, which could explain his success as a pirate chief. Whilst in Blood's scenes with Arabella (Olivia DeHavilland), he is awkward and conflicted, he is shown in scenes of physical intimacy with his closest friend Jeremy Pitt (Ross Alexander). In this scene, they are shown, sitting very close, with Pitt's leg in his lap, slowly winding his bandage as they plan their escape. He says, 'Remember, Jeremy. You're the only navigator among us. Without you there is no escape'.



Figure 44. Peter Blood (Errol Flynn) and Jeremy Pitt (Ross Alexander).

Even the Colonel seems suspicious, asking them, 'What the devil have you been up to? [...] What's going on between you two?' Later Jeremy is tied to a pole and beaten by Colonel Bishop but when Blood finds him, he gives him a drink and tends to his wounds. Again the men are placed together in the frame in intimate connection with each other as Jeremy assures his friend that he has not betrayed him.





*figure 45*

Pitt is stripped and hung on the pole. Blood comes close behind him, gently tending his wounds and whispering encouragement to him.

It is against this background of male homosocial intimacy that Rathbone as Levasseur enters the story. It is one hour and twelve minutes into the film when Peter Blood meets 'hard-fighting, hard-gaming French rascal' Captain Levasseur (Rathbone). The first scene they share shows them with a young woman (Yola D'Avril) in a tavern in Tortuga.



Figure 46. Blood, Levasseur and friend.

Here the men's rivalry results in a shooting game, and the transactional woman is the prize. There is no shortage of women, as the establishing shot of the bar has made clear, so it is not necessary for them to compete, yet they choose to do so. Rathbone, his hair long, with lace around his throat, is paired together with the woman in the frame so that the comparison is set up between them. He also wears his hair like Flynn's, long and wavy, and dresses in a similar way.

When Levasseur good naturedly concedes that Blood has won the 'prize' he pushes the woman towards him. Blood does not 'accept' her, saying 'some other time'. The woman responds, 'ooh, pourquoi? What sort of man are you?' Blood answers 'The sort of man you like, my dear. A man with money.' He throws down a bag of money which she follows like a dog and he walks away to sit by the fireside in a chair. Levasseur follows him and the two men laugh and talk.



Figure 47. The partnership is established.

The whole scene has been arranged so that Levasseur can persuade Blood to enter an alliance:

Ah, mon capitaine. What a pair we would make. On the Caribbean there is no buccaneer so strong as me. Except you [...] With your brain and my strength there is nothing we cannot do.

In this sequence, they laugh and smile at each other. Eventually they make the agreement, with Levasseur agreeing to Blood's conditions. 'Those very severe articles of yours. Mais oui, I sail under the articles of the *grand seminaire* to have you as my partner, mon capitaine.' In these exchanges it seems as if Blood is taken with Levasseur but realizes he cannot be trusted. As soon as the two men sign their treaty, the French captain lies down in a group of prostitutes. Blood, evidently regretting his decision to work with the other pirate, says bitterly, 'women will be the death of you'. This seems to be implying that it is Blood who is least interested in women, who tries to maintain his relations with Levasseur, but is frustrated because the Frenchman flirts with him to get his signature and then immediately goes off to join a group of women. The woman's question, 'what sort of man are you' and the

Colonel's 'what's going on?' can be seen as indications that Blood is not unambivalently heterosexual.

When Levasseur captures Arabella, Blood challenges Levasseur to fight when he refuses to hand her over. He looks at the Frenchman earnestly as their men watch their disagreement.



*Figure 48. The final meeting on the beach.*



*figure 49*

The two men stand in opposition to each other, both with wavy hair and dressed in pirate lace and leather. Levasseur seems surprised at Blood's interest in Arabella, perhaps because he has made assumptions about his partner's sexuality. He stammers, 'You ... you want the girl?' Blood replies, 'Why not? And I am willing to pay for what I want.'

In the fight that follows, the two men are seen moving together and apart as they move around the beach. They seem to be smiling as they come into a clinch with each other



*Figure 50. The fight.*

The inevitable swashbuckling ‘cross swords’ moment seems to be pleasurable as their faces come close and sweat is evident on their brows.



*Figure 51. Crossed swords.*

Levasseur pushes Blood to the ground with his sword, then Blood turns the tables, pushes Levasseur down onto the beach and runs him through. He looks down at him lying on the beach, washed by the waves, and says, ‘And that, my friend, ends a partnership that should never have begun.’

The chemistry between Flynn and Rathbone has become the thing of legends, although these two films were the only ones in which they fought each other (Rendell, 2013: n.p.). Their on-screen charisma is such that, in his gossipy biography of Flynn, British writer of sensationalist biographies, David Bret, alleged that Flynn and Rathbone had an affair (2004: 69). Although this seems unlikely and there is no corroboration, the relationship seems to have taken on a life of its own. One online commentator observes,

they have become slash icons for a new generation of fans on Tumblr and elsewhere. You don't need to begin crassly exploring their personal sexualities to be aware that something happened when Flynn and Rathbone were on screen together, duelling or not [...] Whether they are playing Norman and Saxon, rival pirates or traumatized WW1 flyers, as soon as they face each other there is movie magic. Unspoken things happen when they hold each other's gaze. As audience members we are drawn in, intrigued. Gisborne and Robin are more than just rivals. They are – what? Curious about each other. Attracted to each other in some indefinable way. They seem to know – as we do – that, however much Olivia de Havilland might be their symbolic object of desire, it's their mutual interaction that truly engages and defines them. And when they fight, they seem to move like two bodies with one mind (Rendell, 2013: n.p.).

Rathbone was unique in Hollywood because he was a British Army fencing champion, something that was rarely mentioned in fan magazines or press articles in his lifetime, but which now has entered the online legend that has been built up around him (ibid). Flynn's athleticism, energy and charisma match Rathbone's smooth prowess in the scenes they do together. The choreographed movements, and the rhythm of the movements, building to a sweaty climax, clearly suggest sexual relations. Hollywood's fencing expert, Fred Cavens, describes the ideal screen swordfight, emphasizing,

the reliance on one another to go at full speed, where one slip could administer serious injury. You hold each other's eyes. You see nothing else. The focus totally on one another, the almost telepathic sympathy, like one set of thoughts flowing through two bodies, and the hard hard work of sweating it out right time and time again. If you don't love each other and trust each other and live in each other through the sequence you are going to fail (ibid).

The physicality of the movements, their ghostly symbolism about same-sex passion lies beneath the surface of Caven's comments as they do in the action sequence itself.

In *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, director Michael Curtiz, with the help of co-director, William Keighley, created arguably the swashbuckler genre's finest example. Again with Flynn and Rathbone pitted against each other, and with Olivia DeHavilland's transactional Maid Marian between them, in vivid Technicolor, the film still stands as a classic today. The film was a box office hit for Warner Brothers; winning three of the four Academy Awards for which it was nominated, its critical accolades were many (Druxman, 1976: 195,198).

Like Peter Blood, Robin (also Flynn) is established firmly as a man whose primary relationships are with other men. Gisborne too is seen as a man who sits at the right hand of the prince. As Jessica Rains testified, her father, Claude, played the part of Prince John 'as a homosexual' and his closest relationship - and shared function in the plot as villain - is with Gisborne (Soister and Wioskowski, 1999: 67).

In an early scene, Prince John and Gisborne are seen drinking together in the Prince's private quarters.



Figure 52. Prince John and Gisborne (Rains and Rathbone).



*figure 53*

The two men wear feminised bright and tactile fabrics, Prince John always appears in muted pale cream and luminescent gold, Gisborne in sapphire blues, emerald greens and crimsons. Robin, in contrast, invariably appears in earthy forest colours, brown and green. All of the main male characters wear their hair long and the Normans decorate themselves with rings

and gold or silver belts, buttons and clasps. The men are more of a spectacle than the women, as they strut around in tights and boots, swishing in cloaks and rattling with silver.

At a banquet to celebrate Richard's capture, Prince John, Gisborne and the Sheriff of Nottingham (Melville Cooper) are seated next to each other. Guy is on the Prince's right side, Maid Marian (Olivia deHavilland) on his left. At the meal, Guy does not speak to Marian and seems disinterested in her, although John tells her Gisborne is in love with her. This sets the tone for Guy's 'love' for Marian throughout the movie. He rarely speaks directly to her and always seems to become inactive around her. When the beautiful outlaw bursts into the room, however, Prince John and Gisborne cannot take their eyes from him.



Figure 54. Reactions to Robin's entrance.

At Guy's castle, men sit at tables, eating and chatting. Robin's band of outlaws in Sherwood Forest also banquets at long tables in this way, in their parallel homosocial world. When they celebrate, the men of the forest are unrestrained as they hold hands with each other and form a circle to dance.

When Marian, her maid, Bess (Una O'Conner), the Sheriff and Gisborne are captured by Robin and his men in the woods, the men seem reluctant to fight each other. Prince John later challenges Guy and the Sheriff, 'Where are your wounds? Your bruises? And where are your men?' Guy half-heartedly argues 'The Lady Marian was in our company and Locksley's men outnumbered us three to one'.

Gisborne is quite silent when he is captured, and his passivity is highlighted by Marian's question, 'Are you going to permit this insolence without even..?' whilst Bess fiercely and courageously shouts at Robin, 'You impudent rascal. You're not going to harm my lamb, my honeysuckle'. As Bess rushes forward on her horse, Guy quietly stays back on his. One of Robin's men, Much (Herbert Mundin) laughs, 'We only want to stroke his pretty neck'. This mocking comment can be seen as an acknowledgement of the queerness of the situation and possibly of Guy. Yet this passivity seems surprising when we consider his later courage in his final swordfight with Robin. The indication is that he is not ready to fight yet, and that he is taken aback and fascinated by his rival.

At Locksley's camp, Robin's men strip Guy and the Sheriff and put on their clothes in a same-sex drag that enters into a performance of gender and class. We see the men undress Gisborne down to his underwear and dress him in their clothes whilst they wear his.



Figure 55. Gisborne stripped of his finery.

This scene creates a type of class transvestitism that draws attention to the ways in which, in this film, the characters identify as (Prince John's) Norman men - usually Lords - or (Robin's) Saxon band - working class men apart from their leader. This 'taking on' and 'putting off' of clothes makes a comment on homosocial identities, in which belonging to a group is intrinsic. When Gisborne is dressed like the outlaws, he is draped in brown fabric and decorated with green leaves, becoming in effect, Robin's mirror or double, his shadow self.





Figure 56. Gisborne as Robin's double.



*figure 57*

Although Robin's men dress in the Normans' colourful clothes, Robin does not. His masculine identity – and his class - does not need costume, as his nobility is written on his body, which, in shorter tunic and tighter tights, is put on display. 'The cultural associations of mind with masculinity and body with femininity' is challenged here as Errol Flynn's body is a focus of the visual pleasure of the film (Butler, 1999: 21). Basil Rathbone, true to his star discourse as the well-dressed man who sends for berets from Paris and spends phenomenal amounts on suits, is rarely seen in such a dowdy costume. He is the plumed peacock in comparison with Flynn in most scenes, but not at this moment. As Tamar Jeffers McDonald has argued, costume is significant in themes of transformation in Hollywood film (2010: 205). Robin and Guy's costumes have been 'shorthand for personality' but also for their social position (Jeffers McDonald, 2010:206). Robin embraces his role as outsider whilst Guy enjoys the opportunity to deck himself out in a number of costume changes throughout the film. In the exchanges of power that take place in this film, this sequence of

same-sex drag is the symbolic point at which Robin takes control of Guy, and this is where Gisborne's passionate response to Robin becomes most powerful, as he dwells on his humiliation. Robin's men had recreated Guy in his image through symbolic costume, and Gisborne had rejected this.

In scenes that follow, in brighter, more colourful costumes than ever, Gisborne's hitherto lacklustre hatred becomes his dominating motivation. His single-minded obsession with Locksley makes him crave control over him. He asks Prince John to 'give' him the rebel to punish after the archery tournament. The ways that male costume is coded in this film (and other costume dramas) reveals a feminisation and objectification of the male body that makes it a spectacle. When a man dresses another man, it is usually significant, suggesting the figure of the tailor or dresser – a man who touches and is intimate with other men's bodies –as queer. When Guy imprisons Robin and has the opportunity to dress him, he chooses an interesting look.



Figure 58. Robin shackled by Gisborne.



Figure 59.

He adds this bondage collar that Robin wears in Gisborne's dungeon in a move suggestive of the villain's repressed desires.

When the two men meet for the final swordfight, the true climax of the film, they are restored to their original types of costumes. It is the final release of all the tension that has been building up between the two men. They face each other in a beautifully choreographed physical fight, moving around the castle as the music speeds up. There is a definite sense of their relationship reaching a sweaty climax. The feverish rhythm of Erich Korngold's music builds up to the moment when Robin finally runs Guy through and he falls to his death.



Figure 60. The final fight.



Figure 61. Crossed swords.

The sweat on their brows during the inevitable 'crossed swords' moment, speaks of exertion that seems sexual as the music builds to its crescendo.



Figure 62. Climax.

Their bodies' close proximity and the moment of pain when Robin's sword penetrates Guy and hits home seems to suggest the final moment of orgasmic release.

Talking about the rehearsals and filming of the scene years later, Rathbone said that both men had been physically exhausted and had lost nine pounds in weight, and that he feared Flynn's physical recklessness (Rendell, 2012: n.p.). This fight scene has been considered to be one of the best swashbuckling scenes in movie history for many reasons, not least because of the skill and energy of the major players (ibid).

The final swashbuckling drama I will discuss in this section is one where Basil Rathbone is paired with another costume drama athletic hero, Tyrone Power, *The Mark of Zorro* (Mamouljian, 1940). This movie belongs to a 'hidden identity' genre of stories that harks back to Baroness Orczy's *Scarlet Pimpernel* and has been recognised as a clear influence on the development of the ever popular 'masked crusader' superhero genre (Williamson, 1997: 3):

Secret identity narratives such as *The Mark of Zorro* invoke queer textuality when one character runs the spectrum of gender identities. Such queerness is always contained, however, by the text's conservative political agenda (ibid).

The character Zorro was created in 1919 by Johnstone McCulley and, as in the case of the Pimpernel, the crusader passes in the world as highly feminised man, a dandy or fop, but when masked he becomes the swashbuckling hero.

Catherine Williamson has noted that ‘the superhero who exploits the gender continuum from feminine to hypermasculine is a projection of a young boy’s maturation from androgynous adolescent to adult male’ (1997: 3).

The ‘secret identity’ trope reminds me of two often times related but not interchangeable phenomena, drag and closet: drag because of the way superheroes use clothing and performance to signify an ironic relationship between gender and sex; the closet because of the way secrecy and silence permeate all corners of superhero characterisation, including – and especially - sexuality (ibid).

As in the Curtiz swashbucklers, costume - here particularly the mask - becomes significant. Once again Rathbone is used as antagonist to a matinee idol, himself ethnicised as ‘almost’ English (Flynn, although Australian, was often claimed to be Irish, Power was seen as Irish-American). Power camps it up as Don Diego, but as Zorro takes on the fight for truth and justice in a more masculine manner. But, as in the other swashbucklers, even his ‘straight’ persona is comparatively feminised, through dress and sweeping, choreographed movement. Diego/Zorro is split and dual and finds a compelling binary in Rathbone’s Captain Esteban. The sword, as in all swashbucklers, becomes symbolic of male virility and power.

Same-sex drag, like cross-sex drag, is effected through clothing and performance, but without actually donning the gender-coded garb of the other sex. It is a masquerade which, like cross dressing, ‘uses sartorial disguise to create alternative identities’ and which can subsequently highlight constructions of sex, gender, and, most importantly [...], sexual orientation [. . .] The gender crossing performed by superheroes like Zorro would seem to complicate the cultural collapse of gender performance with sexual orientation since one character encompasses and makes visible the entire spectrum of gender possibilities and, by association, sexual orientation (Williamson, 1997:6- 7).

Tyrone Power, in his dually gendered performance,<sup>73</sup> comes across as bisexual. His most physically intense relationship in the film is undoubtedly with Esteban rather than with the

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<sup>73</sup> A number of sources have claimed Tyrone Power was bisexual, although evidence is inconclusive. Rumours only began with Hector Arce’s 1980 book *The Secret Life of Tyrone Power*, and the sources cited were all anonymous.

wide-eyed, childlike Lolita, whose very name indicates her diminutive status.<sup>74</sup> Their conversations convey an intensity laced with hidden meanings.

Writing about Leslie Howard's performance in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (Young, 1934), Sue Harper comments that 'The film's appeal to female viewers resides in the way the hero combines feminine sensitivity with masculine vigor', which implies that the presentation of the contemporary man in cinema of the era did not allow for this 'sensitive' man (1994: 27). Whilst in Hollywood – and many other places – in the 1930s and 1940s, under censorship, lack of societal acceptance, threatened by prison (for men at least), gay men and women felt compelled to hide their identities, putting on a heterosexual 'mask'. It was common to find a 'beard' partner or even to enter into lavender marriages (McAuliffe and Tiernan, 2009:78).

Whilst in reality, many gay men and women 'performed' heterosexuality, in this popular movie the heterosexual man 'performs' homosexuality in order to seem harmless, unmasculine and therefore incapable of heroics. Inevitably, at this time, performance of homosexuality for each binary gender meant taking on the interests and gestures of the other.

The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted social temporality [...] if the assumption of femininity and the assumption of masculinity proceed through the accomplishment of an always tenuous heterosexuality, we might understand this accomplishment as mandating the abandonment of homosexual attachments or, perhaps more trenchantly, pre-empting the possibility of homosexual attachment, a foreclosure of possibility which produces a domain of homosexuality understood as unliveable passion and ungrievable loss (Butler, 1999:16).

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<sup>74</sup> Female given name of Spanish origin. It is the diminutive form of Lola, which is taken from Dolores, which means "suffering" (popular-babynames.com).

This 'stylisation of body' is used to create the illusion of different grades of masculine and feminine in the movie, through gestures, voice and feminine silks, satins, velvets and lace. Heterosexuality, then, can be seen as 'tenuous', as Butler says, by this interplay that represents a full kaleidoscope of gendering. As might be expected, the film proposes that masculine qualities are vastly superior to feminine ones, with feminised Diego obsessing over 'female' concerns such as fabrics and clothes, rejecting activity in favour of languidly reclining on a couch. He has two clear personae, yet, as Diego Vegas is his real name and 'Zorro' is little more than a nickname, there are hints that the former might be his real identity. Perhaps his tragedy lies in the 'ungrievable loss' of 'unliveable passion' (ibid).

The mysterious figure of the masked man in black, Zorro, is a mere shadow self for Diego. He rarely speaks, travels by means of secret passageways or on fast horses and steps out of the darkness, lacking the convincing characterisation of Don Diego. Although when he 'comes out' as heterosexual to Lolita (Linda Darnell), Diego declares that his love for her is 'the one real thing in this whole masquerade', we have very little idea of a non-feminised version of his character. The use of the term 'masquerade' is evocative too of performance and play acting. Throughout the film, Diego is referred to as the 'cockerel of California', a 'little peacock', 'popinjay' and 'puppy'. He is 'someone who knows the newest fashions', he waxes lyrical on the joys of 'the shimmer of satin and silk' and declares himself bored except when at court. He concerns himself with performing his gender in the form of magic tricks or illusions, one with a fan, the other with a lace handkerchief. This is a clear reference to the bigger illusion that he is creating – that he, Don Diego, lacks the courage to fight against his oppressors. But the assumption that a homosexual-appearing, 'cissy' man will not have the courage to fight, is a pre-judgement that works in Diego's favour. It is the mask or cloak that hides his real actions.



Figure 63. Tyrone Power as Diego.



Figure 64. Diego ignores Lolita (Linda Darnell).

When Diego complains about his bath, Esteban says drily to Inez (Gale Sondergaard) ‘Tepid? Poor Lolita. I’m afraid her wedded life will be the same’. This questioning of his sexual prowess is still hanging in the air when he dances with his fiancée. His greatest performance of the feminised masculine is here, where he proves his ability to dance better than the woman. The camera skims over Lolita and rests on his fast-moving feet as he stomps and kicks the flamenco steps. Although the couple come close together briefly in the dance, they are mainly separate, matching each other’s movements. In this scene, far from being sexual partner who is of the binary opposite to Lolita, Diego is similar to her, as they move in synchronicity. The distance between them in this scene can only serve to be a contrast to Diego’s final swordfight with Esteban, where their bodies move together.





Figure 65. The dance.

From the beginning Don Diego is most comfortable in an entirely homosocial context, at military school in Madrid.



Figure 66. The crossed swords drill.

Here the soldiers face each other for a drill that involves the crossing of swords, in an image that will dominate the rest of the film.

The sword is the subject of innuendo. When Diego first meets Esteban (Rathbone), he threateningly caresses Diego with his sword. The two men face each other, doubled in the two-shot. Both wear similar small moustaches, Rathbone is in the uniform that he wears throughout the film. No robes or dressing gowns here, as he retains a military function in the plot. The uniform, however, is highly decorative, with very tight trousers and over-the knee boots. In this initial meeting he is opposed by Diego who wears a cloak that falls down to his ankles like a skirt.



Figure 67 Esteban and Diego.

Don Diego: How can I refuse a man anything when he has a naked sword in his hand?

Captain Esteban: Haha! So a wit has come to Los Angeles. (*brandishes the sword*) [...] I toy with a sword. Do you fancy the weapon?

Esteban takes Diego to Don Luis' office, where the wall is decorated by crossed swords. Don Alejandro, Diego's father, also has the same symbolic arrangement on his wall.

When Esteban and Diego fight their final duel, Esteban takes a sword from the wall.

Unusually for the climactic swordfight of a swashbuckler, the location is kept within one room, Don Luis' study with the crossed swords.



Figure 68. Crossed swords.



Figure 69.



Figure 70.



Figure 71.



Figure 72.

The choreography follows the usual swashbuckling pattern. Beginning with the stance of doubling, then the fight, the villain drives the hero to the floor, then the crossing of swords, then Diego is pushed against the wall. In this case, Rathbone uses his groin to push Power against the wall and keeps his sword at the same level, as they both start to look dishevelled and sweaty, with their dark curly hair tumbling down. The dialogue, like the movement, is loaded with meaning:

Don Diego: That's a good effort, mon Capitaine.  
Capt. Esteban: The next will be better, my fancy clown.  
Don Diego Ah, the Capitaine's sword is not so firm.  
Captain Esteban: Still firm enough to run you through.

The combination of the sparring dialogue, the thrusting movements of the phallic swords, the building of the pace and the increasing exertion of the actors make this swordfight – and others like it – the closest that classic cinema gets to showing a physical relationship between men. It also has the effect of attempting a type of deconstruction of rigid rules of sexuality and gender through pretence and performance, masquerade and linguistic *double entendre*.

#### **(iv) Sherlock Holmes and the Mad Doctors**

"You're not hurt, Watson? For God's sake, say that you are not hurt!"

It was worth a wound -- it was worth many wounds -- to know the depth of loyalty and love which lay behind that cold mask. The clear, hard eyes were dimmed for a

moment, and the firm lips were shaking. For the one and only time I caught a glimpse of a great heart as well as of a great brain. All my years of humble but single-minded service culminated in that moment of revelation.

— Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*. 1927/2011: 193-194

Homosexuality was something most adults knew about, but it was not represented in public media; to do so was intrinsically shocking. Mainstream Hollywood would not cater to the taste for sexual sensation, which left a space for B-movies, including *noir* (Richard Dyer, 2001:109).

Of all of Basil Rathbone's dressing-gowned, coded homosocial screen relationships, the most famous and least villainous is seen in the series of 14 films he made as Arthur Conan Doyle's iconic detective, Sherlock Holmes. These films were made between 1939 and 1945, with the first, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Lanfield, 1939) establishing the homosocial setting of 221B Baker Street where Holmes (Rathbone) and Dr Watson (Nigel Bruce) live, first seen together in this domestic scene.



Figure 73. Watson and Holmes at home.

Holmes gazes at Watson here, wearing the same robe – classic, understated, dark, with white piping – that he would wear at some point in all but three of the subsequent 14 movies.

The popular Sherlock Holmes series began at Fox with *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (Werker, 1939), with Victorian settings. But when the characters' rights were sold on to Universal, the new studio experimented by placing Holmes and Watson in contemporary contexts, initially in wartimespy adventures, later in Gothic thrillers.

Whenever Holmes is seen at home in these films, he is usually dressed in his robe. In one film, we have an insight into domestic routine, as he takes off his coat as he comes through the door, hangs it up and puts his dressing gown on over his tie and shirt (*The Woman in Green*, Neill, 1945). Whether listening to the radio, playing the violin, eating breakfast or pouring tea for his friend, domestic Holmes is most frequently in his dressing gown. Here he pours Watson's cup of tea in *The Pearl of Death*, (Neill, 1944) as Lestrade, clearly excluded from the family circle, looks on.



Figure 74. Breakfast. *The Pearl of Death*, 1944.

Whilst Holmes retains the same dark robe with lighter piping through the contemporary set stories, Nigel Bruce's Watson rejects the Victorian smoking jacket for a striped robe as seen in *Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Weapon* (Neill, 1942). The stripes of Watson's dark gown coordinate with the white piping of Holmes'. Their style is classic and not cissified by any standards, yet still the robe itself indicates that the masculinity of their shirt and trousers are feminised by a robe in their homosocial domestic space.



Figure 75. Homosocial domestic space.

The synchronicity of the monochrome robes worn by Rathbone and Bruce in the Sherlock Holmes films denote a type of domestic closeness and comfortable intimacy that does not (in the twenty-first century at least) necessarily imply purely friendship. Indeed, by wearing robes together in their shared domestic world, there is an intimate, perhaps post-coital rapport implied. The familiar and affectionate dialogue between the two men and their total lack of interest in any other romantic partners seems to denote more than a usual friendship, suggesting transgressive possibilities hidden in the homosocial world. It is also a deviation from the Arthur Conan Doyle stories, where quite early on Watson gets married and moves out of Baker Street (Doyle, 1890). These films openly show an easy affection between the two men but anything else lies submerged beneath the surface of the text.

In what is for me the queerest of their films, the generally disregarded *Pursuit to Algiers*, (Neill, 1945) the dressing gowns do not appear, but the relationship between Holmes and Watson is at its most suggestive.

Baker Street in this film is replaced by adjoining cabins on board ship. Within the confines of their shared cabins, they are placed together a number of times intimately in the *mise en scene* by the door or in front of the bed.



Figure 76. *Pursuit to Algiers*, 1945.



Figure 77. On the boat to Algiers.

The first part of the film sees them having to rearrange their holiday, something that particularly upsets Watson. He protests, in wifely tone, 'Oh no, Holmes, you gave me your promise. You need your rest you know. You've not been up to the mark recently'. In a reunion after a period of separation, Holmes, like a jealous partner, smoothly lifts a long blonde hair from Watson's jacket and deduces he has been seeing a lot of a certain young woman and nonchalantly questions him about it. Watson laughs and is flattered and embarrassed.



Figure 78. Holmes finds a woman's hair on Watson's jacket.

This interaction serves to show Holmes' skills of deduction whilst also hinting at another level to their relationship.

As often in these Sherlock Holmes films and others, fog takes on a particular function. This pattern of losing and rediscovering each other on a foggy landscape is used in other films of the franchise and is a recognisable motif. This can be seen as a visual representation of the same-sex romantic experience which must be disguised and exists against the odds.



Censorship is itself a type of fog that leads to submersion of challenges to the rules of normativity.

On his arrival on the ship without Holmes, Watson is befriended by a queer-coded female character, tweed clad mannish Agatha Dunham (Rosalind Ivan), 'exercise fanatic', loud, booming, monocled. Agatha seems to recognise Watson as kindred, calling him 'ducky', a word that had implications of queerness even at this time and would eventually be appropriated into the vocabulary of Polari.<sup>75</sup> Watson describes her to Holmes, 'If she's a she. From the looks of her, I wouldn't be surprised if it's a man dressed up!'.

In an extended scene set in fog on the ship's deck, all of the characters appear as silhouettes or as disembodied voices in the *mise-en-scene*. The scene is disorientating for the viewer. Watson has been sent by Holmes to search for his 'nephew' the bogus prince and meets up with Agatha. Sheila Woodbury (Marjorie Riordan) is on deck with her love interest Nikolas (Leslie Vincent). The dialogue, delivered in the fog in the most innocent tones possible, is loaded with *double entendre*:

Sheila: You know, there's something fascinating about the fog at sea.  
Nick: Gets you just as wet  
Sheila: Really is thick, isn't it?

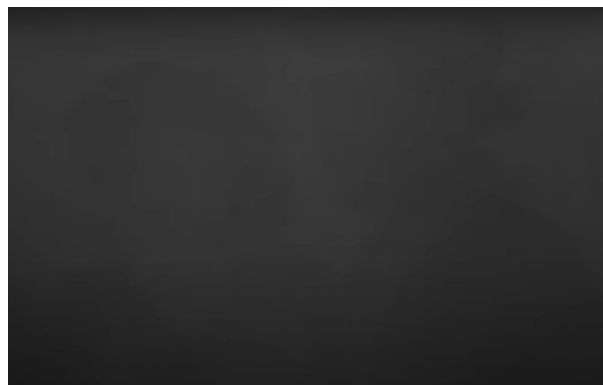


Figure 79. 'It looks ominous'.

*(The camera pans around the shadowy fog)*  
Sheila: You can hardly see the water.  
Nick: It looks ominous  
Sheila: Yes, doesn't it?

