

# **Performing Masculinity: the Star Persona of Tom Cruise**

**Ruth O'Donnell**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Royal Holloway, University of London  
Department of Media Arts

March 2012

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## **Acknowledgements**

My thanks go to Prof Mandy Merck for her energetic and insightful supervision and guidance over the course of my studies at Royal Holloway. I am also grateful for the opportunity I have had to present my work at internal postgraduate 'away days', MeCCSA postgraduate conferences and Middlesex University's 'Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society' event, for the chance it has afforded me to obtain feedback on my ideas.

I would also like to express a heartfelt thank you to my family and friends for their continued support and encouragement. My postgraduate peers Claire Ball, Darren Elliott-Smith and Billy Smart have always been on hand for tea and sympathy as well as the lively exchange of ideas. My aunt, Elizabeth Murphy, has been a great help in the final preparation of these pages. Last but not least, I would like to thank my parents Paddy and Mary O'Donnell for their support - financial, emotional and intellectual - without which this simply would not have been possible!

## **Declaration**

This thesis contains all my own work. It has not been submitted for a degree at any other university. None of the work within this thesis has been published, or submitted for a previous degree.

## **Abstract**

Tom Cruise was one of the most financially successful stars of the 1980s and 1990s and remains an important Hollywood player. In his time at Paramount, he negotiated new deals which redefined how stars earned revenue from their films. Yet little substantial study has been made of him or his persona.

Cruise came to prominence in the 1980s, an epoch which redefined the terms of masculinity, moving away from a particular martial ideal following American defeat in Vietnam. His persona addresses the consequent anxieties surrounding these significant social changes. In addition to this, his image can be understood within a psychoanalytic framework to be offering a 'compromise formation' to the difficulties of psychosexual development. Cruise appears to offer a challenge to the father, but in reality recedes from Oedipal threat.

Chapter One examines the nascent Cruise star persona and its development across his films. The chapter provides a historical overview and contextualisation of the persona.

Chapter Two explores how the persona offers a 'performative' model of masculinity based on a heroic martial ideal, as well as his positioning as an object of spectacle and the onscreen homoerotic relationships he enjoys.

Chapter Three looks at the star's association with the racial 'other' and preoccupation with male friendships at the expense of heterosexual romance. Objectification through spectacle, which black characters and Cruise share in his films, indicate a symbolic shared powerlessness within the hegemony.

Chapter Four argues that this lack of status is characterised by Cruise's struggle against male authority figures, which represent both corporate America and the punishing father. This relays the trauma of Oedipal struggle, which Cruise recedes from.

Chapter Five looks in further depth at the Cruise persona's preoccupation with male bonds and lack of interest in women, both indicative of a regression from the phallic to the earlier anal/cannibalistic psycho-sexual stage, as he is unable to overcome the symbolic father.

The thesis concludes by suggesting Cruise's persona is a compromise: it presents a triumphant young man who in reality is oppressed by patriarchal forces. This compromise is premised on youth and is threatened as Cruise ages, exaggerated by social changes within America. Biologically and socially, Cruise's persona is no longer tenable.

### Examiners

Internal: Dr. Pauline Small, Queen Mary's, University of London

External: Prof. Yvonne Tasker, University of East Anglia



## **Introduction: Masculinity and Performance in the Screen Persona of Tom Cruise**

### **Why a Study of Tom Cruise?**

This thesis offers an interpretation of why Tom Cruise can be considered one of the major stars of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its central argument is that Cruise's enduring popularity can be pinned to the psychodynamic work that the persona undertakes; evidence for this premise is provided by analysing his star sign using a psychoanalytic methodology. It begins by tracing his financial and popular success, locating his image within the context of 1980s American culture. This includes an analysis of the social preoccupations of the Reagan epoch and the manner in which his star sign reflected these concerns. Following this, I lay out the core dynamic of his star image, which I set within the context of star theory originating with Richard Dyer, and through a complete chronological overview of his film career. I then go on to critique Cruise's anxious performances of masculinity, which underscore his fragile position within the hegemony, and suggest how these relate to broader gender concerns articulated by his image. The remainder of the thesis conducts an analysis of Cruise's persona within a psychodynamic framework, employing key classical Freudian theory to do so. The hypothesis that I put forward is that Cruise's enduring box office success and popularity can be understood as a reflection of his persona's ability to work through the psychodynamic preoccupations that are presented in his various films. The thesis sets out to examine their particular psychoanalytic constellation and, finally, consider how these concerns link back to issues of masculine identity in modern western culture.

### **Cruise's Box Office Success**

In box office revenue, personal earnings and industrial power Tom Cruise (born 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1962) has proven to be the most successful Hollywood star of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Cruise has consistently starred in higher earning films than his contemporaries, especially at his peak in the 1980s and 1990s. Prior to 2010, his lifetime U.S. domestic box office gross total exceeded \$2,795,421,790. By that date, he had starred in nine U.S. domestic top ten grossing films, and twice two of his films appeared the top ten in the same year: 1988 (*Rain Man* [Barry Levinson] at #1 and *Cocktail* [Roger Donaldson] at #9); 1996 (*Mission: Impossible* [Brian De Palma] at #3 and *Jerry Maguire* [Cameron Crowe] at #4).<sup>1</sup> In addition to this, Cruise has continually earned more than any of his cinema peers: between 1996 and 2006 he has topped the chart of highest paid movies actors seven times; his nearest competitors, Clint Eastwood, Burt Reynolds and Bing

Crosby, have only managed this five times (Basinger, 2007, p.525). In 2006 Forbes magazine named Cruise the most powerful celebrity in the world.<sup>2</sup> Cruise/Wagner productions, co-owned with his former agent Paula Wagner, has ensured that he has enjoyed favourable contracts on the films he has produced, most prominently the *Mission: Impossible* series (1996, 2000, 2006). His position as producer and star on this series of films allowed him to negotiate an unheard of financial deal in recent history for a screen actor. For films such as the *Mission: Impossible* series, his sole payment was by means of ‘gross participation’, in which he earned 22% of the gross revenues (pre-costs and pre-tax) from the theatrical release, television, video and later DVD receipts. Most radically, Cruise negotiated for a revision of accounting practices, in which his percentage was based on total video receipts (minus costs of manufacture and distribution). Prior to this, all video receipts were collected by the home-entertainment arm of a studio and only 20% was given to the movie studio to treat as their total gross; 80% of receipts would be kept by the home-entertainment arm to ‘cover costs’ of video manufacture, packaging, storage and distribution. (In such a set-up 22% of the ‘gross’ would only be 22% of one-fifth of the real gross.) Cruise’s insistence on ‘100% accounting’ and the deal he secured earned him \$70M and \$75M respectively for *Mission: Impossible I* and *II* (John Woo, 2000) and paved the way for stars’ involvement in similar deals with the studios.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, he received a 20% share of the gross profits of *War of the Worlds* (Stephen Spielberg, 2005), being paid \$70M.

### **Cruise’s Star Persona**

In spite of Tom Cruise’s influence at the box office and personal financial success, there exists no substantive work on the figure. The existing research tends to focus on individual aspects of the actor – most often gender issues, or Cruise as an example of modern film stardom - with little contextualisation of such work within other scholarship on Cruise. This thesis provides the first extensive study of the star drawing together existing work and providing new insights on his ‘star persona’, a concept that will be explained and illustrated in what follows. The term ‘persona’ refers to a set of characteristics associated with a dramatic role. The cinema star’s persona is created by the projection of these traits over his or her films, combined with the non-filmic information and gossip that circulates about the star. (Note: in general discussions of stardom in which the star could be male or female, I use both gendered pronouns. However, in instances relating solely to Cruise, or in discussions pertaining to representations of masculinity, I use only the male pronoun.) In analysing Cruise’s

persona, consideration will be given to the industrial and historical context in which he became a star and the ways in which his stardom illustrate changes in Hollywood and the entertainment industries. Related to the industrial context of the star, and demonstrated by the box office success of Cruise's films, is the popularity of the actor. People pay to see his films, many of which are overt star vehicles, because they want to see him. The high earnings of Tom Cruise's films are associated with the specific characteristics of his image and its relation to social issues in modern America, especially those that coincided with his rise to fame in the 1980s. His films' great appeal suggest that, more than any other star at the time, Cruise was able to articulate the anxieties of American society. The thesis proposes that Cruise is an exceptional star; functioning in a manner perhaps unrivalled by any of his contemporaries, his persona gives expression to the era's social concerns while simultaneously articulating the psychodynamic preoccupations of the viewer.

### **Cruise and 1980s America**

The cover of *American Culture in the 1980s* (2007) by Graham Thompson features Tom Cruise and Kelly McGillis in a production still for *Top Gun* (Tony Scott, 1986), the American flag visible behind the couple. Cruise's image as a signifier of American-ness indicates the star's prominence in this decade as a representation of national identity. As the titular character in *Jerry Maguire*, Cruise also appears on the cover of David Bordwell's *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (2006). Yet he is never referenced by Bordwell, although the author writes at length about the film. Such illustrations acknowledge the Cruise image's significance to Hollywood and cinema even where he is apparently overlooked. This thesis considers the place Cruise holds in modern culture and suggests that his screen persona can be understood as an expression of anxieties regarding masculinity in late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century America. It also considers how such gender concerns can be understood within a psychodynamic framework, shedding light on how his films express the unconscious preoccupations of the viewer. Cruise's films register the internal contradictions of the ideology and psychological compromise that the films promote, as well as their attempts to manage them. Issues of national pride and military identity, capitalism and consumption, hegemonic masculinity and gender relations are all present in his films and persona.

Cruise came to prominence in the early 1980s, a time characterised by great socio-economic upheaval in the USA. 1970s America faced a loss of faith in the Nixon and subsequent Ford and Carter presidencies following episodes such as the Watergate scandal, the oil crisis and the country's defeat in Vietnam. The period was characterised by economic recession, high unemployment and the phenomenon of 'stagflation': soaring inflation and simultaneous stagnation of economic growth. Reagan's election in 1980 and his tenure as presidency did much to shift national self-image and boost economic strength, while being accompanied by social change. Cruise's persona is expressive of the ideology of economic competition associated with the early Reagan era of 1980s America, and which remains embedded in US culture. Reagan's tenure is associated with the following four phenomena which are addressed to varying degrees in Cruise's films: 1) his administration's economic policy that led to the destruction of heavy manufacturing in the mid-West and north-East and was matched by expansion of the service industries; 2) greater emphasis on spending and consumer goods, partly stimulated by tax breaks for the upper and middle-classes and career success for the new generation typified as 'yuppies'; 3) revived confidence in the US military, underpinned by technological developments in weaponry and huge spending on defence; 4) social conservatism.

The implementation of 'Reaganomics' had great repercussions for the US labour market and its demographics, the latter of which had already begun to shift due to the advancement of women and ethnic minorities in the workplace. Cruise's persona reflects the anxieties surrounding the loss of traditional masculine industries at this time. In reality, 'Reaganomics' was less a new invention than the rearticulation of well-established economic ideas for a new audience and context (Thompson, 2007, p.7), but it had severe repercussions for domestic manufacturing. This was in part due to the effects of deregulation, begun under President Carter but associated with Reagan. Although aiming to increase global market competitiveness, it stimulated an economic recession and proved crippling for heavy industry. For regions such as the mid-West and north-East, 'the rust belt', which depended on such industries (Thompson, p.11) it 'resulted in the worst bout of unemployment... bankruptcies, and corporate deficits since the Great Depression' (Quart and Auster, 2002, p.127), lasting until 1982. Although the recession under Reagan lasted for approximately 18 months, its effects upon these industries and the communities dependent upon them were pervasive. Unemployment and the loss of heavy industry, attached to a working-class masculinity associated with

physical power, was a blow to masculine self-worth based on these values. The decline of manufacturing and the growth of a service-based post-industrial economy, evident from the late 1950s, began to pick up speed: by the 1980s the production industries accounted for less than half of the jobs provided by service work. Between the 1960s and 1980s, over 38 million service industry jobs were created in the USA (Mohl, 1997, p.220). This shift was matched by a changing work force that absorbed larger number of women and ethnic minorities of both sexes. In addition to providing jobs based in areas such as government, education, medical care and retail, a large number of these roles were based in computer technology or information and data processing, which called for high-tech skills and training (and barred low-skilled immigrants from many of these jobs) (Mohl, p.220).

Cruise's persona tackles the anxieties surrounding such shifts, presenting an attractive model of masculinity based on something other than physical power: he is an entrepreneur, a socially mobile white collar worker. He demonstrates the traits valued in the expanding service industries, such as verbal acuity and professional appearance. He is aggressive and competitive, as a young entrepreneur (*Risky Business* [Paul Brickman, 1983]) or sports agent (*Jerry Maguire*), thus reassuring audiences of his masculine credentials. Although his is not a fighting body, nevertheless it is muscular and strong. Nor is his body used for labour, a point demonstrated in *All The Right Moves* (Michael Chapman, 1983). In this film he plays a high-school football star, Stefen Djordjevic, who sees a sports scholarship to college as his escape route from a job at the Pennsylvania steel works which employs his father and brother. Stefen's rejection of his father's working class identity in favour of an ascent to the middle classes indicates an attempt to resolve the anxiety surrounding the crisis of identity that came with the loss of such industries. As a high school football star he is still able to claim a degree of physical accomplishment – if not through brute strength then by athletic skill. Stefen conserves a measure of masculine physicality, even if it is channelled into sporting achievements rather than labour related ones. It is this apparent resolution of social and psychic crises, linked to shifts in national identity in the Reagan era, which underpins the appeal of Cruise's persona.

Male self-image in early 1980s America arguably became more attached to the earning potential of the middle classes, as the elite members of the generation born in the 1950s and 60s ascended to high income jobs. The creation of the term 'yuppie' – young urban

professional<sup>4</sup> - reflects the growth of this demographic type. Cruise flirts with this identity in *Risky Business*, the film that establishes his career in 1983. Released just as the US was beginning to come out of the economic downturn – though unemployment remained at over 8% until well into 1984<sup>5</sup> - it reflects a growing interest in entrepreneurship, business and consumption of consumer goods. Cruise plays teenager Joel Goodsen, who is left alone in his family's suburban home by his vacationing parents. Before long he has invited call girl Lana (Rebecca De Mournay) home and accidentally rolled his father's Porsche into Lake Michigan. He joins forces with Lana to set up a temporary brothel to service his male peers, thereby making a fortune. Joel obtains a place at Princeton after a college interviewer turns up in the middle of a party and is impressed by his entrepreneurial drive. The film reflects the assertion of Quart and Auster that the 1980s came to be an age 'whose commitment to profit, hedonism, and modern technology basically subverted its conservative political rhetoric' (p.130) – although Joel capitulates to the dictates of heterosexual romance and ends the film in a relationship with Lana. The film reflects the preoccupations of 1980s culture and articulates the nascent Cruise persona, based on the enjoyment of conspicuous consumption while often highly versed in technological know-how: these aspects coalesce in the figure of Maverick in *Top Gun*.

*Top Gun* was the number one film in US domestic rankings of 1986 and the film that made Cruise a star. Encapsulating aspects of the 1980s in America, it is still used as a symbol of this historical era. In *Top Gun*, Cruise's fighter pilot demonstrates enthusiasm for high status retail goods, sporting Ray-Ban Aviator sunglasses, a leather jacket and a motorbike ridden at the side of the airstrips where he trains. As a fighter pilot for the US Navy, Pete 'Maverick' Mitchell has access to the expensive and technologically innovative hardware of war – the kind that Reagan's government was spending a great deal of money on at the time. *Top Gun* expresses the third trend in America under the Reagan presidency: a renewed confidence in a military bruised by the defeat in the Vietnam War, a conflict that had elicited much anti-war sentiment in sections of the American public. By the mid 1980s, 'Americans yearned for a return to greatness. They wanted a military with teeth, equipped to act and fortified by a commitment to a higher code' (Mintz and Roberts, 2001, p.290). The revival of a militaristic national self-image was orchestrated in part by Reagan's re-activating of the cold war through his 'Star Wars' missile defence programme (named after the film) and his patriotic rhetoric. Star Wars tied militaristic strength to the development of

sophisticated technological hardware – the country’s great wealth securing military dominance without having to fight a land war, which had proved so damaging in Vietnam. It is this confidence and exultation in technological progress that is represented in *Top Gun*. So successful was the film in invigorating the reputation of the U.S. military that Navy recruiters set up stalls in a number of cinemas showing *Top Gun* - applications from young men wanting to become naval aviators soared by 500% after the film’s release (Robb, 2004, p.182).

The film negotiates another aspect of the 1980s workplace: the ascent of women to senior professional roles (though not as widespread as Hollywood suggested in its representations at the time. Nor has parity of pay been accomplished: 2009 US census data revealed that women in America still earn 77.1% of men’s earnings for equivalent work<sup>6</sup>). In *Top Gun*, Maverick discovers that the attractive blonde he tried to pick up at a bar is his new tutor, who holds a PhD in Astro-Physics and is older than him (and taller). This threat to male dominance is managed by creating a romance between the masculine nick-named Charlie and Maverick, reducing her authority. Cruise’s later film *A Few Good Men* (Rob Reiner, 1992) is better able to negotiate these tensions without resorting to this ‘levelling’ technique: the film prohibits the development of the working relationship between naval lawyer Lt. Daniel Kaffee and senior officer Lt. Cdr. JoAnne Galloway (Demi Moore) beyond friendship. One reading of Cruise’s tendency to play against older, taller, or better educated women – such as in *Days of Thunder* (Tony Scott, 1990) in which he is a racing driver who becomes romantically involved with his female doctor – can be understood as a negotiation of male anxieties about senior women in the workplace. Competition is resolved by a capitulation to restrictive gender roles and sexual mastery over women.

Cruise’s early films reflect a social conservatism that is symptomatic of the age. While women may be present in the work place, often in positions of seniority, Cruise manages to gain the (sexual) upper hand. His persona reflects social conservatism in so far as he never attacks the system, seeking to find acceptance within it. Thus, in *Risky Business* he embraces an entrepreneurial business ethic in the place of an anti-establishment rhetoric. In *Top Gun* his goal is to win the trophy at the flight academy where he is a student, winning the admiration of his peers and proving to himself that he is ‘the best’. Maverick is haunted by the dishonour associated with his father, whose apparent desertion in Vietnam has blackened the family name. While Maverick

eventually learns the truth about him – that he was ‘one heroic son-of-a-bitch’ - he spends most of the film preoccupied by his familial shame. Through the figure of Mitchell Senior, an attempt can be made to rehabilitate the past of Vietnam, which is what he represents for his son – and for audiences. The implication is that Maverick’s father was betrayed by the upper echelons of the military, in spite of fighting courageously. This reflects a reinterpretation of the Vietnam War which reasserts the courage of the soldiers who fought, while blaming the American leadership which led them down. President Reagan, on the other hand, is representative of a government that can be trusted to lead effectively and restore America’s glory.