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<sup>75</sup> British Slang online: Polari Dictionary

*(silhouettes can be seen more clearly)*

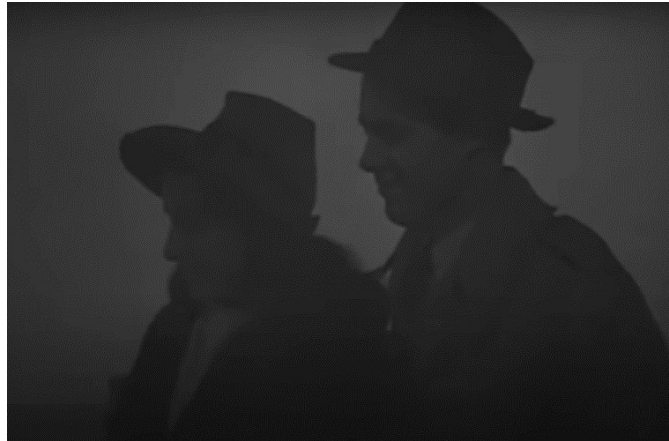


Figure 80.

Sheila: You're right about it being wet.

The closeness of the couple's bodies when they are finally seen and the way that the audience's view clears and is obscured at key moments in a conversation that could - with different vocal tones and pace – be suggestive of sexual activity. Seconds later, Holmes and Watson find each other in the fog and resume their conversation, stepping into the sexually loaded atmosphere left behind by the two lovers.

In the final act of the drama, through close physical contact Holmes stakes his claim to Watson following a party at which his partner has taken centre stage. Holmes seems to be sitting in his partner's lap, as he drapes his arm around his friend in a gesture of intimacy and protectiveness.



Figure 81.

When a dressing-gown clad Sherlock Holmes suggests to his evil shadow self, Moriarty (Henry Daniell), in *The Woman in Green*, that they should ‘walk together through the gates of eternity hand in hand’, he is implying that the two men, regardless of moral standpoint, are mirror images and will end up in the same situation. Their clothes indicate anything but heteronormativity, with Moriarty in a bow tie and waistcoat and Rathbone in his familiar dressing gown.



Figure 82. Meeting with Moriarty (Henry Daniell).

In other films with contemporary settings, Basil Rathbone plays the homosocial villain who faces his mirror self. Like Moriarty, who was ‘professor’, Rathbone the villain is often an expert scientist or ‘Doctor’. These films foreground the male-male dynamic, whilst maintaining a cursory heterosexual plot. They are usually horror movies, and Basil Rathbone’s place in the ‘mad doctor hall of fame’ must be secure. Christopher Frayling has noted that after the Second World War and the arrival of the atomic bomb, it was difficult to present an apocalypse that wasn’t caused by humans or their alien counterparts (2005: 38):

For most of the twentieth century, popular films have presented scientists as either impossibly mad or impossibly saintly and the mad scientists (fictional ones) have outnumbered the saintly scientists (real ones) by a very wide margin indeed [...] (A) detailed survey of more than a thousand horror films distributed in Britain between 1931 and 1984...reveals that mad scientists or their creations have been the villains/monsters of 31 per cent of the threats in all horror films (as compared with only 11 per cent of ‘natural’ threats) (2005: 40-41).

Basil Rathbone’s participation in this trend contained some of his most memorable – and yet

most forgotten – performances. In *Son of Frankenstein*, (Lee, 1939) Rathbone is Baron Wolf von Frankenstein, scientist and heir of his father’s paranoid vision. In this film, Frankenstein neglects his wife, Elsa (Josephine Hutchinson) to tend to the monster (Boris Karloff), who he keeps hidden his laboratory. In turn, the monster is also cared for by hunchbacked Ygor (Bela Lugosi), so the three men form an alternative homosocial family. Wolf Frankenstein is hunted by determined, disabled police inspector Krogh (Lionel Atwill), with whom he has a sympathetic connection despite their opposing functions in the plot. In *Fingers at the Window*, (Lederer, 1942), Rathbone is psychiatrist Dr Santelle, a psychopathic stalker and killer who hypnotises his patients into committing murder. In *The Black Sleep*, (LeBorg, 1956), Rathbone plays sinister Dr Cadman, who carries out illegal experiments on the brains of his victims in order to bring a cure to his wife.

The most intriguing of Rathbone’s scientists is Dr George Sebastien in *The Mad Doctor* (Whelan, 1941), a Paramount B movie.<sup>76</sup> Although the American Film Institute gives this movie’s genre as ‘drama’ and its subgenre as ‘suspense,’<sup>77</sup> the film contains elements of *film noir* style, whilst cashing in on the trend in the 1930s and 40s for horror ‘mad doctor’ narratives (Frayling, 2005: 128-9).

The most unusual aspect of this film is that Sebastien seems to be, despite his marriages, in a permanent domestic setup with his ‘assistant’ and ‘sidekick’ Maurice Gretz, played by homosexual actor Martin Kosleck.<sup>78</sup> Kosleck, who also appeared in *Journey to Algiers* as Holmes’ pursuer, seems to be more emotionally connected to his partner than a purely business arrangement might allow. Even the characters’ names seem to be indicating their

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<sup>76</sup> Richard Dyer has commented that censorship was not as rigorous for such films. B movie production was ‘less surveilled and controlled’ (Dyer, 2001: 109).

<sup>77</sup> AFI online: [afi.com](http://afi.com)

<sup>78</sup> Martin Kosleck recalled making the film positively: ‘I enjoyed working on Mad Doctor more than anything else in my career because of Basil Rathbone. He was a wonderful man ... very precise ... he rehearsed everything until it was perfect. Between our scenes, we would walk around the Paramount lot and go over our lines ... I loved that man’ (Druxman, 1976: 247). Rathbone was accustomed to the ‘culture of queers’: In 1927, he was the lead in Broadway show *The Captive* at the Empire theatre, when the cast was arrested for obscenity as it dealt with lesbianism. He also allegedly had an affair with lesbian actress Eva La Gallienne, who declared that he was ‘the only man’ she had ever loved (Rendell, 2013: n.p.).

sexuality, with 'Maurice' pronounced the effete French way with a long 'ee' and Sebastien's name evoking the 'queer' Christian saint (Dyer, 1995: 77), whilst their family pet is an evocative black cat.<sup>79</sup> Conversations involving authoritative male characters refer to Sebastien as 'twisted', 'strange', 'full of secrets,'<sup>80</sup> 'weird and wrong,'<sup>81</sup> phrases that stop just short of 'queer'.

Following his first meeting with Linda, Sebastien comes home to the apartment he shares with Maurice. He comes through the door to find his friend arranging flowers in dressing gown and cravat. As Richard Dyer noted, 'The identification of luxury and a certain sort of good taste (seen in baroque art, exotic plants) with decadence and evil is central to *film noir*' (Dyer, 1995: 56). The doctor asks, 'How would you like to be rich? Very rich? [...] You will ride like Fortunatus in a coach of gold'.<sup>82</sup> This romantic promise indicates that, unlike Sebastien's legal female wives, his victims, Maurice is the doctor's confidante and partner in crime. Their domestic arrangement hints heavily at a sexual and romantic relationship and the feminisation of Maurice is a stereotype that was well established:

Both male and female queer stereotypes assume that homosexuals are a particular kind of person. They also draw upon the notions of homosexuality as gender in-betweenism, inversion and androgyny, notions found not only in homophobic (religious, psychiatric, sociological) discourses but in subcultural practices, sympathetic sexology and such homosexual rights activism as there was. In this understanding, queer has something to do with not being properly masculine or feminine (Dyer, 2001:97).

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<sup>79</sup> Black cats, the witch's familiar, signify supernatural powers. Sebastien does hypnotise his clients and is talked about as someone who is charming, even mesmerising. The black cat is also commonly avoided as a domestic pet because of commonly held superstitions (McElroy, 2020: 7), which shows that these men live outside of a society that share beliefs and fears.

<sup>80</sup> Dr Downer.

<sup>81</sup> Gil Sawyer.

<sup>82</sup> *The Pleasant Comedie of Old Fortunatus* (1599) is a play in prose and verse by Thomas Dekker, based on the German legend of Fortunatus and his magic inexhaustible purse.



Figure 83. Maurice as femme fatale. *The Mad Doctor*.

Maurice stops arranging the flowers as they talk and drapes himself languorously on the sofa opposite Sebastien, throwing his head back. Seductive Maurice, complete with matching feminine French name, is the nearest thing this film has to a *femme fatale*.<sup>83</sup>



Figure 84.

Having fallen in love with Linda, Sebastien feels that he has been cured of his misogynistic need to kill women and therefore presumably of his homosexuality. His language is very suggestive as he discusses himself. He talks about freeing himself from ‘the devil of time, place, space, things unknown. In the past’. Following the realisation of his love for Linda,

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<sup>83</sup> Richard J Corber builds on Dyer’s theories by drawing together the *femme fatale* and the homosexual villain ‘Like her, they are fastidious about their appearance, wear expensive, well-tailored clothes, and are identified with luxurious settings’ (1977: 10).

Sebastien comes home to break up with Maurice. He tells his partner that he is going away without him, 'You are too materialistic for the company of elves'. Maurice sarcastically remarks, 'so you're going to turn elf'. 'Turning elf' appears to be a personal code between the two men. It might represent heterosexuals as a type of being distinct from fairies or demons/monsters, depending on how they have framed themselves and their relationship previously. The implication of 'turning' elf does seem to incorporate a change in identification of the self. Sebastien continues by insisting that he has changed, 'once again I am human', 'once again I'm the man I was born'.<sup>84</sup> Maurice is visibly upset:

Maurice: And what about me? Hmmm?

Dr Sebastien: We are out of tune, you and I, Maurice.

Maurice: Are we? Why?

Dr Sebastien: Why? Has it ever crept into that Aboriginal skull of yours a slight wonder as to why someone so brilliant, so superior as I should have gone through life like ... like some medieval monster.<sup>85</sup>

Maurice: You are a monster, doctor. Born in the dark of the moon. And no breath of God in your soul.

This conversation clearly sets up a sexual duality and presents the two characters' fundamental differences. Sebastien's association of the heterosexual with the 'elf', the human, the innocence of a man reborn, and the homosexual with monstrosity, racial Otherness contrasts with Maurice's. Sebastien's rejection of Maurice is also a rejection of the homosexual lifestyle and his outsider status in society. It is clear that he always wanted to belong. Maurice's perception, however, is that it is Sebastien's desire to be untrue to his own nature that makes him monstrous, not his sexuality, and he, Maurice, remains faithful and steadfast, as he risks his life to solve his partner's problem. Yet, as the movie progresses, Sebastien fails to cut himself off from Maurice and all he represents, because their past crimes and combined history act as a bonding agent between them.

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<sup>84</sup> There are indications of Sebastien's identity issues here. He perceived himself as Other or monstrous before, but now he can be 'human', a 'man'.

<sup>85</sup> Sebastien perceives his sexuality as racially Other, and monstrous.

Following his marriage to Linda, Sebastien asks the driver to take him to his apartment whilst his bride waits in the car below. He finds Maurice, who is emerging from the bedroom, squirting perfume on himself from a glass bottle and putting on his tie.<sup>86</sup>



Figure 85.

As the dialogue progresses, Sebastien and Maurice stand together in front of the mirror as Maurice does up one tie, then files his nails, then does up another tie in a darker colour. In an intimate moment, Maurice touches Sebastien on the shoulder, turning him to look in the mirror and says, quite gently, ‘Look at you. Look at my brainy professor. Who is afraid now?’

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<sup>86</sup> Richard Dyer: ‘perfume [...] is something with which [...] queers are often associated in *noir* film’ (2001: 92).





Figure 86. 'My brainy professor'.

For a modern audience, the implications of the relationship are clear, and familiar codes of queerness are at work in the characterisation of foreign and effete Maurice. The flowers, the dressing gown, the perfume bottle, the mirror, dapper clothes, tasteful décor and his unswerving devotion to 'his' doctor all indicate queerness, as Dyer has shown (1995, 2001). This foundational relationship for Sebastien proves to be his most significant one, and the doctor, in contradiction of the film's title, is far from mad. He is, however, tortured, in a way that Maurice, secure in his own identity, is not.<sup>87</sup> At one point, Maurice laments Sebastien's fickle nature whilst also hinting at his own past experiences: 'You are like all the other clever ones. Clever until they meet a woman. And then you suddenly become fools.' Maurice has suffered in this way before and seems unsurprised at his partner's lack of faithfulness.

The main difference between *The Mad Doctor* and the *noirs* that follow, is its focus on the pursued rather than the detective/pursuer. This is the story of Maurice and Sebastien, not of Downer, Gil and Linda, and as such it offers an unusual viewpoint. The conversations they have with each other function in the plot as a structural substitute for the heterosexual romance. *The Mad Doctor's* opening scene, a stormy night in a small town, implies that it

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<sup>87</sup> Sebastien's paranoia grows in the final part of the movie. Richard Dyer has argued, 'paranoia is a sign of homosexuality' (2001: 94).

will be the Gothic story of a psychopathic Bluebeard. But as it unfolds the narrative leads elsewhere. Sebastien's genuine intellectual agonies as he wrangles with society's views of his lifestyle make him more than a villain. Although his motives are not initially good, he understands Linda better than Gil does and cures her of her depression.

Critical responses to the film varied, but it was successful enough.<sup>88</sup> Bosley Crowther considered it 'too silly for words' (*New York Times*, February 27, 1941:23) whilst Philip K Scheuer considered it 'a pretty good picture' (*LA Times*, Feb 7, 1941: A17). Only one fan magazine reviewer in my sample noticed anything odd about the movie, commenting 'Martin Kosleck is very effective in a curious characterisation which is never quite explained, but which is intriguing' (*Modern Screen*, March 1941: 96-97). Dyer has argued that 'Noir needs homosexuals not as villains but as part of its endemic epistemological uncertainty' (2001: 110). As in *noir*, this film plays with this sense of uncertainty and almost understanding, where 'queers constitute a disturbance in knowledge' (ibid).

One online source suggests that the story of *The Mad Doctor* is loosely based on Hungarian serial killer 'The Monster of Czinkota', Bela Kiss, who also had a male lover and murdered a series of women in a similar way (Jessen, 2016: n.p.). This might explain why the homosexual subplot is more clear than is often the case in this era. Whatever the inspiration, Basil Rathbone and Martin Kosleck make an attractive screen pairing, with a clear indication of queerness and Otherness.

The roles played by Basil Rathbone in his career are more varied and intriguing than those of many of his British contemporaries. His Hollywood and British output combined reveal his ability to convey Gothic Otherness in a variety of ways. Although he was typecast, his 'type' seemed to cross over genres and allow him to be both hero and villain. The intelligence that

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<sup>88</sup>The *LA Times* reported that it was held over for 4 weeks in a double bill with *The Wolf Man* (Feb 11, 1942: A11)

he conveyed was crucial to audiences' appreciation of his presence in a number of films of different genres.

As I have shown, transatlantic stars Ronald Colman and Basil Rathbone came to express different types of gendered, racial or sexual Other both in their star discourse in fan magazines and media, and in the roles they played in transatlantic film. They were in effect the living, breathing embodiments of the Gothic Jekyll/Hyde dichotomy which took on a particular resonance in heavily policed cinema of the 1920-1950s as it did in the repressive atmosphere of the *fin-de-siecle* UK.

In the next chapter, I will explore screen and media representations of another actor whose fan discourse and film presence also had particular significance for an understanding of the British 'Other': George Sanders.

## Chapter 4: George Sanders: The Unmitigated Cad

### 1 George Sanders: The Beautiful Mask

Whereas on the screen I am invariably a sonofabitch, in life I am a dear, dear boy (George Sanders, 1960/2015: 73).

If you covered him in garbage

George Sanders would still have style (*Celluloid Heroes*, The Kinks).

I myself am heaven and hell (*The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Al Lewin, 1945).

In David Niven's account of the British colony Christmas gathering at Ronald and Benita Colman's Hollywood home in the thirties,<sup>89</sup> Niven notes that he and George Sanders were the younger generation of actors who sat at the feet of the 'ladies from hell', listening with some awe to the stories about their time in the war (Niven, 1975/1995: 179). There is some irony here, because another transatlantic world war was on its way, and the two younger men would be affected by it whilst the older ones dedicated themselves to fundraising (variously dated letters Noel Coward Rooms). David Niven would join up and fight as soon as Britain declared war (Lord, 2003: 51, 128), whilst George Sanders would move his closest relatives from the UK to Hollywood, becoming the breadwinner for his extended family (Watson, interview, 2019).

Perhaps more than any other star of his era, George Sanders epitomised the duality of the star's position, as he sidled from villain to hero to character roles throughout his 40-year career. Best remembered today as the voice of evil Bengal tiger Shere Khan in the 1969 Disney film of *The Jungle Book*, Sanders is defined by his villainous rather than his leading man roles.<sup>90</sup> It is notable that, for a very brief period, George Sanders' profile in fan publications implied that he was at least as popular as the matinee idols of the era, even more than heartthrob Ronald Colman. Sanders' rich, sonorous voice, loaded with irony, could convey a whole world of double meaning, which, in the heavy censorship of the 1930-1940s, allowed him to convey moral and sexual ambivalence.

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<sup>89</sup> Chapter 3 of this thesis.

<sup>90</sup> Wikipedia: 'His heavy, upper-class English accent and smooth, bass voice often led him to be cast as sophisticated but villainous characters'. Internet Movie Database: 'He continued to play mostly villains and charming heels until his suicide in 1972'.

Like Basil Rathbone, George Sanders would become known for his screen villainy, but unlike Rathbone, he would continue to appear in leading man roles until the late 1950s. In sharp contrast to Ronald Colman, despite them having a wife in common,<sup>91</sup> he would become associated with behaviour that was the absolute antithesis of gentlemanliness both on and off the screen. Unlike the ‘Ladies From Hell’, Sanders would not go to war and would express unpatriotic views, teasing his fan magazine interviewers with the idea that his sister was married to a Nazi.<sup>92</sup> Despite this, he would appear in the first anti-Nazi film *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, (Litvak, 1939) and, although he apparently did not mention it in interviews, presumably he received death threats like the rest of the cast (Hirschhorn, 1979: 198).

Even more than Basil Rathbone and Herbert Marshall, George Sanders in his heyday exuded the *fin-de-siecle* decadence of a latter-day Oscar Wilde and a sheen of Noel Cowardesque apparent amoral wit and elusiveness. In a 2000 article in *Opera News*, contributor Brooke Peters wrote an article called ‘Vox Humana’, addressing the question ‘Who had the greatest voice you ever heard?’ She answers the question with the name George Sanders, arguing, ‘Speech is too often neglected in discussion of vocal artistry’. She continues: ‘His voice was too artfully mannered, too deliciously ornamental, ever to be taken for sincere’ (Peters, 2000: 76). Even his voice expressed insincere doubleness and a suggestiveness that is absolutely uncensorable.

George Sanders was born into the genteel world of the Russian aristocracy just before the Revolution, and, as he recounted in his autobiography in 1960, that, at age 11, he and his family left the refined atmosphere of pre-revolutionary St Petersburg on one train just as Lenin rode in on another (Sanders, 1960/2015: 13). The Sanders family was part Scottish, part Russian, and a discovery made after his death revealed that their father was in fact the

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<sup>91</sup> Following Colman’s death, Sanders married his widow, Benita Hume, a very happy marriage, until her death in 1967 (Vanderbeets, 1991:157). Aherne recounts, however, that ‘Ronnie’ disapproved of George ‘who was rarely invited to the house’ (1981: 78).

<sup>92</sup> ‘His sister married a high up Nazi’ ‘The Strictly Private Life of George Sanders’ (*Photoplay*, September 1943: 53). There is no evidence for this, although his brother-in-law was German (Watson, interview, 2019).

illegitimate son of two senior members of the Russian royal family who had been fostered by the Sanders family (Watson interview, 2019). Sanders' education took place in the British public-school system where he and his older brother Tom felt like outsiders and both used a persona of aloof intelligence and rebelliousness to find their way through the confusing change in their lives (Parkinson, 2016: 21). Sanders shows an awareness of the need to create doubles through screen personae in his biography:

Actors are oddly compounded of fact and fantasy. They are spell-binders who are bound by their own spells...Sometimes this curious sorcery produces a second man, a sort of sorcerer's apprentice, or marionette, who leads a separate, almost uncontrolled life of his own [...] Sometimes this marionette or mask is so intoxicatingly beautiful that the wearer becomes reluctant to reveal his less enlivening aspects to the public, and retires inviolate, securely carapaced from the world by his mask. (Sanders, 1960/2015: 41).

Even at the end of his life, Sanders maintained the illusion of the 'mask', which is evident from the way that he felt it right to write two suicide notes. The first one, written for the public in his usual ironic tone, read: 'Dear World, I am leaving because I am bored. I feel I have lived long enough. I am leaving you with your worries in this sweet cesspool. Good luck' (Vanderbeets, 1991: 203). Aware of his own failing health and declining quality of life, however, following an Alzheimer's diagnosis and a minor stroke, he wrote a private, affectionate note to his sister: 'Dearest Margoolinka. Don't be sad. I have only anticipated the inevitable by a few years' (Vanderbeets, 1991:204). The sincere, affectionate tone of the latter message is in sharp contrast with the world-weary adoption of the Sanders 'mask' in the former.

The phenomenon of George Sanders, from his first films in the mid-thirties until 1972, stands out from his contemporaries, revealing something of the 'role of the individual in society' (Dyer, 1979/1998: 9), but also revealing something of the role of the British double in American movie culture. And yet, paradoxically he was also an actor who over and over would play versions of himself (Sanders, 1960/2015: 59). George Sanders revealed that the role of the individual is complicated and must sometimes protect itself with masks and distractions

from the private self. His star persona also reveals the way that British masculinity was Othered and gothicised in film.

As early as 1938, an article was produced about him entitled ‘Villain or Hero? George Sanders hasn’t quite made up his mind just which he wants to be!’ (*Hoyt News*, March 19<sup>th</sup> 1938: 10). In his autobiography, however, George reflected on this period:

When I began my career in films I found it rather frustrating not to be cast in romantic parts, since it seemed to me that I was just as handsome, dashing, and heroic as any of my contemporaries. But I soon became adjusted to the idea that I would always be cast as the villain and I have found many compensations for this state of affairs (Sanders, 1960/2015: 40).

Sanders did take on some heroic and romantic leading roles, but he always seemed more comfortable as the hero’s evil nemesis.<sup>93</sup> When in 1940, Sanders persuaded his brother, Tom, who had become an actor, to join him in Hollywood, a social, media and cinematic discourse was set up involving the two brothers, which added to a sense of a certain type of British identity as dual and split. The two men were so similar vocally that when they were both cast in a radio play, they were told they would have to ‘toss a coin’ for one part because they sounded as if they were the same person (Parkinson, 2016: 36). Although George would not allow Tom to use their family name, Sanders, the close identification of the two men became part of their fan magazine and media discourse.<sup>94</sup> The less charismatic, more troubled Tom could rarely be seen in media discourse, as I will show, in any light other than as ‘George Sanders’ brother’ (Parkinson, 2016: 3).

The fan magazines of the twenties, thirties and forties worked with the studios to present the ‘illusion of a window into the lives of the stars that the readers adored on screen’ and were, it

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<sup>93</sup> George played the romantic lead in *Lancer Spy* (Ratoff, 1937), *International Settlement* (Forde, 1938), *Sundown* (Hathaway, 1941), *Rage in Heaven* (Van Dyke 1941), *The Lodger*, (Brahm, 1944), *Hangover Square*, (Brahm, 1945).

<sup>94</sup> Tom Sanders took on the name Tom Conway, a name chosen by ringing a random number (Parkinson, 2016: 36).

is thought, generally aimed at a female readership (Slide, 2010: 6, 4). Anthony Slide has observed:

Fan mags were never totally under the control of the studio heads, but they did provide a constant and reliable outlet for publicity stories. The writers of those stories were often under the employ of either the stars or the studios to which those stars were under contract. The relationship was never spelled out to the reader, but it was an open secret within the industry, and the trade papers of the time would often identify a fan mag writer as a publicist and vice versa. (Slide, 2010: 7).

As Paul McDonald has observed, not all actors are stars:

In the labour pool of actors, stars are the elite. [...] Ordinary performers will not have to complete the promotional commitments that a star will, however, a star will not have to undergo the humiliation and disappointment of the auditioning process (2000: 10).

Whilst Sanders' time amongst the starry elite might have been brief, he was particularly controversial. Certainly, it is likely that he might not have had to audition much in his career, undoubtedly because his uniqueness meant that there was a 'type' in films of the era that was a George Sanders part.<sup>95</sup> His period of popularity in fan magazines was clearly the result of some clever manipulation on the part of Fox's publicity department, as his film roles became entwined with his star image until the two became one.

Sanders had not begun acting until his late twenties, when a colleague (an actress later known as Greer Garson) suggested he join her amateur dramatics society whilst they were both temping at an advertising company in London (Vanderbeets, 1991: 28). Following singing lessons from his white Russian uncle, he went on to appear in revues and musicals, and was Noel Coward's understudy in *Conversation Pieces* in the West End (Vanderbeets, 1991: 29). He worked consistently on BBC radio, then in 1936 he appeared in a small but memorable part as a god called 'Indifference', oiled up, nearly naked, riding a horse, in *The Man Who Could Work Miracles* (Korda, 1937).<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Sanders would play leading men and villains, detectives and criminals, but always exuded a type of English charm and sophistication.

<sup>96</sup> Sanders recalled, 'The part called for me to ride half-naked and shiny with grease, at four o'clock in the morning during one of England's coldest winters, on a horse which was also coated with grease. [...] I was the only one of the three that didn't fall off' (1960/2015: 39).



Following his success in this film, Sanders was offered the part of Lord Everett Stacy in the Twentieth Century Fox production *Lloyd's of London* (King, 1936), a huge box office success, resulting in a seven-year contract at the studio. The reception of his first Hollywood role was entirely favourable. As his biographer observed, 'a major movie villain was born.'

(Vanderbeets, 1991: 32). In the *New York Times* Sanders was described as 'a new villain threat on the cinema horizon,' quoting Sanders as saying, 'I find it so pleasant to be unpleasant' (Vanderbeets, 1991: 35). In the UK, too he was hailed as a major new talent 'a fine study of a rascal', 'newcomer, George Sanders plays a nasty dandy with a polish reminiscent of Basil Rathbone' (*The Sunday Express*, April 11, 1937: 15) 'George Sanders plays the villain with menace and a sense of style'. (*The Sunday Times*, April 11, 1937: 25).

The tone of Sanders' comment, 'I find it so pleasant to be unpleasant' formed a launching pad for his star discourse as the media responded to his function as performer, and this wide acceptance of him as a villain permeated the discourse that surrounded him on and off screen. Both in film roles and in media, Sanders is seen to welcome the role of villain, 'heavy' or, to be more precise, to successfully epitomise the image of the 'cad'.

From the launch of his Hollywood career, George Sanders was associated with a type of villainy that made him, as the title of his autobiography reveals, a 'professional cad'. The 'cad' is a British stereotype that is firmly rooted in a class system. The word originates from a noun for the servants who would run errands for young rich undergraduates in Oxford and Cambridge, but it came to be used more widely as an insult (OED.com). By the time George Sanders went to Hollywood, the word had evolved to mean 'A man who behaves dishonourably, especially towards a woman' (ibid). Sanders himself described the character he became best known for with his tongue firmly in his cheek:

I was definitely a nasty bit of goods. My nastiness however was of a novel kind. I was beastly but never coarse. I was a high-class sort of heel. If the plot required me to kill or maim anybody I always did so in a well-mannered way and if I may say so, with good taste. And I always wore a clean shirt. I was the sort of villain who was finicky about getting blood on his clothes; it wasn't so much that I cared about being found out, but I liked to look neat (Sanders, 1960/2015: 60).

Sanders brought a sense of humour to the cad, and a heavy sense of irony. In *The 100 words that make the English*, Tony Thorne discusses the word and the concept as particularly and peculiarly English. He describes Sanders, his prime illustration of the term, as ‘a languid, supercilious scoundrel, [...] so suave that he was rumoured not to be English after all’ (2011: 122). Thorne considers Sanders’ screen persona as an archetype of caddishness. Of course, despite his education, in many ways Sanders was not very English, his formative years having been spent in the ‘clink of champagne glasses’ amongst the Russian elite (Sanders, 1960/2015: 10). Benita Hume, Sanders’ beloved third wife, wrote to a friend, ‘there is something irresistible about a man who cultivates caddishness to such Homeric proportions’ (Aherne, 1981: 69). She wrote this before they were married, revealing that the ‘cad’ was a part that George played in his social interactions, not just with the press, but also implying that she considered it to be an act.<sup>97</sup>

The literary antecedent of the cad is to be found in a familiar literary Gothic character, the aristocratic villain. This villain is high class, corrupt, with a veneer of charm and civilisation that hides a self-seeking dishonourable desire to cheat the young defenceless woman of her worldly goods and her virginity. Signor Montoni is clearly caddish in Ann Radcliffe’s classic *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) but it is Victorian Gothic fiction that focuses most clearly on the upper-class male predator: Count Fosco and Lord Percival Glyde in Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White* (1859), Charles Dickens creations such as Sir Mulberry Hawk and Bentley Drummle (*Nicholas Nickleby* 1839 and *Great Expectations* 1861) and Oscar Wilde’s Lord Henry Wotton, in *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, (1891).