Beyond the overt social implications of Cruise’s persona lies a psychological dynamic and for this reason a psychodynamic methodology has been adopted in the analysis of his star image for a significant portion of the thesis. Father-son relationships provide social and psychological challenges for the young man - both of which align with issues of patriarchal hegemony and can be understood within a classical Freudian framework. Cruise does not challenge the figural fathers he finds himself up against. This signifies a lack of social rebellion but also an evasion of psychological challenge. If Cruise’s characters are confronted with psychodynamic tasks – namely, opposition to the rule of the father which raises the spectre of castration within the Oedipal stage delineated by Freud – they never quite challenge patriarchal authority. Cruise’s films are full of ‘bad fathers’ which symbolise - just like the leadership which condemned Maverick’s father – the patriarchal authority gone awry that the figure of Reagan went some way to restore. It is not patriarchy per se that is bad, only the corrupt leaders within it. This is demonstrated in *A Few Good Men*, which shows Cruise as lawyer Daniel Kaffee challenging Colonel Jessep (Jack Nicolson), who has flouted naval law in his fatal disciplining of a Private.

Cruise’s persona is formed at a time of great change in American society, stimulated by Reaganism’s shift in economic policy and emphasis on conservatism. His films reflect an idealisation of American identity, which Reaganism also encourages, while resolving anxieties around the place of modern man, especially in the workplace. He favours the skills of the upwardly mobile professional classes in his verbal fluency, sales pitch and attention to the deal. This may be as a salesman in *Rain Man*, or a lawyer in *A Few Good Men* or *The Firm* (Sydney Pollack, 1993), or as a sports agent in *Jerry Maguire*. His preoccupation with image and consumer goods reflects the interests of young urban



professionals. He is able to operate in a workplace increasingly dominated by women, while appearing to gain the upper hand. Moreover, he is symptomatic of a militaristic identity that promotes national self-image while evading involvement in combat – his portrayal of this type often includes an expertise in high-tech gadgetry (this is true of the later *Mission: Impossible* series as well as *Top Gun*). Finally, he is able to oppose corrupt patriarchs, while supporting the existing order. His evasion of threat indicates the playing out of psychological issues as well as social ones – the overthrow of the old by the young and father by son. Cruise is often opposed to the patriarch while not actually going through with the challenge and facing his wrath.

### **A Psychodynamic Approach to Cruise**

Certain key ideas of psychoanalysis are employed in my study of Cruise's films and need further elaboration. The most important is Freud's hypothesis of the psychosexual stages that every child passes through. I argue that certain narrative themes appearing in the star's films can be mapped onto an unconscious dynamic typical to one psychosexual stage, thus the relationships of the Cruise character can be interpreted within a psychoanalytic framework. The psychosexual stages are experienced by the child sequentially, although there is always slippage back and forth between each phase – even in adult sexuality these various impulses struggle to assert themselves simultaneously (Fuss, 1995, p.85). The oral/cannibalistic phase comes first in infancy, then the sadistic/ anal phase from the ages of two to four, followed by the phallic phase between the ages of four to five. These make up the three pre-genital stages of psychosexual development identified by Freud. This is followed by a period of latency, between the age of six and adolescence, until the genital stage and adult sexuality (Freud, S.E. VII, pp.198-243).

In the oral stage, the infant's relationship towards his or her mother, concerning issues of feeding, is of central importance. Here 'sexual activity has not been separated from the ingestion of food' (S.E. VII, p.198). Furthermore, the object of both activities is the same: 'the sexual *aim* consists in the incorporation of the object – the prototype of a process which, in the form of identification, is later to play such an important psychological part' (S.E. VII, p.198). In the anal stage, development of the 'opposition between two currents' (p.198), the active and the passive, is already apparent. Here, the child's mastery of his or her bodily eliminations, i.e. the process of toilet training, is the major preoccupation.

The 'phallic stage' that follows concerns the child's growing awareness of genital sexuality and 'presents a sexual object' (S.E. VII, p.198 n.2) for his or her erotic impulses. Freud argues that the boy's first love object is his mother (as it is for the girl), which is understood at least partly as a sexualized desire. The father is viewed as a threat to the boy's wish to possess the mother and the son harbours an unconscious wish to kill him and thus dispose of his rival. Such a desire is accompanied by what Freud termed castration anxiety – the fear that the patriarch would learn of his murderous intentions and castrate his son as a punishment. (As the little boy understands all females to be castrated males, the threat of castration is ever-present.) This dynamic came to be defined by Freud as the 'Oedipus complex', recalling 'the Greek legend of King Oedipus, who was destined by fate to kill his father and take his mother as his wife' (1917, S.E. XVI, p.330). The symbolic castration is represented by Oedipus's self-blinding when he discovers his true identity.

Films that feature a marked struggle between a young and old man, especially one framed in filial terms, can be understood as expressing Oedipal tensions. Troubled father-son relationships characterise Cruise's films, which often feature vengeful patriarchs. The trauma that is experienced by the Cruise character can thus be understood as an expression of the young boy's castration anxiety. His films continually position him as a figural son mistreated by a destructive father; indeed, it is a central dynamic of his persona.

The psychosexual stages delineated by Freud, although they are passed through in sequence by the child, are never quite left behind; the child experiences a varying degree of difficulty in the process of mastery in each phase. For example, failure to successfully overcome the Oedipus complex can be traced to early fixations at the oral or anal level (S.E. VII, p.242). The thesis suggests that the Cruise persona exhibits a compromise solution to the Oedipus complex and yet simultaneously retains traces of early oral maternal fixations. Given the importance of oral preoccupation in his star image, the work of Melanie Klein is an especially useful methodological tool. Klein's work explored the psychological mechanisms underlying the mother-child bond. Her ideas that expand upon Freud's delineation of the oral/cannibalistic stage are particularly pertinent.

Klein defines the period of the first few months of the infant's life as the 'paranoid-schizoid' phase of development, characterised by the relationship between the infant and 'archaic' or 'early' mother. An omnipotent figure of fantasy, the mother is represented by the breast, split in the child's mind into 'good' and 'bad', nourishing and withholding by turns. The infant is preoccupied by fantasies of devouring the object (in this case, the breast) and of being devoured (Klein, 1957, pp.180-181). This wish to 'incorporate' the mother has particular implications for the male child – for in his identification with the mother, the father presents a homosexual object choice. How do these concepts relate to an understanding of the Cruise persona? The difficulties that the infant faces in separating from the mother as well as the homoerotic impulses displayed towards the father (in the pre-genital sense) all resonate with aspects of his star image. The auto-erotic aspect of image points to fixation at the oral stage, as does his tendency towards narcissism. The strong tendency for his romantic opposite to be positioned as a more powerful figure than his character, in addition to pronounced homoerotic relationships with men all indicate a regression to this early psychosexual stage. The classical Freudian and Kleinian conceptualisation of infant and child development are thus engaged to provide a psychodynamic interpretation of the Cruise persona.

### **Cruise Within Stardom**

The study begins with an examination of the career that Tom Cruise has enjoyed in Hollywood and his financial impact as an actor, while attempting to understand how these have been made possible by the economic conditions of the modern film industry. Following this is a consideration of how stars are 'made', contextualised historically, and Cruise's own positioning within modern stardom, in particular his status as an exceptional star, which reflects the unique social conditions that created him. Chapter one sets out what is meant by star 'persona' within star studies and the existing literature which traces the development of the star system, before indicating its relevance for Cruise himself. The significance of Richard Dyer's study of stars for this work's reading of the Cruise image is acknowledged. An analysis of the personae of other relevant Hollywood stars of the late 1970s and early 1980s helps to locate Cruise's image historically. A brief summary of each of his films, considering how the persona is utilised, altered or progressed in each work concludes this section. Where a film has marked a distinct shift in his persona or otherwise indicated an important landmark in his career, such as his production of the *Mission: Impossible* series, greater detail is

given. The mediation of significant personal events - such as his marriages - by the popular press is also discussed where it significantly affects his screen image.

Much as the persona of Tom Cruise reflects the sociological reality of 1980s America, the career he has enjoyed as a star illustrates the economic conditions of modern day Hollywood. His success, such as his accomplishments as a producer with Cruise/Wagner productions and latterly his involvement with United Artists, are symptomatic of what Jeanine Basinger terms the 'neo star' (2007, p.549), a star in determination of his own career. Basinger argues that Cruise is the most successful example of this new type. Here his financial involvement with United Artists, in which the star invested part of his own wealth in the mini-studio in 2009, is an act of symbolic importance. Founded by the most powerful stars of the 1920s, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks and Charlie Chaplin, as well as the director D.W. Griffith, United Artists was created to secure greater financial control over their images and careers than the studios would concede.<sup>7</sup> Cruise was aligning himself with these influential figures, and in doing so positioning his own career in terms of historical consequence. Significant too was the timing of this move, following his professional humiliation at the non-renewal of his contract with Paramount Pictures, with whom he had worked on the *Mission: Impossible* series. The decision made by Sumner Redstone, C.E.O. of Viacom and CBS, which owns Paramount, was attributed to Cruise's unstable public behaviour. In May 2005 Cruise had appeared on the *Oprah Winfrey* show for the second time in his career, to promote the release of *War of the Worlds*. The interview was dominated by his emphatic declaration of love for his new girlfriend Katie Holmes, jumping on Oprah's couch. The following month he appeared on the *Today* show, where he gave host Matt Lauer a lecture on the dangers of anti-depressant drugs and deemed psychiatry a 'pseudo science'. These media appearances contributed to Cruise's increasing unpopularity: by May 2006, a Gallup poll conducted on the weekend of *Mission: Impossible III*'s opening revealed that 51% of those surveyed had an 'unfavourable' opinion of the star.<sup>8</sup>

Cruise/Wagner Productions' departure from Paramount was in the end related to profit not personality. *Mission: Impossible III* did not meet its targets at the box office or on DVD, leading to a dispute about Cruise's existing DVD royalty deal. (Nevertheless, it managed to earn \$393M in theatrical grosses at the US box office and was Paramount's highest grossing film of 2005.) The previous percentage deal, which Cruise had first

negotiated with Paramount, had been altered as DVDs became a larger part of the film revenue stream. His new deal involved 30% of the gross theatrical revenue and 40% of the royalties from DVD sales (the shift back to royalties was an acknowledgment of the increasing difficulties of tracking all expenses involved in DVD distribution). Cruise earned more than \$30M from DVD sales alone on *Mission: Impossible II*. Faced with lower profits from *Mission: Impossible III*, Paramount demanded that Cruise reduce his cut of the royalties, which he refused to do. Cruise blamed the film's disappointing performance upon Paramount's decision to make redundant key marketing and distribution executives across Europe.<sup>9</sup> The studio blamed Cruise's behaviour. Redstone is quoted in *Vanity Fair* as saying, 'His behavior was entirely unacceptable to [my wife] Paula, and to the rest of the world. He didn't just turn one [woman] off. He turned off all women, and a lot of men.... He was embarrassing the studio. And he was costing us a lot of money. We felt he cost us \$100, \$150 million on *Mission: Impossible III* [J.J. Abrams, 2006]. It was the best picture of the three, and it did the worst.' (Burrough, 2006) Whether Redstone believed this or not, his comments neatly underscore a number of issues bound up in the concept of stardom - and encapsulate how stars are often considered within academic studies. The argument that Cruise was costing the studio money, indicates that stars are responsible for the marketing and promotion of films, i.e. that they are the product, the commodity and the sales staff. It supports the assumption that the star is the most persuasive method of structuring and marketing film product.

Richard deCordova traces the historical development of the film star system, revealing how the American film industry existed for a number of years before stars were deemed a way of selling films, as the novelty of the moving image waned. The shift in interest to the presence of the actor onscreen related to the increase in the number of narrative films being made: from 17% to 66% between 1907 and 1908. However, only once *named* performers were acknowledged as a lure for audiences was their power established. The higher pay they received was based on the perceived power they had to increase admissions. DeCordova specifies the difference between what he terms 'physical performer', 'picture personality' and 'star' and their historical lineage. The notable difference between the categories of physical performer and picture personality is that the performer is not just recognizable but named; this shift takes place from about 1909. For the latter, inter-textual information, such as the performer's filmography or stage roles, may affect ticket sales. But at this stage the audience's knowledge of more

personal details is limited. The 'star' is differentiated from the 'picture personality' by the publication of biographical information, including details of the star's private life and this shift happens from roughly 1914 (although there is considerable overlap between the two categories chronologically). As such information proliferates, the star 'becomes the subject of a narrative which is quite separate from his/her work in any particular film' (deCordova, 1990, p.27).

Barry King argues a similar point when he suggests that a star's worth is premised on a tendency towards 'personification' (1991, p.168) in his performance. Personification means the repeated enactment of the star persona, whereby character traits attached to the star – from film roles and through other media - carry over from one film role to another, with little modification of this persona to the demands of the individual part. This is contrasted with what can be considered as the conventional acting skills of acting, termed by King as 'impersonation' (1991, p.168), such as the ability to transform one's appearance, voice and manner to fits the demands of each role. There inevitably exists a tension between the craft of acting and the film star's performance. King explains that film acting is widely considered to involve a 'deskilling process' in relation to stage acting. 'Good' acting privileges intentionality, the 'mastery of the actor over verbal, gestural and postural behaviour', what King calls the 'norm of impersonation' (p.168). The actor's self should be suppressed, in order to 'become a signifier for the intentionality inscribed in the character' (p.170). In classical cinema, however, it appears that the skills of the actor become less important; *mise-en-scène*, for example, is central in the conveyance of plot and mood. The performance of the actor is broken up into takes filmed out of sequence, which compensate for limited technical ability (p.171). Most significantly, the close scrutiny of the camera ensures that meaning is constituted by aspects of the actor's physical presence over which he or she has minimal control: 'he or she activates via impersonation those aspects of general cultural markers that he or she bears as a private individual for character portrayal' (p.173). The film actor is reliant on the technical apparatus to produce his or her performance. Furthermore, 'competition for parts, given the operation of naturalistic conventions, lead to an emphasis on what is unique to the actor, displacing emphasis from what an actor can do qua actor onto what the actor qua person or biographical entity is'. King goes on to argue that actors seeking stardom will conduct themselves in the public eye as if there is an inherent connection between their person and their image. The resulting persona is 'in itself a character, but one that transcends placement or

containment in a particular narrative (or in the case of the vehicle, subordinates the narrative to the spectacle of the persona)' (pp.178-179).

How might we understand the persona of the star – a phenomenon concerned with the structuring of audience anticipation and expectation about the star, and his or her apparent characteristics off screen? The term 'persona' is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as 'a mask used by a player' (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1989, p.598). Used in relation to film stardom, 'persona' refers to the physical and psychological traits that coalesce around the figure of the star via the film roles and public appearances he or she undertakes. Although that would suggest marked differentiation between the persona and the person of the star, the term has been expanded in film scholarship to cover all aspects of the star that are in public circulation; this may include promotional material, publicity not generated by the star's promotional team, as well as fan writings or gossip. The tension between the information publicly circulated about the star and what he or she may 'really' be like in private stimulates the desire of the film fan to learn more about the star's real self. Richard Dyer highlights this private-public dichotomy as one of the defining features of film stardom. Although Dyer uses the term 'image' in his writing on stars, 'persona', with its play on the projection of a psychological entity and the dramatic performance that it implies, will be employed most frequently here (and is most useful for understanding the figure of Cruise and his relation to performance). The question of what the star persona constitutes, its relation to particular film representations but also its dependence upon extra-textual sites of meaning, makes up the second area of star scholarship. The 'star-as-text' approach to stardom combines the study of semiology, sociology and ideology to understand the star as a social production. In this framework the star persona is more complicated than the films in which they appear, with Paul McDonald suggesting that 'the study of stars as texts... cannot be limited to the analysis of specific films or star performances' (1995, p.83). DeCordova's definition of the star highlights the importance of the circulation of knowledge of the star's personal life, beyond the film roles in which he or she appears.

The significance of film stars as a social phenomenon is argued by theorist Edgar Morin in *Les Stars* (1957, trans. 1960). Morin is the first scholar to approach the star from a psychological and social standpoint. He considers stars in terms of their personal meaning to spectators and what they signify in terms of archetypes. The position of the star, according to Morin, changed a great deal from the 1920s to the 1950s, reflecting

the altering social relations and personal ambitions of the average moviegoer as well as the changes in the stars' and studios' relative power. This evolution, in which the exceptional and ordinary are increasingly combined, 'permits the public to identify itself with them by means of certain increasingly realistic points of reference' (Morin, 1960, p.14). He suggests that the then 'new "assimilable" stars, stars as life models, correspond to an increasingly profound desire on the part of the great mass of people for individual salvation' (1960, p.26). Morin's argument has implications for later social analyses of the contemporary star. If the breakdown of star aura can be traced as far back as the 1950s to greater parity of social opportunity, then the modern decline of the film star may have as much to do with a perceived egalitarianism – and the possibility of attaining celebrity - in the expanding media universe that accompanies this trend. This will be apparent in Marshall's discussion of the devaluation of Cruise's own professional worth from 2005 onwards.

Morin's writings are built upon by Richard Dyer's *Stars* (1979, new ed. 1998). Dyer raises questions about how stars figure in representation and the meaning of the characters they depict on screen, emphasizing how they function ideologically. He defines ideology as 'the set of ideas and representations in which people collectively make sense of the world and the society in which they live' (1998, p.2). In any society, there will be a number of different ideologies generated by collective groups and there will exist contradictions both between these various ideologies and within the ideologies themselves. The dominant or hegemonic ideology functions 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' (1998, p.2). Its efforts are taken up in displacing its own contradictions and those that arise from alternative ideologies, an effort in which the mass medium of Hollywood cinema engages. Dyer poses a number of questions in relation to stars and ideology. Why do stars – individual stars and stardom as a category – exist and what is their relation to society? What meanings do images of stardom in general and of particular stars create? How do star images interact with other aspects of the film, including character and performance (p.2)? Individual stars represent the contradictions of hegemonic ideology, which may occasion a significant political struggle. While the star may be seen as a preserver of the conservative status quo, Dyer maintains that the system is not entirely closed, and being 'leaky' (p.25) allows readings, and viewer pleasures, that may go against the ideological grain. Conversely, stars may reinforce values under threat or be



engaged in ‘concealing prevalent contradictions or problems’ with hegemonic ideology (p.27). Stars may also compensate people for their aspirational failures, shifting attention from one value to another ‘compensatory’ one. Dyer briefly discusses James Dean as an example of the rebel hero whose roles recuperate the rebellion he appears to promote (p.53). His revolt against the family in *East of Eden* (Elia Kazan, 1953) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955) is against the failures of the particular family he finds himself in rather than the institution per se (p.54). This anticipates Cruise’s apparent resistance – or evasion – of the figural father in his films. The patriarch is one who is corrupt or in other ways harmful: Cruise resists this figure rather than patriarchy as a relation of power.

Cruise’s persona exists within an altering mode of stardom - what has influenced the study of stardom most in recent years is the shifting perception of stardom in an era saturated with celebrity images. The above models of examining cinema stardom threaten to become outmoded as the concept of celebrity alters. Christine Gledhill notes that cinema once provided the ‘ultimate confirmation of stardom’ (1991, xiii) but this is decreasingly the case. There has been a broadening of the notion of stardom, with the term celebrity changing the definition of what it is to be famous, in what way, and to what end. Even limiting the sphere to cinema, there are rivals to flesh and blood stars: ‘synthespians’, computer-generated virtual actors, have a recognisable existence beyond their film roles. One line of thought suggests that special effects are now the stars of films (Barker, 2003, p.8), and that in a circular movement of history, the spectacle of film itself has again become the draw for the audience. *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009) is one such example, relying on animated characters, special effects and 3D exhibition as the basis of its marketing campaign. The film’s protagonist is played by the then unknown Sam Worthington, with star actor Sigourney Weaver taking a smaller supporting role.

Hollywood stardom must now negotiate its definition in the light of developing media forms. Christine Geraghty notes that: ‘Film stardom... has to be seen in the context of the drive in the media to create and exploit the status of being famous across the whole range of entertainment formats’ (2000, p.188). She indicates that there are three ways of considering stars in the modern cultural arena: star-as-celebrity, star-as-professional and star-as-performer (2000, p.187). The film star as celebrity indicates the extent to which the concerns of modern celebrity impact on the star’s image. The celebrity is a

public entity whose life is documented in the public press and may come from a variety of popular entertainment backgrounds such as film, sports or music, or from royalty, business or elsewhere. This circulation of the details of the celebrity's private life as discussed by deCordova in relation to the star system is a major component of this celebrity identity. The star-as-professional relates the star's onscreen image to his off-screen behaviour – too wide a gap and the star's popularity is likely to suffer. Cruise's public gaffes in 2005 are examples of this rupture. His 'couch jumping' enthusiasm for his new fiancée on the Oprah Winfrey show revealed a Tom Cruise who was emotionally excessive and embarrassing to watch. Cruise's attempts to win back public opinion through his subsequent film, *Lions for Lambs* (Robert Redford, 2007), introduces Geraghty's third category, 'the star-as-performer'. This highlights the labour involved in the work of the star, and the employment of his or her talent in creating a character different to his or her perceived off-screen personality (these two terms have echoes of King's terms 'personification' and 'impersonation'). Cruise's intermittent attempts at serious roles is a strategy that he has used throughout his career, starting in 1988, when he played against Dustin Hoffman in *Rain Man*, gaining by association some of the gravitas of the Hoffman persona. For stars who exist in a changing industry in which synthesians and special effects are given equal or greater billing, 'acting has become a way of claiming back the cinema for human stars' (Geraghty, 2000, p.192) – most recently Cruise's appearance in the special-effects laden *Mission: Impossible* series has been counterpointed by roles in films such as *Eyes Wide Shut* (Stanley Kubrick, 1999), *The Last Samurai* (Edward Zwick, 2003) and *Valkyrie* (Bryan Singer, 2008). Cruise is facing the pressures that all film stars are subject to in the changes to production and marketing of film product. Angela Ndalians (2002) indicates that 'the restructuring of the Hollywood film industry along conglomerate lines since the 1960s has resulted in an underlying rationale that operates differently to the system of the pre-1960s era' (2002, x). While Cruise's career has benefited from the modern system, in terms of control over his career and financial reward, he may now be discovering such conditions are not always advantageous.

### **Cruise Within Modern Hollywood**

The inscription of Cruise's star image, and his career as a star-producer, are particular to this historical context in terms of industrial economics and cultural concerns. Most obvious for the industry is the phenomenon of the 'blockbuster' film. The term's first usage is listed as 1957 in the OED, meaning simply 'the biggest' (1989, p.298) and was

used in relation to film hits such as *Ben Hur* (William Wyler, 1957). It narrowed in the 1970s to describe a type of film – one with a big budget and a simple premise, aimed at a young audience. This form of blockbuster found its greatest success from the mid 1970s onwards and was responsible for Hollywood’s stabilisation after thirty years of uncertainty. The preceding period had been effected by the post World War II recession, the suburbanisation of the American populace and the coming of television, all of which had a negative impact on film revenues (Schatz, 1993, p.11-12). The arrival of the blockbuster is best demonstrated by *Jaws* (Stephen Spielberg, 1975), ‘redefining [the hit film’s] status as a marketable commodity and a cultural phenomenon as well’ (Schatz, 1993, p.17). It was the first film to earn more than \$200M at the American box office and return over \$100M to its distributor, a measure that is still used to describe a blockbuster film. Part of the movie-going trends indicated by *Jaws*’ success was ‘the composition and industry conceptualisation of the youth market, which was shifting from the politically hip, cine-literate viewers of a few years earlier to even younger viewers with more conservative tastes and sensibilities’ (Schatz, p.19). It was also significant for its new development in film marketing, the ‘saturation’ release campaign, with *Jaws* opening on over 400 screens and blanket network TV advertising. Further profits were raised from sequels, merchandising, even theme park rides and other tie-ins. With domestic grosses totalling \$2B for the first time in 1975 and rising 40% in the next three years (Schatz, p.20), it was evident that there were huge profits to be made in projects of this type.

Such entertainment products and their supporting industries were based on films that were defined as ‘high concept’. This ironic term for a simple narrative premise is defined by Justin Wyatt as ‘a form of narrative that is highly marketable’ by ensuring the use of the star’s image to illustrate the premise of the film (2002, p.12). The casting of a particular star is related to the film’s narrative idea (and by extension, its genre). Indicatively, Wyatt chooses Cruise’s *Top Gun* – ‘fighter pilot in love’ (2002, p.84) – as an example of the high concept film, arguing for the importance of cross-promotion. The pop group Berlin’s *Take My Breath Away*, which featured in *Top Gun*, went on to be a chart hit in the US and Europe, with excerpts of the film featured in its music video. Wyatt also notes the product placement of Ray-Ban Aviators in the film and alludes to the rumoured sales rise in leather jackets following its release (though he does not provide any data for either assertion) (p.85).<sup>10</sup> *Top Gun* was also one of the first films to benefit from the growing home video industry, selling 2.5M copies in its first

week of release in the US, making it the fastest selling video at that time. It was also the first video release to include commercial advertising, one for Pepsi Cola featuring pilots with similar names to characters in the film, participating in aviator stunts (Thompson, 2007, p.94).

Home video was a huge financial success for the entertainment industries: between 1980 and 1989 profits rose from nearly nil to become more lucrative than the theatrical distribution of films. Pay-cable movie channels were also becoming increasingly profitable with the first channel of its kind, 'Home Box Office' (HBO), arriving in 1975. Yet conventional cinema was doing better than ever: over the course of the 1980s US domestic theatrical revenues rose from \$2.75B to \$5B. It was a trend accompanied by a huge growth in the number of movie screens, up by 50% from 14,000 to 22,000 over the decade. The secondary markets were dependent on blockbuster hits whose success was founded on large scale advertising campaigns; domestic theatrical success remained important for the markets of home video and cable TV. Hollywood's focus on the production of potential blockbusters meant unprecedented financial investment in a few key products; thus fewer films were made and marketed at greater cost. From 1980 to 1989 the average budget of a Hollywood feature rose from \$9.4M to \$26.7 M – six times the rate of inflation. Over the same period, the amount spent on 'Prints and Advertising' rose from \$4.3 M to \$11.6 M (Schatz, 1993, p.21). One method of stabilising this high-risk high-investment film-making was through casting. Echoing Wyatt's comments on the use of Cruise's image to promote *Top Gun*, Schatz indicates how closely the hit dependent industry is linked to the 'star-driven nature of top industry products' (p.31). In a Hollywood that produces far fewer films of 'much wider and cultural impact... the star's commercial value, cultural caché, and creative clout have increased enormously' - demonstrated most clearly in the escalation of star salaries in the 1980s (p.31). The highest paid star at the end of the 1980s was Sylvester Stallone, who had been involved in two of the decade's most lucrative franchises: *Rocky* (John G. Alvidson, 1976) and *(Rambo) First Blood* (Ted Kotcheff, 1982), each of which spawned multiple sequels. His earnings in 1989-90 were estimated by *Variety* magazine to top \$63M (by comparison, Tom Cruise was estimated to have earned \$26M over the same time span). Cruise's highest earnings came from his participation in the gross profits of his own later series, *Mission: Impossible*.

Paramount's decision to end its business dealings with Cruise/Wagner productions reveals the limits of such star power. The success of *Avatar*, the highest grossing film of all time at this moment, is the most profound example of a box office increasingly driven by products marketed on technological innovation. The top five grossing films of 2009 (*Avatar*, *Transformers II* [Michael Bay], *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* [David Yates], *Twilight: New Moon* [Chris Weitz] and *Up* [Pete Docter, Bob Peterson]) are notable for their absence of stars. In addition to these changes in Hollywood economics, celebrity itself is changing. The advance of digital media, in particular that enabled by the internet, have augmented the development of novel forms of 'celebrity', which have impacted upon the inscription of film stardom. P. David Marshall argues that in an age of celebrities from the fields of music, film, TV (those from reality TV as well as television actors), sports and those 'famous for being famous', the star value of the film actor becomes diminished. A film star must now work harder to remain in the public eye. Focusing mainly on new forms of celebrity, Marshall also looks at Cruise's career, his second star study to do so. Here he cites the star's erratic behavior in 2005 as symptomatic of the increased necessity to generate publicity for a film's release as competition with other media increase. The star's arguably opportunistic relationship with Katie Holmes, to whom he is now married, 'threatens the stability of his image' (Marshall, 2006, p.32), yet it may have been stimulated by the need for publicity within the narrowing windows of a film's theatrical release. Cruise's career is thus repeatedly used to exemplify how modern Hollywood stardom works, both in terms of an economic history of the industry, the ideological implications of modern celebrity and whether the model of film stardom will survive in its current form.

## **Structure of the Thesis**

### **Section One: The Star Persona**

The dissertation begins with a chronological review of Cruise's persona and a survey of his films. This approach facilitates a tracing of the star's nascent persona from his earliest films and the factors responsible for shaping his image. An overview of this kind also helps place Cruise within industrial, economic and historical contexts, locating him within a broader discourse of celebrity studies. This is especially useful for his later career, which has been increasingly subjected to the demands and iterations of new digital media forms. Following Cruise's career chronologically allows me to examine the alterations to his star persona informed by the films in which he has starred, the

publicly documented events of his private life and his aging. Each film is briefly considered for the manner in which it has progressed, contradicted or reinforced existing persona traits and reshaped his image, as well as negotiating extra-filmic discourse, such as newspaper or internet material (especially true in his later career). In order to consider the construction of Cruise's star image, I look at the first usage of the term 'star persona' and the subsequent scholarly writings within the field of star studies. In particular, I engage with certain seminal writings on stars, such as the work of Richard Dyer. Dyer's discussion of the 'star image' provides a basis for my appraisal of how the films and other media of Cruise have contributed to the formation of a coherent persona (albeit one wrought with contradictions). His account of the way in which star images embody and apparently resolve certain ideological contradictions (Dyer, 1998, p.27) is also useful in considering how Cruise's persona negotiates certain paradoxes of masculine identity – such as a military figure who does not fight (*Top Gun* is one such example). These paradoxes are equally valid for considering Cruise from a social perspective, such as his positioning as a post-Vietnam epoch martial figure, and within a psychoanalytic framework.

Part of this 'scene-setting' involves a look at the history of Hollywood stardom and an assessment of how industrial and economic factors have shaped what we understand as Hollywood stardom in the twentieth century. This also includes an evaluation of other writings that explore the Cruise persona. The work of P. David Marshall is central here, providing a detailed critique of the actor's image by utilising Richard deCordova's historical writing on the Hollywood star system as a framework to consider Cruise's ascent to stardom. Marshall's chronological tracing of the Cruise persona indicates how his image has altered as his career has progressed, especially in dialogue with the film roles he has chosen. This has provided a useful model for my own historical study of Cruise which forms the first chapter. What becomes clear from a chronological evaluation of Cruise's career is the manner in which two points of his star image intersect. A homoerotic, spectacular, aspect of his star sign is in the ascension in the early part of his career, until around 1999. After this point, his body becomes increasingly covered up and less erotically 'marked'. From this period onwards, the troubled father-son dynamic that was always a feature of his film narratives takes on a darker, more menacing, aspect. His eroticised body now becomes physically threatened by the castrating patriarch. This trajectory of Cruise's persona thus provides the rationale for the ordering of the larger part of the thesis. Section two analyses Cruise's

persona in relation to his presentation of youthful beauty in the earlier stage of his career. Section three looks in further depth at the father-son relationships that characterize his films, and their destructive aspect in the latter part of his filmography.

## **Section Two: Cruise's Performances of Masculinity**

This section of the thesis explores Cruise's persona in relation to issues of performance, gender and sexuality, taking as its focus the homoerotically marked performances that are in ascendance in the first half of his career. Chapter two considers certain paradoxes of gender inscription in the Cruise image and how they *appear* to be resolved in his various film roles, following Dyer's assertion of the ideological work that stars engage in (1998, p.27). The chapter is broadly divided into two halves. The first part addresses the star's military films and the soldier roles that present an ideal masculinity, one which cannot possibly be attained. The second portion looks at Cruise's performances in 'staged' settings, their homoerotic energy and their implications for the star's 'spectacular' image. The two parts are linked by the premise that Cruise's persona is based on the idea of 'marked' performances of manhood, which in their very citation assert the possibility for failure of the masculine ideal.

Employing methodology that encompasses a queer theoretical approach to gender, I apply the perspectives of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler to my analysis of the Cruise persona. Sedgwick's discussion of 'male homosocial desire', as a means of describing masculine bonds historically, and which she uses in her study of 19<sup>th</sup> century literature, is pertinent here. The coining of this phrase marks an attempt to 'draw "homosocial" back into the orbit of "desire", the potentially erotic' in a society where masculine bonds are often characterized by homophobia (1985, pp.1-2). Her ideas have particular relevance in considering the close male friendships enjoyed by Cruise's characters and the homoerotic aspect of his persona. His anxious performances solicit the attention of a male audience at the expense of heterosexual romance. This is true of both his military films and those in which he is coded as a 'performer'. Thus, the second half of the chapter is concerned with Cruise's positioning as an object of erotic spectacle and the homoerotic implications of performing to this masculine audience. The young Cruise is characterised by his narcissism, his visual erotic appeal and his roles feature sequences of sexualised spectacle, which position him in the 'feminine' performance space typically allocated for Hollywood's women. That Cruise's autoerotic performances are almost always witnessed by a male audience, such as in

*Top Gun*, is indicative of homoerotic impulses experienced in relation to the father during the pre-genital psychosexual stages. This will have implications for the psychodynamic interpretation of Cruise's persona that forms the final section of the thesis.

Cruise's frequent casting as an anxious male performer in a variety of professions is also usefully illuminated by Butler's observations on the 'performativity' of gender. She defines 'performativity' as being based on the repetition of acts, gestures and words that *create* what we understand as gender, as opposed to *expressing* a pre-existing nature (2006, preface xv). Given the imitative nature of gender, it follows that all performances of gender are citations of citations – there is no original to be copied. This indicates a fundamental instability at the core of idealized gender norms. Cruise's excessive performances of masculinity – the imperfect citation - highlight their own artificiality and his vulnerable manhood. Following on from this, writer Gaylyn Studlar argues that Cruise's films emphasise 'the notion of male identity as performative ... anchored by the spectacle of the star's body' (2001, p.175). This has implications for how Cruise 'tries on' different identities in his films, usually signified by costumes, hair style and other visual indicators. It also signals how masculinity itself is a performance and the Cruise persona's embodiment of this, which I explore at great length in the analysis of certain key films, such as *Risky Business*, *Cocktail* and *Magnolia*. This emphasis on male spectacle is accompanied by, as writer Veronika Rall has noted, his films' disinterest in the erotic potential of the leading lady, given her psychoanalytic figuration as the mother of the oral/cannibalistic stage – she is powerful, but not sexualised. Instead, her position in a typical Cruise film is marginal to the emotional – and often erotic - significance of the men with whom he interacts.

His relationships with women are thus marginalised in relation to these homoerotic bonds with male peers and a typically troubled dynamic with his (figural) father. Although the malevolent patriarch's capacity for violence is exaggerated in the second half of Cruise's career, in which the star's body suffers greater physical damage, his influence is apparent in Cruise's earliest films. The conflating of erotic objectification with vulnerability towards the father in these narratives can be related to Freud's articulation of the Oedipus complex, notably the male child's fear of sexual attack by the father, as a projection of his own homosexual impulses. These feelings oscillate with his fear of castration by the father as punishment for expressing sexual interest in



his mother. (This will be explored at length in the third and final section of the thesis which employs classic Freudian theory to present a psychodynamic reading of Cruise's persona.)

Chapter Three extends this account of Cruise's marked performances and homoerotically inscribed male relationships, broadening out from a psychoanalytic account of the star's narcissism and homoerotic inscription. It presents a social interpretation of the Cruise figure who is constrained by formidable hegemonic forces, through the prism of racial difference. It offers an analysis of the films *Jerry Maguire* and *Collateral* (Michael Mann, 2004) in terms of their preoccupation with and - at least partial - endorsement of a capitalist economic model. This ideology is linked to the films' depictions of race. I will show how Cruise is represented in relation to his black counterparts and how culturally deemed traits of 'blackness' are assigned to his character, arguing that the treatment of the Cruise body is, at one level, symptomatic of his powerlessness within patriarchal structures. Stereotypical depictions of black men situate African-American masculinity specifically, and non-white masculinity more generally, as physically and emotionally excessive. Such traits are shared by Cruise's characters; where black characters figure in his films he is aligned with them. Moreover, a biracial buddy dynamic structures *Jerry Maguire* and *Collateral*, in dialogue with a longer history of American cinema and 1980s buddy films such as the *Lethal Weapon* series (Richard Donner, 1987; Richard Donner, 1989; Richard Donner, 1992) and *Die Hard* (John McTiernan, 1988).

In both *Jerry Maguire* and *Collateral* the treatment of race runs parallel to a consideration of capitalism – the African-American becomes a visual symbol of the American working class. The films suggest that, just like Cruise, these working class men can aspire to the American dream (though *Collateral* is ambiguous). In *Jerry Maguire* football player Rod Tidwell (Cuba Gooding Jr) is able to make a fortune playing the sport he loves; in *Collateral* Max (Jamie Fox) dreams of becoming the owner of a limo firm. Both resemble Cruise and the films promote a solution to the difficulties of capitalism in the way that his characters do more broadly. In *Jerry Maguire* the free market ethic of professional sport has stolen the pleasure from the game and care from the players themselves. The previously cynical Maguire (Tom Cruise) decides sports agents should develop emotional ties with their clients and forms a close friendship with Tidwell. The racial difference between Tidwell and Maguire

distracts us from the homoerotic longing experienced by the pair, a device noted by writers Yvonne Tasker (1993) and Cynthia Fuchs (1993) in relation to *Lethal Weapon*.