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<sup>97</sup> Presumably, a woman who was married to the famously gentlemanly Ronald Colman, would not have married a man she thought would mistreat her, and it is uncontested that she and George had an extremely happy marriage (Watson, interview, 2019)

Sanders' performance as Dorian's languid mentor and admirer, Lord Henry Wotton in the 1945 film version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Lewin) is still definitive. His smooth Jack Favell in the cinematic version of Daphne Du Maurier's modern Gothic tale of female entrapment and doubling, *Rebecca*, (Hitchcock, 1940) exudes sexuality and disdain for morality. American Gothic classic *The House of the Seven Gables* (Nathaniel Hawthorne), filmed as a B movie in 1940, has Sanders in its role of smooth, suave, cruel brother, Jaffrey Pyncheon, set up in contrast with harmless Vincent Price's hero. In the 1930s and 1940s, Sanders played Germanic villains, and suave unreliable European love rivals to American leading men,<sup>98</sup> the Saint and the Falcon, (Holmesian British detectives relocated to the American city). The English detective hero played by actors such as Basil Rathbone and George Sanders allowed for a new type of heroic masculinity in film. As Christopher Hart has argued,

Their association with villainy/Englishness allowed the detective-heroes they played to embody conflicting notions of heroism that a specifically 'American' hero might not be able to do: the soft-boiled detective could (as James Bond does today) allow an indulgence in, and an identification with, a type of man who is suave and cultured, lives an indulgent lifestyle and bends the law without 'tarnishing American values or masculinity' (2008 :103).

In fan magazines too, George Sanders' rudeness, selfishness, laziness, and caddishness, juxtaposed with his charm and intelligence, made his discourse unique. No contemporary American actors seemed to be presented in such a dual way, keeping American values and masculinity 'untarnished' for the censors.

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<sup>98</sup> Sanders played a First World War German villain (and English hero) in *Lancer Spy* (Ratoff, 1937), and *Nurse Edith Cavell* (Wilcox, 1939). Nazi in *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (Litvak, 1939) and *Man Hunt* (Lang, 1941), Nazi collaborator in *This Landis Mine* (Renoir, 1943).

In this chapter, I will explore George Sanders' representation in the fan magazines in my sample, then I will be looking at the ways in which his film roles expressed his doubleness and Otherness. Finally, I will be looking into the Hollywood career and media discourse of his brother, Tom Conway.

## **2 Fan Magazines: The Strange Case of George Sanders**

The period of George Sanders' popularity in the publications in my sample is between 1938-1946, climaxing in 1942, then gradually petering out with the last feature article about him appearing in *Screenland* in 1946, the oddly titled 'There's a Bloke, My Son'. After this time, according to this digital sample, Sanders seems to be usually mentioned in passing, usually in reviews of his films. The creation of George Sanders' star persona in this sample of fan magazines reveals as much about social history as it does about his function as transgressive Gothic British man.

The first available fan magazine interview with George Sanders is 'Ten Ways to Avoid Matrimony' which appeared not long after his arrival in Hollywood (*Hollywood*, January 1938: 15). Sanders is introduced by writer Melissa Dodd as a 'personable young man', and the first paragraph is dedicated to the attractiveness of his physique. His height (6ft 3), weight (200lbs) and 'gray-green eyes, humorous [...], thick brown hair' (ibid). The journalist feels the need to justify the 'avoiding marriage' thread of the feature by protesting: 'Not that he's a woman-hater, he simply isn't a woman-seeker' (ibid). The narrative thread allows Sanders to detail the ten different ways in which he has avoided marriage through his romantic evasion of ten women, from sitting down on the curb in public to 'jokingly' suggesting that women are inferior to men (*Hollywood*, January 1938: 15, 47). The tone is flippant and witty, urbane and supercilious, and it established Sanders as charming, caddish, and, in its list of ten women of different nationalities, energetically and promiscuously heterosexual. This article sets up George Sanders as attractive, eligible and suggests that he is a man for whom sex does not need to be accompanied by romance or marriage. This article is illustrated by a

photograph of Sanders in the B movie *Lancer Spy* (Ratoff, 1937). He stands, impassive, facing the camera, in a shaven Germanic haircut, with Dolores Del Rio draped on him, gazing up at him adoringly. The by-line reads:

George Sanders does not claim to be a Don Juan or a more than normally pursued young man, but here is how he learned about the single life the hard way (*Hollywood*, January 1938:15).

**10 WAYS TO AVOID MATRIMONY**

**George Sanders does not claim to be a Don Juan or a more than normally pursued young man, but here is how he learned about the single life the hard way**

By MELISSA DODD

■ "Ten ways to avoid matrimony . . ." ruminated George Sanders, his six-foot-three height outlined against the stone chimney in the living room, his gray-green eyes humorous. "I wonder if there's anything a man needs to know more in these expensive days than how not to get married? Well, I know ten ways.

"I learned them in Finland, Denmark, Germany, France, England and South America. Unintentionally, mind you."

He ran a hand across thick brown hair in a rueful gesture. He is, of course, the hero of *The Life of a Lancer Spy*, a picture in which he plays no less than four (please count 'em!) roles. He was the film husband, a meanie, of Madeleine Carroll in *Lloyd's of London*, and subsequently had parts in *Slave Ship* and *Love Is News*.

In short, Sanders—you pronounce it "Sahn-ders," for it's as English as Piccadilly Circus—is the new discovery at 20th Century-Fox Studios. They don't understand why the personable young man hasn't been marched to the altar long before this. But Sanders understands, all right.

Not that he's a woman hater; he simply isn't a woman seeker. He just reads and smokes his pipe and sails a boat and works at the studio. His big ambition is to snaffle 20 hours' sleep a day but, failing this, he snaffles as much as he can. He even lives in solitude at the top of a gosh-awful hill on a road called, aptly, Hermit's Glen.

■ "In avoiding matrimony," continued the hermit of Hermit's Glen, his raffish look belying the modulated accents, "a man generally has to be skilful. But I wasn't. My single blessedness, if it's that, comes from following rules I didn't know existed. Like that time about the silver box.

"And a good thing! For if a man marries too early, he's likely to marry the wrong woman.

"Meanwhile, you behold in me an expert. An inadvertent expert. From my own sad experiences and those of my friends I've gleaned ten rules on how



he happened to have been born; an expert swimmer, holder of the British Humane Society Medal for rescuing a man from the Thames; and, with time out for tobacco growing in Brazil, a London stage, radio and cinema hit.

"Curlstones," the hermit was recalling gloomily; "they have nice, high curbs in some of the towns of Denmark, and I was tired of walking, so I sat down on one. She said people didn't do such things. I grew stubbren, and sat any-way. I like to sit on curlstones. She walked off, and I never could even get her by telephone afterward. Be highly individualistic (she called it conspicuous) in conservative company. That's rule No. 1 for the wedding-ring dodger.

"Then—I prefer to sail a boat alone or with a couple of fellows, no woman tottering about the deck. And I like raw onions. If a lady needs a gas mask to listen to your tender chatter (have you any idea how harsh 'gas mask' sounds in Finnish?), or if you never meet girls under glamorous circumstances, the spell of the sea, you know, or the moonlight and what-not—Well, there you are. Or here I am.

■ "A fourth way to make an orange blossom curl up, as I realized from watching a friend's effort, is to launch the topic of hard times plus an endorsement of the economic equality of the sexes when the waiter presents the dinner check. My word, that'll work like a charm; she never spoke to him again. Still another method, which unfolded on the Riviera, is to ignore the little amenities. By the time a second friend of mine hadn't done enough hand-kissing and bowing from the waist to suit his lady love—finis! With fireworks."

Sanders puffed thoughtfully at his pipe. "A truly infallible way to scramble the bridal bouquet and make utter hash of the nuptials, though, is to get going about the superiority of the male. Once in England I barely mentioned that man seemed intended by nature to be the boss, because where are your [Continued on page 47]

George Sanders shows of what stern stuff he is made in *The Life of a Lancer Spy* by resisting the allure of Dolores Del Rio at this moment in the adventure film

to strew the banana peel in the path of romance.

"Curlstones did it in Denmark. A silver box in Venezuela. A hat in Paris."

He slanted an eyebrow from the corner where he'd dropped into a big chair. The knotty pine living room of this neat, camp-like house among eucalyptus trees and terraces of blue-purple flowers has comfortable chairs all about, and plenty of end tables with books on them; a man's room, with a free outlook from many windows down the tumbled green hillside. A bachelor is safe here from at least the dangers who are overweight; they'd be out of breath before the slope was half way conquered, let alone the hermit on top of it.

■ Don't toss an overabundance of solicitude, however, at the hermit in question. He's around 200 completely athletic pounds; former interscholastic boxing champion during his English college career; after he and his British parents escaped the revolution in Russia where

Figure 1. *Hollywood*, 1938.

Sanders' attractiveness to women – and his foreignness<sup>99</sup> – move to the forefront of his star discourse. The magazine article establishes Sanders as a cynical and world wearily anti-romantic, potentially misogynistic figure.

<sup>99</sup> As can be seen in the comparison to famous fictional Spanish lover, Don Juan, who was first mentioned in a seventeenth century play by Tirso de Molina (Waxman, 1908: 184).

This focus on the attractiveness of Sanders continues as in *Photoplay* September 1939, the Cal York gossip column, puts George Sanders on the list of 'great screen lovers' and asks whether British men make better lovers than American ones. He is placed as follows:

Errol Flynn, George Brent, Brian Aherne, David Niven, George Sanders, Leslie Howard, Cary Grant, Laurence Olivier, Ray Milland, Dick Greene, Ronald Colman, Basil Rathbone, to say nothing of Douglas Fairbanks Jr, who seems more British than American' (*Photoplay*, September 1939: 61).

Sanders appears at the start sandwiched between David Niven and Leslie Howard, two of the most sought-after British leading men of the period. Surprisingly, he is placed ahead of the hugely popular Ronald Colman, which gives some indication of his burgeoning and sudden fame. All of these actors were primarily known for their attractiveness and charm, and Sanders' appearance on this list in 1939, when he is only a supporting or B movie player, might give some indication of his growing popularity with fan magazine readers or the studio's desire to promote their new star.

In the February 1940 edition of *Photoplay*, Sanders is included in a list of 'neglected players', where the writer protests that he is sadly not used as much as 'other British leading men' (19). This further reference to him as a 'leading man' indicates that the fan magazines are perceiving him as something that he really, consistently, is not, but the studio seems to be promoting him. In June of the same year, Cal York briefly reports 'George Sanders' theory about marriage is upsetting the girls no end' (*Photoplay*, June 1940: 12). In August 1941, Sanders tells Fredda Dudley dismissively, 'all women are actors, we needn't discuss them' (*Screenland*, August 1941: 51). The female readership and female writers focus on Sanders' sex appeal and notice his apparent disdain for women but do not seem to be put off by this, as can be seen in Sanders' discourse in the magazines in the months to come. One 1941 article, 'Hollywood's Most Baffling Bachelor', suggests that women 'have gone mad about him', they 'want to reform him', that his life is 'too private', he is a 'heavenly hermit' with 'the disposition of an angel' (*Modern Screen*, June 1941: 44-45). The photographs of a smiling

Sanders, one with arms folded and the other, taken from above as he relaxes in an armchair, emphasise his role as attractive star. The second image shows him in casual sweater, an unusual look for Sanders. The smiles and relaxed poses are unusual for his publicity images from this time. The text promotes his attractiveness, whilst admitting that most of his roles are as villains (45).

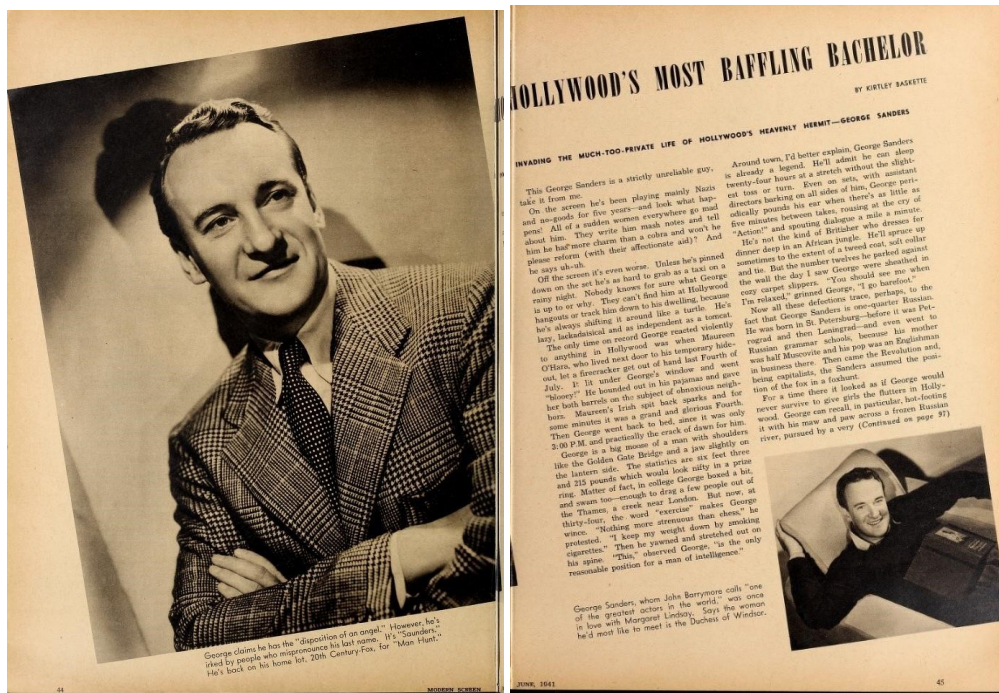


Figure 2. *Modern Screen*, 1941.

The contradictory discourse of villain/hero is echoed throughout the pages dedicated to George in this era.<sup>100</sup> In August 1940 an article entitled ‘Sanders – Saint or Sinner’ carries a capitalised bi-line that emphasises his charisma:

GEORGE SANDERS WHOSE TEUTONIC TIDBITS WOULD EVEN MAKE HITLER CRY ‘COMMAND FUEHRER [sic] WE FOLLOW!’ IS AS GOOD IN SAINTLY ROLES AS WHEN HE’S PLAYING SINNERS (*Motion Picture*, August, 1940: 32).

<sup>100</sup> Examples include: ‘Sinister But Smooth’ (Gloria Brent, *Hollywood*, August 1941: 62-3), ‘Hollywood’s Baffling Bachelor’ (Kirtley Baskette, *Modern Screen*, June 1941: 45).

Somehow Sanders is both approved and disapproved of, he is split into Jekyll/Hyde roles and the discourse makes him seem fragmented and dual. The contentiousness of his persona led to some discussion in fan magazine letters pages.

Marsha Orgeron has noted that in fan publications, letters pages offered fans an opportunity to interact with film culture, often offering not only publication but also remuneration for these interaction (Orgeron, 2009: 3). Scholars have also argued that the letters produced in these pages might not be genuine but invented by magazine staff (Stacey, 1994: 5). Lies Lanckman has recently addressed this, conducting her own research into a sample of letters from the pages of a selection of magazines published in 1930 (2019: 45). She used census records in order to build up a picture of the fans who were published in these magazines and has established that the majority were sent by real people from across the US, and that the fans who interacted with these magazines were often, but not exclusively, women (Lanckman, 2019: 47).

The star discourse constructed around George Sanders in letters pages in 1941 focuses on his sex appeal. One poem enthuses, 'Three cheers for Sanders' he is 'that popular rascal' 'the robber who steals every scene' (*Photoplay*, March 1941: 15). In *Screenland* a letter from Ruth King, New Jersey, declares:

He leers and sneers his way off with every scene in which he appears and the hero's oomph pales into insignificance before the strength of his cold cultured knavery. (*Screenland*, 1941: 13).

Another *Screenland* letter bemoans 'haven't they got enough heroes roaming around Hollywood without wasting the magnificent evil of George Sanders in *saintly* roles?' (*Screenland*, March 1941: 15).<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> The discourse surrounding George suggested a moral ambivalence as well as a villain/hero dichotomy: 'He gets letters accusing him of being 'a German spy, a fifth columnist and a Nazi fugitive. He gets a kick out of the accusations. 'That sort of thing would require effort' he says, settling into a comfortable chair' (*Screenland*, August 1941: 51).



Duality is central to the appeal of George according to these women. Whether the letters' page responses were from real women or not, the female voice that is propagated is one without coyness or pretence, seemingly confident, sexually responsive and aware. The voice rejects prudery and shyness about sex. These could well be the voices of the female audiences who flocked to see Mae West films, with her ready assertion of female sexuality and power (Black, 1994: 72). The most sexually open of all is the 'Open Letter to Mr Churchill' from Mary Huntingdon of San Francisco:

Dear Mr Churchill

You should be warned of the subtle pro-Nazi propaganda being spread by some of our nicest villains. It goes like this: the hero is being knocked around by the Gestapo and I'm all worked up. Then in comes George Sanders as the head Nazi and gosh, I'm sunk. You can see it's a serious situation Mr Churchill. Conrad Veidt murders babies and I like it; Martin Kosleck beats up the heroine and I sigh happily. Paul von Henreid cocks an eyebrow and I murmur 'Heil Henreid!'

[...] You'd better work fast, Mr Churchill. I'm still wearing the union jack, but someone's sabotaging my heart (*Photoplay*, November 1941: 22).

In this letter, the writer is acknowledging the sexual attraction she has for the transgressive, non-American male film stars, and the letter indicates a wistful promiscuity that in previous generations would have been considered distinctly unfeminine. Huntingdon's 'happy sigh' at the 'beating up' of the heroine captures the philosophy of some of Sanders' post 1942 films, where the idea is put forward that women are willing to be hurt - emotionally or physically - by an attractive man. George Sanders' function as sex symbol is short-lived, but in the spotlight of his popularity, there is an acceptance of male power over women and a female sadomasochistic desire.

Violence against women was frequently portrayed on film before the Production Code, and Molly Haskell describes the Warner Brothers gangster films of the thirties as 'the most violently machismo, woman-bruising films in history' (Haskell, 1973/1987: 91). Sanders, however, is no James Cagney, and his films do not show him 'beating up' the heroine, because his caddish villain is too clever - and lazy - for that. This letter does not seem to indicate a desire

to be ill-treated however, as much as a desire to be promiscuous or sexually active without the necessity of marriage, as the writer lists her favourite sexually attractive male stars. The language of this letter, whilst humorous, is provocative and hyperbolic, as if the ‘murdering of babies’ and ‘beating up’ of women alongside the possibility of becoming Nazi, surely all shocking concepts. The indication is that the sexual urge is so powerful that all usual human considerations will be discarded.

In Lies Lanckman’s study of the letters’ pages of 1930, she reported very few non-American contributors (2019: 51). However, a transatlantic story featuring George Sanders was initiated in *Photoplay*, February 1940. Sanders is referred to as ‘answer to the prayers of a lot of maidens.’ On a full-page photograph is a letter, from, we assume, ‘maiden’ Marjorie O’Toole in Liverpool:

Here we are, night after night, waiting for ‘Jerry’ to come over, running down the garden into our shelter. Now if I had a nice picture of George to put on my wall, I’d even forget there was an air-raid on or that the battle of Britain was being fought (*Photoplay*, June 1941:19).

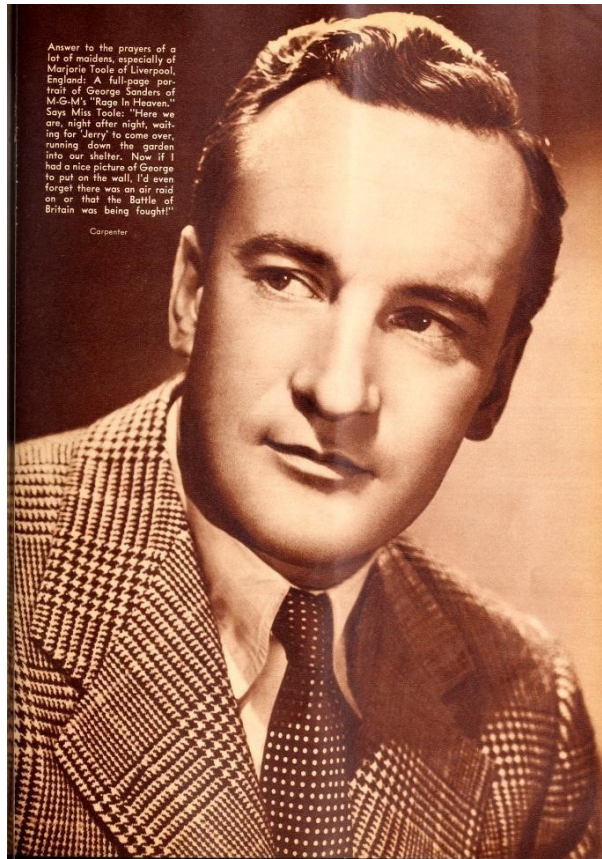


Figure 3. *Photoplay*, 1941.

This letter, unusually foregrounded by its combination with a pin-up photograph, links Sanders' story to that of the Home Front in the UK. His attractiveness becomes part of what strengthens women under fire. This letter appeared over a year before the US joined in the war, in a period of political neutrality and American isolationism (Frost, 2010: 170). But here, in line with the trend of Hollywood films, there was a clear sympathy for and empathy with the British in the war. By the time, in March 1942, a follow up to the story was published, America had been in the war for four months, and a sense of poignancy was unmistakable. This time a full-page photograph of Sanders carries the caption 'The man about whom most people want to know more' (*Photoplay*, March 1942: 25). A second letter from Marjorie O'Toole told her story of Liverpool's blitz:

We wouldn't mind his [Jerry's] bombing military objectives. As a matter of fact we would respect him for being patriotic enough to face the awful barrage we put up if he came to do that but when it gets light and the smoke that has laid sleep over the city for hours dies away and you can see factories and chimneys of all kinds of public works standing, but rows of little houses simply gutted by fire and high explosives, you realise how unmerciful are these Germans. I lost an auntie and an uncle in this

last blitz and although I know it must have been a sudden death because their house got a direct hit, I often wonder what they had done to deserve such a death. Then the mailman knocked on what was once a good house (now without electric light, water or gas, and windows and frames completely blown out) to give me George Sanders all wrapped up in first class mail. Although I was tired from loss of sleep and sorrowful through the death of loved ones, I managed to forget just for a while as I read your letter. Now when I go into the shelter, I take George with me to make sure he won't get a direct hit (*Photoplay*, March 1942:25).

Whether authentic or not, this letter was constructed to extricate an emotional response from the women on the Home Front of a country now at war, and it propagandises the narrative of George Sanders' attractiveness, making him part of a heroic tale of everyday bravery, deprivation and loss. He becomes part of a story of German dishonour and British bravery. In this publication, Sanders takes on the function of a Betty Grable-esque sex symbol, a cheesecake pin-up. Where popular myth declares that Grable's star image helped soldiers on the front to be brave and to face life-threatening situations, so here George Sanders provides a similar function for Marjorie O'Toole. It is an equivalent story in many ways to that told by cultural historian Robert Westbrook of a young man who died whilst clutching Grable's most iconic pin-up image (1990: 599). It is highly likely that O'Toole's words might have been edited, or even invented, as the writing is moving and well-constructed and inevitably Americanised (*mailman* instead of *postman*). The fan magazines, like the studios, were supportive of the British efforts in the war, and the emphasis of O'Toole's story, which is given its own designated central space in this magazine, adds a sense of moral rightness to the US position in joining the war. For a magazine aimed at women, it also gives a significant 'woman on the Home Front' point of view. O'Toole calls Sanders 'George' and synecdochally refers to taking *him* into the shelter, expressing a desired and imaginative intimacy that has obvious sexual overtones. This indicates that it is not always the female body that is the 'sexual spectacle for the pleasure of the male gaze' (Mulvey, 1975). Marsha Orgeron has argued that the letters pages offered fans 'a discourse of empowerment' and the debate that followed these articles in the letters pages and presumably elsewhere allowed women to express themselves in a culture of change (Orgeron, 2009: 4).

In 1942 George Sanders was at the height of his popularity. Six full fan magazine articles were dedicated to him.<sup>102</sup> Even in this year, it is easy to detect a fluctuation in tone of these articles. The early ones introduce Sanders' attitudes towards women, which then becomes a focus, but the last two from this sample use male mediators to talk about Sanders and his misogyny is underplayed.

The narrative that emerges about Sanders in the early articles is that of an adventurer, who is lazy and secretive, anti-social, but well-read, clever, a linguist and polymath. As we have seen from 'The 10 Ways to Avoid Matrimony', the discourse of Sanders' possible misogyny weaves in and out of his discourse, usually tempered with humour. In 1941, in 'You Girls are Too Beautiful' (*Screenland*, March 1942: 23), Sanders' earlier comments about women are humorously excused. The article title is deceptive, as the writer deflects the negative attention that had supposedly resulted from Sanders' views expressed in previous interviews (the excuse given was that he had had a headache in the previous interview) by recording Sanders' supposed comparison of British and American women, saving his best barbs for British women's lack of style and bad teeth (*Screenland*, March 1942: 63)

Liza's *Screenland* article 'The Strangely Fascinating Mr Sanders' published in September, is one that is supremely confused about whether to love or hate Sanders. Liza reveals the ambivalence of women towards Sanders' opinions and behaviour. She points out that she and her fellow female writers in Hollywood regularly meet to talk about 'the charming compliments paid by those gallants, Tyrone Power, Robert Taylor, and Errol Flynn', but

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<sup>102</sup> 'You Girls Are Too Beautiful! says George Sanders', (James F Scheer, *Screenland*, March 1942: 24), 'The Strange Case of George Sanders' (Kirtley Baskette, *Modern Screen*, April, 1942: 32), 'George Sanders Puts Women in Their Place' (Gladys Hall, *Photoplay*, June 1942: 37), 'The Strangely Fascinating Mr Sanders' (Liza, *Screenland*, September 1942: 57), 'Mystery Man' (Jack Dawson, *Hollywood*, September 1942: 64), and 'My Brother George and I' (Tom Conway with Jack Holland, *Screenland*, December 1942: 51).

describes a conversation about George Sanders where one journalist ‘who dabbles in the intimate interview’ describes him falling asleep as soon as she approached him. On waking, he tells her he would get around wartime shortage of petrol by ‘buying an invalid’s electric chair’ (*Screenland*, September 1942: 57). She declares ‘he’s a selfish, horrible, unpatriotic man’ (ibid) Another ‘of my carbon-stained ilk’ described how ‘he told me frankly that he thought a woman’s place was over the washtub, and not the typewriter [...] grabbed the last doughnut [...] I’ve never seen such rudeness’ (ibid). Another described him as replying ‘naturally’ when she complimented him on his performance, whilst nearly ‘knocking her over’ on his way to the water cooler. At Liza’s exclamation, ‘Why, how you must loathe him!’ her friends protest:

‘Loathe him?’ they turned on me in indignation. ‘Why, we love him! He’s the most fascinating man!’ this opinion, strangely enough seems to be shared by women all over the country. I say strangely enough because with a few exceptions George has played scoundrels, cads and bounders ever since he and Tyrone Power got off to a good start in ‘Lloyd’s of London’. None of that hero stuff for George. But suddenly women everywhere have gone completely mad for him [...] I’m no isolationist. I could hardly wait to be insulted by Mr Sanders (*Screenland*, September 1942:57).

The breathless admiring tone of this article becomes even more confused when Sanders begins to wax lyrical on the deficiencies of women (ibid). Liza purred ‘He smiled, and I was completely captivated’ whilst quoting Sanders as saying:

Women [...] are constantly trying to become the superior sex, when they know darned well that they are the inferior [...] It’s a sad situation, and it keeps growing worse. I’m going to do all in my power to keep women the inferior sex (ibid).

The movie that started this cycle in 1942, *The Moon and Sixpence*, is the one referred to by journalist Liza, revealing her own confusion, as his ‘romantic but cruel’ role (*Screenland*, September 1942). The film tells the story of Charles Strickland, (a thinly disguised Paul Gauguin) a London stock market broker, who leaves his wife and children to live the life of an artist in Paris. The film contains many lines that Sanders was to use in interviews through the years. In interviews throughout his life, Sanders would not tell journalists that the

‘women are strange little beasts’ line he was so fond of, originated with this film.<sup>103</sup> In his autobiography, however, he admitted it:

It was a remark I made in *The Moon and Sixpence* which resulted in my acquiring a reputation as an authority on women [...] I wasn’t responsible for my own dialogue—I just spoke the words that were given to me. The fact that on this point Gauguin, Maugham and I were in unanimous accord was, in my opinion, neither here nor there (Sanders, 1960/2015: 114-5).

He adds that ‘I have learned what sort of answers they expect, and I do my best to provide them’ (Sanders, 1960/2015:115). In the film, Strickland tells his young (possibly underage) bride ‘I will beat you, you know,’ to which she replies, ‘How else would I know you loved me?’ At one point, as Strickland is holding forth on his favourite subject of the inferiority of women, the narrator Wolfe turns around to Strickland in disgust and hisses ‘You unmitigated cad!’ It cannot be a coincidence that, as he was consolidating his star persona, lines from this film filtered through to his interviews. It seems that he had found his ‘mask’ or ‘marionette,’ and the myth he chose was that of the professional cad (Sanders, 1960/2015: 41).

Sanders was the Byronic sado-masochistic dream lover for a while but female writers after 1942 seemed to lose interest quickly in Sanders’ star image and in 1943 he was voted the Women’s Press Club’s ‘most uncooperative actor’ (Vanderbeets,1991: 39). Journalism was a notoriously difficult profession for women to break into at the time, and Hollywood fan magazines gave women writers the opportunities that were not available elsewhere (Slide, 2010: 25). The crescendo of Sanders’ alleged misogynistic views seemed to clash with the *zeitgeist* as war made it necessary for many women to re-think their position.