This sentiment is echoed by Robert Lang (2006), who identifies a homoerotic impulse at the core of Jerry and Rod's working relationship. He relates this to Jerry's deeper hunger for a meaningful relationship with his father, which in turn is symptomatic of a greater cultural malaise. Though writing specifically on the film *Jerry Maguire*, Lang's observations relate to Cruise's persona more broadly. The bond between the men in both films is conflicted by the presence of a profit motive. In *Collateral*, taxi driver Max is held hostage by professional killer Vincent (Tom Cruise) and instructed to drive him across Los Angeles as he carries out his hits. The business dynamic between Rod Tidwell and Maguire is more complicated: mutual affection appears to circumvent the worst excesses of capitalism, but the relationship is undermined by the profit model. The only reliable bond a man can rely on, so the logic of *Jerry Maguire* goes, is that between husband and wife: the closeness of the two men is undermined by their marriages. The message is that heterosexual romantic bonds will out. Similarly, *Collateral* ends by uniting Max with lawyer Annie (Jada Pinkett Smith), whom he rescues from Vincent. This romantic pairing is fundamentally dishonest, using the visual matching of race to elide the class difference between a criminal attorney and a taxi driver. Yet both films engage in a de facto defence of capitalist society, privileging masculine bonds as a way of softening a harsh market ethic, and then side-lining these by the primacy of the heterosexual romantic couple. Nevertheless, the homoerotic dynamic of Cruise's same sex friendships remains compelling – we are never quite convinced that he has put these attachments aside fully in the name of heterosexual closure. The reasons for this will be explored in the third section of the thesis.

### **Section Three: A Psychodynamic Reading of the Persona**

The final section of the thesis presents a formally psychodynamic reading of Cruise's persona, looking at key films of the actor that exemplify certain psychological preoccupations. As previously indicated, there is a shift in the presentation of Cruise's body from his early to late career. In his earlier films, his body is offered up as spectacle; he is a self-pleasuring narcissist. This continues up until the end of the 1990s, when he is still presented as the object of an erotic look in films such as *Magnolia*. However, as he ages his body is increasingly covered up. He still provides moments of spectacle, in films such as *Minority Report* and *The Last Samurai*, but these

are demonstrations of physical and technological skill, as opposed to a presentation of a youthful, erotic physique. Instead, his body is more likely to suffer the attacks of a castrating patriarch and be subjected to bodily damage. Thus, this section takes as its study the father-son relationships of Cruise's films, in particular those that characterise the later part of his career. The methodology of these chapters is based upon key classical Freudian psychoanalytic concepts, to better understand the psychodynamic basis of these conflicts and the 'working through' of key psychosexual issues.

Chapter four examines the films of Cruise that figure a persecuting patriarch, taking the film *Minority Report* as a case study. It also relates this psychodynamic reading of the star back to the marginal social position that the Cruise figure so often occupies; thus there continues to be a dialogue between the psychoanalytic and social reading of his star sign. Freud's writings on the Oedipus complex (1917) and masochism (1919, 1924), are used to provide a psychodynamic interpretation of Cruise's positioning as the fearful son suffering from castration anxiety. 'Trauma' in its psychoanalytic meaning, to make sense of the internal experiences of psychosexual development, is considered here; such 'traumatic' experiences find expression externally in Cruise's films in the mistreatment he is subjected to by the father. Stella Bruzzi suggests that Cruise's characters are the troubled sons of fathers who are alternatively neglectful or absent; often his films depict a coming to terms with a father who has been either idealised or rejected (2005, p.141-142). Paternal failure and the son's subsequent suffering are thus crucial to an understanding of Cruise; Oedipal concerns organise virtually all of his films. The dynamic his persona displays can be understood to represent a 'compromise formation', a term invented by Freud initially in his discussion of dreams to indicate the resolution of two contrary impulses: 'we find a struggle between two trends, of which one is unconscious and ordinarily repressed and strives towards satisfaction—that is, wish-fulfillment—while the other, belonging probably to the conscious ego, is disapproving and repressive. The outcome of this conflict is a compromise-formation (the dream or the symptom) in which both trends have found an incomplete expression' (S.E. XVIII, p.242).

Cruise's films stage the son's wish to overthrow the father. This tension is resolved by an apparent challenge to the father that is ultimately an evasion. This compromise formation plays out repeatedly. Though he does not situate this concept in

psychoanalytic terms, Dyer's notion of stars as creations of two contradictory states, one based on reality and the other on wish-fulfillment, resolve themselves in the ideological myth. The American dream resolves the wish to be wealthy with the reality that most people are not and will not become rich, thus relieving psychic distress at the inequity of society (and providing a form of social control for the ruling classes). When the evasive persona of Cruise is extended beyond the family, his social figuration is revealed as a powerless individual at the mercy of hegemonic forces. Although he has no possibility of asserting himself, he nevertheless projects the appearance of social mobility. In reality, under attack, he often requires rescuing - and by a woman. This is apparent in *The Firm* (Sydney Pollack, 1993), *Eyes Wide Shut* (Stanley Kubrick, 1999) and *Minority Report* (Steven Spielberg, 2002). The latter film explores the Oedipal issues present in Cruise's image. *Minority Report* includes a case of child abduction (and imputed sexual abuse) which makes manifest the trauma of normal psychosexual development. Given these issues' prominence for the Cruise persona, this makes it a critical example through which we may understand his other films.

Chapter five extends this interpretation of the troubled filial dynamic further, suggesting how the patriarch's rage can be interpreted as the projection of the male child's own unconscious pre-genital homoerotic longings for the father. It concludes by relating this reading to a social analysis of martial sacrifice in Cruise's military films, such as his recent film *Valkyrie*. The chapter takes an examination of the mythological Laius figure (Oedipus's father) as its starting point. This reading considers the homosexual violence demonstrated by Laius towards his son as a representation of the male child's own fear of his father's sexual designs - this in turn is a projection of his own homosexual love towards his father at the pre-genital stage. At the oral/cannibalistic stage of psychosexual development the child's primary love object is the maternal breast and its phallic substitutes. This incorporation of (identification with) the mother allows for a same-sex object choice, thus the male child experiences an eroticised bond towards the father. This becomes more muted as he moves through the anal/sadistic phase, then the phallic stage which is characterised by rivalry with the patriarch in the son's desire to possess the mother. A childish fear of being eaten up by an ogre-ish father has its roots in the oral/cannibalistic psychosexual stage.

This is played out in what Freud refers to as the 'totem', which he describes in his hypothesis of the origin of human society. The 'totem' is typically an animal symbol

which a clan identifies with. This has implications for social protocol, such as prohibitions against sexual relations with members of the same tribe and killing of the totem animal – though in the latter instance there will be exceptions, such as on occasions of ritual sacrifice. Freud interprets the totem as symbolic of the father, who may not be killed but who nevertheless is viewed with ambivalence by the child (S.E. XIII, p.202). He suggests that the prohibition against killing the totem animal is an expression of remorse following the tribe's killing of the father. This murder was in retaliation for the patriarch's dominance and especially his ownership of a harem to which the sons did not have access (S.E. XIII, 1913, p.204). Thus, male violence can be read psychoanalytically and socially. The aggression underpinning inter-generational male bonds is reflected on a social level by a sacrifice, most often through war, to expel hostility. Cruise provides a compromise formation as a military figure who escapes physical injury, one that reflects the Reaganite 'Star Wars' assertion of military might while avoiding combat.

This is evident in the military or quasi-military films *Top Gun* and *Mission: Impossible* series, which rely on Cruise's skilled use of martial technology. Successful evasion of bodily harm is complicated in his more recent films. In *Minority Report* and *Valkyrie* (Bryan Singer, 2009), Cruise's body is increasingly subject to violence – in both films his eyes are damaged, recalling the castrating act of self-mutilation by Oedipus. Perhaps this is a function of Cruise's aging persona. The compromise formation of evading paternal threat, concealed if played by a youthful man, becomes unsettling when enacted by an older one. In these films we see fuller representation of the patriarch's castrating violence as the middle-aged Cruise challenges the existing order. *Valkyrie* is also defined by its foregrounding of intense male-male bonds. In previous films such as *Jerry Maguire* or *The Last Samurai* he substitutes his buddy relationship with heterosexual union. In *Valkyrie* he only gives up his homoerotic bond at the point of death; the father is just too dominant and cannot be overcome.

More and more, Cruise's films suggest that those in control are brutal and that the everyman is condemned to suffering. *Valkyrie* is no exception. Although the film is saved from total bleakness by historical reality (we know that the Allies beat the Nazis) it intensified the pessimism of Cruise's prior work. Rather than a single corrupt father figure who can be ejected, as in *A Few Good Men*, here is a system that is entirely abhorrent, implicating Cruise's Von Stauffenberg by his role as a senior officer in the

German army. His revolt against the system and its leader – the most overt struggle against the father in Cruise’s filmography - ends in death.

*Valkyrie* continues and intensifies the homoeroticism that is characteristic of Cruise’s persona. It brings together the homoerotic bonds typical of his films and concomitant lack of heterosexual interest (exaggerated by the all male environment) with the terrifying patriarch from whom he is unable to escape. More than any of his films to date, Cruise’s body is broken by the might of the patriarchy, first in the explosion that maims him, then in his assassination by firing squad. He is figuratively castrated by the patriarch, sacrificed to expel Oedipal aggression and dispel the threat which the son poses to the father. Even at this late date, Cruise is unable to overcome the patriarch and accede to a place of power.

### **Conclusion**

One explanation for Cruise’s shifting persona may be found with his age. The compromise Cruise presents in the earlier part of his career is founded upon, in psychoanalytic terms, evading the threat of castration while appearing to challenge the father. In his earlier films, he is placed firmly in the oral/cannibalistic stage, in which his relations with his father are characterised by a homoerotic aspect. In social terms, he appears to rebel against authority, while being incorporated into the social order. For the compromise to work, Cruise must be a young man. His popular screen image is threatened by the limited longevity of the psychodynamic (and social) range of the persona. There are problems inherent in an older man taking on these challenges – the evasion is more unsettling, more transparent in its failure to confront the figural father. His physical aging appears to force a progression to the phallic stage in which Oedipal challenge, and concomitant castration anxiety, become unavoidable. The dissertation concludes by considering the implications of Cruise’s aging body, as well as broader social factors, upon the efficacy of the persona.

## Notes

1. Source for all U.S. domestic box office totals and chart rankings are taken from the U.S. Nielsen EDI Database.
2. Forbes calculated 'power' in part by salary for that year (June 2005 - June 2006) in terms of entertainment income but also how often the celebrity in question had appeared in the media. (Salary estimates by Forbes drawn from sources: Billboard, Pollstar, Adams Media Research, Nielsen SoundScan and Nielsen BookScan. Media prominence determined by 'Web mentions on Google press clips compiled by LexisNexis; TV/radio mentions by Factiva; and number of times a celebrity's face appeared on the cover of 26 major consumer magazines.') Given that Cruise experienced a high level of media coverage for his erratic behavior in 2005, one may wish to consider how far this is an accurate method of measuring celebrity 'power', and what this word means in this context. The top five were as follows: No1 Tom Cruise; No2 Rolling Stones; No3 Oprah Winfrey; No4 U2; No5 Tiger Woods 'Top 100 Celebrities: Tom Cruise' (no author, undated) at Forbes.com Available at: <http://www.forbes.com/lists/2006/53/6YG2.html> (Accessed: 16 May 2011)
3. E.J. Epstein (2005) 'Tom Cruise Inc.: The Numbers Behind his Celebrity', 27 June at *Slate.com* Available at: <http://www.slate.com/id/2121617/> (Accessed: 16 May 2011)
4. D. Rottenberg (1980) 'About that urban renaissance.... there'll be a slight delay.', in *Chicago Magaine*, May, p.154ff.
5. 'The US Unemployment Rate October 1966 to January 1990' (no author, undated) at *Misery Index US.com* Available at: <http://www.miseryindex.us/urbymonth.asp?StartYear=1966-10&EndYear=1990-01&submit1=Create+Report> (Accessed: 16 May 2011)
6. 'The Wage Gap Over Time: In Real Dollars, Women See a Continuing Gap' (no author, September 2010) at *National Committee on Pay Equity* Available at: <http://www.pay-equity.org/info-time.html> (Accessed: 16 May 2011)
7. See T. Balio, *United Artists: The Company Built by the Stars* (1976a) for an in-depth study of the company.
8. A similar poll conducted the year before, over the *War of the Worlds* opening weekend, had returned a 31% 'unfavourable' result. However, it should be noted that *War of the Worlds* opened on July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend 2005, immediately after the appearances on Oprah and the Today show.  
S. Wloszczyna (2006) 'In public's eyes, Tom's less of a Top Gun', 10 May at *USA Today.com* Available at: [http://www.usatoday.com/life/people/2006-05-09-cruise-main\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/life/people/2006-05-09-cruise-main_x.htm) (Accessed: 16 May 2011)
9. E.J. Epstein (2006) 'Paramount vs Cruise: all down to the killer cut', 24 August at *FT.com* Available at: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/d817b680-33a0-11db-981f-0000779e2340.html> (Accessed: 16 May 2011)
10. This cross-promotion of the film product also relates to the nascent video market and newly-emerging music video form. For further studies of these forms see Schatz [ibid] and A. Goodwin, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory* [1992, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press]).

## Chapter One: The Tom Cruise Persona

### Meanings of Persona

In his writings on film stardom (1979), Richard Dyer uses the term ‘star image’ to designate the discourse of the star as it is created by the films in which he or she appears, plus the extra-filmic ‘knowledge’ (true or false) circulated about the star. An early academic use of the term ‘star persona’ appears in Janet Thumin’s 1986 article ‘Miss Hepburn is Humanized: The Star Persona of Katherine Hepburn’, defining ‘persona’ in this context to mean ‘a public image which derives from the performances and utterances of the person and is constructed over time in specific ways’ (1986, p.71). Thumin sets out the meaning of star persona in terms of Dyer’s ‘star image’ and its creation by the various media texts in circulation; thus the two terms are made synonymous. Dyer’s term ‘star image’ is perhaps broader than Thumin’s term, including information and ideas about the star beyond the personage of the star him or herself, often beyond his or her lifetime. ‘Image’ in this usage can also suggest broader traits – such as youth, glamour, rebelliousness – which the star may represent.<sup>1</sup> The subsequent scholarly adoption of ‘star persona’ incorporates all of these implications. My decision to employ the word ‘persona’ rather than ‘image’ (though not exclusively) relates to the specific characteristics of Cruise as a star. ‘Persona’ as a word invokes the idea of playing a part, a ‘performativity’ that is at the nub of this study of Cruise’s star persona.

‘Persona’ is the Greek term for mask, referring to the classical masks worn in the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens, which denoted exaggerated facial expressions that would be easy for audience members to read. The term also has roots in Latin, made up from ‘per’ meaning ‘through’ and ‘sonare’ meaning ‘to sound’ – that through which one speaks. This description encapsulates the double function of the mask which acts as a projection for an audience and its juxtaposition to a private authentic core. The dual nature of the mask relates to conceptions of stardom and the impulse to know the star beyond the personality projected in public and on screen, posing questions regarding the authenticity of the mask’s bearer. Of particular interest for Cruise’s persona is that his characters typically are role-players of certain masculine identities. The motif of the mask (or otherwise disguised visages) appears in films such as *Mission: Impossible* (Brian De Palma, 1996), *Eyes Wide Shut* (Stanley Kubrick, 1999) and *Vanilla Sky* (Cameron Crowe, 2001). This also recalls sociologist Erving Goffman’s work on the



presentation of self in everyday life: he uses dramaturgical imagery to explore how people interact in day to day life, indicating how public behaviour is characterized by role play, performance and impression management (1959, p.32).

Dyer traces how the star image is constructed by the films in which the star appears (the film text holds a 'privileged' place in creation of the image); promotional materials, 'produced as part of the deliberate creation/manufacture of a specific image' (1998, p.60) and publicity, which should not appear to be deliberate (as in the case of promotion) but authentic. He suggests that such publicity is 'often taken to give a privileged access to the real person as star. It is also the place where one can read tensions between the star-as-person and his/her image, tensions which at another level become themselves crucial to the image' (p. 61). Finally, the star image is created by criticisms and commentaries, which may and often do continue beyond the star's lifetime. Dyer considers how stars figure in representation and the meaning of the characters they depict on screen. His analysis examines the often uneasy resolution of ideological contradictions that star 'work' is engaged in. The star is seen as a preserver of the conservative status quo, although Dyer maintains that the system is not closed and being 'leaky' (p.25) allows readings, and viewer pleasures, that may go against the ideological grain. Stars may reinforce values under threat or be engaged in 'concealing prevalent contradictions or problems' within hegemonic ideology (p.27). They may also compensate people for their aspirational failures, shifting attention from one value to another 'compensatory' one.

In Dyer's account, a star image may help construct character in a variety of ways. There is its 'selective use' where certain features of the star image are highlighted and others are ignored. Thus in Cruise's *Mission: Impossible II* (John Woo, 2000), his typical vulnerability is almost absent from his character Ethan Hunt. This use of the star persona may be problematic as a film cannot always guarantee that the aspects of the image highlighted are those which most appeal to the audience (1998, p. 127) (although *Mission: Impossible II* remains one of Cruise's most profitable films). Another possibility, Dyer argues, is the 'perfect fit', in which all aspects of the star image and character seem to be harmonious, as one would expect in 'vehicles' developed for the star (p. 129). We see this in Cruise's films such as *The Firm* (Sydney Pollack, 1993) and *Jerry Maguire* (Cameron Crowe, 1996), in which the film seems tailored to the persona. There is also the possibility of the 'problematic fit', in which the existing star

image seems to contradict the requirements of character. This conflict may be apparent and labelled 'miscasting' or the star may be able to resolve the contradictions present. The audience may 'deny the truth of the star's image *vis-à-vis* the character' (p.131). However, Dyer concludes that this can only happen when the audience is unaware of the star image or the film is having a joke at the expense of the persona. Alternatively, the star image dominates and the character is brought into line with it. This is rare for Cruise. Even films such as *Magnolia* (P.T. Anderson, 1999) and *Collateral* (Michael Mann, 2004), that appear to subvert the persona, utilize many of the image's key traits (while ignoring others). One example of a potentially problematic fit is *Tropic Thunder* (Ben Stiller, 2008) in which Cruise plays Les Grossman, an abusive film producer. However, this is a deliberate inversion of his persona, which is played for comic effect.

Dyer's perspective on stardom, so central to this analysis of Cruise, needs to be updated in the context of the modern media landscape. The information that contributes towards the star persona's creation has in recent years been amplified by the growth of the World Wide Web and the additional material that it presents – fan sites, YouTube postings, online journalism, blogs and reader comments. Much of this is created by members of the public and is beyond the control of the star and those employed to maintain his or her image. The development of new media has, P. David Marshall suggests, created a 'shift to a more presentational and personal mediation of culture from its more representational culture' (2006, p.641). In this changing arena, film is losing its place at the centre of the cultural commodities market and with it, its prestige. It is an uncertain time to be a Hollywood film star - Marshall notes that as film loses its hegemonic cultural position there is a concomitant diminishment of the significance of its stars. The 'immediate repercussion of this change has been an intensification of film celebrity stories and publicity' (2006, p.643) as film stars are forced to work harder to keep their image in public circulation. Describing Cruise's erratic behaviour over the course of 2005, he suggests that the star 'ensured that cameras, commentators and bloggers were regularly talking about his brazen public actions' (p.643). Thus, any kind of publicity, including scandal, has the potential to be harnessed for the furtherance of the star image and his films, yet simultaneously indicates stars' lessening importance in the culture.