At the mid-way point of the year, in June 1942, an article was published entitled ‘George Sanders puts Women in Their Place’ by another woman, Gladys Hall, that took these arguments a step further. The article begins by reporting Sanders’ instance, in an echo of his

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<sup>103</sup> ‘Women are strange little beasts - you can treat them like dogs, beat them till your arms ache and still they love you.’

first 'pleasant to be unpleasant' insists, 'I am not a sweet person. I am a disagreeable person. I am a hateful person. I like to be hateful' (*Photoplay*, June 1942: 37). He argued for women's inferiority to men by insisting that women had made far fewer great discoveries or inventions:

I see no reason why women should presume equality with us [...] the entire relationship between the sexes was founded and built on the premise that women are frailer than men. So they are. It is stupid. It is entirely futile to argue around that basic irrevocable point. Being more frail, it follows, naturally, that she has greater limitations [...] the one thing that a woman does superlatively well [...] is to bear a child. This is her difference from, and her superiority over man (*Photoplay*, June 1942: 72).

Later in the article Sanders continues:

The world is changing no doubt about it. Women are changing. No doubt about that either. Their clothes are becoming more masculine, their voices deeper, their handshakes harder, their conversation freer. A pity. In time women will have to wear badges or men beards, or vice versa, in order to distinguish one from another. (ibid.)

Sanders' apparent anxiety was reflective of a backlash in popular culture at the time against the 'unfeminine' woman (Snelson, 2014: 5), and he was right about one thing. Women were changing indeed.

Although the media largely praised women for going to work, the praise was invariably tinged with a warning about the return to families once war was finished, and the need for women to remain feminine (Snelson, 2014: 151). Sanders' words echo anxieties expressed by many in war time about how women should retain their femininity and glamour in a world of restrictions and rationing of clothes and scarcity of makeup and silk stockings (Winchell, 2018: 5). For many men the possibility of closing the gap between genders was a source of anxiety, and women too wanted to retain some element of their pre-war selves (Snelson, 2014: 158). The greatest symbol of glamour in wartime US and UK became the humble tube of lipstick (Winchell, 2018: 5). Both in Britain and the US women were encouraged to hold onto their lipstick, and it was invariably red. Whilst women in factories and at home wore lipsticks called 'victory red' and 'fighting red', Elizabeth Arden was commissioned to produce



make-up for the American Marine Corps Women's reserve, even matching the red to the uniform (Nicholas, 2018: n.p.).

In the August edition of *Photoplay*, one letter takes Sanders to task under the heading

'George Sanders Started This!':

So Mr Sanders likes women in their place! And who is Mr Sanders to say what a woman's place is? Ask the men at the battlefronts whom they prefer—a woman who can do nothing but sit whining at home or a woman who can hold down a job at Lockheed? Do you suppose, Mr Sanders, the Western Frontier would have ever been pushed back if women had not been willing to take their share of the hardships? No, Mr Sanders, it wasn't your type of feminine woman who helped put America on the map, nor will it be your type of woman who will help win this war!

The writer is employed as payroll clerk for a large garment manufacturer engaged in making clothes just now for the US army. About ninety-five percent of the employees are women---feminine women, Mr Sanders—who wear lipstick and bright fingernail polish. Only they, unlike you're your type of feminine women, have a job to do and they know how to do it. Wake up Mr Sanders, this is AD not BC! (Claudia Case Thames, Brookhaven Miss) (*Photoplay*, August 1942: 20-21).

This letter exactly highlights the untimeliness of Sanders' supposed views for his career, as 1942 is the year of mobility, female employment and male conscription, if everyone held George Sanders' apparent views, the war could well be lost as it was just beginning. Jeffers McDonald has written about the ways in which the layout of fan magazines would work as a 'pathway' for the reader (2013: 41), and here the placement of an advertisement alongside Thames' letter seems particularly powerful. As Orgeron observed:

Although fan magazines were always imbued with Hollywood's corporate ideology [...], by training fans to interact with both pen and pocketbook they still offered a variety of ways for women to become actively involved with movie culture and to, in the process, negotiate their own identities (2009: 8).

Alongside Thames' letter, covering two thirds of the page, as if to illustrate her point, was an eye-catching advertisement for Max Factor *Tru-Color* lipstick:

been pushed back if woman had not been willing to take her share of the hardships? No, Mr. Sanders, it wasn't your type of feminine women who helped put America on the map, nor will it be your type of women who will help win this war!

The writer is employed as pay-roll clerk for a large garment manufacturer engaged in making clothes just now for the U. S. Army. About ninety-five percent of the employees are women—feminine women, Mr. Sanders—who wear lipstick and bright finger-nail polish. Only they, unlike your type of feminine women, have a job to do and they know how to do it.

Wake up, Mr. Sanders. This is A.D., not B.C.

CLAUDIA CASE THAMES,  
Brookhaven, Miss.

**\$1.00 PRIZE**  
And G. S. Started This, Too!

I HAVE just finished reading the article about George Sanders. I enjoyed it because he is my favorite actor. In this article, it says he never has visitors, vanishes after a day's work and it ends by saying he is a strange individual.

To me, this doesn't seem strange, because I do the same things myself. I believe George Sanders is just trying to lead a simple, wholesome life.

To me, he is the most brilliant actor today—as John Barrymore once said. I hope George Sanders' career lasts for a long time to come.

MARIE SOTHMAN,  
Grand Island, Neb.

**\$1.00 PRIZE**  
Entertainment Plus!

THE movies are my chief source of entertainment. Primarily, that is my reason for going to see them, but I have still another: I like to learn from them.

(Continued on page 81)

PHOTOPLAY-MOVIE MIRROR awards the following prizes each month for the best letters submitted for publication: \$10 first prize; \$5 second prize; \$1 each for every other letter published in full. Just write in what you think about stars or movies, in less than 200 words. Letters are judged on the basis of clarity and originality, and contributors are warned that plagiarism from previously published material will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Please do not submit letters of which copies have been made to send to other publications; this is poor sportsmanship and has resulted, in the past, in embarrassing situations for all concerned, as each letter published in this department in good faith. Owing to the great volume of contributions received by this department, we regret that it is impossible for us to return unaccepted material. Accordingly we strongly recommend that all contributors retain a copy of any manuscript submitted to us. Address your letter to "Speak for Yourself," PHOTOPLAY-MOVIE MIRROR, 205 East 42nd St., New York City, N. Y.

NOVEMBER, 1942

EVELYN KEYES  
in "Flight Captain"  
A COLUMBIA PICTURE



**TRY**  
*Tri-Color Lipstick*

...give your lips an alluring color accent!

HERE are lovely reds, glamorous reds, dramatic reds... exclusive with Tri-Color Lipstick... created in original lifelike shades of red based on a new, patented\* color principle discovered by Max Factor Hollywood.

Try Tri-Color Lipstick... designed to accent the individual beauty of your type... the color stays on through every lipstick test. Smooth in texture... non-drying, too... it will help keep your lips soft and lovely... one dollar.

\*U.S. Patent No. 2,152,667; 2,211,465

BLONDE  
BRUNETTE  
BROWNETTE  
REDHEAD



COMPLETE your make-up in color harmony with Max Factor Hollywood Powder and Rouge.



Max Factor Hollywood

PURSE MAKE-UP KIT

MAIL FOR POWDER, ROUGE AND LIPSTICK IN YOUR SOLAR HARMONY

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 4.

The star image used by the advertisers is of Evelyn Keyes, best known as Scarlett O'Hara's younger sister (*Gone with the Wind*, Fleming, 1939), who pouts at the reader, creating a sense of identification with the starlet through the consumption of cosmetics. If lipstick was a weapon, then it was a weapon that should be chosen carefully, especially in a culture of clothes and food rationing, where the pleasures of shopping were squeezed out by other concerns. The use of four shades of red on the black and white page, on lips, lipstick and in the thin trail that circles the different shades acts as a warning to George Sanders and his antiquated views. The identity of working femininity, as argued for in Claudia Thames' letter, is negotiated and reinforced in the rest of the page.

In October 1942 an 'official' response to 'George Sanders Puts Women in their Place' was finally published in *Photoplay*. If the readers of the fan magazine were predominantly female, it seems as if Sanders' extreme views might have finally begun to alienate his main fan base. 'From the day we went on sale, our mail bags began to groan with protests demanding vindication of the female sex after the brash comments of Mr Sanders' the editorial voice lamented (*Photoplay*; October 1942: 38-39). 'Who Said Women Aren't Men's Equals?' by Dora Albert with Rosalind Russell gives the counter-argument. Introducing Russell as the 'anti' Sanders representative is particularly apt because of her own intertextual persona. Her best-known roles were as independent, wise-cracking career girls, particularly the feisty Hildy Johnson in Howard Hawks' *His Girl Friday* (1940), who tries hard to resist her overwhelming urge to work as a journalist rather than settle down to a dull married life but just cannot. At one point she protests: 'I am not a suburban bridge player, I am a newspaperman'. This is a role and a film that struck a chord in the early forties as women moved into the world of men's work.<sup>104</sup> The movie might have been of interest particularly to Liza's colleagues, who had found Sanders so 'fascinating' and would in the year ahead consider him 'uncooperative' (*Screenland*, September 1942: 51).

The article itself, however, is not as direct or hard hitting as Sanders' attributed views. The article across a double page, shows Russell smiling in a picture that takes up two thirds of the left side of the page, and Sanders' image appears in the top right corner. The subheading which is on the right side is a call to arms:

Calling all women! To sit here and grin while Roz Russell rolls up her lacy sleeves and takes up the issue raised by George Sanders when, in *Photoplay and Movie Mirror*, he raked women over the coals. (*Photoplay*, October 1942: 39).

The language here is provocatively gendered. Women are being tortured over hot coals but still grinning and wearing lace. Russell is described as 'champion of careers and career girls' (*ibid*). She is quoted as saying, in a ladylike non-combative way, 'I won't argue with Mr

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<sup>104</sup> The film made 163.1 million at the box office, despite its relatively low budget of \$900,000 Information on [ultimatemovierankings.com](http://ultimatemovierankings.com), 2011.

Sanders [...] But there certainly is another side to this question' (38). Albert builds up Russell's skills: 'the editors could not help feeling a sense of elation upon reading Rosalind's brilliant presentation of her case' (ibid). The fan magazine itself is taking a position in the debate, as it later does in recommending Tom Conway's charm over his brother's rudeness.



Figure 5. *Photoplay*, October, 1942.

The voice that is attributed to Rosalind Russell opens by suggesting that 'helpless, coy' women are often 'putting on an act', are either 'stupid and bovine' or 'cunning, shrewd and conniving' (ibid). This emotively negative language connotes an attitude of ambivalence and a type of 'divide and conquer' that was evident in popular culture (Snelson, 2014: 150). Newspaper and media were full of criticism of certain 'types' of women: the 'victory girls' whose bodies threatened the wellbeing of soldiers by harbouring disease; the toxicity of the over-protective mother in what became known as 'mom-ism', warnings to women about keeping themselves pure and patriotic (Kleinberg, 1999: 255). Female solidarity was not something that was culturally familiar. So, in condemning women first, the article is acknowledging part of the Sanders argument to be truth. A column and a half are taken up

by exploring (and therefore reinforcing) negative stereotypes of women, before the writer moves on to men (*Photoplay*, October 1942: 38-39). Other than the initial respectful reference to 'Mr Sanders' and the appearance of his image in the corner of the second page, Sanders himself is not directly criticised. However, the voice of 'Roz Russell' argues:

The man who insists on either type as a mate is the male with terrific ego who wants to be number One in the house. He wants to be flattered. Little does he know it is actually more flattering to be picked by a woman with brains. [...] A man who wants to marry a fragile miss is fundamentally afraid of himself (*Photoplay*, October 1942: 39).

Although these criticisms are quite sharp and possibly perceptive,<sup>120</sup> they are somehow less emphasised than Russell's criticisms of her fellow women. The pinnacle of the argument, however, does not come until the third column:

I think women are clever enough to have a place in the home and outside it as well. They are the only species on earth who can do it. A man can't do all three, run a home, keep a job and keep a woman. Why, the average man will agonise over it if he has to go to a lodge meeting at night after a hard day's work. Spend his time running a household and running a job too? No man would attempt it but women do and make a success of it. (*Photoplay*, October 1942: 39).

The writer of the article calls Russell as a 'perfect example of the type of woman she champions' (ibid). This could be a reference to Sanders' legendary laziness and his lack of patriotism, as Russell is described as running two households, holding down her job and selling war bonds. The writer's voice articulates the expectations that are demanded of women and the challenges women faced in a culture that was issuing conflicting messages in the US and the UK.

The ripples of Sanders' apparent misogyny awakened controversy in *Photoplay* and following this climax of discussion in the summer-Autumn of 1942, interest in Sanders as a sex symbol in these available publications began to wane. Generally, despite the fevered enthusiasm shown for him by female writers particularly and in letters pages in magazines of 1942, by 1943 letters pages no longer discussed him.

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<sup>105</sup> Sanders' first wife Elsie/Susan was a timid woman he considered 'boring,' whilst his second, Zsazsa Gabor, was determined to use his fame to promote herself (Watson, interview, 2019).

An apparent attempt was made to create sympathy for George in the fan publications through two articles apparently written by men close to him. One is by his movie stand-in, Jack Dawson, the other is supposedly written partly by his brother, Tom Conway. Both men in these texts are defined by their relationship to George and are apparently used to create sympathy with Sanders. Dawson's article argues,

Nearly everyone who has written about George has made him a mystery man, a meanie, a snob or a sleepy head. But there's more to it than that [...] Maybe you don't like him, but he's colourful and he's himself. Hollywood has probably affected him less than any actor who's been in the town. Because he's himself, you know where you stand. He makes no pretenses. It doesn't make any difference to him whether you're Joe Doakes or Darryl Zanuck (*Hollywood*, September 1942: 64).

As George himself seemed incapable of smoothing over the dispute, the studio seemed to be bringing in other men to give a new perspective and to make Sanders seem less problematic. This claim for Sanders' lack of pretension or snobbishness, written by a 'nobody' who effectively is his movie shadow, his 'stand-in', (a type of cinematic Gothic double) is a convincing presentation of George's actual behaviour rather than his contentious views. Dawson also argues against Sanders' misogyny by claiming that he was particularly generous to unknown actress Elena Verdugo<sup>106</sup>, of whom he claims, George said, 'That little girl has an amazing amount of talent. She helps me get my characterisation better' (ibid). Although Sanders' comment seems to be supportive, his infantilisation of a grown woman clearly does nothing to disprove his misogyny.

In 'My Brother George and I', which purports to be written by George's brother, Tom Conway (*Screenland*, December 1942: 52-3). Tom defends his brother's apparent misogyny:

George and I are alike in another respect. We both find women interesting. I know George has said much about his ideas on the fair sex. He has lambasted them several times, but it's my idea that he's made such remarks because he had to say something? (*Screenland*, December 1942: 66).

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<sup>106</sup> His co-star in *The Moon and Sixpence* (Lewin, 1942).

This explanation of Sanders' misogyny actually is the one that coincides with his family's view of him (Watson, interview, 2019). Basically unwilling to reveal anything personal about himself, George was allowed to keep his privacy (ibid).<sup>107</sup>

The last fan magazine article dedicated entirely to George Sanders in my sample takes on a different tone. Lupton Wilkinson's article 'There's a Bloke My Son', in *Screenland* in 1946, seems to be giving a masculinised response to the backlash against Sanders. The writer sweepingly dismissed George's views about women as 'just a big act', adding provocatively that he was amused to have received a letter from the President of Associated Women's Clubs concerned about his misogynistic views (*Screenland*, June 1945: 68). In 1945, as the war ended, the government in the US initiated a huge drive to get women back into the home, to take their places in the home once more (Hartmann, 1982: 169). One historian summarised the pressures women were under 'to be sensitive to soldiers coming home':

Sociologist Willard Waller advised women to accept "more than the wife's usual responsibility for her marriage" and to offer "lavish - and undemanding - affection," and to expect "no immediate return." [...] wives were reminded that soldiers wanted "feminine" women who would display "tenderness, admiration, or at least submissiveness." (Hartmann, 1982: 169).

The authoritative male voice of Wilkinson's article, indicating Sanders' amusement, not distress, at his formal reprimand from the women's group (not his first), implies that it has all been 'a fuss about nothing' (*Screenland*, June 1945: 68). Women now should be taking their place back in the home, so, theoretically at least, the tide was turning back in the cads' favour. A 1946 article in the *Los Angeles Times* picks up the narrative about Sanders' misogyny in 'Stop Ladies!' Begs George Sanders' (June 23, 1946: 25), which prints the transcript of a conversation between Sanders and Mrs Walter P Story, chairman of the committee of the Associated Women's Clubs of New York City. This article appears at a time when Sanders was promoting his film *The Private Affairs of Bel Ami* (Lewin, 1947),

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<sup>107</sup> Later in this chapter, I will explore the discourse that was surrounding Tom Conway at this point.

resorting to the old response: 'I am a firm believer in that old saying, 'A woman, a dog, a walnut tree – the more you beat them the better they be' (ibid).<sup>108</sup> Hedda Hopper's 1948 column headed 'Sanders Alters Style of Villainy' reports news of George's apparent reinvention:

I wanted to know about the ruckus he had kicked up with the PTA and women's clubs in general when he'd made his announcement, 'Women are little beasts.' He's since been deluged with thousands of vituperative letters and phone calls by women from Afghanistan to Sioux City and back again.

'I'll confess' said the NEW George Sanders, 'I was more or less persuaded into making such wretched observations as part of a publicity stunt for 'Bel Ami'. I doubtless went overboard – I'd developed a talent for putting things forcibly you know – and I brought the entire sex down on my head. Of course, women long ago coined the phrase, 'men are beasts' and have gotten away with it beautifully...' His voice trailed off, he made an apologetic little smile, his hands stayed mid-air in a half completed gesture of dismissal. 'Does that cover it?' (*LA Times*, Oct 10, 1948: 85).

Sanders' star persona, then, underwent a transformation after fan magazines had lost interest in him. This admission that he had been encouraged to make misogynistic comments reveals him as a man who took on a constructed persona. His engagement with the dialogue about women, men and misogyny does not quite end here, as he revives it in his autobiography, which, although very amusing, anecdotal and full of controversial opinions, does little to reveal much about Sanders the man.

### **3 Brand Sanders: Cad Incorporated**

It is a short leap from film stars being sold as commodities, to the same star's names being used to promote other products. From the early days, Hollywood film studios were connected with consumer fashions and trends (Eckert 1978/1991: 35). Many A-list female stars including Lana Turner, Olivia DeHavilland and Carole Lombard were used to advertise Lux soap, which boasted '9 out of 10 screen stars are Lux girls' (McEuen, 2011: 113). The creation of a brand linked to one celebrity, however, took some time to evolve.

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<sup>108</sup> Taken from *The Moon and Sixpence*.



Although today it is possible buy the Bogart family's whisky, George Clooney's tequila, Paul Newman's salad dressings and novels written by TV personalities, in the forties this was uncharted territory. Stars were confined by contracts with little autonomy to exploit their own image as studios priorities controlled them (Basinger, 2009: 131). In 1952, film actress Arlene Dahl began to write a beauty column after her studio contract had lapsed, which resulted in her starting her own company, Arlene Dahl Enterprises, specialising in cosmetics and lingerie (TCM.com, n.d.). This was an early example of a Hollywood star successfully seeking a wider brand that they and not the studio might exploit.

Although not widely publicised, George Sanders was for the whole of his career, the sole financial provider for his family in England, especially for his parents and for his nieces and nephews until they were old enough to earn their own way<sup>109</sup> (Watson, interview, 2019). This might be the reason why Sanders always protested that he would, particularly in later years, never turn down a job that paid well, and was always seeking ways of diversifying, particularly of using his most valuable commodity in the years of fame: his name (ibid).

Although many stars did add to their earnings by working in radio in the forties, only two used their names to sell novels: Gypsy Rose Lee<sup>110</sup> and George Sanders<sup>111</sup> both with the same publisher, Simon and Schuster. They also used the same writer, female screenwriter and crime novelist, Craig Rice.

In 2015, British publisher, Dean Street Press, added to their lists of retro mystery stories these latter two novels, still published under Sanders' name. The novel retains its original

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<sup>109</sup> George would help them to find employment, as when he organised for his nephew, Peter, to work for his ex-wife ZsaZsa Gabor as her personal assistant in the late fifties (Watson, interview, 2019).

<sup>110</sup> *The G String Murders*, 1941.

<sup>111</sup> *Crime on My Hands* 1944, *Stranger at Home*, 1946 both reprinted in 2015 by Rupert Heath's Dean Street Press.

dedication: 'To Craig Rice, without whom this book would not be possible. G.S.' The editor's introduction explains:

But Sanders and Rice were not strangers: the latter happened to have written screenplays for two films in which Sanders had recently starred, so there were other possible sources for their literary collaboration. There certainly is forensic evidence that Sanders contributed substantially to *Crime on My Hands* (Rupert Heath in Sanders, 1944/2015: viv).

Heath elaborates further in an email:

Gypsy Rose Lee, it is generally accepted, was a significant contributor to her own novel; so why should we assume Sanders was not to his, especially as we know from his memoir that he could write superbly well? The dedication is certainly Sanders's; and the novel as a whole is peppered with examples of Sanders's flashing, sardonic wit. Plus the novel also brings out some of his frustrations about being an actor, and his longing to succeed in other endeavours, like being an inventor - these are things expanded on in his [...] and somehow seem too personal to be the contributions of a ghost writer. It may well be that Craig Rice wrote the story and the bulk of the prose, and Sanders then took the MS and added many of the one-liners and other elements which make it so Sanders-esque. We'll never know for sure, but I do feel that it is assuming too much to say the novel was simply ghost-written - which is what everyone else has always said (Heath, 7 October 2019).

The novel is indeed full of self-mocking, ironic 'Sanders-esque' wit and references to Sanders' own persona as it appears in films, fan magazines and media. There is also a knowing reference to the 'soft-boiled' genre of the *Saint* and the *Falcon* films, with an intertextual, postmodern, even satirical use of the genre. Even Sanders' well-publicised antipathy for his typecasting as the urbane detective is ridiculed. 'George Sanders' the character says to his agent 'I'm not playing detectives anymore, and I'm so typed I doubt if anyone wants me to play anything else' (Sanders, 1944/2015: 7). In an interview in 1951, Sanders is reported as saying that his time as the *Saint* and the *Falcon* were the 'nadir of my career'. The journalist asked him about the novels published under his name. He denies any involvement:

I am told there were guns which appeared and disappeared in these books, and strange tangents that led to dead ends, as well as a number of mysterious men with whiskers [...]. Sanders said 'Actually, I have never read them. They were written for me by some ingenious scrivener or other (*The Saturday Morning Post*, 18 August:1951).

It is possible that the books' lack of commercial success caused Sanders some embarrassment, and this was a way of shutting down the conversation, especially considering his dismissal of the Saint and Falcon genre in the same article. Or it might be true that the ghost writers were drawing on the well-known Sanders persona and the Saint/Falcon character to write the books. 'George Sanders' in the novel is just as dismissive as in this interview. When 'Sanders', ironically enough, is offered the role of a John Wayne type rugged western hero, he says 'I'll do it. I'm that tired of bending over corpses and looking deductive' (Sanders and Rice, 1944/2015: 11)

Craig Rice wrote about her deal with George Sanders in a private letter, admitting that she had hired Cleve Cartmill to finish the novel:

I have a contract with George Sanders of which he is to pay me 50% of all royalties, reprint rights etc on 'Crime On My Hands'. As you know, I have to split with my own ghostwriter in this case (Marks, 2001: Loc 1800).

Along with many of his contemporaries, Sanders embraced the relatively new form of television, and joined the numbers of Hollywood stars who tried to make the transition to the small screen (Irvin, 2017: 60). From 1955 onwards, Sanders was in negotiations for a role in television and in 1958 made an unsuccessful pilot called *The Fabulous Oliver Chantry*, where the lead character, a Broadway critic, bore more than a passing resemblance to Addison DeWitt, Sanders' character in *All About Eve* (Mankiewicz, 1950) (Irvin, 2017: 60). In 1957 the summer schedule on NBC included a show, initially called *The Mystery Writers Theatre* appeared as the *George Sanders Mystery Theatre* (ibid). It was usual for film stars to host anthology series in this way since Robert Montgomery had begun the trend in 1950 (Irvin, 2017: 1).

Sanders, as the format dictated, introduced the stories and added a coda. In his introduction to the first episode, Sanders sips the sponsor's beer in the 'mystery writers' club room library

museum'. His tone dripping with irony, George introduces Edgar Allen Poe's 'original raven' with a cynical knowing glance at the viewer.



Figure 6. Sanders meets the raven.

He smoothly adds that 'a good mystery is the normal recreation of noble minds'. He introduces writer Craig Rice, commenting that, 'females always excel in the gentle art of murder', adding that the story shows the 'female of the species at her most lethal, which to me is at her most fascinating'. The Sanders caddish persona is evident here and in other introductions in this series, in one of which he is 'shot' by a jealous husband in a feverish dream. The suave, handsome misogynist is the persona that crosses the divide between film and television.<sup>112</sup>

Following an appearance on Tallulah Bankhead's radio show where he impressed by singing Ivor Novello's *Someday My Heart Will Awake*, Sanders recorded an album of romantic ballads called *The George Sanders Touch: Songs for the Lovely Lady*, which was released on vinyl in 1958 in the US by ABC-Paramount. There is little evidence of the cad in the way in which this Long Player was put together. Every song is slow in tempo and romantic in tone, with lush, violin dominant orchestrations. The Sanders cynicism is discarded, as he aligns

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<sup>112</sup> Although the series was not renewed, Sanders would go on to occasionally play villains in other popular shows, including *The Rogues* (1965), *The Man From Uncle* (1965), *Mission Impossible* (1972) and was one of three actors to take on the role of Batman's deadly icy rival *Mr Freeze* in the Adam West TV series (1966).

himself with Bing Crosby or Frank Sinatra in his fleeting reinvention as romantic crooner.

One of the songs on the album, *Such is My Love*, is written by Sanders:

Tender and warm.  
Warm as an angels' wing.  
Tender as any Spring.  
Such is my love,  
Strong as the wind sweeping a stormy sea,  
deep as eternity such is my love,  
sweet as a kiss under the mistletoe  
tender as falling snow yes as a flame.  
My every dream would come true if only you knew.  
Such is my love.  
Such is my love.  
Such is my love for you.  
My every dream would come true if only you knew.  
Such is my love.  
Such is my love (Sanders, 1958: spotify).

This genuine creative product from real George Sanders forms a marked contrast with his established media identity. There is no debate about the song's authorship, and the language of romantic poets, with angel wings, Spring, mistletoe, falling snow and flames, indicate a highly romantic, idealistic sensibility. Brand Sanders takes on a completely new – softer, more vulnerable - image here, the year before he married Benita Hume. The cover of the album shows Sanders in black tie, with a background of pencil drawn flowers, leaning forward, offering a red carnation to the 'lovely lady'. There is an assumption again of Sanders' attractiveness to women, and the genre of music is clearly seen to have a primarily female audience. Although the choice of carnation rather than red rose might be hinting at another potential audience.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Carnations are associated with male decadence of the *fin de siècle* and Oscar Wilde, although the dominant discourse about George portrayed him as heterosexual (Lugowski,1999: 4).

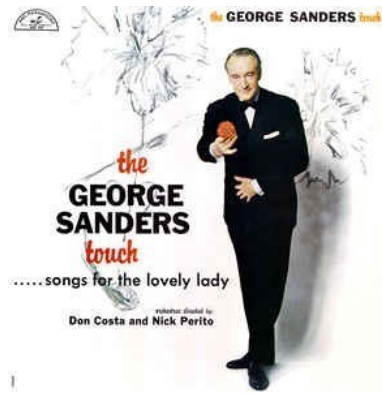


Figure 7.

This romantic image of Sanders is short-lived, however, as his last attempt to develop a brand both uses the ‘cad’ image and manages to raise questions about whether or not the Sanders charm was a cover-up for something sinister.

In many interviews in fan magazines and in other media, Sanders frequently expressed a desire to start a business, to invent something, to get out of the acting business. One article in 1958 reports Sanders as saying that he considers acting to be ‘rather embarrassing’ and a ‘false life’ (*LA Times*, June 30, 1958: 129). The journalist hints that Sanders is:

a movie star who doesn’t want to act and wants to be a businessman and operate a small factory, produce some sort of product like a good Scotch whisky (*LA Times*, June 30, 1958: 137).

Brian Aherne tells the story of how Sanders came to be involved with a company making sausages in the early 1960s, describing his association with ‘an obscure English rascal by the name of Albert Harris’ (1981: 109). Harris and his partner Ted Lowe claimed to have a recipe for sausages enjoyed by Queen Victoria and persuaded Sanders to invest and establish a company which they called Cadco (ibid). In 1962 a British article announced, ‘George Sanders \$9,000,000 Frozen Food industry in Scotland’. It claimed that Sanders was to set up 5 factories in Scotland, thereby creating thousands of jobs in East Scotland (reported in *Variety*, June, 1965: 16). By 1965 the company had gone bust and Sanders was bankrupt (Aherne, 1981: 190). Newspapers in the US reported that Sanders had filed for bankruptcy on October 29:

saying he was the victim of an international swindle. He said he lost \$360,000 and his wife Benita Hume, lost \$140,000 in a defunct British sausage making company named Cadco' (ibid).

The British press gave a different perspective on the story, with the *Observer* on 4 December headlining 'How Cadco Betrayed the Hopes of the jobless'. They published an interview with Sanders that interrogated his role in the catastrophe:

I am perfectly prepared to be called a fool [...]But I am not a rogue. As I have found to my cost, I am as much of a fool in business as I expect the Board of Trade and the Royal Bank of Scotland would be on stage' (*Observer*, 4 December, 1965: 4).

Although the article makes it clear that Sanders was naïve, there was no actual hard evidence that he knew that the company was a swindle, and he certainly did not seem to have made any money from the venture (ibid).

And so, in all of his efforts to build on Brand Sanders, and to move away from his dependence on film acting, from the 1940s to the 1960s, Sanders would swing from crime writer, with Craig Rice as his female double and 'voice', to radio and TV presenter of mysteries, drawing on his villainous and caddish image, to romantic crooner, to perhaps criminal, perhaps naïve and bumbling businessman. The splitting of the Sanders identity, the contradictions that were inherent in it, wove in and out of his screen persona, which also evolved and split as time wore on.

#### **4 Sanders on Screen**

In the next section, I will be considering Sanders' key cinematic roles in three parts. Firstly, I will explore the ways in which he was used in 1940 by the era's most influential director, fellow Englishman, Alfred Hitchcock. This established Sanders as a star who could express villainy or heroism, albeit with an effete, even feminised, therefore transgressive, veneer. Then I look in some details at Sanders' contributions to the images of queerness on screen as part of the trend I have already identified in previous chapters for the queering of the British male. Finally, I move on to look at the cycle of misogynistic films Sanders made over the

years, which he also appropriated to form a part of his fan magazine discourse. In the final section, I will explore the ways in which Sanders' association with his brother played out on screen and in the media.

### **(i) Hitchcock Sanders: 1940**

In the early part of his career, the heterosexual attractiveness of George Sanders so frequently mentioned in the letters' pages of the fan magazines is seen at its height in the early 1940s. In 1940 he made two very different films with British director, Alfred Hitchcock. These were *Rebecca*, released in April and *Foreign Correspondent* released in August. In one he is the villain, in the other he is an action hero. In these movies, Hitchcock seems to draw on the duality, physicality and sexuality of George Sanders. In *Rebecca* Sanders plays caddish blackmailer Jack Favell, whilst in *Foreign Correspondent* he is heroic Scott Ffolliott, who works with the American hero to expose a spy ring in the UK.

Although Sanders' character, Jack Favell, Rebecca's lover and Maxim's (Laurence Olivier) would-be blackmailer, appears infrequently in the movie, Sanders creates a sense of *double entendre* in his performance that is intrinsic to the narrative subtext. His initial appearance is structured to occur after a scene between Maxim and his wife (Joan Fontaine) where Maxim makes it clear to his new bride that he is disappointed in their marriage. He leaves her to go to London, leaving a note implying that 'a holiday from me should be most welcome.' The implication is clearly that there is a sexual malfunction in their newly consummated relationship, something that is exacerbated by the stiffness of Olivier's performance.

As the young bride sobs bitterly on the sofa in the drawing room the next morning, she overhears Mrs Danvers (Judith Anderson) talking to Favell, so it is his voice that we hear



offscreen as an introduction to his character. Sanders' rich, elongated vowels and deep languorous phrasing can be heard in intimate conversation with the intimidating Mrs Danvers, where he teasingly calls her 'you old harpy Danny' and teases her. He wheedles 'Oh, yes, we must be careful not to shock Cinderella, mustn't we?' and agrees to leave by the back door so as not to be seen. This reference to the new young wife as Cinderella emphasises the lack of 'happy ever after' that she is experiencing in her marriage. Then, just as the new Mrs DeWinter believes he has left, he surprises her by speaking from behind her, and she whips around. The camera is positioned behind her, to her left, as Favell appears briefly on the other side of the window frame. In his first brief appearance, his face is hidden in the shadow of the lattice window pattern, and there is a dark cross momentarily on his face.



Figure 8. Favell meets Mrs DeWinter.



Figure 9

This criss-cross pattern is an indication of his shadowy role as sexual partner outside of marriage and greedy blackmailer. When the camera cuts away from him to focus on the bride's reaction, her face, surprisingly, is also in shadow, as if there is a darkness being stirred in her too. There is a fleeting moment when both characters are in shadow together which is clearly implying a shared secret dark desire, which is exacerbated by our developing understanding of the nameless woman's role as dead Rebecca's paler double.

During their dialogue they are initially seen in medium shot from each other's viewpoint. In a moment that is sexually charged and invasive, Favell feels for his cigarette lighter in his jacket. Leaning against the window frame, he asks, 'And how is dear old Max?' so that the odd emphasis could insinuate 'in bed'. His voice has an insinuating quality as in medium shot, he looks the off-camera heroine up and down. He insists on calling her 'the bride' as his eyebrows move suggestively and down as he taps his cigarette, then feels for his lighter, as 'bride' seems to imply 'virgin.' He observes that it is early in the marriage for Max to have gone away to London. 'Too bad' he draws, 'Isn't he rather afraid that somebody might come down and carry you off?' pulling out the vowels to indicate his own wolfish lust.

Favell throughout the film is associated with liminal spaces. He is standing on the garden side of the window at this first meeting. Later in the conversation, he addresses an ironic comment to the dog 'we mustn't lead the young bride astray, must we Jasper?' and as he says these words, the camera focuses on his point of view of the spaniel. He turns his back on the heroine and Mrs Danvers, and his back is in view moving back to the window, as he says meaningfully, 'I wish I had a young bride of three months waiting for me at home'. He turns his head, 'I'm just a lonely old bachelor.' He turns back and jumps, making a sound as he leaps over the window back into the garden. In contrast with stiff, unemotional, humourless Maxim, Sanders' Favell is sexually available and knowing. His use of the windows to enter Manderley suggests an ease of transgression and a violation. Here the camera gives us the heroine's view of Favell, especially at the beginning and end of their meeting, as she is

trapped in her domestic context. He is framed by the window, and appears with the backdrop of the garden, perhaps aligning him with nature as opposed to artifice and restriction. She does not respond with spirit to his evident insolence and suggestiveness, but naively agrees not to tell Maxim about his visit, an indication that she has been captivated, albeit momentarily, by his charm.

In *Foreign Correspondent*, Hitchcock typically plays with expectations by casting Sanders as a heroic newspaperman, making even his name part of an eccentric but decent characterisation. At their first meeting, their similarity but also national differences are emphasised:

Carol Fisher: This is Scott ffolliott, newspaperman same as you. Foreign correspondent. Mr Haverstock, Mr ffolliott.  
ffolliott: With a double 'F'.  
John Jones: How do you do?  
ffolliott: How do you do?  
John Jones: I don't get the double 'F'.  
ffolliott: They're at the beginning. Both small 'F's  
John Jones: They can't be at the beginning.  
ffolliott: One of my ancestors was beheaded by Henry VIII. His wife dropped the capital letter to commemorate it. There it is.  
John Jones: How do you say it, like a stutter?  
ffolliott: No, just a straight 'fuh'.

The American journalist's name has already been a matter of discussion, as his boss insists on giving him the pen name Huntley Haverstock. Jones (Joel McCrea) is disgruntled at this division of his identity into public and private and makes a joke out of it throughout the film, making it clear that he really is plain Johnny Jones, just an American 'Joe'. Acting as doubles in a way that shows their compatibility, Jones is solid and reliable, ffolliott is British upper class and honourable. In this scene ffolliott is proving himself by driving the car in which the three of them are chasing the villains. This implies that he is ahead of the situation and can direct operations. Throughout the two men alternately take control of situations so that it becomes clear that they need each other. As a transatlantic team, Jones and ffolliott work together to defeat their common enemy. They are both, as Carol Fisher (Laraine Day) points out 'foreign correspondents' in a film in which Alfred Hitchcock makes himself the foreign correspondent, passing onto the American public the need for participation in the war. When

Jones gives his final speech in a radio broadcast to the US during a London air raid, he makes his lack of neutrality very clear. Mark Glancy says of this final speech,

Having the words spoken by a once-neutral American, who now equates the streets and homes of London with America itself, is part of the strategy (1999: 115).

Perhaps also part of the strategy is the use of Sanders, so often seen as the representation of European evil, playing a virile, attractive hero, who works with the American double to win a battle in an imminent war. This film is one of the rare examples of Sanders as action hero, winning physical fights, surviving a plane crash, leaping out of windows.

Even in his most heroic roles as the Saint and the Falcon, Sanders rarely is seen moving too fast or taking part in an actual fist fight. In *Foreign Correspondent*, however, casting against type, Hitchcock uses him in unexpected ways. At the dramatic climax where the gentle, bird-loving Van Meer (Albert Basserman) is being tortured, Hitchcock closes in on Sanders' face whilst the victim's voice cries out from offscreen. The combination of the cries of pain and Ffolliot's reaction shots shift to a perspective from outside the building, where the onlookers can see that something dramatic is happening. Unable to bear another second of the man's torture, Ffolliot has broken out of his position and is struggling with the two men, whilst Fisher escapes. Ffolliot sees the canopy underneath the window, smashes the glass and throws himself out, where he lands unhurt on the pavement.



figure 10. Ffolliot jumps.

The effect of seeing familiar Sanders in a heroic part can be unsettling. As Glancy observed:

George Sanders quickly became identified on screen as the sophisticated cad. He played such parts so convincingly and with such zest that when he occasionally took a benign and innocuous role, such as the friendly Herbert ffolliott in *Foreign Correspondent*, it was hard to believe that he would not be revealed as a treacherous villain in the final reel (1999: 161-2).

Sanders' presence in this movie, doubled with McCrea, also offers another possible ending to the heteronormative romantic solution that is offered. In the scene where Jones reports back to his editor despite the disapproval of the ship's captain, Carol, Jones and ffolliott are shown in medium shot. As Jones is speaking into the receiver, ffolliott is watching him warmly, whilst Carol seems to be coldly eyeing ffolliott, as if she perceives him as a rival. In this, and other moments in the movie, there is a sense of suggestive doubleness in Sanders' performance. One twenty-first century reviewer noticed:

When his mask of hauteur is down, Sanders' face registers all kinds of emotions, sometimes against his will: he gives a look of sexual appraisal to Joel McCrea in *Foreign Correspondent* that can't have been fully conscious (Callahan, 2008: n.p.).

Ffolliott offers the possibility of a homosexual ending for Jones, that would satisfyingly cement the homosocial warmth of their partnership throughout the narrative.



Figure 11. Carol and ffolliott vie for Jones' attention.

## (ii) Queer Sanders

This effete bisexual Sanders came to personify the 'gay-as-alien', acting as a 'symbol of sophisticated decadence' (Russo, 1981:59, 95). Despite the heterosexual promiscuousness of his early years (Watson, interview, 2019), there was something in George Sanders that

expressed deviance from the norm, whether he was playing villains, heroes or anti-heroes. According to the Hollywood Production Code, homosexuality was, as we have seen, strictly outlawed.<sup>114</sup> A homosexual lifestyle could not be seen as promoting ‘the American way of life’ (Miller, 1994: 295). Yet, Anglo-Russian George Sanders, with his effete mannerisms and his deep drawl, enabled a sense of ‘queerness’ to be shown on screen despite censorship, so like the ‘ladies from hell’, his casting allowed storytelling to transgress boundaries set up by censors.

Sanders’ first Hollywood role, establishing him as a particularly camp villain, was in Fox’s ‘British’ epic, *Lloyd’s of London* (King, 1936). His character, Lord Everett Stacy was a greedy, lazy, self-serving fop. *Lloyd’s of London* foregrounds affinities and rivalries between men by keeping Jonathan’s (Tyrone Power) childhood attachment to Horatio Nelson as the unresolved idealised relationship of the film and by highlighting his closeness to his mentor, Angerstein (Guy Standing). The movie’s heroine, Elizabeth (Madeleine Carroll), does not appear until half-way through the running time. In the part of Stacy, Sanders minces and drawls, waving white lace handkerchiefs and walking stick, showing delight when his adversary, the sensitive Tyrone Power, reveals a romantic interest in his wife. Stacy is not concerned about her, but rather tries to squeeze money from Blake to feed his gambling habit. The first shot of Sanders as Stacy shows him in close-up, his hair scraped back, carefully studying his rival through a triangular monocle. His face is framed in pale, shining silks and satins in front of an obscured, black background.

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<sup>114</sup> In the Code’s promotion of ‘the sanctity of the institution of marriage’ and its ban on ‘sex perversion’ (Frank Miller, 1994: 296).



Figure 12. Breakthrough role. Sanders as Lord Everett Stacy.

The expression on his face is supercilious, luminescent fabrics make him feminine and, as the camera follows Blake, it clear that he is the focus of Stacy's interest.

In his autobiography, George would humorously recall the ways he was called on to wear monocles early in his career (1960/2015: 59). This ocular indicator of effete decadence would add to the queerness of his screen persona, and the triangular shape here hints at the homosocialtriangle. The *mise-en-scene* makes the contrast between Stacy and Jonathan Blake startling. In the first confrontation between the two men at Stacy's ball, with Lady Elizabeth placed between them, they are effectively juxtaposed. Stacy, being introduced by his wife, looks at Blake superciliously, condescendingly observing: 'ah yes, a waiter at Lloyd's coffee house'.

Sanders is dressed in a silk jacket over a lace shirt, his feminine, curved stomach is cased in tight light-coloured breeches. As the light falls on his face and body he actually seems to shine on the screen. Power wears a simpler lace cravat and plain dark coat and dark trousers, but his frame is small in comparison with Stacy's bulk. British producer Alexander Korda considered costume films, which he considered to be aimed at a female audience, 'fed visual hungers' and effectively showed off the male physique (Harper, 1994: 20). In an image that chimes with Sedgwick's 'homosocial triangle' (1985/2016: 21) the two men are linked by the woman between them.



Figure 13. The homosocial triangle. *Lloyd's of London*.

David Bergman has argued that camp, with its historical associations with homosexuality, draws attention ‘to the gender system through exaggeration, parody and juxtaposition’ (1993: 123). Sanders’ portrayal of Lord Everett Stacy, evoking Basil Rathbone’s Marquis de St Evremonde<sup>115</sup> is quite delightfully camp, in its ‘artifice and exaggeration’ (Sontag, 1964: 515). In her influential *Notes on Camp*, Sontag locates eighteenth century Gothic novels as a point of origin for the camp sensibility (1964: 518). Confirming the Gothically dual nature of camp, she explains:

(T)he camp sensibility is one that is alive to a double sense in which some things can be taken. But this is not the familiar split-level construction of a literal meaning, on the one hand, and a symbolic meaning, on the other. It is the difference, rather, between the thing as meaning something, anything and the thing as pure artifice (Sontag, 1964: 519).

In this sense, the creation of a star, the act of creating a star image can be seen as camp, and the fan magazine as a propagator of camp sensibility. The camp artifice of Sanders’ performance, clothes and setting, plus Sanders’ doubling with Power (they would go on to make four films together), draws attention to a system of gendering by playing with its expectations. Britishness itself can be seen as camp according to this definition, as this thesis proves.

In *Lloyd's of London*, Sanders is not just acting as a sort of dark, corrupt double to Power’s sensitive, honorable hero, but also can be seen as offering an alternative to Power’s

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<sup>115</sup> *A Tale of Two Cities*, Jack Conway, 1935, as discussed in Chapter 2.



supposed masculinity and heterosexuality. Everett Stacy's attraction to gambling, his use of the phallic walking stick and his use of snuff hint at his queer nature. He prefers the male company of gambling dens and coffee houses, neglecting his wife to pursue these interests. This draws on English Gothic associations of the aristocracy with decadence, impotence and deviance. Sue Harper argues:

Of course, in both nineteenth and twentieth century culture the aristocracy functions not solely as itself but as a symbol of repressed desires or inexpressible social fears (Harper, 1994: 26).

Again, the genre is used to emphasise a sense of disrupted identity (Cook, 1996: 62).

Although the film is ostensibly about the British way of life, the Regency setting allows a showcase for a distinctively classless, self-made 'American' style hero to face the corrupting decadence of British history through the conflict with aristocratic Stacy. This breaking down of gender expectations and the addition of the feminising of a man who is bigger, stronger and more physically imposing than the hero, fits in neatly with George Sanders' media discourse, where he apparently refuses to fit into the English gentleman stereotype, embracing a subversive, ambivalent, caddish persona. His attractiveness is part of his apparent feminisation and misogyny, not in spite of it.

Although the fan magazines never alluded directly to Sanders' camp or queer persona, the coding of his early roles was picked up in some early articles. One Sanders family scrapbook containing cuttings from the thirties contains one gleefully insinuating British article in an unattributed newspaper piece entitled 'They've Given him Silks and Satins But he Wants To be Tough'. Referring to George's role in *Lloyd's of London*, the journalist snidely comments:

He portrayed this role with detestable charm and an effluvia of sneers and lavender exudations that chilled the blood of the ladies in the audience. Mr Sanders was

disgusted with himself “Heavens! [...] why did I ever let them put lace on my cuffs?” (Watson scrapbook, n.d, n.p.).

ZsaZsa Gabor, George’s second wife, when asked about Sanders’ sexuality, insisted he was heterosexual, with the proviso that ‘all English actors are a little bit gay’ (Musto, 2016: n.p.). We could see George Sanders, like Danny Kaye, as ‘personally heterosexual but culturally queer’, although such labels invariably offer, to a twenty-first century audience, an oversimplification of sexuality (Cohan, 2017: 1). Sanders himself satirises the gender stereotype in a 1961 article for *Good Housekeeping*, ‘George Sanders Says There’s a Lot to Like About Women’, when the ‘voice’ of Sanders lists the qualities needed by his ideal woman. In the final paragraph, he concludes: ‘It occurs to me as I survey my Galatea that she only needs a mustache to be a promising candidate for the grenadier guards. I must have made a mistake somewhere’. Most transgressively, George Sanders has described his ideal woman as a man.

George Sanders’ place in the queer canon of cinematic portrayals - if there can be said to be such a thing - was sealed in his performance of Lord Henry Wotton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Lewin, 1945). This thoughtful, intelligent adaptation of Oscar Wilde’s *fin-de- siècle* novel was released only fifty years after Wilde’s scandalous three trials.<sup>116</sup> Although Wilde’s novel was not officially deemed to be ‘obscene’, it was used extensively to prove his homosexuality, and was considered a ‘corrupting influence’.<sup>117</sup> Widely publicised at the time, the general public must have understood that the novel told a scandalous story of male-male sexual relationships.<sup>118</sup> As Sedgwick has asserted Wilde ‘seems the very embodiment of [...]

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<sup>116</sup> Oscar Wilde’s three trials in 1895. Firstly, he sued the Marquess of Queensberry for libel after he called him a sodomite in a note. When evidence started to emerge that Wilde did have sexual relations with a number of men, the case had to be withdrawn. Then he was arrested for gross indecency because of the evidence collected for the previous trial. The first trial ended with a hung jury. When Wilde was prosecuted a second time with new evidence he was found guilty and sentenced to two years in prison (Linder, famous- trials.com, n.d, n.p).

<sup>117</sup> The prosecution counsel quoted at length from passages of the book as evidence that Wilde was homosexual (<https://www.famous-trials.com/wilde>).

<sup>118</sup> In its original form, as published by *Lippencott’s*, the same-sex relations were more explicit than in later versions (Denisoff, 2008: 40).

a new turn of the century homosexual identity and fate' (1990/2008: 132) and I would argue that the spirit of Wilde on screen, is never more fully embodied than in Sanders' portrayal of Wotton. On the discourse around Wilde and his novel, homosexuality had become,

An open secret [...] it is in a sense a perfect rhetorical distillation of the open secret, the glass closet [...] from our twentieth-century vantage point where the name Oscar Wilde virtually means 'homosexual' (Sedgwick, 1990/2008: 164-5).

A film taken from a novel does not stand alone, it stands alongside the original as a new interpretation of that story. Audiences coming to see the movie adaptation come with an understanding of what they are looking for, even if the system of censorship does not allow for clarification of the themes. The scandal surrounding this book would surely have persisted across fifty years even for people who had not read it.

Critical responses to the film's release do reveal a cultural awareness of the nature of the film's subtext. One reviewer observed, 'Lewin, who directed, has very subtly, but unmistakably, pegged Gray for what he was, but it may go over the heads of a lot of people' (*Variety*, March 7, 1945: 20). Another *Variety* review calls the original novel, 'Oscar Wilde's flawless yard of lavender', describing Sanders' performance as 'Oscar Wilde in a girdle' (March 7, 1945: 20).<sup>119</sup> If Sedgwick's assertion about Wilde's name signifying homosexuality, then this feminisation (through 'girdle') would have made Sanders' screen queerness understood. In clarification, the writer ends with an apparently irrelevant anecdote:

Years ago 'Variety' printed a story about an actor who was spraying the set with his Dorian dialogue and gestures. So the director said to him 'Take your hand off your hip and act like a man!' The Dorian replied he wasn't hired for character parts. 'okay' snapped the director, 'recast him in westerns where he can ride with his hand on his hip and no questions asked' (ibid).

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<sup>119</sup> Lavender was familiar code for homosexuality, as I have already shown. (Russo, 1981: 38-39). The comment about Sanders being Oscar Wilde in a girdle references not just his slimmer stature but also the way that Wotton is clearly represented in the film, as in the novel, as in some ways passive, particular and feminised, with a clear sexual interest in – even obsession with – Dorian.

This snide stereotyping of the effeminate actor as ‘a Dorian’ makes the general understanding clear as the character takes on the qualities of his creator. Yet, in Hollywood, as we have seen, censors did not allow for any mention of gay sexuality, which it classified as ‘perversion’. This silence was nothing new, of course. Lord Alfred Douglas, Oscar Wilde’s lover had proclaimed male-male passion as ‘the love that dare not speak its name’.<sup>120</sup> This performance of sexual ‘deviance’ under the stricture of silence is echoed in the novel and in this film adaptation.

The film’s studio, MGM, used the ‘unspeakable’ nature of the film’s subject matter part of its selling point, taking out a page in *Variety*, that gave a number of critics’ views:

so amazing! [...] with a daring theme [...] unusual!, exciting! [...] [it] will be the most talked about movie of 1945! [...] One of the most daring and revealing films ever produced! Truly remarkable! [...] a daring film and MGM has filmed it daringly! Marks a milestone! [...] unusual, intriguing and novel (March 7, 1945: 11).

In the advertising column that appeared alongside the contents pages of most of the most prominent fan magazines in June 1945, ‘The Lion’s Roar’, the writer, supposedly the lion ‘Leo’, encourages audiences to see it by playing on the same enigma:

Changing the subject, how many of you have seen ‘The Picture of Dorian Gray’? The most unusual film of the year. The production based on Oscar Wilde’s absinthe-tinted drama is causing a great deal of talk. It is so superbly produced, so different in theme from conventional fare. We think you ought to see ‘Dorian’ (*Photoplay*, June 1945: 2; *Movieland*, June 1945: 4; *Screenland*, June 1945: 1; *Modern Screen*, June 1945: 4).

The teasing innuendo is, in itself unmistakable to anyone who would be aware of the story’s subject matter. The film’s unusualness becomes its unique selling point. The theatrical trailer reinforces this discourse, declaring it ‘the most unusual story to ever reach the screen’, adding, ‘men and women alike, all fell under the spell of his charm’. The bisexual nature of

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<sup>120</sup> When questioned about this in court, Wilde performed a definition of it that both confirmed and denied its implications. Wilde explained: ‘The ‘love that dare not speak its name’ in this century is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan... It is that deep, spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect... There is nothing unnatural about it. It is intellectual, and it repeatedly exists between an elder and a younger man, when the elder man has intellect, and the younger man has all the joy, hope, and glamour of life before him.’ (Aymer and Sagarin, 1974: 88).

Dorian's 'sins' were being directly referenced as a selling technique, and although writers skirted around naming it, the theme is made clear.

Following the 'pansy craze' of the 1920s and 30s, the war increased freedom for the gay community in the US and in Britain as vast numbers joined the armed forces (Faderman and Timmons, 2006: 44). Official army and navy handbooks acknowledged the possibility of same sex involvements and 'deprivation homosexuality', where it was considered that men and women would become temporarily homosexual because of the lack of access to the opposite sex (Costello, 1985: 159). American authorities were more tolerant in the South Pacific where homosexual relations, it seems, were considered to be less concerning than those between the races (Costello, 1985: 170).

The war eventually helped to foster the building of permanent homosexual communities in Los Angeles. By one estimate, a quarter million 'war migrants' both straight and gay, settled in Los Angeles during the first eight years of the 1940s (Faderman and Timmons, 2006: 73).

The establishment of gay communities in big cities, LA, New York and London can be traced back to the wartime mobilisation of people. The relative openness of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and its publicity as regards homosexual themes might be partly because of this sense of changing times in the final months of the war. Or perhaps the status of this film as prestige, self-conscious work of art of a revered 'censor-proof' director (Felleman, 2010: 444) disguised its subtext, much of which was buried in symbols. Whatever the reason, this is a landmark movie that clearly speaks of unspoken things from the 'silent closet' (Slide, 1999: 24-32), lifting the lid on something that had been largely repressed in Hollywood.

Like Albert Lewin's films, Oscar Wilde's works were entrenched in systems of coding and symbolism. As a homosexual man, living in dangerous times, even over-confident Wilde knew that certain subjects could be hinted at but not said. WB Yeats recalled him saying,

Olive Schreiner<sup>121</sup> is staying in the East End because that is the only place where people do not wear masks upon their faces, but I have told her that I live in the West End because nothing interests me but the mask (Yeats, 1955: 165).

Lewin's film of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* draws on Wilde's obsession with masks, with images, reflections of the self, with aestheticism and the ways in which the visual senses can evoke emotions. Although the film was dismissed by some critics as static and 'pompous'<sup>122</sup> and welcomed by others as 'excellent',<sup>123</sup> 'intelligent and successful',<sup>124</sup> Sanders' performance was unanimously praised.<sup>125</sup>

It was director and screenwriter Albert Lewin's life's project to make this film, and as a former university lecturer with a Master's degree from Harvard, he was very aware of Wilde's cultural and literary heritage (Felleman, 1995: 387). He took pains to remain faithful to the spirit of the original, using dialogue straight from Wilde, employing a wide range of symbols that would speak through the 'silence'. Although the movie can be seen as static by modern standards, it is literate, atmospheric and beautifully photographed by Oscar-winning cinematographer Harry Stradling.

The film breaks with Hollywood tradition in its presentation of masculinity in a number of key ways. The three men that form the central dynamic of the film, Basil, the artist, Henry Wotton the decadent Lord and Dorian the beautiful young man, all transgress the American ideal of muscular masculinity and embrace the idea of British effete manhood. Oscar Wilde said of the three characters that Dorian was who he wanted to be, Henry was how the world thought he was, and Basil was the most like him (Gomel, 2004: 85). This sense of characters as somehow standing for the fragmentation of one man lends a sense of Gothic division of self to the story. These male characters exist in a primarily homosocial context and their

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<sup>121</sup> Schreiner was a South African writer.

<sup>122</sup> Bosley Crowther insists that the adaptation is 'mawkish' with 'artificial thinness' with 'visual affectations', but considers the novel 'a thin piece of philosophical writing', 'without profundity', so perhaps cannot be expected to appreciate the movie version (*New York Times*, Mar 2, 1945:15).

<sup>123</sup> *The Monthly Film Bulletin*, Jan 1, 1945: 61.

<sup>124</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, June 12, 1945: 3.

<sup>125</sup> Even Bosley Crowther allowed that Sanders gave 'the only commendable performance in the film' (*New York Times*, Mar 2, 1945: 15).

main relationships are with other men. Although the film version embellishes heterosexual complications by introducing the character of Gladys (Donna Reed), she remains little more than a plot device. Like the novel, the film concerns itself with aestheticism and the creative process, embedded within a tale of homosexual obsessions.

The crystallisation of the moment when art captures life is most vividly found in the sequence in Basil's artist's studio, at the momentous first meeting of Henry and Dorian. Basil (Lowell Gilmore) and Henry (Sanders) are in the garden talking about Dorian (Hurd Hatfield). Henry says he wants to meet and befriend Dorian, but Basil says he does not want him to meet his friend. Then the piano music starts and Henry asks Basil 'who's that at your piano, Basil?' They both move to the French doors and look in to see Dorian sitting at the piano. Their function here as viewers and Dorian as the viewed puts Dorian into the feminine role, where Dorian is 'to-be-looked-at' (Mulvey, 1975: 12-15).

The music he plays transforms him into a mystical presence, as the sound becomes part of the enchanting spell he weaves over the other two men. He is surrounded by paintings, baroque eclectic *objects d'art* and heavy drapes, in a familiar iconography from the era of the aesthetic movement. Lewin's desire to use some authentic pieces and to recreate others fills each room in this film with symbols (Lansbury, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 2014: n.p.). It also recalls Richard Dyer's observation about the ways in which antiques and beautiful decorative environments were used in Hollywood's coding of queer masculine sexuality (Dyer, 1979: 12).



Figure 14. Basil and Henry watch Dorian.

In the conversation that follows, we see Henry simultaneously entrance Dorian with his decadent philosophy, whilst capturing a butterfly under his hat, poisons it and mounts and frames it. As this is happening, off screen, Basil is adding the finishing touches to his painting of Dorian.