The imperative to generate publicity of any kind is a high-risk strategy, as can be seen in the erosion of Cruise's popularity. He may have suffered more than most stars from

the user-driven product that the internet has enabled: doctored footage of his 2005 appearance on the Oprah Winfrey Show was uploaded to YouTube, as were clips from the Matt Lauer Show in which Cruise debated the merits of anti-depressants with his host. Footage which caught Cruise in a heated moment crying, ‘You don’t know the history of psychiatry. I do’, was widely uploaded and commented upon. This was followed in January 2008 by the online posting of an ‘International Association of Scientology’ video, created for its members and featuring Cruise, which soon made its way to YouTube. The film in question featured Cruise’s acceptance of Scientology’s ‘Freedom Medal of Valor’ and an accompanying interview espousing the views of the cult. He was frank about his views on the mental health profession: ‘psychiatrists, I’ve had it, I’ve had it with them. It’s disgusting’. The footage had been filmed in 2004 and was already familiar to journalistic and anti-Scientology circles. However, it was not until its posting on the internet that its full influence upon the public’s perception of Cruise was realized. The video had been designed for an audience sharing Cruise’s own beliefs and was revealing of both the star and the organization. Unlike other material that had damaged Cruise’s image, such as his ‘couch jumping’ episode on Oprah, the award ceremony had not been televised.

The impact of previously aired footage has the potential to alter with its recirculation on-line. In this case, the clips were circulated on YouTube and reached a much larger audience. The editing of longer programmes, such as the Matt Lauer show, into short clips exaggerated Cruise’s outlandish behaviour. In such instances, the original producers and performers have little control over their later manifestations (though footage may be removed from a site such as YouTube in cases of copyright infringement). Yet each permutation filters into the persona. The importance of the internet for the star’s persona was underlined when Cruise appeared on the David Letterman show in December 2008 and was invited to read out a list of ‘Top Ten craziest things said about Tom Cruise on the Internet’. Entry No. 4 – ‘I believe all emotional and psychological disorders can be cured with Vicks Vaporub’ was an obvious allusion to Cruise’s Scientology anti-psychiatry stance which was now common knowledge. Although this and other TV appearances have attempted to defuse the damage that internet material has done to the Cruise persona it seems likely that this new discourse has had an impact on Cruise’s popularity and by extension his box office success. Moderate US domestic box office returns for Cruise’s film *Knight and Day*

(Roy Miller) in 2010 were described by many – journalists, Hollywood insiders and internet bloggers – as a consequence of his prior eccentric behaviour.

Another possibility is that financial failure has resulted from the nature of the projects that Cruise has chosen to star in. These films may not facilitate the vulnerable persona demonstrated in films such as *Jerry Maguire* and *Magnolia* and proved so popular with audiences. This is the case in *Knight and Day*, in which Cruise's character Ray Knight is symptomatic of the 'problematic fit' that Dyer suggests the star may encounter with certain roles. Knight exhibits the mania typical of the Cruise persona without displaying the vulnerability underlying it. The resulting character is inexplicable and even disturbing. The writer David Thomson makes a similar point when he argues for Cruise to take more 'dead-beat' parts, playing the underdog and reprising the type of role that made his previous films so successful. He also suggests that such films might better reflect the depressed mood and resignation of the American public in what is predicted to be the longest recession since World War II<sup>2</sup>. Such a suggestion acknowledges the place Hollywood film has in sustaining hegemonic ideology and providing a compromise for audiences that 'resolves' ideological contradictions. What Thomson overlooks, however, is that Cruise has always played a 'small fellow ... getting dumped on' (2010, p.12). The Cruise persona, as it existed prior to 2005, offers his 'over-enthusiasm' as a manic defence against the threatening situation that the Cruise character finds himself faced with. Thomson is right to draw attention to Cruise's age – in 2010 he turned 48 – as a factor in the star's waning popularity. He draws comparisons to successful middle-aged stars of the post-war era such as Bogart who at 48 had just made *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks, 1946) and Gary Cooper who had starred in *The Fountainhead* (King Vidor, 1949). Montgomery Clift, a star to whom ready comparisons can be drawn with Cruise, was already dead. Bogart and Cooper are more adult than Cruise, who as Thomson points out, was in 2010 set to appear in the action film *Mission: Impossible IV*. Cruise plays a boyish man struggling in an adult world, a position that is becoming untenable.

### **Cruise's Persona**

Cruise's ascent to stardom coincides with the loss of confident blue-collar masculinity in the USA and the decline of American direct military power with the defeat in Vietnam. The reduction in industrial employment coincided with the increasing presence of women in the workforce and a shift to service industry jobs characterized by

'feminine' skill sets. Cruise's image presents a compromise to such social tensions, able to reconcile masculinity in the post-industrial workplace, where men no longer claim pride from physical labour. Cruise is the white-collar working man, upwardly aspiring to the middle class and indulging in conspicuous consumption. He also presents a solution to psychodynamic dilemmas. For this reason a psychodynamic methodology has been employed in this study of his persona. His persona is that of a young man on the cusp of adulthood. He acts as if masculinity has already been achieved, but this remains role-play, a trying on of parts; he is often a trainee in the world he inhabits, never at the top of his field. He sends out conflicting signals: he challenges authority but does not overthrow it. He rebels but does not lead. He mixes with men but often seems uneasy in their company. He is poised between childhood carelessness and adult responsibility. He is pretty (feminine) yet physically active (masculine), often depicted running and climbing, yet rarely aggressive. When he is aggressive, it comes out in a rage against the father, a moment of suppressed anger unleashed. Cruise's characters are often in danger of regressing to a feminine identification, and usually come across as sympathetic to, but not desiring of, women. They relate to women as mother figures, seeking their help and protection – in his films he is often rescued by a woman. At times his actions endanger women, and his films feature abused women. This repeated plotting suggests an unconscious misogyny on the part of the Cruise persona in these films. This relation to women is linked to a failure to identify with the male gaze – Cruise's look is rarely that of a desiring male gazing at an eroticized woman. Quite the opposite, it is Cruise who usually inhabits this exhibitionist space and solicits the male gaze himself. I will show in the final section of the thesis that this auto-erotic presentation lends itself to a psychodynamic interpretation. I engage with a classical Freudian and Kleinian conceptualisation of infant and child development in order to understand the figuration of Cruise in this way. As indicated above, his characters are typically positioned in relation to older, higher status women and this invokes the figure of the Kleinian 'archaic' mother. A phenomenon of the oral/cannibalistic psychosexual stage that the infant passes through, the mother (or the part-object, the breast) has the power to deny or grant the child's desire to feed and is thus experienced as all-powerful. Frustration of the child's desire to feed provokes his or her rage, who engages in destructive fantasies of devouring the breast and, in turn, of being devoured (Klein, 1957, pp.180-181). The ill treatment that many of Cruise's female counterparts suffer in his films can thus be interpreted,

psychodynamically, as a destructive consequence of the anger that the infant feels towards the mother.

Another characteristic of the oral/cannibalistic stage of male infant development is an unconscious homoerotic impulse towards the father. This would explain why Cruise's characters are preoccupied with male relationships, which are often defined by a homoerotic aspect, in films as diverse as *Top Gun*, *Cocktail*, *Interview With the Vampire* and *Jerry Maguire*. In addition, Cruise often plays a supplicant role with older men. He is frequently the victim of a scrutinising, sadistic communal male gaze, and though he appears to evade physical dispute with other men, the threat of violence or mistreatment is never far away. Psychodynamically, this can be understood as an expression of the castration anxiety that the young boy feels towards his father, in fear of retaliation for his wish to kill the patriarch and take possession of his mother. It indicates the shift from the oral/cannibalistic phase of infancy to the phallic stage and Oedipal challenge, which provokes the castrating rage of the father. This physical threat becomes more overt as he ages, indicating a change to his aging persona, with films such as *Minority Report*, *Mission: Impossible III* (J.J. Abrams, 2006) and *Valkyrie* depicting Cruise's body as increasingly injured. He typically attempts to talk his way out of conflict, and failing that, he tries to flee; he evades conflict with the father figure. His aggression emerges under stress as a loss of control and undirected violence. Cruise does not wish to rebel against the system, but to be accepted into it. He never becomes his own lawmaker but accepts in the end conventional authority, albeit now reformed, as seen in *Minority Report*. In Cruise's films the 'bad' father is eventually defeated and the woman is rescued. However, this is never through his bravery or combat. He wins by luck, cunning, female assistance, running away and acrobatic exhibitionism. In psychodynamic terms, it forms a 'compromise formation' in which Cruise recedes from Oedipal threat and regresses to an earlier psychosexual phase – that of the oral/cannibalistic stage.

### **The Early Persona of Tom Cruise**

Like many stars' biographies, Cruise's own story presents itself as an example of the 'American dream' success story. The narrative highlights his childhood poverty and his mother's struggle to raise a family alone (for a fuller biography see Appendix 1). It also points to an estranged relationship with his father. Cruise's discovery of acting is presented in similar mythological terms: the night before a high school wrestling match,

desperate to shed a couple of pounds to make his weight category, he started racing up and down his stairs. Unfortunately, he tripped and sprained his ankle. No longer able to perform in school sports at a competitive level due to the injury, he found acting to be a worthy substitute. While this story follows a long line of American male star biographies intimating the accidental discovery of acting as a pursuit,<sup>3</sup> the combination of two alternate gendered impulses - the possibly effeminate pursuit of acting against the masculine, physically dominating sport of wrestling - is particularly prescient for Cruise's star persona.

This juxtaposition of masculine and feminine traits is evident in Cruise's very first role, at the age of 19, in Franco Zeffirelli's *Endless Love* (1981). A scene opens with his character Billy playing football. Abandoning the game he joins his friends at the side of the pitch where he peels off his vest and lies back in the grass. He is athletic, physically on display and boastful with his peers, who remain suspicious of him – all elements that are developed across his career. This empty bravado is also present in his next film, *TAPS* (Harold Becker, 1981). It was the first film in which Cruise had a significant role. *TAPS* exploited the on-screen intensity that, according to one East Coast producer early in his career, made Cruise unsuitable for television (Johnstone, 2006, p. 72). He plays the trigger-happy cadet David Shawn who, along with his fellow students, takes over his military school to prevent its imminent closure. The film provides, while critiquing, a presentation of young men playing at being soldiers; it is a game that Shawn takes more seriously than the others. Under siege by the local National Guard, his peers are on the point of surrender. Refusing to admit defeat, he starts spraying the enemy with bullets, grinning like a maniac, moments before he is killed in a hail of bullets. At this moment, P. David Marshall suggests, 'the smile and the grin indicate the reckless insanity of the personality' (1997, p.96); but this 'killer smile' (Dargis, 2000, p.20) ultimately becomes Cruise's trademark.

Less often a sign of insanity, Cruise's smile has become a symbol of his easy accomplishment, achievement without application. 'His famous smile expresses the Hollywood masculine myth in one dazzling grin: easy, spontaneous, irresistibly natural' (Simpson, 1994, p.251). The smile is remarked on frequently in the media, particularly in comparison with other established stars: 'He has the killer smile that Nicolson and Redford have' claims casting director Ellen Chenoweth (quoted by Scheer, 1990, p.108). Yet each of these stars' smiles connotes quite different qualities: Redford's

suggests charismatic warmth from an aging sex symbol; Nicolson's indicates a streak of instability, if not downright devilishness. Cruise's grin is complex, concealing as much as it may be supposed to reveal. It defines his boyish cockiness and is part of a manic defence concealing the vulnerability beneath its surface. The grin is sent up in Cruise's cameo appearance as Austin Powers in the 'film within the film' of *Austin Powers in Goldmember* (Jay Roach, 2002). In addition to the velvet suit, frilly shirt and thick glasses of Powers, he wears a set of dentures displaying rotten teeth – a reference to the stereotyped American perception of British dental hygiene – in opposition to Cruise's perfect white smile.

Yet in the early stages of Cruise's career, the grin was less important than his youthful physicality. P. David Marshall recognises this latter attribute in Cruise's progression to star status. In *Celebrity and Power* (1997), Marshall uses the definitions, first employed by Richard deCordova to chart the historical development of the star system, of physical performer (a 'type'), through to picture personality (a recognizable figure) and then to star, to map Cruise's career. Marshall argues that Cruise's 'emergence as a film actor and star is first connected to the physicality of his performance' (1997, p.102) grounded in his youth. This is an aspect developed by his association with sports where Cruise's athletic (and partially clad) physique is on display for the characters and spectators of the film. For Marshall, Cruise's easy success is an important part of his persona, 'most often manifested around either sports/athleticism or the managing of sophisticated technology' (1997, p.102). Depictions of sporting endeavours are prominent in his films, including those which are not principally about the activity, such as *Endless Love* (soccer), *All the Right Moves* [Michael Chapman, 1983] (American football), *Top Gun* [Tony Scott, 1986] (volleyball), *Cocktail* [Roger Donaldson, 1988] (basketball), *A Few Good Men* [Rob Reiner, 1992] (baseball) and *The Firm* [Sydney Pollack, 1993] (basketball). There are also the 'high contact' combative sports of *Far and Away* [Ron Howard, 1992] (boxing) and *Born on the Fourth of July* [(Oliver Stone, 1990] (wrestling) which are performed for an audience. However, not all of Cruise's early films exploited this nascent persona trait of athleticism and bodily energy. *Losin' It* (Curtis Hanson, 1983) barely acknowledged Cruise's previous role in *TAPS*. A 1960s period teen road trip film, Cruise plays one of four teenage boys travelling to Tijuana with the goal of losing their virginity. The film comes at the end of a cycle of male teen sex comedies such as *National Lampoon's Animal House* (John Landis, 1978) and *Porky's* (Bob Clark, 1982), which follow the sexual exploits of their male protagonists



and are characterized by a high level of ‘gross out’ comedy. In *Losin’ It* Cruise portrays a sensitive teenager – wholly lacking the bravado of *TAPS*’ Shawn - who fulfills his friends’ joint mission by sleeping with older woman Shelley Long. This is not atypical for the genre; as Mandy Merck notes, ‘Male sexual initiation by a maternally inflected older girl or woman is a venerable feature of teen comedies’ (2007a, p.263), citing *Porky’s* and the much later *American Pie* (Paul and Chris Weitz, 1999) as two examples. The relationship also anticipates subsequent romantic pairings of Cruise with a maternal figure that are so characteristic of his films and can be understood within a Kleinian framework as indicative of regression to the oral/cannibalistic psychosexual stage.

Marshall’s statement that Cruise’s early films are on the whole ‘intensely focused on youth and, more or less, on rebellion’ (1997, p.98) recurs in the two films that followed *Losin’ It*. *All the Right Moves* features Cruise as teenager Stefen, who wants to break away from his familial tradition of working in the local steel works, and earn a college football scholarship. The narrative centres round a fall-out with his football coach and how this threatens his chances of college. Although the blue-collar Pennsylvania background does not fit the later Cruise image, nevertheless, the aspirations of the young Stefen and the utilization of his skills of performance to succeed anticipate the persona. So does the conflict with the football coach, who in his domineering punishment of Stefen anticipates the later father figures who torment Cruise. In his next film, *The Outsiders* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1983), Cruise was one of a number of young actors, along with Patrick Swayze, Rob Lowe, Emilio Estevez, Ralph Macchio and Matt Dillon, who starred in an adaptation of S.E. Hinton’s 1960s cult novel. He plays one member of the working class ‘greasers’ gang’ who are rivals of the better off ‘socials’. Two of the greasers, Ponyboy (C. Thomas Howell) and Johnny (Ralph Macchio) are attacked by the ‘socs’ for showing an interest in two well-off girls; Johnny ends up killing one of their gang to save Ponyboy being drowned by them. Both go on the run from the police before returning to claim the killing as an act of self-defence - and take part in one final ‘rumble’ between the rival gangs. Cruise’s role as Steve Randle is marginal, yet the film makes use of the bulked up body previously displayed in *TAPS*, with the muscular actor sporting a sleeveless denim jacket in the film’s publicity. Although the film cast Cruise as a poor boy from the wrong side of town, which is at odds with the later white collar progression of his persona, it nevertheless exhibits familiar elements of his later films: masculine brutalization (though taken out

against Ponyboy rather than him), victimisation and power displays. Acting in Coppola's film was an early indication of his drive to work with notable directors which continues to punctuate his career – to date, he has worked with Martin Scorsese, Ridley and Tony Scott, Steven Spielberg, Neil Jordan, Oliver Stone, Michael Mann and Stanley Kubrick. *The Outsiders*, though less financially successful than *TAPS*, nevertheless brought Cruise to the attention of Warner Brothers, who would later give him the role of teenager Joel Goodson in *Risky Business*. It was not an obvious casting choice. After playing David Shawn in *TAPS*, Cruise was initially offered only 'killer-murderer parts' in horror films (Johnstone, 2006, p.80). When his name was put forward for the protagonist of *Risky Business*, writer/director Paul Brickman was quick to dismiss him: 'This guy is a killer – let him do *Amityville III*' (p.88). Cruise ultimately won the role in a film that took 10<sup>th</sup> place at the American box office in 1983. Marshall argues that in *Risky Business* Cruise moved from being a 'physical type' – a beautiful torso and manic grin – to a 'picture personality', with a recognisable presence and personality beyond his film parts. It cemented key aspects of the persona, making him much more than the grinning, maniacal boy of *TAPS*.

Following the opening credits of *Risky Business*, the film's first image shows the reflection of an eye upon a dark surface. Zooming out reveals more of the surface, finally apparent as the lens of a pair of sunglasses, then Cruise's boyish, fleshy face, a cigarette hanging from his lip. He is childish looking but the sunglasses indicate self-conscious image promotion and the cigarette suggests an adult posturing. It is representative of the bravado demonstrated in his early roles, a defence against the vulnerability he so wishes to hide. It also establishes sunglasses as a recurring prop used by Cruise and linked to his self-presentation. The Ray-Bans Cruise wears in *Risky Business* reappear in a number of his films, identifying his persona with the brand, such as the use of the Wayfarer model in *Risky Business* and the Aviator model in *Top Gun*. The Wayfarer has been associated with Hollywood since the model's inception in 1952. Popularised by figures such as Audrey Hepburn, Marilyn Monroe, James Dean and Roy Orbison, it had fallen out of fashion by the 1980s. In 1982 a sponsorship deal for \$500,000 between Ray-Ban and Unique Product Placement at Burbank, California guaranteed Ray-Bans a presence in U.S. television and films.<sup>4</sup> Before the deal, annual Wayfarer sales were estimated at 18,000; after Cruise's use of them in *Risky Business* (including an image of him wearing them on the film's publicity poster), sales shot up to 360,000. (Later Don Johnson in *Miami Vice* and Bruce Willis in *Moonlighting* would

further stimulate sales to over 800,000.) Most famous of all is Cruise's association with Ray-Ban's Aviator model in *Top Gun*, whose annual sales were estimated to have risen by 40% in response to the film.<sup>5</sup> The referential use of the sunglasses is reiterated in *Rain Man* and *Jerry Maguire*, the latter invoking 'the cool image of Tom Cruise (Ray-Bans now hiding a black eye)' (Bordwell, 2006, p.63). The Ray-Bans identify Cruise's persona with the conspicuous consumption of the young American man, spending money on the accoutrements of appearance. This type of consumption may indicate more consumer choice but less political influence, especially for the working classes of America. According to Mark Simpson 'Tom Cruise was the perfect cinematic embodiment of the new male narcissism that emerged in the mid-80's' (1994, p.230). Cruise likes to look good, spend money on his appearance, and is aspirational in outlook. This narcissism is also symptomatic of powerlessness. His characters' lack of influence stands in contrast to their controlled image projection. Sunglasses are also used as a narcissistic prop to conceal undesirable emotion or to project bravado – both utilised in Cruise's performances. (As well as a signifier of vanity, sunglasses are a marker of stardom, a conspicuous attempt to go incognito. Cruise's publicity, even now, often shows him posing in shades - though it is not clear that he has, or ever had, an official sponsorship deal with the Ray-Ban brand.)