Henry's seduction of Dorian and his capture of the butterfly occur through a clever paralleling of dialogue and images:

Dorian: *(a disembodied voice as the camera closes in on Henry)* Are you a bad influence, Lord Henry?

Lord Henry: *(his face close to the butterfly)* There's no such thing as a good influence Mr Gray. All influence is immoral.



Figure 15.

Dorian: Why?



Henry: Because the aim of life is self-development. (*Medium shot as he takes his hat off, watching the butterfly.*) To realise one's nature perfectly. That's what we're here for. (*He turns his head, still following the butterfly.*)



Figure 16

A man should live out his life fully and completely, give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream. Every impulse that we suppress broods in the mind and poisons us. (*He creeps up on the creature.*) There's only one way to get rid of temptation and that's to yield to it (*He places his hat over the butterfly, as Dorian watches from behind him, posing on the plinth.*)



Figure 17.

Resist it and the soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself. There is nothing that can cure the soul but the senses. Just as there is nothing that can cure the senses but the soul.

As Wotton finishes his speech, the image of the dead butterfly dissolves into Dorian's immobile face, which gives way to a statue, then the butterfly is seen, framed, in front of two statues in front of the window. The large painting behind Dorian shows feminine naked

bodies entwined with each other, giving a glimpse of the sensual pleasures that Henry is encouraging Dorian to seek. There are two nude classical statues to the left of the picture, one black the other white, and the mystical Egyptian cat stands to his right and our left on a tall side table next to an African statue. The exoticism of all of these images expresses the urge to push boundaries of the familiar and serve to reinforce Wotton's message.



Figure 18.



Figure 19.

The symbolic process of killing and mounting the butterfly foreshadows the poisoning of Dorian's mind and the crystallising of his essence into his own mystical portrait. The placement of the butterfly at the end of this sequence in front of a classical bust of a beautiful face in black and a white nude statue of a female torso holding a large phallic protuberance evokes hermaphroditism. It symbolically references Dorian's mixing of genders and his sexual ambivalence. James Agate, in the *Tatler*, commented on Hurd Hatfield's disappointing looks in his scathing dismantling of Wilde and the film, comparing the actor

with the 'golden' boy described in Wilde's novel. He asked, 'What's become of all the gold?' commenting bitterly, 'he looks as if he were not the master but the footman' (*Tatler and Bystander*, May 9, 1945: 165).



Figure 20.

According to Angela Lansbury, Hurd Hatfield was distressed by the way that Lewin refused to let him show any emotion on his face as he insisted on the actor's face as remaining 'mask-like' and impassive (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 2014: n.p.).<sup>126</sup>

Albert Lewin's preoccupation with art was evident from his first film, *The Moon and Sixpence* (1942). Here he had inserted Technicolor plates of paintings to show the genius of his main character. He employs the same technique in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. As in *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming, 1939), the colour plates of the portraits in the black and white narrative highlight the fantastic, supernatural element of the movie (Wells-Lassagne, 2016: 81). The portrait is moved from Basil's studio to Dorian's parlour, then is shut away in his childhood nursery. Basil and Henry 'want to have the picture; Dorian wants to be the picture' (Gomel, 2004: 82). The shadow self and the real self, the portrait and Dorian are objects of desire. The picture, in its incongruous nursery setting, is a most visceral 'haunted mirror'.

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<sup>126</sup> In commentary on *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* DVD, Lansbury describes one scene that had to be re-shot over 100 times.

Whilst in the novel, the portrait's descriptions are cursory,<sup>127</sup> Lewin's exploitation of the visual medium of cinema is dramatic and spectacular.

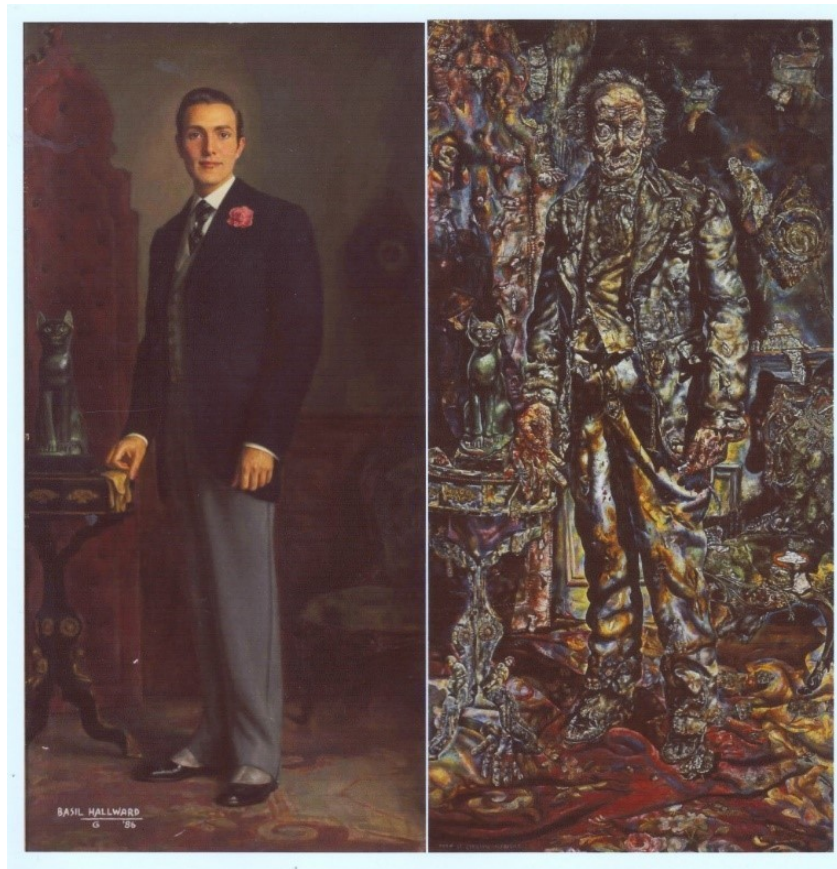


Figure 21.

Lewin always intended to put the portraits at the film's centre, and commissioned artists to work on them (Turner, 1997: 87). Two main versions of Hatfield's portrait were made. The first, the early painting, done in a naturalistic style, was by Henrique Medina, a painter of society portraits (christies.com, 2015). Dorian is shown with a splash of colour in the pink rose in his lapel and the red screen to his right. The pink and red, startling as the first colours seen in the film at the portrait's unveiling, express both his visceral desires and his femininity. This portrait is initially placed in his drawing room, with a 'mirror' female one (presumably of his mother). He is seen standing between the two images in a central spot, and they reflect back to him a queerly gendered static being. Other mirrors are frequently

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<sup>127</sup> 'In the centre of the room, clamped to an upright easel, stood the full-length portrait of a young man of extraordinary personal beauty' (2001: 5).

shown in his home, suggesting Dorian's obsession with his own surface. Dorian is seen walking through his life without expression, his face immobile, and once the painting is in his home, he is drawn to its presence. The movie captures moments of looking which for Dorian expresses Wilde's perception of Dorian as 'a Narcissus' (Wilde, 2001: 6). A philosophical link between narcissism and homoeroticism was something taken from Wilde's novel:

In linking homosexual desire to the narcissistic personality of Dorian Gray, Wilde would seem to be accepting both sexological and a later Freudian conception of same-sex eros (Kaye, 2008: 58).



Figure 22.

The second portrait of Dorian's corrupt soul, painted in a modern American Magical Realist style, is by painter Ivan Albright and his identical twin (or double) Malvin. The grotesque, degenerating portrait is the dominant image of the film. The painting itself uses colour and texture to recreate a horrific 'hell within,' a sort of personification of human sin.<sup>128</sup> Even the background of the portrait is studded and swirled with tumours, worms and devils. This

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<sup>128</sup> 'Each of us has heaven and hell in him, Basil' (Wilde, 2001: 125). The film opens and closes with the quotation: 'I sent my soul through the invisible, Some letter of that after-life to spell; And by and by my soul returned to me, And answered, 'I myself am heaven and hell'' (*The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*).

painting is horrific and Gothically uncanny 'belonging to all that is terrible – to all that arouses dread and creeping horror' (Freud, 2016: 1). In death, Dorian becomes the portrait and the portrait becomes him. The haunting of Dorian by his 'mirror' portrait is exorcised by Dorian's attempt to destroy his mirror 'self'. His face as he lies dead on the nursery floor is that of one who has experienced untold horrors. The words on the rug beneath the body, 'Come little boy blue', add impact to the theme of lost innocence as the viewer glimpses the final image of the famed face, in all of its syphilitic decay.



Figure 23.

*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, like its source novel, does not have a homophobic message. Basil Hallward, possibly the most straightforwardly queer character – unmarried, besotted by the subject of the painting into which he pours all of his passion – is, like Sybil Vane, an innocent and is Dorian's victim. The agony of Allan Campbell, who Dorian blackmails into hiding Basil's body, is also clearly to be sympathised with.<sup>129</sup> Whilst both of these men showed a flawed judgment in becoming involved with Gray, that was their worst sin and Campbell's remorse and guilt was such that he took his own life. More than any other film I have seen from the first half of the 1940s, this is most clearly dealing with queerness sympathetically not as a 'flash' or a motif but as a theme.<sup>130</sup> George Sanders' appearance as the corruptor of young men, as 'Oscar Wilde in a girdle', Dorian Gray's Mephistopheles, is

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<sup>129</sup> Although it is not specified, Dorian's threat to send a letter to Allan's wife is clearly alluding to a shared sexual experience.

<sup>130</sup> The one exception is *The Mad Doctor*, as discussed in the previous chapter.

the finest expression of his dual ambivalent allure. It was a role for which he was perfectly suited.<sup>131</sup>

The film that led George Sanders to his Oscar for best supporting actor, *All About Eve* (1950), has become known as an important 'queer classic', the 'great camp film' (Benshoff and Griffin, 2006: 71; Cleto, 1999: 311). It is a film in which everything – including heterosexual fulfilment – is subordinated to the theatre, with the word 'theatrical', with its associations with masquerade and disguise, forming the perfect setting for a plot that throbs with the possibility of performed gender and illicit same-sex desires.

The narrative tells of ageing star, Margo Channing, and young, calculating, up and coming actress, Eve Harrington. Eve befriends Margo and insinuates her way into her life, manipulating those around her. Forming a diabolical pact with amoral theatre critic Addison DeWitt, Eve goes on stage as Margo's understudy and finds her own fame. The doubled relationship between Eve and Margo, which vacillates from warm friendship and intimate co-dependency to bitter and angry enmity, is often read as a same-sex romance that sours, and the presence of urbane mannered DeWitt also adds a queer flavour, in the ever 'gay' Broadway theatrical setting.

The character who most perfectly expresses the marginalisation of the homosexual in this film is Addison DeWitt. He others himself in the movie, referring to 'theatre folk' as 'improbable', 'abnormal', arguing, 'we are the original displaced personalities.' Dull heterosexual, Bill Sampson (Gary Merrill) counters this view, protesting:

Sure, there's a screwball element in the theatre. Sticks out. It's got spotlights on it and a brass band. But it isn't basic, it isn't standard. If it were, the theatre couldn't survive.

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<sup>131</sup> Basil Rathbone was also considered and could certainly have made it his own. Like Sanders, Rathbone's sophisticated, effete, potentially queer Britishness was a suitable fit for Wilde's alter ego, Lord Henry.

Bill sounds emphatically defensive and homophobic here, as, within the coding of the time, his association with the theatre, with the arts, might have made him, too, potentially sexually 'suspect' (Hawkins, 1990: 13). These contrasting types of masculine representation exemplify where 'feminisation and over-civilisation became the conflated antagonists to traditional masculinity' (Studlar, 1996: 29) and plain, uncomplicated Bill is set up in contrast with anglicised, sharply dressed Addison.

Addison, from the beginning of the film, is styled in a way that sets him apart from the other men. At the Sarah Siddons award ceremony in the opening scene, he wears a white tie and waistcoat with a carnation and a cigarette in a holder whilst the other men wear black. Whilst the wearing of white and the need to keep whites white, makes assumptions about domesticity and therefore femininity, the carnation, following Oscar Wilde, has long been a signifier of gay style (Lugowski, 1999: 4). DeWitt is the only character, male or female in the film, to use the cigarette holder, an item associated in Hollywood with androgynous stars such as Marlene Dietrich or Greta Garbo, and occasionally with feminised men (such as Waldo Lydecker) (Lugowski, 1999: 4). Fastidiousness of dress and the 'luxury milieu' are accepted codes for gay male representation (Dyer, 1979: 8).



Figure 24. Addison DeWitt.

Unlike Waldo, Addison is often seen in liminal spaces: outside doors, at the entrance to rooms, windows, on stairs, in the theatre foyer, expressing a sense of 'outsiderness' and



distance (Fuss,1991: 2). His pose of asexuality is also a common 'beard' for the 'wrong' sexual desires. He puts it in religious terms: 'Margo, as you know I have lived in the theatre as a trappist monk lives in his faith. I have no other world, no other life'. Other characters perceive him as feminised. Lloyd Richards (Hugh Marlowe) refers to him as 'that venomous fishwife'.



Figure 25. Listening at the door.

Addison's desire to control and 'own' Claudia Carswell (Marilyn Monroe) and Eve Harrington (Anne Baxter), does not take an overtly sexual form. He plays the part of their Pygmalion or Svengali, encouraging Claudia to use her sexuality to get better parts, amused by Eve's seduction of Lloyd, as his desire to *be* them seems to replace any desire to be with them sexually. It is only when Eve mentions marriage to Lloyd that he becomes riled. Marriage, as a legal bond, would give the husband greater power over his star than the Svengali could have. His anger and physical sadism towards Eve in her bedroom, where he slaps her and pushes her on the bed, is unconvincing if we see it as him blackmailing her into being his mistress.



Figure 26.

His desire for her is actually his need to hold power over her, to vicariously make her his avatar. He will use his contacts and media ubiquity to make her a star, but she will be his creature. His desire to be the star, to *be* the new Margo Channing, dominates his thinking as in that moment, with Eve distraught on the bed, terrified that he will rape her, he has a moment of self-realisation, concluding: ‘that I should want you at all strikes me as the height of improbability’.

There is a complexity to Addison as he strips away all of Eve’s lies, standing in front of the window: ‘We are improbable people, Eve, that is what we have in common. We have a contempt for humanity, an inability to love or be loved’. It is their past, their difference, their queerness that creates a bridge that brings them together to form an alliance. Addison’s queerness here is underplayed by Sanders, quiet even in this scene of passion, and through facial expressions particularly in reactions to others. He is the outsider whose caustic wit and cruelty expresses frustration at being pushed to the margins even in the theatrical world in which he exists.

Unlike Lewin’s *Dorian Gray*, *All About Eve* does seem to relay a homophobic message, with Eve and Addison making classically performative gay villains. It might be said, however, that their characters highlight the danger of repression of the true self, which always in Gothic fiction leads to violence and the return of the repressed in some form or another. Interestingly, the ever-subversive George Sanders considered Eve to be the real heroine of the story (Staggs, 2001: 106).

From 1950 onwards, attitudes towards the gay community changed yet again. In 1952 in the UK there were 3,757 convictions for homosexual offences, compared with 956 in 1938 (Bourne, 2017: 121). Similarly in the US, in the District of Columbia arrests topped one thousand per year in the 1950s and in Philadelphia there were one hundred per month (D’Emilio and Freedman, 1989: 294). Los Angeles, police chief Bill Parker also led a crackdown in arrests (ibid). This homosexual panic might have, in part, been the result of the 1948 Kinsey report’s revelations:

‘Persons with homosexual histories’ he wrote ‘are to be found in every age group, in every social level, in every conceivable occupation, in cities and on farms, in the most remote areas of the country...in large city communities...an experienced observer may identify hundreds of persons in a day whose homosexual interests are certain’ (D’Emilio and Freedman, 1989: 291-292).

Homosexuals were perceived as threats to national security and were persecuted by the House of UnAmerican Activities Committee (ibid). The Senate released a report alleging that homosexuals lacked ‘emotional stability’ and ‘moral fiber,’ and homosexual civil servants were unfairly dismissed from their positions (D’Emilio and Freedman, 1989: 292). The committee warned: ‘even one sex pervert in a Government agency ... tends to have a corrosive influence upon his fellow employees. [...] One homosexual can pollute a government office’ (D’Emilio and Freedman, 1989: 293). The period of the Cold War, then, was highly restrictive following the relative freedom of the war years for the queer community, as the rise of the queer villain reveals. But in his most memorable Cold War role, George would not be the queer villain, but would become a gender-bending hero.

Two years before his death, George Sanders would cause a stir by his appearance in John Huston’s cold-war thriller, *The Kremlin Letter* (1971). In this film, Sanders plays a transgender, homosexual spy called ‘The Warlock’. Whilst, typically, rugged masculinity in this film is represented by Patrick O’Neal’s Charles Rone, homosexuals and deviants are depicted as British or Russian. The character, known only by his pseudonym, Warlock, is a

professional spy, drawing on contemporary ideas of British spies as homosexuals (Carlston, 2013: 10). The OED defines a warlock as a 'sorcerer' or 'person in league with the devil', a 'male witch' (OED.com). The use of the masculine noun, when the Warlock is at first appearance seen as female, seems to be privileging the view of the character as male and homosexual, with the transgender appearance as a staged, camp performance. The magical power implied in the name, however, might denote the gender transformations in a world of ever shifting identities that are tightly bordered by biology in the world of the film.

The Warlock is introduced nonchalantly playing piano in drag in a gay bar, (Sanders was an excellent pianist) then, in conversation with Rone, removing his make-up in the dressing room, talking via the mediation of the mirror as if to divest himself of the performance.



Figure 27.

His response to Rone coincides with him taking off his wig. In front of the mirror in the medium shot there seems to be a dismembered female arm, bedecked with pearl bracelet. This has a disorientating effect as, through the lightbulb studded showbusiness cliché of the mirror, we see the Warlock turn his eyes from his image to look directly at Rone.



Figure 28.

As they talk, Rone leans in to light the Warlock's cigar as he peels away his false eyelashes. The bringing together of male and female, the masculine phallic cigar and the feminine accoutrements, are convincingly combined in Sanders' performance. The removal of the feminine and the easy male interaction of one man lighting another's cigar, are juxtaposed formemorable effect, whilst the odd combination of (iconic) red lipstick, pearls and cigar and deep rich masculine voice, create a layering of different gender identities that form an eccentric, baroque backdrop to the functional dialogue.



Figure 29.

A similar play occurs in a later scene, the Warlock reports back to his handler on his undercover work in the Russian university, casually putting down a pistol and taking up his knitting:

The Warlock: (*He puts down gun and takes knitting out of the bag and starts to knit with red wool.*) Rudolph says he's in love with me. He claims that I'm the only one he's been in love with since Poliakov and talking about their affair makes him weep. He wants me to leave the Professor and move in with him. I told him it wouldn't be wise to break off so suddenly but that I would find a way soon. (*laughs*) I am knitting these bed socks for him.

The feminine association with knitting and the language of the unfaithful wife mingle with his familiar, male appearance and the gun that he lies down to take up his wool, all reinforce this mixing of genders and, in modern terms, a representation of a non-binary persona.

Historians have commented that the association of British homosexuality particularly with the life of a spy lies in its very duality. As the homosexual man had to put on a pretence, so does the spy.

The Warlock is a heroic figure, and when he is found out by the enemy, he throws himself out of the window to avoid capture. Within the film's world his sexuality and gendering fit in with a concept of the British as eccentric. It is an interesting part for Sanders to take, and his performance was widely acclaimed. Despite everything, it seems to be taking Sanders' persona only a small step further to envisage him as a non-binary, sexually nonconformist heroic figure. The duality of Sanders, his ability to say more than is in the script, again works for the narrative of this film. It would take an imaginative leap to have imagined his American contemporaries in 1970 (John Wayne, Henry Fonda, James Stewart) taking on a role where they would be required to wear a dress and wig. In this performance Sanders rejects 'camp' for under-playing and normalises his character. One journalist mused that he was 'figuring it might be fun to ask the cantankerous *distingué* how it felt, after winning an Oscar for tongue lashing Margo Channing in *All About Eve*, to finally play Margo Channing (*Chicago Tribune*, July 6, 1969: N9). In this one dismissive mocking comment, Sanders' gendered versatility, his lack of binary definition, is called into question.



Figure 30.

### **(iii) The Misogynist Cycle**

As the portrayal of Sanders in fan magazines as a virulent anti-feminist hit a height in 1942, Sanders appeared in the first of a short cycle of films that featured him that exploited his star discourse, but which also might have been the death knell to his career as a leading man. I will refer to this as the ‘misogynist cycle’ of films. They might be seen in terms of Richard Dyer’s definition of ‘star vehicle’ as they are a deliberate series of films that set out to exploit George Sanders’ star image (Dyer, 1979: 70-71). These are movies in which Sanders plays the main central protagonist, which can be said to actively promote misogyny. Although *The Moon and Sixpence* started the cycle, I will be focusing on the later films, which develop the Sanders misogynist persona further: *The Private Affairs of Bel Ami*, 1947 (from Maupassant’s novel), the third is Douglas Sirk’s *Scandal in Paris* (based on the memoirs of Vidocq), 1946 and finally, the film where the anachronistic cad finally dies, *The Death of A Scoundrel*, 1957, directed by Charles Martin, inspired by the life of playboy confidence trickster Serge Rubinstein.

The George Sanders misogynist cycle fits into a much wider cinematic trend. Large numbers of 'women's films' were made in the US and UK from 1940 onwards. The gaslight films of the early forties, and the 'Paranoid Women's Films', express female fears about entrapment in marriage and the domestic setting (Hanson, 2007; Barefoot, 2001). As Helen Hanson has observed, the female Gothic film emerged that expressed 'the stresses and strains' of the female experience (2007: 9). However, for every movement in a forward direction, there is a reactionary movement trying to pull it back, and the cycle of films produced starring Sanders as abusive 'cad' acts as an antidote to these female Gothic stories, where the narratives explore the emergence of women from the home and from patriarchal power. These films, in contrast, are fantasies of male power over women. In the sexually attractive Sanders figure in each of these films, men could see a world in which women not only succumb to male power but enjoy being badly treated. The anti-hero invariably has sexual relationships with several women, and ultimately (presumably to conform with censor's rules) either is reformed or dies. Perhaps it is surprising that, as female interest in Sanders in fan magazines died out after 1943, the last of these films was made in 1957. The relative lateness of this film can be explained in that the revival of the cycle was almost accidental. Serge Rubinstein's unsolved murder (in 1956) had captured the public imagination and the filmmakers wished to exploit this. As Rubinstein was an actual living personification of all things 'caddish,' it was the perfect role for archetypal cad, George Sanders.

Douglas Sirk's melodrama, *A Scandal in Paris* tells the true story of criminal turned detective Vidocq (Sanders). Most of the film is dedicated to his criminal career, with a quick redemption bolted on at the end, when he finally falls in love with Therese (Signe Hasso) because 'she does not speak,' whilst her double, his lover Loretta (Carole Landis) is 'the flame that is too hot to handle'. The film's tone, unlike *The Moon and Sixpence*, which takes itself very seriously, is ironic and playful, and Vidocq is described by a rival as 'young, handsome, Casanova-like.' A priest tells the heroine: 'In all of us there is a St George and a dragon. That is the true meaning of the legend of St George.' The film plays with this idea of



dual and conflicting identity. Vidocq admits he has both the saint and the dragon inside him and he is drawn to two contrasting types of women. As the poster says ‘Tsk tsk. The way George Sanders carries off Signe Hasso and carries on with Carole Landis, it’s no wonder there’s *A Scandal in Paris*’. Even the poster adopts a tone of innuendo.



Figure 31.

Sanders’ ability to convey extra meaning is fully exploited in this movie. Following their first meeting, Vidocq and Loretta are alone together in a carriage, kissing passionately. Although she is wearing a long dress, on leaving the carriage and reaching her fiancé, her stockings fall to the floor. She realises that he has stolen her ruby studded garter. As her fiancé remarks, ‘Is it possible that a gentleman could steal a respectable woman’s garter without...’ Loretta protests ‘He must have taken it off when he was putting it on.’

As in *Rebecca*, Sanders’ ability to deliver a line with double meaning is crucial to the film’s true meaning. Vidocq philosophises: ‘in crime, as in love, there are only those that do and those that don’t dare,’ adding ‘only the heartless succeed in crime. As in love.’ Following up on this connection, he later adds, with unmistakable suggestiveness, ‘I am what you might call a connoisseur of crime’. Crime and love are intertwined as Vidocq makes it his modus

operandi to steal from the women he seduces, making his twin crimes interplay with each other. When he rejects his old life to become chief of police, his father-in-law Houdon de Pierremont (Alan Napier) broadmindedly accepts his confession. He humorously suggests Vidocq should 'recompense the 'many ladies whose treasures you had um...pilfered'. Vidocq's women, as symbolised by Loretta and her garter, are very happy to have their 'jewels' taken by him. Although this movie is a fantasy of male power and misogyny, it does at least have some female characters who are a match for Vidocq. Perhaps even Therese has more strength of character than originally is evident, as she offers to join him in his life of crime. Her grandmother's flexible morality and pet monkey called Satan give us hope that Therese will not be entirely silent when she is married to Vidocq, and that female desire -in its place- will also be fulfilled.

Albert Lewin's *The Private Affairs of Bel Ami*, 1947, is closer in tone to his *The Moon and Sixpence*, sharing a serious, heavy-handed emphasis on the male character and his dubious fantasy life. Lewin seemed to turn to Sanders in a number of films as his preferred anti-hero, possibly as his idealised self. Charles Duroy (Sanders) works his way up through Paris society through his relationships with a series of different women, taking their help with his chosen career of journalism. He manipulates everyone around him in order to clear his path and finally tries to buy a title and marry into a wealthy family. This leads his downfall when the true owner of the aristocratic name he wishes to adopt challenges him to a duel and shoots him.

The poster advertising poster focuses on one image from the film. Angela Lansbury's Clotilde is seen dragging on Bel Ami's trouser leg in a pose of supplication.



Figure 32.

This is the most meaningful relationship with a woman that Duroy has throughout the film. Lansbury's character, Clotilde de Marelle, remains devoted to him through his desertion of her and his many amorous adventures. She happily debases and sacrifices herself for him. Clotilde tells him: 'Your cruelty is dearer to me than the love of others,' as she throws herself to the floor and falls at his feet. It is very telling that this is the scene that is selected to be represented in the poster, that is supposed to entice audiences into the theatres. Clotilde almost seems to take pleasure in his cruel treatment and is forgiving of his affairs and marriages. The quotation that heads the image is taken from the beginning of the film, when he is sitting at a bar named 'Desir' and is approached by a woman. He tells his friend: 'I have noticed that women take to men who have the appearance of wickedness,' thus establishing a central theme of the narrative.

Wherever he goes, Duroy carries a walking stick, sweeping it around as he walks like an extra phallus. In a deliberate allusion to *The Moon and Sixpence* and possibly to Sanders' reputation the line 'You unmitigated cad!' is used again to insult Duroy. His wife Madeleine realises she has been betrayed, yet he has made her appear unfaithful to him, so that he can divorce her and marry an heiress.



Figure 33.

The motif of the Punch and Judy is employed throughout the film, most notably framing the beginning and the end, contextualising Duroy's role as trickster, cad and cudgel wielder, in the Punch mould. Following his death, the words 'we are all no more than puppets unless we believe' hang in the air over the final image of the advertising poster for *Le Petit Guignol* that shows Punch beating another puppet character. The final words are ambivalent. Either the dying Duroy is expressing his regret for a life lived without proper faith in God (a theme halfheartedly planted earlier in the film), or he is expressing his faith in himself, his own power and abilities as puppet master to the women around him. The faith is a faith in the power of patriarchy for which Punch is an appropriate icon.

The advertising poster declares: 'Four beautiful reasons behind ... *Death of a Scoundrel*.' The male figure is lying flat on his back on the floor, his arms outstretched, his tie fallen back. Over him stand the four women he has hurt. This image is a poetically fitting one for the end of the George Sanders cad, he is formally dressed, prostrated and vulnerable. This forms a contrast with the poster for *Scandal in Paris*, as the pleasure lies in seeing the abuser defeated by the women he has hurt, as they stand victoriously over him in full glamorous evening dress.

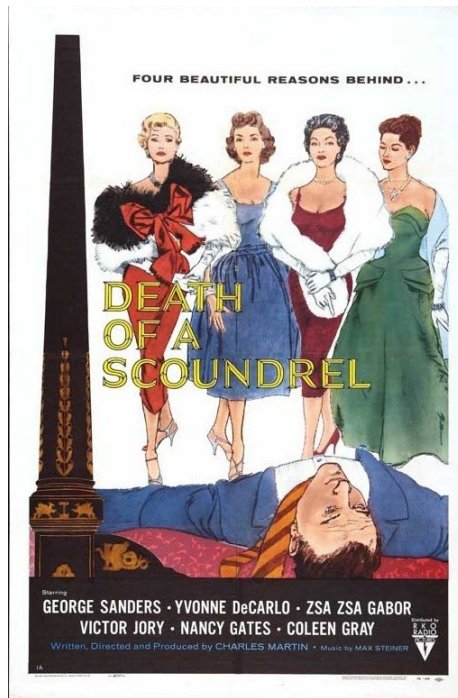


Figure 34.

Sabourin proves a less than effective predator on women. Stephanie North (Nancy Gates), his young actress protegee, flatly turns down his advances even though he has produced a play for her and expects her to understand that he expects sexual favours in return. Stephanie has the lead in a play is called *The Walking Doll*, financed by Sabourin and in a beautifully comic scene, he goes to a performance of the play and watches an exact replica of his own plan unfold on the stage.