Such narcissism is also writ over the eroticized body of the young Cruise, beginning with his cameo as Billy in *Endless Love* and reaching its peak as Maverick in *Top Gun* lunging for a volley ball. His is an 'All-American brand of boyish bodily sexiness, a cinnamon flavoured studliness – a pure and wholesome indulgence' (Simpson, 1994, p.230). Cruise spends these early films in a state of partial undress, more or less dictated by the narrative. *TAPS* depicts Shawn lifting weights, muscles bulging, while other cadets rest in their rooms. *All the Right Moves* (Michael Chapman, 1983) opens with Cruise as the sleeping Stefen, who staggers out of bed wearing black boxers (and a gold crucifix), the puppy fat of *Risky Business* now shed to reveal a muscled torso. Images of his father and brother coming home from the steel works are juxtaposed with Stefen doing press-ups on his bedroom floor – their exploited corporeality contrasted with his exhibitionist masculinity. A later locker room scene reveals Stefen and a number of semi-clad football players grinding their hips alongside their team mates. It is a precursor of the locker-room scenes from *Top Gun* and is cited by Cuba Golding Jr's locker room nakedness in *Jerry Maguire*.

The mise-en-scène of the stage is apparent as early as *Risky Business*. The dance sequence in this film presents an exhibitionist Cruise enjoying himself in front of an imaginary crowd. Finding himself home alone for the first time, Joel (Tom Cruise) turns on his father's stereo system. The arched doorway of the suburban living room frames the hall and stairs: he slides into view, wearing only a shirt, socks and white boxer shorts. He proceeds to dance and grind his body against a poker grabbed from the fire place, delivering air guitar to the resonant twangs of the sound track – and finishes the scene by launching himself on the couch, kicking his legs in the air, flashing his white boxers. This autoerotic exhibitionism is more muted in Cruise's next project, Ridley Scott's fairytale fantasy *Legend* (1986), in which he plays Jack. The character's childish love of kinetic rather than purposeful activity is an element that Cruise's star persona has retained. A malevolent father figure is present in the form of Tim Curry's Lord of Darkness, who has designs of reigning over a world cloaked in perpetual night. The film's fairytale qualities exaggerate the absolute power of this terrifying patriarch. As both Jack and the Princess Lily (Mia Sara) are very young, their romance is portrayed as chaste, driving the quest rather than providing an erotic subplot. Challenged to recover her ring from a pool with the promise that she will grant her hand in marriage if he succeeds, he returns to the surface of the water to discover that the Lord of Darkness has kidnapped her. Thus the challenge of the fairytale quest is set with little emphasis on a physical relationship between the pair. This fits the pattern of Cruise's nascent persona: little overt romantic interest in the heroine and a compelling fear of the father.

### ***Top Gun and Stardom***

Less than a month after *Legend* was released on American screens came the film that helped determine Cruise as a star. Produced by Don Simpson and Jerry Bruckheimer, *Top Gun* (Tony Scott, 1986) opened on 16<sup>th</sup> May to become the week's highest grossing film in the U.S., 'a number one hit movie all about being number one.' (Shone, 2004, p.180)<sup>6</sup> It was the top domestic grossing film of 1986. Cruise's new ability to generate audiences saw his star worth soar. *Top Gun* is still the film that audiences most associate with Cruise. As Mark Simpson suggests, even the name Tom Cruise and *Top Gun* have graphical and aural similarities (1994, p.230). The homoerotic male display, which characterises the film, is responsible for defining the persona. Ray-Bans, now in the Aviator style, are worn by Cruise riding a motorbike: the ultimate in consumer desirability. His character embodies the persona's contradictions: a macho Navy pilot

flying high-tech fighter planes, yet objectified in a manner typical of Hollywood's representation of women. He projects 'no-nonsense masculine values' argues Simpson, (1994, p.230) yet his physical attributes indicate a contradictory image: 'his round face, baby blue eyes and surprisingly high-pitched voice send out an ambiguous undertow; an undertow which is the real appeal of his screen presence, which makes him both desirable and desiring' (p.230). Such boyish attributes are exaggerated by 5ft 6in Cruise being cast against 6-ft plus co-stars, who tower over him. His love interest Charlie, possessing a gender-ambiguous name, is older, more senior, better educated (she holds a PhD), and taller than Maverick, adding to her maternal figuring. As Cruise's career continued, his stature became increasingly commented upon, alluded to by the popular press to denigrate him. Although many film stars past and present have been of a similar height (from Alan Ladd through Paul Newman, Robert Redford and Mel Gibson) few have been targeted in the same manner as Cruise. His short stature has been exploited to project his boyish persona – as well as *Top Gun*, films such as *The Firm* and *Eyes Wide Shut* exaggerate the actor's shortness – perhaps the reason it is so commonly noted.

The boyishness connoted by Cruise's stature is shored up by the immature behaviour of Maverick and his fellow officers in *Top Gun*. The airmen show off for one another, and 'being the best' is all about impressing one's peers. This concern with appearances is consistent with male adolescents unable to effect real change; although the pilots fly military planes, they attend a training school and are not engaged in real life combat. Maverick is only accepted by his former supervisor at the close of the film when he has defeated a real enemy threat (he blows up a Russian 'Mig'), while on assignment. He is now engaged in man's work, not as a trainee. Yet this acceptance by the father does not negate the fact that Cruise has spent the course of the film playing at being a naval aviator, donning the part along with the uniform. Dress is important for Cruise – whether a uniform of the armed forces, a business suit or sportswear – indicating how he puts on and takes off his roles. It indicates childishness, with his uniforms often appearing too neat to be used as work wear. Such clothing appears as pretend masculine dress: it is Tom Cruise dressing up as a soldier, an aviator, a racing driver, a samurai, in order to achieve a feminine aim - to be looked at. The number of locker room scenes in which these pilots parade around in their underwear or white towels while bandying expletives of 'my dick' and 'my ass' (Simpson, 1994, p.233), suggest a greater preoccupation with their beautiful bodies than with their professional skills. *Top*

*Gun*'s overt homoeroticism has been referenced a number of times in the popular media: Will Young's music video for the song 'Switch It On' parodies many scenes from the film, including its volleyball sequence. The 1994 film *Sleep With Me* (Rory Kelly) features a cameo by Quentin Tarantino describing *Top Gun* thus: 'It is a story about a man's struggle with his own homosexuality. It is! That is what *Top Gun* is about, man.' Although co-star Val Kilmer has subsequently been cast in reference to the 'camp' qualities of *Top Gun* – he was private eye 'Gay Perry' in *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (Shane Black, 2005) – it is Cruise's star image that has borne the film's homoerotic charge.

Two elements contribute to this state of affairs: the first is his positioning in the mise-en-scène, which emphasises his objectification as youthful, beautiful and erotic. The second is the marginal place assigned to the female lead in relation to Cruise. There appears to be little onscreen 'chemistry' - visible attraction, interest or excitement - observable between them. This has been a trend in his career (as has the relative lack of his female co-stars' subsequent career progression – Renee Zellweger and Kidman being the only two real exceptions). Cruise's films are rarely centred on heterosexual romance: *Top Gun*'s Kelly McGillis plays the role of a 'beard' (a heterosexual prop to dispel possible accusations of homosexuality on the part of Maverick); *Cocktail*'s Elisabeth Shue (and Gina Gershon) are distractions to the tension between Doug Coughlin (Bryan Brown) and Brian Flanagan (Tom Cruise). Renee Zellweger's Dorothy is less appealing than the charismatic Cuba Gooding Jr's Rod Tidwell, who strikes up a close bond with Jerry Maguire. As Gaylyn Studlar argues, in many of Cruise's films the 'intensity of commitment and feeling is displaced from the heterosexual to the homosocial to the homoerotic' (2001, p.177). Even when he stars with his wife Nicole Kidman in *Days of Thunder* (Tony Scott, 1990) and *Far and Away*, as well as the later *Eyes Wide Shut*, their romantic pairing is less charged than his close male relationships.

The sexual transgression quality of Cruise's persona manifests itself beyond the films in which he stars. Studlar asserts that this 'can be discerned in the slippage between the construction of his onscreen desirability as both a homoerotic and heteroerotic sign and offscreen fan inscriptions of him as the object of gay desire coupled with media innuendoes to the effect that he is gay.' (2001, p.174) Such is the strength of these rumours that popular writer David Ehrenstein dedicated an entire chapter of his book *Open Secret: Gay Hollywood 1928 - 1998* to Cruise. Ehrenstein argues that the actual

fact of Cruise's sexuality is less interesting than his homosexual image and offers no speculation as to Cruise's real life sexual preferences. He does, however, note Cruise's tendency to sue publications that have intimated that he is gay in real life (Ehrenstein, 1998, p.328). When Cruise divorced his second wife Nicole Kidman in 2002 various publications speculated that his sexuality had caused the split. Cruise was quick to file a \$1M lawsuit against one of these claims. Chad Slater, formerly an actor in pornographic films, denied that he had ever told the French magazine *Acustar* about an alleged relationship with Cruise, said to have caused his marital split. Slater claimed that he had not made any such statement, or indeed even knew Cruise. Ultimately *Acustar* published a retraction. Three years later came the affair dubbed 'Closetgate'. A now infamous episode of *Southpark* was broadcast in which a character called Tom Cruise refuses to emerge from a clothes closet. A repeat due to air in March 2006 was hastily pulled, leading to speculation that Cruise's lawyers had threatened Paramount (which owns the Comedy Central network that *Southpark* broadcasts on) with the star's refusal to take part in *Mission: Impossible III* promotions if the company did not intervene.<sup>7</sup> In spite of his subsequent marriage to Katie Holmes and the birth of his first biological child (he adopted two children with Nicole Kidman), Cruise's rumoured homosexuality continues to inflect his star persona.

### **Tom Cruise as Actor**

*Top Gun*, central to the crystallisation of Cruise's persona and his launch as a film star, was followed the same year by *The Color of Money* (Martin Scorsese, 1986). While continuing Cruise's drive to work with talented film-makers, it also indicated his wish to develop his acting expertise, a point discussed by Marshall (1997, p.100). In addition to working with director Martin Scorsese, Cruise played opposite veteran star Paul Newman. The casting of Newman is a reminder of his 1961 role in *The Hustler* (Robert Rossen) as an over-confident young pool player, not unlike Cruise's character Vince, if more anguished and brutalised in a darker story. By this time, a pattern in Cruise's acting choices had developed: an apparent split between roles that were likely to be financially successful and those that allowed him to work with a major director (and often a respected senior star, such as Newman). Sometimes these overlapped: prestige films such as *The Color of Money* and *Rain Man* did well at the American box office. In such films Cruise's star image appears to take second place to the artistic demands of the directors, a privileging of his technical performance over a straight forward reiteration of his persona. Cruise's desire to work with notable directors is a tacit

acknowledgement that he seeks recognition for his acting ability, invoking tension between 'impersonation' and 'personification' described by Barry King (1991, p.168). This split in the end is artificial, as certain directors with an understanding of the persona have exploited it for their own artistic ends. Thus Spielberg's use of the persona in *Minority Report* and Kubrick's in *Eyes Wide Shut* do not play against the existing image but develop it in particular ways for their respective projects.

Nevertheless, there remains an opposition in the typical star's career between his status as star and as artist. P. David Marshall investigates this tension using deCordova's history of the Hollywood star system to delineate the development of Tom Cruise's career. DeCordova argues that the field of knowledge pertaining to the early 'picture personality' is limited to the inter-textuality of their filmography and prior acting experience. The evolution to the category of star occurs at the point where interest is generated in the actor's life off-screen and the apparent relationship between it and their screen roles. Marshall traces this development from Cruise's early performances as portrayals of 'youth', to the development of a recognisable picture personality in *Risky Business*. It is *Top Gun* that secures his status as star. Discussing the development of Cruise's acting skills, Marshall invokes deCordova's historical paradigm to compare the social transgressions of the film stars of the 1920's – such as their decadent lifestyles – to the professional transgressions of his early screen personality in choosing roles against type. According to Marshall, this has enabled Cruise to project a subjectivity independent of his screen roles, which is crucial in establishing his stardom as a 'distinct cultural commodity that is transferable to other domains' (1997, p.110). Marshall cites the first instance of this transgression taking place in *The Color of Money*. Although Cruise's character exhibits elements of narcissism and exhibitionism in keeping with his persona, it is given new depth by the respective contributions of Scorsese and Newman.

It is not clear that Cruise's prestige films exploit his persona any less than films designed as star vehicles: *Rain Man* makes apt use of Cruise's screen image, in spite of its 'quality' credentials. Yet Marshall notes that in *Rain Man* the presence of Hoffman, well known for his method acting, enabled Cruise to shift his image to that of a serious actor, who can attract distinguished actors and directors such as Barry Levinson to a project (1997, p.112). In short, 'Cruise now becomes a moniker that has a certain guarantee of quality, a brand-name status that not only includes his promise of alluring



filmic masculinity, but is also symbolic of serious and quality films' (1997, p.112). *Rain Man* became a surprise hit – it was the number one American film of the year (and won Hoffman his second Academy Award). However much Cruise may be emphasising his skill as an actor, his persona resonates powerfully in his role as Charlie Babbitt and the character's relation to his late father, a punishing figure who continues to assert his control beyond the grave. Charlie is a luxury car salesman, dishonest, manipulative and superficial. His concern with appearances – literally demonstrated in the first shot of him, in which his face appears reflected in the shiny hood of a Ferrari - is ultimately a concern to appear masculine. His narcissistic posturing is shored up by his sunglasses, recalling their use as a stylish prop in earlier roles. In early scenes they flag his privileging of style over substance, a typical response for a man who earns his living selling sports cars. However, by the film's end he uses the sunglasses to hide his pain as he bids his autistic brother Raymond (Dustin Hoffman) goodbye. Raymond, who feels no emotion at their separation, is called back by a panicked Charlie to say goodbye. As Raymond finally shuffles off, Charlie's face reveals his distress at the separation. A moment later, the Ray-Ban Wayfarers are donned as he steps back into a wide shot, looking on as the train pulls out of the station. The gesture signals a closing down of the emotional vulnerability and desire for a relationship with the father that Charlie's reunion with his older brother Raymond has exposed. Unlike Cruise's previous films, in which the star overcomes the destructive father, *Rain Man* cannot reassure so easily, suggesting that the father's negative legacy is far-reaching. (Such reassurance is even less tenable in Cruise's later films which are often darker in tone and outcome, such as *Vanilla Sky*, *Eyes Wide Shut* and *Valkyrie*.)

Cruise's next film continued the star's efforts at serious acting. In *Born on the Fourth of July* he plays Ron Kovic, a real life paraplegic Vietnam War veteran. The film casts the star best known at the time for his fighter pilot character 'Maverick' in an anti-war epic from the politically minded director Oliver Stone. Paula Wagner, later the star's producing partner, was then the agent of both Cruise and Stone and suggested the 'packaging' of the two artists. The film was a gamble for Cruise as the script had languished unmade for several years. Twelve years earlier, Al Pacino had expressed interest but his subsequent cancellation led to the collapse of the project, eventually deemed unmakeable (Scheer, 1990, p52). *Born on the Fourth of July* is an important film in regard to Cruise's attempts to position himself as an actor of quality. It won him the first of three Academy Award nominations ( *Magnolia* and *Collateral* are the other

two), and his performance and tales of his 'method' style preparation – perhaps inspired by his previous collaboration with Dustin Hoffman on *Rain Man* – indicated his committed attitude towards the project.

*Born on the Fourth of July* opens with episodes from the life of teenager Ron Kovic prior to his inscription into the marines. Stone exploits Cruise's military persona to subvert the values of *Top Gun*. The early scenes focus on Kovic's experiences as a high school wrestler, tying into Cruise's earlier high school football film *All the Right Moves* as well as the star's own wrestling experience. Stone continues the trend of Cruise's previous films by highlighting the star's vulnerability (once again, the actor's posterior is on display, this time in proximity to his wrestling opponent's crotch) and appealing physique. The threat of public defeat is exquisitely humiliating, mainly because of his mother's presence in the audience. Although his friends, father and sweetheart are present, it is the judgment of the mother that the young Kovic fears most. When he is flipped over on his back by his opponent to lose the point and the match, he is shown paralysed, already amputated by the framing of the shot, crying in shame. At this moment he has failed at being a man – his later loss of legs and penis represent what has figuratively already been lost. The following scene depicts a recruitment drive by the Marines at his high school, who declare that they only take 'the best', and invokes *Top Gun*. Kovic's enlistment appears to be a defence against the shame provoked by his earlier inadequate display of masculinity. With their various presentations of the Cruise characters' homoerotic exhibitionism (*Top Gun*) and mother fixation (*Born on the Fourth of July*), both films centre on crises of masculinity.

### **Extensions of the Persona**

Cruise's subsequent decision to star in the auto racing film, *Days of Thunder* (Tony Scott, 1990), indicated a return to popular entertainment. Robert Towne wrote the script, although the story has a joint Towne - Cruise credit, an early indication of Cruise's behind the camera ambitions. Towne went on to write *The Firm*, *Mission: Impossible* and *Mission: Impossible II*, creating continuities in the presentation of Cruise's persona: the three films share an exploration of the malevolent father figure so key to Cruise's image. There are also recurring visual metaphors: *Days of Thunder* includes sequences involving blindness, which suggest Cruise's Oedipal violence. The film, made by the producers, director and star of *Top Gun*, did however, fail to repeat the earlier film's success, gaining only 21<sup>st</sup> place at the American box office that year.

For *Days of Thunder*, Cruise had requested a young Australian actress, Nicole Kidman, best known for the film *Dead Calm* (Phillip Noyce, 1989), to be cast as love interest Dr Claire Lewicki to his character Cole Trickle. The star's early involvement in the casting of his leading ladies anticipated the rights that he has subsequently claimed over the course of his career. Shortly after the end of filming, he asked his then wife Mimi Rogers for a divorce. Kidman and Cruise were married in January 1990. Kidman's own star persona was little developed in her early Hollywood roles. But her later work with directors such as Jane Campion and Gus Van Sant garnered praise for her acting. When paired with Cruise onscreen, her performance has been more applauded than his (most famously for *Eyes Wide Shut*). The popular press worked hard to stress the oppositions of the two actors: visually their brunette/redhead, tanned/pale, muscular/slim polarities were emphasised in photo shoots, including a cover for *Time* magazine (July 5 1999).<sup>8</sup> The Anglicised sophistication, attributed to Australians in the US, was contrasted with his American style and candid nature. Although Kidman is eight years younger than Cruise, she was often depicted as more adult than him. Her height also implied seniority – her onscreen relation towards him at times is suggestive of a nurturing mother, reiterated in so many of his films.

The couple's roles in their first two films together supported these tendencies: in *Days of Thunder* she plays his personal physician, professionally responsible for his physical care, demonstrating maternal impulses and concern. In *Far and Away* she plays an aristocrat, Shannon Christie, and he a peasant, Joseph Donnelly. This film is congruent in its depiction of familiar Cruise persona traits: a difficult, at times brutal, relationship with an older male (the overseer of his father's farm, then later his boxing agent); the innocent aspirations of the young man (he wants to make his fortune in America); his positioning as physical spectacle; the judgment of the female figure. Shannon goes so far as to scrutinise Joseph's penis as he lies in bed, recovering from a pitchfork injury she has caused. She also rescues him from a duel, demonstrating a protective tendency that fits Cruise's relationships with women. *Far and Away*, envisaged as a romantic epic in the manner of David Lean's *Ryan's Daughter* (1970), remains one of Cruise's least financially successful films. This may be in part because of a deviation from vital persona traits. He plays a boxer, incongruous with his image - though often threatened he is typically skilled at evading physical conflict. Although Cruise's body is on display here, it is challenged by the physical brutality of the boxing ring. With the exception of *Born on the Fourth of July*, at this stage in his career Cruise tends to escape

physical threat. This only begins to shift as Cruise ages, around the time of *Vanilla Sky* (Cameron Crowe, 2001).

Cruise's evasion of physical threat is matched by his verbal acuity. His high voice, patter and fast delivery appear feminine. This is especially true in comparison with the taciturn heroes of Stallone, Schwarzenegger, or Matt Damon's Jason Bourne, who align minimal speech with traditional masculinity. Cruise's verbal facility is tied to the manipulation of the listener, but it is also itself a spectacle. This is why Cruise plays so many salesmen: in *Cocktail*, in addition to mixing drinks for a living, he performs poetry in two of the bars in which he works: the first in the nightclub where Doug and he work shifts, in a flamboyant sales pitch; the second is in the bar he owns, a love poem to his pregnant wife. In *Rain Man* he sells expensive sports cars; in *A Few Good Men* he is an attorney defending two young marines accused of murder; in *The Firm* he is a young lawyer drawn into the illegal dealings of his Tennessee firm; in *Jerry Maguire* he is a sports agent; in *Magnolia*, perhaps the most compelling talking spectacle of all, he plays a motivational coach. In most performances, his excessive talk is evidence of soul sickness, and he must learn to direct his verbal talents into effecting change in the world – the mark of a 'real man'. *The Last Samurai* (Edward Zwick, 2003), performs a reversal by taking Cruise's drunken ex-soldier Nathan Algren, a salesman of rifles used to overpower Native Americans, and transforming him into a meditative samurai. Garrulousness is an indication of vanity. The figure of the salesman encapsulates facets of role play, a split between one's true and projected identities. Ironically it enables Cruise to perform many roles while always being 'himself' – it is Tom Cruise playing a lawyer, or a car salesman, or a samurai. Such roles reiterate the themes of self-presentation and shifting identity, feeding back into Cruise's persona.

The theme of role play is accentuated by Cruise's frequent status as a trainee: in *TAPS* he plays a trainee soldier; in *Risky Business* he plays a trainee entrepreneur; in *All the Right Moves* he plays a trainee football player. In *Top Gun* he plays a trainee fighter pilot; in *The Color of Money* he is a trainee pool shark. In *Cocktail* he plays a trainee cocktail waiter; in *A Few Good Men* he plays a newly trained lawyer. Even as late into his career as *The Last Samurai*, he plays a 'trainee' samurai. For those films that he appears more established in his role (often hinging on professional status) he is depicted at a moment of crisis, when he does not seem to be playing the part very well.

Examples include *Rain Man*, when his business starts to fall apart in his absence; *Jerry Maguire*, in which he has to start again as a sports agent when he is made redundant by his firm; *Minority Report*, when as the head detective of a police unit he is accused of murder and has to go on the run. His roles are defined by a struggle to fulfill a particular identity. This is apparent in *The Firm* in which Cruise plays Mitch McDeere, a new law graduate who is enticed into working for a Southern law firm. McDeere's fragile identity as a middle class professional is accompanied by anxiety over his working class origins. The law firm appears to be his passage to an affluent lifestyle previously denied to him. Only once he has joined the organisation does he discover its links to the mafia and the deaths of colleagues who have attempted to quit. The film was notable for being the first Paramount film that Cruise had starred in – he and then agent Paula Wagner would later sign a contract to produce films for the studio. As indicated above, *The Firm* also reiterates the idea of Cruise being a 'trainee' – when he first joins the law firm he cannot practice law until he has studied for the bar exam. In his interactions with mentor Avery (Gene Hackman), he conducts a rather benign filial relationship with the older man (though he must ultimately betray him to escape the firm). The terrifying patriarch, typical of his films, is most apparent in the firm itself and its representatives.

### **Transgressing the Persona**

Cruise's next project was *Interview with the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles* (Neil Jordan, 1994). Given Cruise's homoerotic star persona, it is perhaps surprising that his casting as the vampire Lestat in the adaptation of Anne Rice's novel was met with such opposition by fans of the book and the author herself. Rice's original text privileged erotic readings of the male-to-male oral penetration and exchanges of blood, in sympathy with Cruise's persona and its sexual elements. Other contributors to the project had similar associations: co-star Brad Pitt, hugely popular as a sex symbol, was still remembered for disrobing in *Thelma and Louise* (1991) and contributed to the film's preoccupation with masculine beauty. Director Neil Jordan's previous film *The Crying Game* (1992) was an exploration of a transgressive relationship between a self-identified straight man and transvestite. Cruise's ambiguous onscreen sexuality might have thought to have complimented the project, yet Rice pronounced herself 'stunned by the casting of Cruise, who is no more my Vampire Lestat than Edward G. Robinson is Rhatt Butler' (Elaine Dutka, *The Los Angeles Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 1993).<sup>9</sup> Shortly before the film's theatrical release that November when it reached number 11 in the

American domestic charts, Rice took out a two page advert in *Daily Variety* proclaiming her volte face:

From the moment he appeared Tom was Lestat for me. He has the immense physical and moral presence; he was defiant and yet never without conscience; he was beautiful beyond description yet compelled to do cruel things. The sheer beauty of Tom was dazzling, but the polish of his acting, his flawless plunge into the Lestat persona, his ability to speak rather boldly poetic lines, and speak them with seeming ease and conviction were exhilarating and uplifting. The guy is great.

(*Daily Variety*, 23rd September, 1994)

Cruise's metamorphosis into the pale, blond vampire provided a useful visual signifier for the apparent 'plunge into the Lestat persona' that Rice was so impressed by. This is typical for Cruise - the roles in which he seems to deviate most from his star persona are accompanied by physical transformation. In *Collateral* his usual brown hair is coloured silver; in *Tropic Thunder* he wears a fat suit, glasses and a receding hair piece. Both of the latter undermine the physical appeal of the star by aging Cruise or making him appear grotesque. This is not the case in *Interview with the Vampire*, although Cruise's beauty is rivalled by that of Brad Pitt. However, the altered appearance does facilitate an acceptance of the departure from his persona – he plays the persecutor instead of the persecuted. The latter role is now taken by Pitt.

By the time of *Interview's* release, Cruise was already developing his career as a producer with his long-time agent Paula Wagner. That year they signed a contract between Paramount Pictures and their co-owned production company Cruise/Wagner productions. Their first project was an adaptation of the 1960s television series *Mission: Impossible*, in which Cruise would star as well as produce. *Mission: Impossible* was released in 1996 and reached third place in the annual US box office returns. The success of this film and his talent as a producer have contributed to his star persona, complimenting the mastery demonstrated by Cruise in his screen roles. There he demonstrates technical skill and knowledge in addition to physical agility. He is smart, though no scholar, coming second in the bar exam in *The Firm*. He is nearly the best in *Top Gun*, but not quite: after Goose's death he loses his nerve, and the *Top Gun* trophy goes to his rival Ice Man (Val Kilmer). He is a skilled cocktail mixer in *Cocktail* and an accomplished track driver in *Days of Thunder*. Cruise's on-screen mastery, even as early as 1989, was supported by accounts of his off-screen activities. Bob

Bondurant, who trained Cruise for his part in *Days of Thunder*, claimed that he had the ability to become a professional racer (Johnstone, 2006, p.172) – a statement that also links him to Paul Newman. Although these characters demonstrate mastery of a variety of skills, few are heroic – with the possible exception of *Top Gun* and Maverick’s aviation exploits – nor in roles that are primarily driven by action. *Mission: Impossible* signals a shift to physical action for the star, a trend which has continued through the rest of this series and films such as *Minority Report* (2002), *The Last Samurai* (2003) and *Knight and Day* (2010). As with *Days of Thunder*, media accounts foreground the actor’s natural talents at the skills on show. One of the DVD extras of *Mission: Impossible II* (John Woo, 2000) features a short documentary episode which tracks a stunt team setting up Cruise’s climbing feats at the beginning of the film – it claims he does most of his own stunts. The piece reinforced more general trends surrounding his reputation as an actor of quality: not only did he take time to develop his acting abilities but he also perfected the various physical feats required of him. This dedication has extended into his later action roles, demonstrated by reports of his training in the Japanese martial arts. On the set of *The Last Samurai*, director Ed Zwick declared ‘You can talk about Tom Cruise and samurai in the same breath because there are a lot of shared aspects – the dedication, the almost fierce focus’; co-star Billy Connelly remarked ‘I watched Tom (learning swordplay) in the gym – he was remarkably fit and keen. At one point he was fighting five people, using complicated choreography, and he never lost track of the routine’ (Schruers, 2003, p.46). The promotion of this heroic quality has extended itself into the real world, echoing the 1916 declaration that ‘there are scores of heroic deeds, of patently self-sacrificing acts, performed by the film folk which never reach pictures or print.’ (deCordova, 1991, p. 27, quoting from *The Motion Picture Classic* [February 1916, p.55]) Around the time of the first *Mission: Impossible* a number of stories appeared to certify Cruise’s real life heroism. Ehrenstein cites two such reports: in the first the star saved a number of people from a burning boat off the coast of Italy, while holidaying in the region. In the second he discovered a pedestrian victim of a hit and run, and having called 911, insisted on paying her medical bill (1998, p.328).

Supporting Cruise’s heroic feats onscreen is a heroic mise-en-scène of high technology. *Top Gun* is the earliest example of this, in which Maverick pilots both fighter planes and a motor bike. *Days of Thunder* is filled with racing cars; *Mission: Impossible* follows the tradition of spy film gadgetry popularised by the Bond series (and reasserted the

previous year by *Golden Eye* [Martin Campbell, 1995]). This is paralleled by Cruise's interests off-screen; he is known to own motorbikes, fast cars, and a plane (as well as a license to fly it). He also enjoys other extreme sports that require high technology, such as sky-diving. Although Cruise's development as an action hero proper came relatively late in his career, his persona has always been linked to athleticism and specifically running. This trait and his hyperkinesis is highlighted by the YouTube posting 'Just Cruise', a Nike Commercial spoof.<sup>21</sup> It indicates the commercial branding of Cruise and its links to athleticism and determinedness; 'just do it' could equally be a catchphrase of Cruise's characters and their privileging of action over reflection. The video edits together Cruise's running in films as various as *Minority Report*, *Cocktail*, *Far and Away*, *Mission: Impossible* and *MI: III*, *The Firm*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *Jerry Maguire*, *Rain Man*, *Vanilla Sky* and *War of the Worlds*. Running is linked to Cruise from his very first film *Endless Love*, depicting him running along a football field in his only scene.

Hyperkinesis is suggestive of childishness and an evasion of physical threat. Cruise's positioning in films such as *The Firm*, *Mission: Impossible* and *Minority Report* typically take the pattern of entrapment, frustration (often accompanied by an excessive outburst of emotion from the Cruise character as in *The Firm*) followed by escape. The display of frustration is indicative of suppressed anger against the father that is finally released. In *Mission: Impossible*, as 'Impossible Mission Force' operative Ethan Hunt, he meets his IMF superior Eugene Kittridge (Henry Czerny) in a Prague restaurant, where they argue over the failed mission, which has led to the death of all of Hunt's team mates. Told by Kittridge that the operation was a 'mole hunt', he grows enraged, his internal disequilibrium represented by close-ups of Hunt and Kittridge which frame each man at a 45 degree angle. Confronted by Kittridge, who accuses him of being the mole, Hunt tells him "you've never seen me very upset", before blowing up the restaurant's glass fish tank and making his escape through a torrent of water cascading into the streets of Prague. In *All the Right Moves*, after an argument with his football coach, he runs in fits and starts, unable to articulate his rage. Finally he stops, turns on his heel and gives his coach the finger, before running off into the night. As he runs through an empty Times Square in *Vanilla Sky*, the sound track of electronically distorted high pitched screeches and fast edits suggest his panic and confusion at the empty city he finds himself in. In *Far and Away*, *Minority Report*, *The Firm*, *Mission: Impossible* and *Valkyrie* he finds himself fleeing from a punitive patriarchal power.



### ***Eyes Wide Shut* – a Shift in Persona**

1996, the year that both *Mission: Impossible* and *Jerry Maguire* released, marked the pinnacle of Cruise's star power, with the films taking no.3 and 4 places respectively in the annual U.S. domestic box office figures. Each film explores overlapping features of the Cruise persona: *Mission: Impossible* is preoccupied by punishing father figures and other Oedipal concerns: *Jerry Maguire* explores the significance of male bonding, love and homoeroticism. Following these two films a three year gap ensued before *Eyes Wide Shut* was released. This represented a commitment on the part of Cruise to develop his acting as well as a desire to work with director Stanley Kubrick. The film was an adaptation of the 1926 novella *Traumnovelle* (Dream Story), by Alfred Schnitzler, set in fin de siècle Vienna. It appears to have been developed with Cruise in mind. There is a malevolent father figure in the guise of Sydney Pollack. Cruise is boyish, wearing an overcoat that seems just a little too big for him; he spends most of the film out of his depth in a sinister patriarchal order to which he has marginal access. He suffers homophobic taunts walking down the street. As in many of the other films, where he fears 'discovery' (as in the case of the *Mission: Impossible* series or *The Firm*), *Eyes Wide Shut*'s use of the mask suggests a fear of exposure. Larry Gross suggests *Eyes Wide Shut* is 'Kubrick's *Risky Business*' (1999, p.23) as both feature dream sequences and/or have a pervasively oneiric atmosphere, 'The dreamer not only is not sure where they are or how they ought to behave, they risk being revealed, unmasked, humiliated' (p.20). Fear of discovery also characterises Cruise's next film *Magnolia* (PT Anderson, 1999). The film furnished Cruise with his third Academy Award nomination. In this multi-narrative film, also starring Julianne Moore and William H. Macy, he plays the misogynist motivational speaker, Frank 'TJ' Mackey. With his catch phrase of 'respect the cock and tame the cunt' this role appears to test the limits of Cruise's arrogant yet vulnerable star image. However, Mackey's persona is exposed as a pose, a manic defence. A female journalist confronts him with his troubled childhood history and neglectful father, details he has hidden in the creation of his public image. Mackey is revealed as another vulnerable Cruise figure maltreated by his father.

*Magnolia* was followed the next year by Cruise's return to the *Mission: Impossible* series. By 2000, in a climate in which studio executives were questioning the financial logic of star salaries, while star-free films such as *The Blair Witch Project* were doing

well at the box office, Cruise's *Mission: Impossible II* nevertheless took the top figure of \$215M in domestic grosses that summer - it was the highest internationally grossing film of 2000. (It also generated the highest earnings that Cruise has received, up to that point and subsequently. As star and co-producer, he was able to negotiate payment through 'gross participation' in *Mission: Impossible II*'s receipts instead of a fixed salary, thus earning \$75M from the film.) In tacit acknowledgement that the familiar Cruise persona had been absent from screens for some time, *Variety* put the success of *Mission: Impossible II* down to a 'pent up desire for Cruise' (Dargis, 2000, p.23). However, Cruise's shift toward more pessimistic themes marked by the release of *Magnolia* and *Eyes Wide Shut* in 1999 was echoed by *Mission: Impossible II*. Subsequently Cruise's films seem increasingly melancholy in tone, such as *Vanilla Sky* (disfigurement and loss); *Minority Report* (murder and kidnap/ the loss of a child); *The Last Samurai* (genocide of native peoples); *Collateral* (urban alienation in modern society); *Lions for Lambs* (an unjust war).

*Mission: Impossible II* follows protagonist Ethan Hunt's (Tom Cruise) attempt to recover a genetically engineered virus, Chimera, and its cure, Bellerophon, before antagonist Sean Ambrose (Dougray Scott) is able to exploit their bio-terrorist potential. In order to learn more about Ambrose's plans, IMF head Swanbeck (Anthony Burgess) instructs Hunt to hire cat thief Nyah Nordoff-Hall (Thandi Newton) and send her undercover to resume a romantic relationship with Ambrose. While the film de-emphasizes the father-son dynamic typical of Cruise's films (except in the brief, if sinister, exchange between Swanbeck and Hunt) and accompanying vulnerability in the face of paternal threat, it does exaggerate the bravado of the persona. Although Nyah and Hunt's ensuing relationship is presented in romantic terms, Nyah's character is maternally-inflected - she chooses to expose herself to the dangerous Ambrose, allowing Hunt to remain at a safe distance. Cruise's persona often is articulated through relations to a maternal figure, and this has been the case since the beginning of his career - *Endless Love*, *Losin' It* and *Risky Business* provide the earliest examples of this dynamic. However, the manner in which he relates to this figure becomes more ominous in this more recent grouping of films, from *Magnolia* onwards. In *Mission: Impossible II* Nyah injects herself with the deadly Chimera virus. Women in Cruise's films are left vulnerable, neglected - or dead.

This trend becomes even more sinister in Cruise's next film *Vanilla Sky*: his character David Aimes is accused of killing his girlfriend, in one interpretation of a disorientating and dream-like narrative. David is the wealthy heir to a print empire; in a manner typical of Cruise's characters, he is positioned against the corporation who resent his stake in the company. His fortune allows him to remain irresponsible. When David is involved in a car accident which leaves him with terrible facial injuries, he starts having flashbacks and begins to doubt his senses. Having conducted a relationship with one woman Julia (Cameron Diaz), whom he rejects, and started an affair with another, Sofia (Penelope Cruz), he begins to confuse their identities. At one moment in the film, while having sex with Sofia, he sees the face of Julia and smothers her to death. Later when he is shown the photographic evidence of his crime, he claims that the board of directors is framing him. Nowhere else in Cruise's filmography is his latent fear of women and paranoia of authority so overt.