Figure 35  
The on-stage seduction.

This scene within a scene follows a conversation where Clementi and Bridget Kelly (Yvonne DeCarlo) discuss the hotel room she has organised for him with ‘champagne and flowers’. On stage a room laid out with supper and champagne is the setting for the lovers’ meeting. Stephanie’s character in the play turns down her prospective lover’s advances, saying, when offered champagne, ‘I never acquired the taste’. When Tom, the man, offers to ‘keep’ Stephanie’s character as his mistress, Bridget wryly asks Sabourin, ‘Did you write this play?’ Meanwhile, on stage, Stephanie says to her lover ‘I’m afraid I’ve never been in sympathy with men who stage things.’ The camera cuts to a close-up of Sabourin’s reaction, as Bridget meets his eye meaningfully. Stephanie’s character continues ‘Frankly, I thought you had a little more imagination than this. I thought you had decent instincts. I guess I was wrong. You’re pretty rotten, Tom’. The editing of the sequence flickers from the stage to the audience, as Sabourin and Bridget react to the play. It is a witty Shakespearean ‘play within a play’ device that acts as an indication of what is to come.



Figure 36.

In a reproduction of the stage set, and a doubling of the preceding sequence, Sabourin takes Stephanie to a hotel room that duplicates the one in the play. The table with two candles is at centre, with champagne, and flowers. The young actress tells him of the champagne ‘I don’t care for it on stage or off, Mr Sabourin.’ Champagne, like Vidocq’s jewels, comes to represent sex. In declaring himself, though, Sabourin uses the exact words of the play. Clearly unimpressed, Stephanie says, ‘those lines have a familiar sound’ and she laughs at him.

Before she leaves, she says ‘You needn’t have gone to all this trouble, however, you could have invited me backstage. We have the same scenery.’



Figure 37. Sabourin’s seduction attempt.

This mirroring of the scene with the play is clever, as it throws a light on the lack of originality in the situation of an older man seducing a young star in this way. It is a ‘casting couch’ storyline in which the woman has the upper hand. It also draws our attention to the performative nature of the cad, as this is his most sincere relationship and yet he is unable to tell her how he feels other than in the trite words of the play he has just seen.

Sabourin, like Duroy and Vidocq, repents of his lifestyle in the final minutes of the film. In each of these movies, the protagonist’s final repentance is a hurried justification for what remains a story that indulges a specific type of male fantasy. Only Sabourin’s ending is finally brought about by a wronged woman, his brother’s former wife, Zena, (Lesa Ferraday) who, although she does not pull the trigger, makes it impossible for him to continue as before. The movie delights in Sanders’ star discourse and persona. The cast of the film includes his ex-wife ZsaZsa Gabor as one of his female victims who eventually gets the upper hand over him, his brother Tom Conway playing his own brother, and many references to his attributed ‘caddish’ views and representation in film texts such as the Lewin productions. This, the situation with Stephanie and the presence of Sanders’ ex-wife (ZsaZsa Gabor) as the

glamorous rich widow on whom Sabourin preys make this of all of the misogynist cycle, the most knowing and self-referential.

### 5 The Cad's Brother: 'Nice' George Sanders

*Death of A Scoundrel* is also a significant film for George Sanders as it was the second time for him to appear on screen with his brother, Tom Conway. In the opening scene of the movie, before Clementi Sabourin leaves Europe for America, he visits his brother Gerry, who owns an antique shop in a small town. It is the middle of the night, and Gerry is shocked at his visit. The two brothers appear in contrast with each other in what is supposed to be their first meeting in years. Through the scene, as Clementi slowly realises that his brother has betrayed him, the brothers stand facing each other across a room full of Eastern European antiques. The camera shows Sanders in profile and Conway facing ahead with head bowed, nervously fingering a gun.



Figure 38. *Death of a Scoundrel*. George Sanders and Tom Conway play the brothers Sabourin.

Against the baroque paraphernalia of Eastern European artefacts, silver, clocks and paintings, Clementi (Sanders) plump and well dressed in a familiar suit and Homberg hat looks down on his brother, who looks ill and haggard in pyjamas and dressing gown. The scene seems to express more about the real brothers than it does the brothers in the story. Whilst Gerry is supposed to be the successful brother, Clementi has just been released from a



Nazi concentration camp. Yet the appearance of the two men challenges this narrative and we are left with the 'real' brothers in this moment of intimacy.

This setting of the shop is a reminder of the Sanders brothers' history, as white Russian *emigres* themselves from a very different world to that of America in 1957. On discovering that his brother has betrayed him, Clementi says, 'Mother always said you were the one with brains. I was the dreamer. I was the dreamer they took to the Nazi prison'. The haunted expression on Gerry's face and the contrast between the physical appearance of the two brothers is particularly poignant when we realise that this is not just the last time they will appear together, but shortly after they became estranged because of Conway's alcoholism. In 1953 Tom Conway had been diagnosed with terminal liver disease but had seen some improvement due to an experimental treatment. In 1956, George had suggested his brother for the role in *Death of a Scoundrel* and Conway had come back from Europe to make the film (Parkinson, 2016: 77). The association of one brother with another was well known, and the doubling of ageing Conway with his more successful brother is a sharp contrast. The difference between the two brothers had never been as evident, as Tom's career had really been built on his similarity to his brother. This moment in this film marks a divergence between them and it is evident by their physical bearing and facial expressions.

Never as successful as George, Tom Conway rarely appeared in fan magazine features, but in 1942, he rode on the crest of his brother's fame in the article 'My Brother George and I' which suggested 'For a fresh slant on Sanders, read this closeup of him by the one who knows him best – brother Tom, who incidentally reveals a lot about himself.' Photographs accompanying the text show George and Tom together on a film, flicking through the script, and laughing and chatting over a restaurant meal.



Figure 39. *Screenland*, December, 1942.

Conway enters into the star discourse on his brother in the period immediately following his most misogynistic comments. In a positive narrative of fraternal closeness, the 'I' that is supposed to be Conway describes his relationship with his brother:

George and I hardly fought amongst ourselves. We got along royally since we both had the same disinterest in anything constructive or respectable. Besides, since we were continually trying to get other young chaps into trouble, we never had time to get into much of a row ourselves (*Screenland*, December 1942: 53).

Having created the image of the two of them as a tight team united against the world, in the article Conway describes them as somehow interchangeable. He describes how they would take each other's place in telephone conversations with girls:

George, who was lying down and feeling rather drowsy— oh yes, he liked to sleep even then—turned to me and said 'You talk to her and pretend you're I.' I found it easy to mimic George. [...] the girl never did find out that it was I who spoke to her several times, not George. [...] This business of portraying each other did come in handy in other matters besides dates. Often, when one of us would get a call from a creditor we would sit down and talk over the situation. The one who had the best solution to the problem would go on the phone (*Screenland*, December 1942: 65).

The theme of the two as closely linked, even as versions of each other, continued as the article describes their career path: 'George suddenly drifted into acting. I soon met the same fate'. (*Screenland*, December 1942: 66).

Conway here is seen to be actively and enthusiastically participating in adding to his brother's star discourse, whilst also implicating himself within it. By being identified so closely with his brother, Conway became part of the myth of George Sanders' split personality as seen in dual roles, villain and hero roles. The editorial comment attached to this article gives an indication of George's waning star, saying of Tom:

He's a distinguished looking person with plenty of charm. Yet, to most people, he is as unlike George as possible. Where George seems cold and indifferent, Tom is friendly and gay. Where George seems perpetually blasé, disinterested, Tom is enthusiastic, vital (*Screenland*, December 1942: 53).

In a parallel article to this one in *Hollywood* magazine, Tom Conway is announced as *The New Falcon* just before the release of his first Falcon film and the feature is about the parts played by Conway, with a brief mention of his 'kid brother' helping him to choose his new name in the final paragraph (December 1942: 34). Even the tone of this feature, however, implies that everyone knows without being told, who Conway's younger brother was.

Conway's description of his roles in this interview, also evoke his brother: he 'played the villain for eight pictures in a row', describing his many death scenes in pictures:

Horror has paid off for Conway. [...] Maybe his face and name are not wholly familiar to the sophisticates of the big cities, but in the smaller towns and cities, from coast to coast, movie goers know him and love him . . . or, rather, hate him for the villain he is in the screen [...]

But once let him get his teeth into a good romantic lead like he played in England, and all American will become Conway conscious. He has what it takes to make the ladies cry for more (ibid).

In fact, Conway had no success at all in Britain, and in his career, apart from his mysterious leading man in *I Walked with A Zombie* (Tourneur, 1943) never played a romantic lead, unless he was solving a mystery. There is a dismissal of the types of films Conway had appeared in, clearly the reference to the popularity of horror in small towns is condescendingly allowing him popularity but indicates that his successes have come in non-prestige pictures. The dedication of this small half page to announce the new *Falcon* is a clear indication of the popularity of those films to a wider audience. Conway's success in the *Falcon* mysteries defined his roles from the 1940s onwards, and from that time he largely

played the sleuth or villains in horror films. Whilst Sanders had hated playing in the *Saint* and the *Falcon* series' and barely bothered to slink his way around the set or drawl his lines, Tom (as the editor of *Screenland* noted) threw himself into the roles wholeheartedly, and as a result never really escaped the typecasting, going on to play Sherlock Holmes and Simon Templar on radio, Bulldog Drummond on screen and Mark Saber, a debonair British detective in the American urban setting, on television in the fifties (Vanderbeets, 1991: 58). These two articles represent Tom Conway's sole appearances in the available fan magazines. George Sanders rarely mentioned his brother in interviews, and never named him, neither did he name his wives or other family members.

As in the *Screenland* article, the voice of Tom Conway had introduced the theme of ventriloquism of one brother voicing for the other, and the interchangeability of the two, so in film and popular perception, they were closely associated. The closeness between the brothers, described in *Screenland*, was reinforced in their first film together, *The Falcon's Brother* (Logan, 1942).

*The Falcon's Brother* was the first of the two movies the brothers made together, and it was unquestionably a more positive experience and representation of brothers than *Death of a Scoundrel*. Sanders had started playing Leslie Charteris' 'Saint' in films in the late thirties and continued to take the role in three more films. When RKO ran into troubles with Charteris, who was demanding more money for the rights to his work, the studio decided to make films about the *Falcon* character instead (Vanderbeets, 1991: 41). The *Falcon* was a very similar character to the *Saint*, and Charteris sued. In an attempt to persuade Sanders to make one more film, RKO agreed to give a part to Conway, and they made the film *The Falcon's Brother* together in 1942 (Vanderbeets, 1991: 42). Sanders' biographer noted:

The studio was, in fact, astonished when Tom was an immediate success and carried the series forward, even out grossing the pictures George had made. Tom starred in nine of the remaining Falcon films, his last series role coming in 1946 (Vanderbeets, 1991: 42).

The *Falcon* is a suave, debonair, womanising British sleuth solving mysteries in American cities, often New York. They acted as a lighter, more humorous alternative to the ubiquitous darkness of *film noirs*. Philippa Gates has referred to this type of character as ‘a ‘softboiled’ hero:

a suave, charming gentleman in the mould of the English sleuth like Sherlock Holmes. Not tough, disillusioned or defeated working class dicks but middle and upperclass, stable English (or anglicised American) sleuths who embodied a nostalgia for a stable bourgeois society untouched by social and economic change and the reassurance that crime - [...] resulting from poverty, Prohibition and political corruption - could be stopped by one man (Gates, 2006: 99).

As Gates went on to observe, this genre drew on the ‘national myth of Englishness— including those associated with the cad, villain, lover and sleuth—to offer a kind of hero in opposition to that identified as distinctly American’ (Gates, 2006: 99).



Figure 40.



Figure 41

In the publicity photographs made for the film, the two brothers are seen holding guns that are pointed at each other. Both wear pin striped suits and Homberg hats, the familiar Sanders uniform from the *Saint* and other films. In the publicity photograph above they are smiling at each other. The contrast with the scene they shared in *Death of a Scoundrel* years later is painful. George, however, shows his precedence by having the female co-star (Jane Randolph) at his shoulder, although she is looking at Tom, perhaps indicating her upcoming switch of affection. There is an incongruity in these images between the dapper costume and the pistols which becomes central to the iconography of the character of the Falcon in film: British elegant masculinity appropriates the American symbol of rugged cowboy masculinity. *Noirs* had already made the city streets the new frontier and the combination of worlds is an appealing combination. The 'soft boiled' British sleuth added humour and class to an American genre.

The image presents to the audience a *doppelganger* replacement for George Sanders in his popular sleuth role. The double seems more acceptable because he is the brother both in the fiction and in fact. They take a moment as they appear either side of the medium shot.

Tom: Gay!  
Gay: Welcome Home, Tom.  
(*They lower their guns*)

The exchange between them is brief, and they rarely share the screen in the film at all. This meeting differs strikingly from their final scene together in *Death of a Scoundrel*. The two

characters are set up as equals in the first shot, each one taking up his place on each side of the screen in a perfectly symmetrical balance. Their faces are youthful and handsome, their clothes mirror each other, two pinstriped suits, two Homberg hats.

Almost immediately following the introduction of Tom into the film, Gay is knocked down by a car and remains unconscious until the final denouement. Following the accident, the comic policeman Donovan (Cliff Clark) does not believe that Gay is unconscious. In a visit to Gay's rooms, he insists on seeing him and enters the bedroom where Gay lies. In a neat echo of their past ventriloquism, Tom throws his voice, making the policeman believe that they are talking to Gay, but they are actually listening to Tom. In this scene the two men become one as Tom, hiding behind a curtain, becomes his inanimate brother's voice. Gay's assistant and sidekick both comment on the similarity between the two brothers. Lefty says 'Isure hope he ain't got dames for a hobby like you have', to which Gay replies 'I'm afraid you're in for a disappointment'. Gerry notices Gay's charm with women and observes 'If I may say so, Mr Tom, you have the same technique as your brother', to which Tom replies 'I taught him years ago!' This dialogue brings the two characters neatly into one, as, in his interview for *Hollywood*, Tom had also done when he said 'We are both perfectly contented. We are getting our best breaks now. And I'm hoping that the *Falcon* pictures will do as much for me as they did for George' (*Screenland*, December 1942).

Tom Conway was involved in other projects in 1942, one of which was his first film for innovative Horror film producer, Val Lewton. When Lewton and Jacques Tourneur first cast Conway, in *Cat People* as Dr Louis Judd, it might be that he was seeing him as a 'cut price' George Sanders. He certainly famously described Conway as 'the nice George Sanders' (Snelson, 2014: 35). Whilst George was portraying misogynistic Charles Strickland in *The Moon and Sixpence* in the year of change, 1942, his brother was also being unpleasant in a caddish supporting role in Lewton and Tourneur's *Cat People*.

Although it is a supporting role, Dr Judd is crucial to the plot. He acts as a foil to the apparently good but unimaginative Reed and offers a possible cure to Irena, whilst also threatening her. She wants to see him as the answer to her problems but is repulsed by his patent attraction to her. She tells him 'I should not like it if you should kiss me', but he disregards this. Her consent is not necessary to him. His tone in talking to her is invariably condescending, he calls her 'a clever girl' and superciliously dismisses her belief in the supernatural. His role as psychiatrist gives him the apparent right to comment on the sex life of his patient. He smarmily asks her 'Do you think I'm afraid of so charming a lady? Do you honestly believe that if your husband were to kiss you, you would change into a cat and rend him to bits?' Of course, in the end it is not her husband who meets this fate but Judd himself. Louis Judd always carries a 'sword' walking stick that he occasionally unsheathes. This makes Irena associate him with the painting on her wall, and the statue, both of which depicts Serbian King John striking down cat women with his sword. It is always the women who are transformed and this king with a sword is a symbol of male authority and the patriarchal status quo. Despite his dismissal of her references to the supernatural, she sees him in her dream as King John of holding forth his sword.





Figure 42. *Cat People*, 1942. Irena's dream.

In her dream she hears Judd's voice and an echo of his words: 'there is in some cases a psychic need to loose evil on the world ... There is in some cases a psychic need. A desire for death'. Val Lewton's updating of horror, and application of popular Freudianism to supernatural folktales, is highly innovative, and this conflict (and sometimes confusion) between the psychic and the supernatural adds a dimension to the terror of the tale. No easy answer is presented to Irena's dilemma.

Tim Snelson has argued that:

the psychoanalyst's gaze is shown to be destructive through its phallic alignment with both King John's status's sword and Judd's own dagger, significantly hidden beneath the gentlemanly appearance of a cane (2014: 32).

Judd, then, despite his respectable appearance, is the Sanders-esque misogynistic villain. He lies in wait in Irena's home to rape her, and she fights back, breaking his sword in two, thus breaking down his suave masculine assumptions about her limited feminine powers. His death is a moment of satisfaction for a modern audience, and perhaps for the newly mobilised female audiences of 1942. Snelson reads the film as a commentary on the wartime 'rush to the altar' with Irena and Oliver's (Kent Smith) odd mismatching expressive of a generation that would normalise divorce (30) He concludes:

It is the tragic inability to reconcile the contradictory tensions between past and present, expectation and experience, patriotism and pleasure, word and world, that generates horror for the female monster cycle's conflicted heroines (Snelson, 2014: 32).

This film, like the women's films and the misogynist cycle, expresses anxiety about femininity and female power, but also about the way in which masculinity is affected by this power. It is, however, less retrogressive as it explores female power and agency. Conway's Judd here is active and phallic, whilst Oliver Reed is inactive and feminised. Neither seem to be much of a match either for Irena, or for scheming manipulative Alice (Jane Randolph). Judd offers an English alternative to Reed's Americanness, as Scott Ffolliott does to Johnny Jones', but the male characters in this film are jarringly unsympathetic. Judd's final on screen appearance is a brief shot of his dead hand and broken sword stick, surrounded by pieces of the smashed statue of King John. Two representatives of patriarchal power and violence have been destroyed in one fell swoop. The symbolism of the hand and broken phallic stick is unmistakably commenting on the punishment he has received for his predatory behaviour. It is an additional irony that the predator is victim of a predator – but amore robust female power. Judd's attempt to commit sexual violence takes the idea of 'caddishness' a step further, as even in the cycle of misogynistic films, the George Sanders cad is never physically violent and certainly never needed to force a woman to have sex with him. The male fantasy in those films that is one of a world where many women line up to be badly treated by a man and grant him sexual favours with no expectation of anything in return. Dr Judd in *Cat People* is a more familiar – and realistic – sexually violent figure, and he is punished for his transgression.



Figure 43. Dr Judd's broken sword stick.

This violent death is not, oddly enough, the last we see of Dr Louis Judd on screen. In 1943 he was resurrected in a more sympathetic form for Lewton's story of devil worship in Greenwich Village, *The Seventh Victim* (Robson, 1943). In this film, an alternative Judd, still played by Tom Conway, has become a trustworthy and asexual (possibly homosexual) supporting character. He is no longer the woman's predator but is her protector. Lewton and director Mark Robson draw on the audience distrust for Judd/Conway/Sanders by not revealing his good intentions until close to the end. In the same year, this technique is used by Lewton and Tourneur in *I Walked with a Zombie* when Tom Conway plays the Byronic, tortured Mr Rochester figure, Paul Holland, a man's whose torment is echoed and mirrored in his American half-brother, Wesley Rand (James Ellison). The audience's assumption of his villainy is fully subverted by his transformation into doubled, damaged but heroic Gothic hero. Like Sanders, Conway's persona would have added a dimension of expectation to the audience response.

History offers another perspective to the Sanders/ Conway doubling. Whilst in 1942, critics might have acclaimed *The Moon and Sixpence*, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century it is rarely seen or discussed. The George Sanders misogynist cycle of films too, have dropped out of cultural awareness. The Val Lewton horrors, however, are now seen as ground-breaking and innovative, with *Cat People*, *I Walked with a Zombie* and *The Seventh Victim* particularly receiving much academic attention over the past decade by historians of the Gothic tradition and film historians.<sup>132</sup> Likewise, a renewed interest in pulp fiction of the era and the detective story tradition has led to a re-evaluation of the *Falcon* films as an early example of a slickly hybridised transatlantic detective film.

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<sup>132</sup> Alexander Nemerov (2005), Tim Snelson (2011, 2014).

Although the limited media discourse that surrounded Tom Conway only seemed to exist in relation to his brother's stardom, there was a period in 1965 when he became part of a wider newspaper narrative. In September of that year, an article was published, revealing that Tom Conway was living in Venice Beach in a \$2 a night flophouse. This resulted in a series of follow up articles in the *Los Angeles Times*. The writer of 'Offers of Aid Deluge Actor Tom Conway' describes the situation:

Actor Tom Conway - who turned up broke in a rundown Venice hotel—was receiving a phone call 'every five minutes' after his plight became known Tuesday, but nothing from Hollywood.

The 60-year-old brother of actor George Sanders said he had offers to pay his hotel bill and offers of other places to live (*LA Times*, Sept 15, 1965: 6).

The next day the same newspaper reported that 'offers Pour in for Actor'. Sanders is not mentioned until the fourth paragraph. Ironically, this sad situation had led to perhaps the most media attention Tom Conway had received in his life. On September 25, Hedda Hopper meaningfully wrote in her wider column, 'Speaking of George, I'd like you to know he has helped his brother many times. So has our Motion Picture Relief Fund' (*LA Times*, Sept 25, 1965: 58). This was the last mention of the situation until Conway's obituary. On April 25, 1967 *The Los Angeles Times* obituary appeared, 'Tom Conway, Star of Nearly 300 Movies, Dies in Hospital'.

Actor Tom Conway died Saturday, apparently no better off than when he was 'rediscovered' almost two years ago, broke and living in a \$2 Venice hotel room, it was learned Monday (*LA Times*, April 25, 1967: 3).

In fact, Conway had made just over 60 films not 300. The main subheading of the brief obituary reads, 'Brother of George Sanders' (ibid). There is no mention of Conway's alcoholism throughout this discourse in the sixties, although his estrangement from George is mentioned. As might be expected, Sanders' obituary in the same newspaper in April 1972 made no mention of his sibling at all (3).

The Oxford Dictionary tells us that the noun 'cad' is 'dated' (OED.com). Richard Dyer observed that 'There is a sense in which the history of stars in the cinema reprises the history of the

change in concepts of character and the individual' (1979: 102). In a post #MeToo culture, it is difficult to be tolerant of such a stereotype of the man who, at his most harmless 'has dames for a hobby' and at his most dangerous treats women with cruelty and violates them by stealing the little power and influence they do have. And yet, as with all archetypes and stereotypes, George Sanders was much more than popular culture allowed. Like Dorian Gray's portrait, the image of Sanders in popular culture expressed beauty and corruption in a Gothic masculine type that both fascinated and repelled the apparently wholesome Hollywood culture that created him.

In the next chapter, I will draw together my conclusions with reference to the British film, *Dead of Night*, looking forward to the evolution of British masculinity into something new by the 1970s.

## Conclusion: Haunted Mirror

The Gothic [...] Like repressed libidinal forces...forming an other, repressed side of British cinema, a dark disdained thread weaving the length and breadth of that cinema, crossing authorial and generic boundaries, sometimes almost always invisible, sometimes erupting explosively, always received critically with fear and disapproval (Julian Petley, *The Lost Continent* 1986: 98).

Whilst Hollywood took British masculinity and used it to express qualities it considered to be 'un-American' in a culture of anti-intellectual focus on muscular masculinity, British media dismissed Hollywood films as 'shiny barbarism' (Glancy, 2013: 25). And yet, once the war years were done, it was the UK cinema that would begin to express the transgressive masculine. There would be an explosion of Gothic masculinities just months after the end of the war in the period's most remarkable horror film, *Dead of Night* (Dearden, Crichton, Cavalcanti, Hamer, 1945).

The portmanteau structure of this film with its uncanny frame narrative emulates an evening telling ghost stories around the fire that ultimately degenerates into a living nightmare. The narratives are haunted by war, as the repressed returns with a vengeance. In their portrayal of British Gothic masculinity, the stories move away from male wartime heroics, lifting a lid on a fractured and traumatised post-war masculinity.

These stories all display damaged, traumatised, neurotic masculinity that offers an alternative to the wartime ideal of heroism and self-control. Grainger's (Anthony Baird) injury and recuperation call to mind the recuperation that was necessary for injured men after the war, as does his supernatural close call with the randomness of death. Walter Craig (Mervyn Johns), Peter Cortland (Ralph Michael) and Maxwell Frere (Michael Redgrave) all teeter on the edge of a homicidal mental breakdown which might bear a resemblance to post war PTSD.<sup>133</sup> The awkward relationship between Parratt (Basil Radford), Potter (Naunton Wayne) and transactional Mary (Peggy Bryan) and the potential romantic triangle between

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<sup>133</sup> Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Frere, Hugo and Kee (Hartley Power) all hint at non heterosexual involvement. Directors Cavalcanti and Hamer were both homosexual, and Michael Redgrave was, he admitted to his son, 'to say the least of it' bisexual (Redgrave, 1995: 108). The Gothic here is used to challenge normative expectations and to warn at the danger of forcing an unrealistic nationalistic gendering and a homogenous sexuality on a generation of men. The supernatural narratives emasculate men through injury, psychological breakdown and in at least three of the stories the strength of women offer a type of salvation. The movie raises issues that have been repressed during the war years through expressionist technique and Gothic metaphor.

Intertextuality is a concept that naturally lends itself to a consideration of Hollywood stardom, where archetypes, as we have seen, would be repeated over and over again by individual actors as part of an established persona. *Dead of Night* uses intertextuality in rewriting the types of masculinity that are represented by the re-use of actors and by other ways of evoking past British cinematic culture. The male actors used in *Dead of Night* are not really stars, but 'picture personalities' who were mostly known for the parts they played in British cinema (de Cordova 1991: 25). At a time when cinema going was the main national pastime, recognition of familiar faces would have added to the cultural memory of the national community. Mervyn Johns and Ralph Michael were not leading men, but both appeared in a range of British films of the war years. Fan magazines mentioned Johns and Michael only in cast lists, although Redgrave commanded more interest. He was perceived as a leading man after appearing with popular leading ladies of the time, Margaret Lockwood, Elizabeth Bergner and Jessie Matthews.<sup>134</sup> *Dead of Night* places at its centre men that British audiences would have found uncannily familiar. The comedic double act of Basil Radford and Naunton Wayne, had made their debut in pre-war *The Lady Vanishes* (Hitchcock, 1938) where they made their mark discussing cricket. Their type of masculinity

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<sup>134</sup> In 1938, *Picturegoer* named him a British 'new name for 1938' (Vol. 7, Iss. 362, May 1, 1938: 12-14).

was far from straightforward in that film where they rejected female company, shared a bed and a pair of pyjamas, fighting off the Nazis when they attacked. The two men made appearances together in a number of wartime films, acting as comic relief and were very popular with audiences (Conolly and Bates, 2015: 87). Mervyn Johns was a type of ubiquitous cinematic everyman who had played con men, heroic villager, friend of the main hero, even a ghost. Ralph Michael had appeared in a number of wartime films, although never as leading man. He was a support player who often went uncredited but would often be seen in uniform, bravely following orders.<sup>135</sup> Through these familiar - though not too familiar - faces, *Dead of Night* holds memories of earlier films as it interrogates the national self-image that had become prevalent in wartime, giving a glimpse into the paranoid subconscious of a war-torn nation.

According to Charles Barr, the 'haunting' of the characters in *Dead of Night* by their past roles<sup>136</sup> is at its most harrowing in the third of the stories in the anthology, the one placed centrally in the film, 'Haunted Mirror' directed by Robert Hamer (1977: 55). The central image in 'Haunted Mirror' is, of course, the mirror itself. In Freud's exploration of the uncanny he argues that mirrors represent a sort of dissociation of identity, a separation from self, a type of doubling or splitting. For Peter Cortland, his possession by a damaged violent man from another century offers a splitting from his mild-mannered middle-class persona. The modernity of Cortland's flat contrasts sharply with the room in the mirror and the elaborate gothic mirror itself is strikingly incongruous in this setting, reminding the spectator uncannily of 'something of the past' that exists in the present (Rigby, 2015: 35).

When Peter looks into the triptych mirror, he sees Etherington's room. He sees a sumptuous bedroom from a gothic manor house, with a four-poster bed draped with heavy brocade

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<sup>135</sup> *San Demetrio London* (Frend, 1943), *The Bells Go Down* (Dearden, 1943), *For Those in Peril* (Crichton, 1944), *They Came to a City* (Cavalcanti, 1944).

<sup>136</sup> Barr sees the Ralph Michael character as especially significant because of his 'modest and unpassionate' persona, which embodies English repression (Barr, 1977: 54).



bedspread and curtains richly patterned and textured. There is an ornate stone carved fireplace with a fire-lit, baroque candlesticks also lit, and an elaborately carved four poster bed. Walls are covered with paintings in highly decorated frames. Heavy wooden carved chairs are layered with cushions. It is an interior that implies sumptuous upper-class decadence and history.



Figure 1. The haunted mirror.

The room expresses a world distant from wartime austerity but it is a world that nevertheless would have been uncannily familiar to wartime cinema audiences. The depth and detail of the cinematography evokes undoubtedly stirring memories of the popular Gainsborough Gothics where such interiors - usually claiming to be Regency, Restoration or Victorian - would be the backdrop to a variety of excessive passions (Barr, 1977: 57). Ralph Michael, in his passive role as Cortland, faintly familiar to the post-war viewer, looks in the mirror to see a different self, a man who is embittered, selfish, damaged and violent. The man he sees in reflection is a type of character that harks back to a type of wartime leading man that is perhaps his own antithesis: James Mason in Gainsborough melodramas.

Gainsborough studios were Ealing's biggest rivals, who found enormous success producing historically set 'women's films.' These films were the biggest British box office successes of the war era, acting as an antidote to Ealing's sober propaganda output (Rigby 2015: 22). These female Gothic movies created an existence in which 'imagination and emotional effects exceed reason. Passion, excitement and sensation transgress social proprieties and moral

laws' (Hanson, 2007: 53). Gainsborough films would often split the two polarised genders into their own poles: good and bad. Bad women – or 'bitch heroines' (Richards, 1997: 114) played by Margaret Lockwood and Jean Kent – would be set up in contrast to good women aspersonified by Phyllis Calvert or Patricia Roc. Good men such as Griffith Jones, Michael Rennie, Stewart Granger would be directly compared with Dennis Price or James Mason, whose glowering Byronic presence would suggest a type of sexual deviance that invaded the realm of the Marquis de Sade.

Censors were seemingly blind to the amorality propagated by the Gainsborough films, as Margaret Lockwood and James Mason's emerging status as Britain's most popular home-grown film stars testified to their subversive message (Richards, 1997: 115). There was a 'displacement of chivalry by sensual gratification' in these films that directly contradicted wartime propaganda versions of male identity by foregrounding sex and violence (Richards, 1997: 119).

Whilst Ralph Michael played honourable, repressed, fighting men, James Mason in curls, silks, satins, flowing robes, tight riding trousers with long boots, embraced the id as he beat up and raped women in Gainsborough studio's Gothic melodramas. The baroque décor of the room in Peter Cortland's mirror exudes a Gainsborough aesthetic, as Etherington's strangling of his wife echoed scenes where Mason hurt his female victims such as when as Lord Rohan he beat his mistress Hesther to death in his dead wife's bedroom in *The Man in Grey* (Arliss, 1943).



Figure 2. James Mason and Margaret Lockwood *The Man in Gray*, 1943.



Figure 3. Lord Rohan takes revenge on Hesther. *The Man in Gray*.

In *The Wicked Lady* (Arliss, 1945), as highwayman Jerry Jackson, Mason, in long dark cloak, appears suddenly in Barbara Skelton's (Margaret Lockwood) bedroom mirror, emerging from the secret passageway to her room in order to rape her on her own bed.



Figure 4. Margaret Lockwood *The Wicked Lady*, 1945.

His reflection in the mirror draws attention to his function in the plot as reflection of the heroine's de-gendering of herself, as she puts on male drag to live the life of action that she has craved. In these films James Mason is not only sexy but simultaneously feminised and misogynistic. These are all qualities apparently missing from Peter Cortland.

Not just the décor but Peter Cortland's mirror itself is haunted by others familiar from Gainsborough films. The ornate divided triptych mirror itself is the ghost of one that was seen in *Madonna of the Seven Moons* (Crabtree, 1943) and *Fanny By Gaslight* (Asquith, 1944).



Figure 5. Gainsborough's triptych mirror. Stuart Lindsell in *Fanny by Gaslight*. Phyllis Calvert in *Madonna of the Seven Moons*.

Mirrors in Gainsborough – often tryptich – always represent some changing sense of identity for the character that we glimpse in them, as represented by the divided image. In the scenes above we see Barbara Skelton receiving her punishment for wrongdoing which will change her outlook. In *Fanny By Gaslight*, (Asquith, 1944), respectable politician Clive Seymore (Stuart Lindsell) realises he has lost his illegitimate daughter, Fanny, just as his wife Alicia (Margaretta Scott) is also leaving him for the evil Lord Manderstoke (Mason). In *Madonna of the Seven Moons* (Crabtree, 1945) Maddalena (Phyllis Calvert) steps from one part of her split personality to another as she pulls her hair down in front of her mirror.

In 'Haunted Mirror', Joan's engagement gift to bland Peter is the only decorative item in his apartment. It symbolises a change in his life as it did for the Gainsborough characters, as he contemplates the start of his marriage, yet he never looks happy. When the couple initially

looks in the mirror, smiling arm in arm, the divisions in the three sections seem to uncannily dismember them. As Joan smiles, Peter immediately seems uneasy, turning away and having a moment of half seeing - another type of *deja-vu*, a premonition of the haunting to come.



Figure 6. Peter and Joan look in the mirror. *Dead of Night*, Haunted Mirror.

There is a sense of 'peculiar uncanny' by being whole and yet dismembered, but also possibly they are buried alive, passion squashed by respectability. Freud considers the idea of dismemberment to be deeply unsettling, leaving a sense of 'peculiar uncanny (2016: 14). The couple is whole yet fractured; complete and yet dismembered. Peter's catalepsy shows him to be buried alive, passion squashed by respectability, the post-war war hero in crisis. Freud's concept of the castrated male seems most fitting in considering the implied emasculation of Peter in his new role (2016: 7).

Marriage to Joan gives Peter a sense of the uncanny, as his mirror fears do not subside after marriage but intensify, supporting Freud's idea that for men there is often something uncanny in the female genital organs, as sex is a return to their first 'heim' the bodily origin in a woman's vagina (Freud, 2016: 15). For a while before marriage Joan seems to have the power to dispel the visions Peter sees in the mirror but this power weakens after their relationship (at marriage) is consummated. Sex has made him less certain of himself, more haunted. Bearing in mind Michael's past respectable minor film persona, Peter's insipidity

and fear of sex indicate a post-war gender crisis. This female domination of Peter and emasculation of him by female forces is reinforced by the haunted mirror where the Gainsborough narrative of masculine power offers a release. When he describes the room, Cortland notices 'vine leaves' carved in the post of the bed - expressing his subconscious desire to be re emasculated, to be the fruitful vine. In his implied impotent state, the room itself seems to be mocking him. As Conolly and Bates have argued, Joan 'possesses what Peter lacks, not just all-round potency, but also control of her own mind' (2015: 78). Joan is a newly liberated post-war woman, and the driving force, it seems, in Peter's life. It is she who takes control and smashes the mirror, thus restoring order, much as women in wartime had taken over the country and were working after the war to recreate a stable domestic life. When Peter's unexpected Byronic or James Masonic doubling affects his 'present day' self, in a jealous fit he attempts to strangle Joan. Possessed by Francis Etherington the double in the mirror, Peter is divided between lack of action and murder. Charles Barr has argued that this story's intertextuality acts out the gendered tension inherent in British post war culture (1977: 56). And so it seems that the film acts as a mirror itself, expressing a national sense of disorientation that makes this film unique in its time. It is in this film that the issues of post-war identity are reflected in the most surreal ways, through a gothic exploration 'through a glass darkly' (1 Corinthians, 13:12).

The 'Ventriloquist Dummy' segment of the film reinforces the vision of a masculine identity in a state of flux, but women are not the problem in this story. This tale reinforces the interrogation of 'going through the motions' of monogamous heterosexual relations that was raised in 'Haunted Mirror' and in 'Golfers' Story'.<sup>137</sup> It takes the ideas a step further. Perhaps women are not needed. Rather than a passionless alliance as Peter and Joan's seems to be, or one that is entered into as a game like Parrott and Potter's with Mary, the final story, told by psychiatrist Van Straaten, is about male relationships. In a style that evokes German

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<sup>137</sup> In 'Golfers' Story' Mary seems to represent women for Parrott and Potter, and the pull of respectability away from their beloved golf and the years of their 'inseparable' friendship.

Expressionism and its concern with the fractured self, so here we witness an increasingly distorted vision. Camera angles become more and more disconcerting and disorientating as the ventriloquist Maxwell Frere's fractured personality recedes before his much stronger 'dummy' self, Hugo Fitch.

Much has been written about 'Ventriloquist's Dummy', a truly terrifying and most uncanny example of what Freud defined as the fear of 'whether a lifeless object might really be alive', evoking childhood fears and desires regarding those most human-like copies, dolls (Freud, 2016: 5). Freud himself agreed that the psychoanalyst or psychiatrist was the 'most uncanny' of professions and it is significant that it is the psychoanalyst, Dr Van Straaten, who tells this story (Royle, 2003: 59). This is a story of homosexual wooing and angst at a point in history when homosexual acts between men was illegal. Conolly and Bates point out that this is, in effect, a story of a love triangle involving Frere, Hugo and the American ventriloquist who befriends Frere, Sylvester Kee (2015: 100). Andrew Spicer sees Maxwell Frere 'as an example of the 'post-war psychotic' with his 'other' self, Hugo, as a representation of the repressed desires for domination and control (2001: 175-6). Frere and Kee are engaged in an awkward, confused sort of courtship that has transactional Hugo at the centre, but this is complicated. The impression we have is that Kee humorously assumes it is Frere who is courting him through Hugo, whilst Frere, disgusted by his own desires, disassociates, projecting his transgressive sexuality into his dummy. Frere's neuroses divide him from his desires and he loses control and identity. He is 'British male sexual anxiety personified, all emotion repressed to the point of breaking' (Conolly and Bates, 2015: 102).

Although Hugo and Frere seem to be a 'fully formed dysfunctional couple' at the start of the tale, Kee, the American seems uninhibited (Conolly and Bates, 2015: 99-98). Frere is an interesting role for Redgrave, whose gangling, humorous, patriotic leading men had graced British cinema from 1938 onwards. Only in the haunted lighthouse of *Thunder Rock* (Boulting, 1942) did neurosis and lack of control creep into his onscreen persona. In his

*Dead of Night* performance, however, the breaking down of the British leading man through the return of the repressed was complete.

Hugo's suggestive approaches to Kee in the performance in which they meet is instant when they realise they have ventriloquism in common. Ventriloquism itself can be seen as a coded reference to homosexuality as the performer and his (usually) male dummy are connected by the arm, closely bound together physically, with the dummy often seated on the ventriloquist's lap.

The quick recognition of Kee as someone who unlike the rest of the crowd is like them, makes Hugo keen to know him better. The dialogue is suggestive as the three of them appear on screen in medium shot.



Figure 7. Ventriloquist's Dummy.

Hugo: You interest me my man. You interest me quite a lot. We two could make beautiful music together.

The romantic overtones of this are evident, although they seem to be talking about a 'business' arrangement. Hugo seems to refuse to perform with Frere, saying, 'I'm going to talk to the ventriloquist man. Mind if I join you?' Frere looks like a rejected lover and the couple seem to argue. Following champagne at Kee's table, Hugo flirts, 'Do you know



something? I like you. What's your name?' As Frere and Hugo leave the stage following a very public tiff, Hugo pops his head out of the curtain and calls Kee's Christian name in a seductive sing song voice, 'Sylvester! Sylvester! I'll be waiting for you in my dressing room. You and I have got to talk business.' The seductive tone of his voice is subverted by the image on screen of Hugo apparently without human support, emerging from the curtains on stage his face lit from below in an artificial masculine pose that is horrifyingly uncanny.



Figure 8. Hugo calls to Kee.

Kee, apparently enthusiastic, immediately gets up from his table and goes to Frere's dressing room, where he finds Hugo apparently alone. They have a brief conversation, despite the ventriloquist not being visible. When Maxwell comes out of the bathroom he is jumpy, grabbing Hugo from Kee's hands and spilling his drink. The two men go into the bathroom together where the dialogue shows some signs of intimacy but also confusion as Frere continues to talk as if Hugo is alive.

Frere: Sorry, but I can't bear anyone touching him.

Kee: Oh, that's all right. Forget it. Say, I sure liked it how you pulled that gag.

Frere: What gag? I don't quite follow you.

Kee: The one I saw before you came in. For a moment, I could've sworn it was the dummy speaking. And me a pro.

Frere: What did he say?

Kee: Ah now, don't let's start that all over again.

Frere: About you and him?

Kee: Well, yes, but you know that.

Frere: You wouldn't ...You wouldn't ever do that, would you?

Kee: Do what? I don't get you.  
Frere: Do what he was asking.  
Kee: Say, are you nuts or something?



Figure 9



Figure 10.

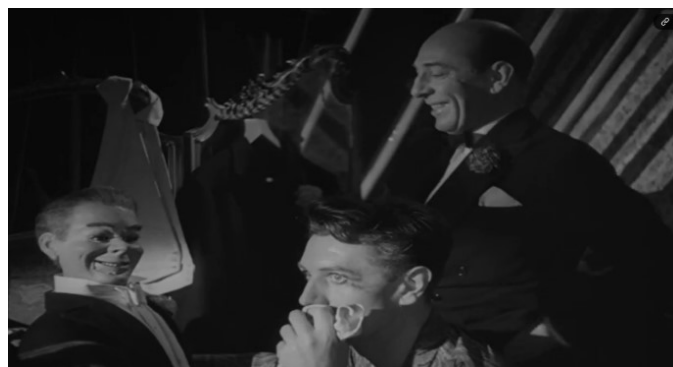


Figure 11.



Figure 12.

Whilst Maxwell, clearly feminised in a paisley dressing gown and silky undershirt, wipes the remainder of makeup from his face, Kee is dapper in his dinner jacket with carnation, itself a *fin-de-siecle* signifier of homosexuality (Lugowski, 1999: 4). Frere is emotional and jealous of Hugo and Kee's connection, finally putting his hand over Hugo's mouth to prevent him from making Kee stay. Either Hugo represents what Frere is trying to repress or he is alive and will take over Frere supernaturally. This question of whether Frere is possessed or divided is unclear, although the story's narrator Van Straaten clearly considers this to be 'one of the most complete examples of split personality in the history of medical science', which makes Hugo Frere's Mr Hyde.

At Frere and Kee's next meeting in their hotel rooms, Hugo mysteriously moves from Frere's bed to Kee's. When Frere comes to Kee's room to accuse him, they are both wearing draped dressing gowns, face each other over the 'man' that has shared both of their beds, with Kee's bed in the foreground.



Figure 13.

When he finds the dummy in Kee's bed, Frere pulls out a gun and shoots Kee in a crime of passion, shouting 'Dirty thieving swine'. As Kee falls to the floor the camera takes up his viewpoint.



Figure 14. 'Dirty thieving swine'.



Figure 15.

Kee passes out as the screen swirls to the sound of Frere's insane mirthless laughter.



Figure 16.

Kee sees the two male faces close together, as the man holds tight to his dummy in an eerily distorted image that turns upside down. The breaking down of Maxwell Frere and his possession by Hugo, with Sylvester Kee as their victim, adds another level to the chipping away at wartime hegemonic masculinity that the film puts forward. There is a sense of distortion and disorientation that is completed in the final scene when, sitting up in bed in the psychiatric hospital, Frere turns his head stiffly and tries to speak, making guttural noises before, his mouth not moving in the right way, he says in the singsong voice of Hugo, 'why hello Sylvester. I've been waiting for you'. This is a truly terrifying moment, an uncanny expression of Maxwell's broken self, his fractured and detached identity. Whether he is possessed or schizophrenic he no longer exists in his previous form. The post war trauma has

affected him in a metamorphosis into a doll or automaton, that is at the very heart of the uncanny horror of the story.

Maxwell Frere's story is the final one of the Pilgrim Farm fireside stories but the terror of this tale is increased by the final part of the frame narrative - that of Walter Craig's nightmare. The 'Linking Narrative', directed by Basil Dearden, shows the architect Walter Craig arrive at Pilgrim's Farm caught endlessly in *deja-vu* and an inescapable nightmare. The film opens on the English countryside: a straight road opens before the camera, in bright daylight, framed by trees, with dappled shadows on the road surface, as Walter's car drives towards the viewer. The road and car are positioned centrally. The camera remains stationary as the car draws nearer, then the camera moves forward for a close-up of Walter; our point of view merges with his, and we see Pilgrim's Farm. The Kent countryside with its orchards and quaint cottages, and the empty barns behind the farmhouse express an English chocolate box twee-ness and, as the camera draws back to focus on him, Walter shakes his head in disbelief. Inside the house, when Elliot Foley asks if he knows the area, Craig answers, 'No. I've never been here before - not *actually*'. As he sits down to have tea, the most ordinary of English domestic situations, he says,

You're still there? So it isn't a dream this time. Yes, it isn't a dream this time. I must be going out of my mind.

He goes on to tell them about his dream:

You see. Everybody in this room is part of my dream. Everybody. I can only tell you that when I came into this room I recognised you all [...] here in this room, which I have never been in in my life. Until today.

Walter's recognition of the place and people and his nervous repetition hints at an inner darkness, a return of the repressed, revealing 'that which ought to have remained hidden and secret' (Freud, 2016: 4). Here, most vividly, the spectator has the impression usually left by the experience of *déjà vu*; the uncanny sense that 'the present reality has a double'. (Royle, 2003: 182-3). For Walter, the doubled reality is forever in his dream. The viewer senses this

powerfully by the final sequence as the movie comes full circle structurally, back to its own 'double' in a sort of repetition-compulsion, trapped in Walter's subconscious, unable to escape his narrative as the first sequence involving the car and the arrival at the farm is also the last (Freud, 2016: 9).

The penultimate sequence, preceding this begins, when Dr Van Straten's glasses fall and break. This makes him helpless, especially as, according to Freud, being 'robbed' of one's eyes is akin to castration (Freud, 2016: 7).

The previously realistic 'daylight' lighting of the previously welcoming parlour gives way to shadows, only lit apparently by the flickering fire's movement, which throws the scene into uncanny obscurity. The room that had previously seemed so ordinary begins to take on a sinister quality. The camera angles become skewed as the two men are left alone and Van Straaten believes he is about to conduct a psychiatric session with Craig:

Walter Craig: If only I'd left here when I wanted to. When I still had a will of my own ... You tried to stop me. You wouldn't have done if you'd known.

Van Straaten: You've not told me yet what it is that you are compelled to do Craig.

Craig: To kill someone. (*Walking forward*) Someone who's never done me any harm. Who wishes me nothing but good. A man without defence. Because he is lost (*taking his tie off*) Oh doctor. Why did you have to break your glasses? (*Strangling Van Straaten with the tie.*)



Figure 17.



Figure 18.



*figure 19*

When the camera shows us Walter's viewpoint, we see the upside-down agonised face of Van Straaten. As Conolly and Bates have argued, the viewer of the film is positioned, like Walter Craig, in a liminal space (2015: 28-29). Whilst Craig's attack might seem motiveless, we are aware that Van Straaten is the only non-English person in the room. His accent and name are unmistakably Germanic, so he is representative perhaps of a post-war violent male xenophobia – or an anti-intellectualism, as he is also a scientist. Also, Van Straaten is the only member of the group to express cynicism about Craig's supernatural interpretation of his situation. In every way, he is set aside from the other characters, so we might consider Walter's actions to be born out of fear of the Other.



Before we can witness Walter Craig waking up, we must be thrust into the worst of his nightmare. In a sequence that brings four of the five stories together, Craig moves through the other stories in his mind. Sally's story merges with Peter's mirror as, joining in a game of hide and seek with the children, Walter asks Peter if he can hide in his mirror. He is unable to hide, however, as Dr Van Straaten's body is in the mirror room. Returning to the attic of the haunted house, Sally finds him and is about to reveal his whereabouts when he hits her, knocking her to the floor. Voices and noises are out of synch with the images.



Figure 20. Walter Craig's nightmare.



Figure 21.



Figure 22.



Figure 23.



Figure 24.

This first part seems to be showing Walter's desire to run away from his crime, to escape detection.

When Sally has fallen onto the rocking chair, Walter finds himself in Hugo and Kee's ventriloquist show, implying that Frere's worst nightmare had come true and they have found each other despite his efforts. Hugo taunts Walter:

Hugo: Why won't he see a doctor?

Kee: Perhaps he has seen a doctor.

*(The audience laugh)*

Kee: My, Hugo, we've never played to a murderer before, have we?

Hugo: I know Kee. Is there a policeman in the house?

Walter runs and finds himself centre stage surrounded by grotesque figures in the audience whose faces and arms close in on him. They carry him to a prison or mental asylum where the undertaker from Granger's dream says, 'Room for one more inside sir', laughing and winking knowingly. This sequence could be interpreted as Craig's manifestation of the consequences of the murder. In the first part he is shown running and hiding, then once caught, the mocking audience stands for a grotesque jury.



Figure 25.



Figure 26.



Figure 27.



Figure 28.



Figure 29.



Figure 30.

The gargoyle like face of Hugh Granger's harbinger of death, the hearse driver (Miles Malleson), once more is a warning, but this time death, it seems, cannot be avoided.

Once in the cell, Craig turns and sees Hugo sitting in the corner. The dummy turns his head, looks at him, then slowly walks towards him, climbs on the bed and strangles him. The laughter that had started in the previous scene continues. The grotesque faces of the audience members are pushed against the barred door to the cell. The scene, in striped

shadows, plays like a parody of an execution. Camera angles and movements poetically heighten a sense of surrealism.



Figure 31.



Figure 32.



Figure 33.



Figure 34.



Figure 35.



Figure 36. Walter Craig wakes up.

As Hugo strangles Walter, we lose the image as it starts to shrink into a black oblivion. The scene fades to black, then we see a white door and chair in a modern flat and Craig wakes with his hands around his neck, as his wife comes into the room. Here there is momentary relief that the nightmare is not true, but this does not last as the phone rings and Elliot Foley invites him to Kent for the weekend. Then in the final scene Craig repeats the events of the beginning of the film, creating a perfect yet horrific circular structure and he must relive the nightmare over and over again.

This climactic nightmarish sequence is a gloriously horrific mosaic of paranoia and potential destruction. Mervyn Johns, the most dependable of actors, familiar like a family member with his world-weary face and small solid form, had been uncannily metamorphosed into the nervous conduit of a shared national night terror, of flashbacks to a recent past. The interconnected images of this nightmarish sequence on an audience are powerful and terrifying. The use of the uncanny and return of the repressed in the bringing together of the disparate stories act as an indication of a post-war breakdown of masculine identity. The film has exemplified all aspects of Terry Castle's condensation of Freud's uncanny or *unheimlich* as:

Doubles, dancing dolls and automata, waxwork figures, alter egos, 'mirror' selves, spectral emanations, detached body parts [...] being buried alive, omens, precognitions, déjà-vu [...] they subvert the distinction between the real and the



phantasmic - plunging us [...] into the hag-ridden realm of the unconscious (Castle, 1995:4).

These male characters have been plunged into their 'hag-ridden' unconscious in an expression of trauma that is extremely powerful.

In his account of the development of horror cinema in Britain, David Pirie calls *Dead of Night* 'actively frightening,' 'remarkable and in some ways prophetic' (2008: 18). Although this film did not begin a cycle of cinematic horror in the 1940s, its impact was felt in British cinema that was born just over a decade later with the home-grown horrors of Hammer and Amicus studios (ibid). The British Gothic male figure, tortured and haunted, had returned home, ripped off his stiff upper lip, escaped the 'tyranny of realism' and settled down (Pirie, 2008: 9).

It seems fitting that, at the end of this project I come to the men of *Dead of Night* and their multiple haunted mirrors. As I started with Donald Glourie and his distant ancestor looking at each other across the barrier of death itself, so death comes back in a most visceral way in the hauntings of this bouquet of ghost stories. Transatlantic cinema through the years of the Second World War, struggling to free itself from the restrictive limits of censors and propagandists, came to its own ways of expressing the unspeakable and, as the restrictive fifties gave way to the liberal sixties and seventies, masculine identity.

There would not be a direct line of ancestry between this film and transgressive masculinity's ultimate twentieth century expression, in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Sharman, 1975) but progress would be made through Britain's love affair with camp and its unexpected power.<sup>138</sup> In this cult classic America's repressed everyman (Brad Majors, played by Barry Bostwick) comes face to face with feminine-masculine, liberated, well-spoken Frank N Furter

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<sup>138</sup> Camp in the 1950-70s was a dominant aesthetic in British cinema, from the Carry-on films to Hammer horrors.

(Tim Curry)<sup>139</sup>, who seduces him and liberates him from his restrictive gendering. The film plays with the idea of what might constitute the transatlantic masculine ideal, and draws on 1930s Hollywood for inspiration, as it explodes the queer subtext of familiar films. Frank purrs ‘How forceful you are Brad. Such a perfect specimen of manhood. So dominant’, as s/he busies him/herself making his/her own male plaything in Rocky (Peter Hinwood).<sup>140</sup> In the *mise-en-scene*, Frank in pearls, corset, long gloves, suspenders and full make-up contrasts with Brad in dull beige coat, collared shirt and tank top. The feminine clothes on the male physique and the female gender identity indicate the possibility of freedom for even the repressed American man. Finally the queer subtext surrounding British men such as Ronald Colman, Basil Rathbone and George Sanders has blossomed into a new identity, one in which repression is no longer to be found. The ‘dark, disdained thread’ of Gothic manhood has finally found a voice (Petley, 1986: 98) and finds itself to be surprisingly feminine.



Figure 37. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Frank and Brad.

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<sup>139</sup> Tim Curry said he tried to make Frank sound like the queen (Gross, 2005: n.p.).

<sup>140</sup> A clear satire of *Frankenstein*, with a twist. The film contains many references to James Whale’s film versions of Mary Shelley’s novel.



Figure 38.

In this thesis I have brought together fan magazine discourse and other media responses, with historical details and readings of films to explore histories that are hidden in cinema's past. I believe that films can be a source of knowledge about the past and, if interrogated and re-read with the benefit of historical knowledge and hindsight, can reveal much about the culture that produced them. The haunted mirror of the Gothic, as a transatlantic code, especially offers poetic narratives that suggest a wealth of transgressive identities.

Cinema is unusual in the way that it uses actual human beings and their personalities to create a wealth of meanings in a hugely complex way. The British stereotypes, the gentleman, the detective, the cad, the cold-hearted villain, all hide greater complexity than at first seems apparent. The uncannily recurring motifs of masks, mirrors, portraits, doubles are all haunted by fragmented identity. Costumes that resemble the feminine skirts indicate a wider sense of manhood than conservative society allows. In my consideration of individual stars and their function in popular culture, I have revealed that repression does not wipe out the feared self, but that it is there, hiding in plain sight, waiting to be assimilated and understood.

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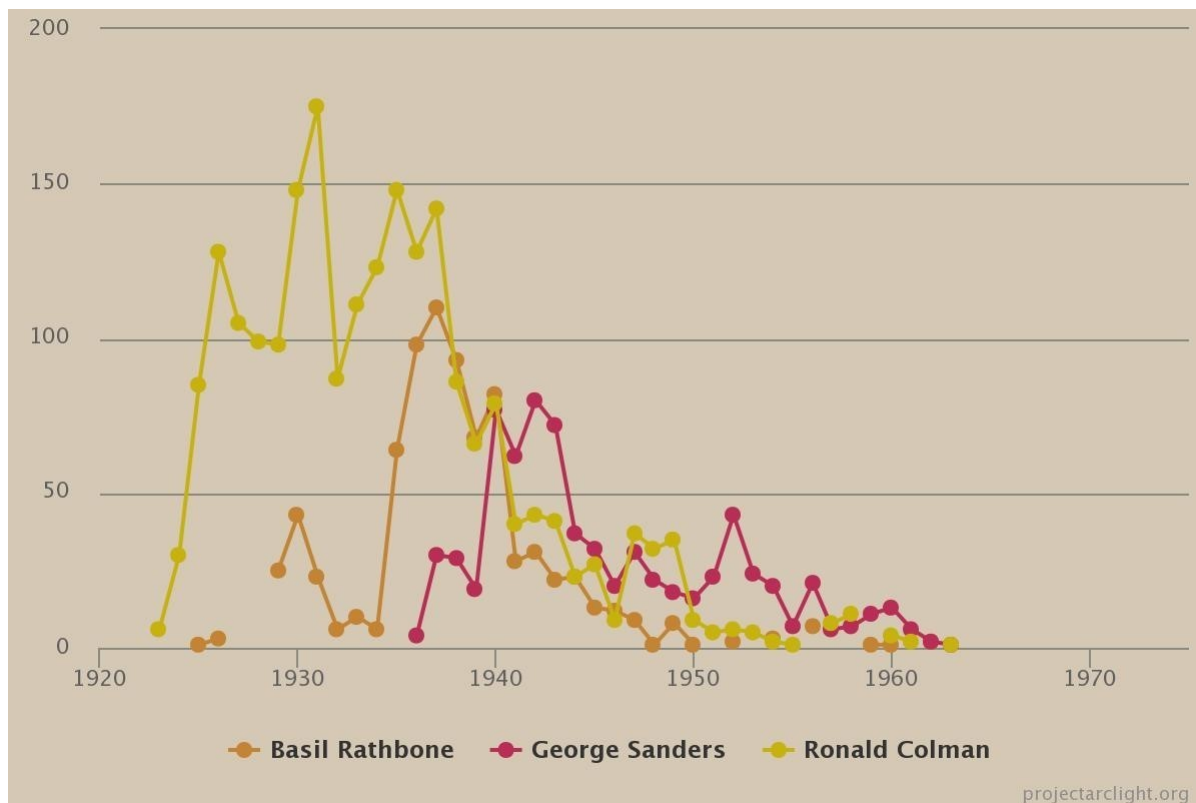
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## Appendix: Fan Magazine mentions 1920-1970.

This table shows the number of times George Sanders, Ronald Colman and Basil Rathbone were mentioned in the most popular fan magazines in this period.



This shows the main publications used in this thesis, digitised on the Media History website.

These were:

*Hollywood*

*Modern Screen*

*Motion Picture*

*Magazine*

*Photoplay*

*Picture Play*

*Screenland*

*Silver Screen*