Around the time of *Vanilla Sky*'s production, personal developments also threatened to destabilize public perceptions of Cruise. During filming, he announced that he was divorcing Nicole Kidman. The event inspired much speculation: Cruise had filed proceedings just before the couple's tenth anniversary, a significant date in California law regarding the payment of alimony (Cruise and Kidman had never drawn up a pre-nuptial agreement, in spite of Cruise's much greater wealth). There were also rumours that Kidman was pregnant and then suffered a miscarriage, facts alluded to in later interviews. The motive for their split wasn't clear. Cruise would only say that Kidman knew the reason for his divorce petition; she would only respond that she did not (Johnstone, 2006, p.39). Cruise did not give any interviews at this time, leaving the press to fall back on Kidman's statements. When it was announced that he was dating Penelope Cruz, his *Vanilla Sky* co-star, Cruise was keen to stress that their relationship had begun after the break-down of his marriage. Intriguingly, these events reflected the earlier split between Cruise and Rogers and his subsequent involvement with Kidman. When Cruise first viewed *Abre Los Ojos* (Alejandro Amenábar, 1997) he expressed an interest in re-making the film with Cameron Crowe, who he paid to re-write it (Johnstone, 2006, p.280). He specifically chose to cast Cruz in her original role as Nuria, echoing his choice of Kidman as leading lady in *Days of Thunder*, and his consequent involvement with her. Cruise's remarks on the subject of his personal life to *Vanity Fair* were taciturn: 'I don't care if it piques people's interest. Honestly people

should mind their own damn business and get a life of their own. My personal life isn't here to sell newspapers.'<sup>10</sup> Cruise's publicist was then the legendary Pat Kingsley, famous for using her influence over her roster of film stars to bully the press into agreeing to the most stringent of publicity arrangements.<sup>11</sup> His presentation of his personal life would alter drastically by the time he started to date Katie Holmes. At the time of the divorce, a new Kidman film was about to open, *The Others* (2001), written and directed by Amenábar; Cruise was also executive producer. The Los Angeles premiere for *The Others* was scheduled for 7<sup>th</sup> August; Kidman and Cruise's divorce was finalized the next day. It is not impossible that the two events were scheduled together deliberately to give the stars and their film optimum coverage, an example of Marshall's argument that as the film star's aura dissolves in the new media landscape, actors are forced to new levels of intimate revelation in an attempt to keep themselves, and their films, in the public eye (2006, p.643).

Cruise's next film, *Minority Report*, was even more explicit in its rendering of the father-son tensions in his persona and continued the trend of disturbed Cruise heroes. He plays Jon Anderton, the head of Washington D.C.'s Precrime unit, a branch of law enforcement, which uses three psychics to predict murders before they happen. As in *Mission: Impossible*, a father figure Director Lamar Burgess (Max Von Sydow) sets up the Cruise character to take the blame for his own crimes. The abusive dynamic between Burgess and Anderton is underscored by the themes of child abuse that are present in Anderton's own history: prior to the opening of the film his son is snatched from a swimming pool. His estranged wife must rescue him from imprisonment, another example of his characters' reliance on maternal figures. The film is unforgiving in its depiction of Cruise's helplessness: when his wife rescues him he has been imprisoned in suspended animation, infantilized in his white clothes and shaven head. The theme of trauma is echoed in his next film *The Last Samurai*. It opens with Cruise's character, Nathan Algren, as a drunken ex-soldier shaken by the military violence against the Native Americans that he has witnessed. Hired as a mercenary to train the Japanese army so that they can control the samurai, he is kidnapped by these warriors and schooled in their martial traditions. As well as exploiting the military aspects of Cruise's persona in *Top Gun* and *Born on the Fourth of July*, his role as novice samurai once again makes him a 'trainee'. When he rides into battle near the film's close, unlike the samurai he is not killed; again Cruise evades any consequences. The extension of the Cruise persona into darker psychological territory, present in *The*

*Last Samurai*, finds its most distinctive expression in *Collateral*. The partial deception that is so often lurking in the Cruise image (especially as a salesman or agent but also in his disguises in *Mission: Impossible*) is overt in his role as Vincent; he disguises himself as a businessman in order to complete his real mission as hit man, carrying out several murders across the city of LA in a single night. The director, in interview, points to an imagined back story of physical violence perpetrated by the young Vincent's father, which has led to a dissociation of personality and a fantasy of becoming a hero, not wholly unlike the actual back story of *Magnolia*. Although his visual appearance – sporting silver hair and a grey suit – flags up that this is a different type of Cruise role, the underlying persona can still be discerned.

Cruise's subsequent character was a departure from his familiar image, playing a deadbeat dad in Steven Spielberg's adaptation of H.G Wells' novel, *War of the Worlds* (2005). His character Ray Ferrier is a cautionary tale, should the youthful Cruise persona fail to mature. Ray is an impoverished dock worker, living in poor accommodation. Yet, although he is coded as working class by his clothing (lumberjack shirt and jeans) – his presentation as a working man is a little too neat to be convincing, another role play of Cruise's. The film displays an intimate knowledge of the Cruise persona, with many visual nods to his previous films: it opens with the globe of planet earth in space (*Jerry Maguire*); an aerial shot of Manhattan presents the city from above in geometric form (*Collateral*); in the early moments of the film, Ray swerves into the road in his sports car, nearly colliding with another vehicle (*Days of Thunder*). The story begins in a dockyard, with similar shots of the cranes and cargo to those shown in *Rain Man*. While *Rain Man*'s protagonist Charlie oversees the importation of luxury cars for his business, here Ray is the crane operator who manoeuvres the cargo into place (incidentally, Charlie's older autistic brother in *Rain Man* and the child in *Jerry Maguire* are both called Ray.) His job is a cruel twist upon Cruise's earlier roles. Films such as *Top Gun* and *Days of Thunder* depict the star inhabiting a cockpit or car, racing through the air or along the track at great speed; here Ray is trapped in a steel cage going nowhere. His costume indicates his paralysis in youth: jeans, t-shirt and a baseball cap – but his face now betrays his age. His immaturity is displayed by his reckless driving and his late appearance for his children, Rachel (Dakota Fanning) and Robbie (Justin Chatwin), whom his ex-wife and her husband drop off for the weekend. His pregnant ex-wife struggles up the stairs with her daughter's suitcase while Ray fails to help. After her departure, Ray insists that his teenage son play catch with a baseball mitt in the backyard (another allusion to a Cruise

character, Daniel Kaffee, in *A Few Good Men*). He lectures Robbie on the importance of doing his schoolwork; when Robbie reminds him that it is step-father who pays for his education, Ray throws the baseball with aggressive force at Robbie. (At his next turn, when Robbie refuses to catch the ball, it goes straight through Ray's kitchen window.) When Rachel asks what they will be eating for dinner, Ray tells her to order takeout and heads to bed. Ray is a distinct paternal failure.

Ray appears to be a significant departure from Cruise's typical persona. While he bears some of the hallmarks of the bravado of the younger Cruise, he lacks the underlying vulnerability. He shows signs of being the aggressive patriarch, such as in the scene above, though he is simultaneously unable to control his teenage son. In the following scene Ray wakes up to find that Robbie has taken his car (another echo of *Rain Man* in which the teenage Charlie borrows his father's car, an action which leads to their estrangement). Ray's failure at fatherhood resonates with Cruise's image – receiving his children for a temporary visit, he only plays the part. The familiar dynamic of Cruise fleeing a punitive patriarchal power remains intact. The aliens, in the form of the 'Tripods', represent an omnipotent, malign force – symbolic of the unforgiving patriarch as experienced by the boy-child. The film provides an opportunity to test the Cruise persona in a new way – if overcoming the enemy is impossible, what adaptation for survival can he make? It doesn't seem as if he can provide a viable alternative to heroism. As soon as aliens invade he brings his children to the safety of his ex-wife's new home. When they are again separated, he is unable to prevent Robbie from joining the military which is engaged in a fight-back against the Tripods (this also echoes Cruise's persona, now projected onto the son). Ray does, however, manage to save his daughter from harm. This includes a moment when a stranger who has given them shelter, Harlan Ogilvy (Tim Robbins), suffers a mental breakdown and in his loud ranting threatens to draw attention to them; Ray kills Ogilvy to silence him. When Rachel is snatched by a Tripod, Ray manages to rescue her. Ray's is a pragmatic heroism, visible under duress. But he is unable to protect Robbie: only at the film's conclusion, returning Rachel to his ex-wife and her new husband is he reunited with his son. The film's final embrace of father and son encapsulates the emotional growth maturation forced on Ray by external events. Nevertheless, he has failed to shield his son from harm, who has found his own way home. While the final shot may be of father and son reunited, Robbie (and Rachel) will be returned to the new family unit and Ray will again find himself alone.

## Cruise, Oprah and Scientology

In May 2005 Tom Cruise jumped on Oprah Winfrey's couch to proclaim his love for Katie Holmes. A subsequent clip of the show's highlight, Cruise's 'couch jumping', was posted on media user sites around the world. One doctored video, which appeared on 'YouTube', showed Cruise standing over Oprah clenching her hands in his delivering fatal lightning bolts. The music and cackling laughter - the latter synced to his own laughing visage - were lifted from the soundtrack of *Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith* (George Lucas, 2005). The phrase 'jumping the couch' entered the Historical Dictionary of American Slang as the 'slang term of the year' in 2005. Its definition: 'Going off the deep end in public in a manner extreme enough to damage one's career'.<sup>12</sup> Cruise's appearance on Oprah was a definitive moment in what biographer Ian Johnstone describes as his 'annus dementius' (2006, p.325). Intended to promote the upcoming *War of the Worlds*, the Oprah appearance coincided with his blossoming relationship with young actress Katie Holmes, best known for her long running appearance on teen show *Dawson's Creek* and film supporting roles, notably in the newly released *Batman Begins* (Christopher Nolan, 2005). This very public relationship evoked press and public scepticism from the start. Cruise's proposal to Holmes, atop the Eiffel tower surrounded by photographers, only intensified the general view that the relationship was a publicity stunt (A *People* on-line poll conducted on May 12 2005 found that sixty-two percent of its respondents were skeptical of the relationship's authenticity). The timing of the engagement appeared to support this view: the Paris photo-op took place on June 17. *Batman Begins* had world-wide release on June 16, *War of the Worlds* on June 23. Both went on to be great financial successes, placing at no.8 and no.4 respectively in annual US domestic box office rankings. Similar criticisms have been leveled at Cruise's performance on *Oprah*. His behaviour on the chat show, going down on bended knee and punching the air repeatedly, before jumping on the studio couch, did less to convince the viewing public of his passion for Holmes than of his possible mental instability.

The following month Cruise appeared on the *Today Show* where he told presenter Matt Lauer 'psychiatry is a pseudo-science' and argued over the inherent dangers of anti-depressant drugs. This was after his public criticism of Brooke Shields for taking anti-depressants for post-partum depression, entangling himself in an argument with his former co-star, who published her retort in *The Times* entitled 'The trouble with Tom Cruise.'<sup>13</sup> Such bizarre statements were widely attributed to Cruise's growing

evangelism for the Church of Scientology. *Mission: Impossible III*'s publicity machine was damaged by the rumour that Scarlet Johansson had withdrawn from the project after being bullied into attending a Scientology dinner with Cruise<sup>14</sup> (the part was eventually played by Michelle Monaghan). Websites such as tomcruiseisnuts.com and savekatie.com (Johnstone, 2006, p.26) as well as the comic advice to the star in *Empire*'s 'Dear Tom' (author unidentified, 2006, p.66), were indicative of the sea change in public perception.

Such media coverage reflected Cruise's sliding popularity at a time when questions regarding his mental health were growing louder. His religious proselytizing seemed to confirm long term eccentricity. Yet his Scientology links were hardly unique in Hollywood circles; both John Travolta and Kirstie Alley were celebrity members of the Church, a fact that had done little to damage their reputations. Some commentators noted that the plummeting of Cruise's reputation had coincided with the dismissal of his publicist of fourteen years, the formidable Pat Kingsley, who had kept his public appearances scripted and to a minimum.<sup>15</sup> Iain Johnstone suggests it is questionable 'whether, if Pat Kingsley had still been his agent, he would have appeared on NBC's *Today* show' (2006, p.46). Kingsley had parted company with Cruise in the spring of 2004, a split that had shocked the entertainment industry, and it was not long before speculation gathered as to the cause of the separation. One report suggested that Kingsley's heavy-handed tactics were no longer as effective in an (irreverent) internet age. Another mooted that since Cruise's split from Kidman, she had received better publicity, in spite of Kingsley being their shared publicist. One rumour suggested Cruise was unhappy with the reception of his *The Last Samurai* appearance – he failed to get an Oscar nomination for the role. Another claimed that the publicist and star had clashed over Cruise's vocal expression of his Scientology beliefs.<sup>16</sup> Whatever the speculation, Cruise followed Kingsley's sacking by employing his elder sister Lee Anne DeVette, herself a Scientologist, to represent him.

By 2006 De Vette had moved on, reportedly to concentrate on Cruise's humanitarian causes. She was replaced by Paul Bloch, an established name in the entertainment business who handled clients such as John Travolta and the Beckhams.<sup>17</sup> Bloch's connection with the Beckhams facilitated a friendship beneficial for all in their respective quest for cross-media fertilization. This new closeness seemed to be reflected by Cruise's business decisions: in the summer of 2007, it was reported that he



was launching a £40 million takeover bid of Beckham's American soccer club, the *Los Angeles Galaxy*,<sup>18</sup> although this never went beyond initial media speculation. Holmes and Victoria Beckham were similarly reported to be spending a lot of time together, particularly at fashion events. Tom Cruise and David Beckham's personas are comparable. Both depend on physical skills and a pretty appearance with a slightly 'queer' edge. They also both have high, rather feminine, voices. However, it is debatable how much good their public alliance did for Cruise's declining popularity in the wake of his relationship with Holmes.

Was the performance on *Oprah* all a tightly stage-managed publicity stunt, or a genuine outpouring of emotion? If it suggested a loss of control, surely this contradicted claims that his relationship with Holmes was a fraud? If it wasn't, why was the public so reluctant to believe in the relationship, which led to the birth of their daughter Suri, as well as to a wedding later that year? As wedding preparations got underway in 2006, there were rumours in the tabloids that in the event of divorce, Cruise would gain sole custody of Suri and/or that Holmes would walk away with a multi-million dollar fortune.<sup>19</sup> Conducted in public, their liaison challenged expectations as to how a relationship between two celebrities should be performed. The response to the *Oprah* show was a reminder that the Cruise persona, like all star images, trades on authenticity and sincerity, the 'two qualities greatly prized in stars because they guarantee, respectively, that the star really means what he or she says, and that the star really is what she or he appears to be' (Dyer, 1987, p.11). 'Because the Cruise/Holmes romance lacks the appropriate marks of authenticity – the majority of photos of the couple together have been made during prearranged photo-opportunities ... the public refuses to believe it is anything but a crass promotional device' (Redmond, 2006, p.32). The public had been robbed of the 'private' moments in which stars are caught by relentless paparazzi. (Such 'private' moments, it should be noted, are often themselves stage managed.) Paparazzi photographs of celebrity couples attempting and failing to meet on the quiet (such as Cruise and Kidman were shown doing at the beginning of their relationship) and more general images of celebrities unaware of the camera are phenomenally popular in fan culture. They represent the desire to look behind the star persona, as propagated by his films and publicity machine, and scrutinize the 'real' person. This is not dissimilar to the way Dyer describes the effect of the close-up, 'separated out from action and interaction of a scene, and not seen by other characters but only us, thus disclosing for us the star's face, the intimate, transparent window to the

soul' (1987, p.11). Cruise's public behaviour at this point deviated perceptibly from his film roles. He now faces new audiences, new actor competitors, and his own aging process. His films attempt to adapt to these changes by modifying his core qualities to suit new audiences. But the Tom Cruise who appeared in hyperactive form on Oprah appeared too intense, too eccentric and just too old to be appealing to audiences.

It remains to be seen if the Cruise persona can successfully mature to cope with his advancing age. *Lions for Lambs*, the first Cruise/Wagner production under the banner of United Artists, was released in 2007, with Cruise playing Senator Jasper Irving. In one of the films' multiple narratives, Irving invites respected TV journalist Janine Roth (Meryl Streep) to his offices to deliver an exclusive story about the government's new strategy in Afghanistan. Cruise is not aged on screen as he is in *Collateral*, in which he sports grey hair and stubble. Here he wears a form fitting waistcoat and shirt and a flashy medallion ring, but the film is unable to let his character develop; there is the feeling that his physicality is boxed into the office he inhabits. Irving is portrayed as a morally corrupt salesman, pitching an argument of dubious ethical value to an increasingly troubled Roth. Streep plays the older woman, conduit of the truth, in much the way the journalist Gwenovier functions in *Magnolia*. However, in this instance, there are no chinks in Cruise's armour, no redeeming vulnerability to expose.

Cruise next appeared in a cameo role in the comedy *Tropic Thunder* (Ben Stiller, 2008), as the abusive film producer Les Grossman. Three stars filming a war picture find themselves lost in the jungles of Laos and are threatened by a local drugs militia. Grossman is the sinister figure who suggests writing off the stars' lives as their life insurance makes them more valuable dead than alive. It is an apt subversion of Cruise's persona. Grossman is corpulent, hirsute and abusive towards those around him: he is the malevolent father figure against whom Cruise is usually opposed. Grossman's popularity was confirmed when Cruise appeared in character at the MTV awards in June 2010. Various episodes of Grossman interviewing the young actors from *Twilight* (Catherine Hardwicke, 2008) were intercut with live coverage of the awards, as was a scenario in which Grossman directed Cruise as Joel in *Risky Business* in the well-known living room dance scene. The pay-off of the joke is that the scene only works once Grossman has ripped off Joel's trousers, so he slides into the living room in his boxers (and here footage from *Risky Business* is used). The episode both foregrounds the young Cruise's auto-eroticism, which the aging Cruise lacks, and the exploitative aspect

of Grossman. However, the highlight of the MTV awards was the hip-hop dance performance by Grossman and Jennifer Lopez of her 2005 song 'Get Right' in which he reprised dance movements first seen in *Tropic Thunder*. Grossman's dancing referenced Cruise's exhibitionism and sex appeal, while undermining this with his repulsive demeanour; knowledge of the former is necessary for the figure of Grossman to work as a comic conceit. Such was the warm reception of the character's performance that an official announcement from Paramount was issued stating that a feature film with Grossman was in development.

Cruise's next starring role, for the rejuvenated United Artists, was the World War II film *Valkyrie*. He plays Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg, the figurehead of the most famous of the assassination attempts against Hitler by members of the German army. The film's production was not without controversy: before the shoot began, a member of the German Defense Ministry indicated that filming would not be allowed at the country's military locations if Cruise took the role of Stauffenberg. This was due to Cruise being a Scientologist, in a country where Scientology is regarded as a dangerous cult espousing totalitarian values. Although the shoot proceeded, the production faced a bar to filming at the Benderblock memorial, a prohibition which was overturned following an outcry by the German media community. (Benderblock provided the Headquarters of the plot conspirators; the memorial is located in the courtyard where its members were executed by firing squad.) *Valkyrie* benefited from a generous grant from the German government, which provides financial support to foreign film productions, including up to 20% of the production budget if enough money is spent in the country. Under this scheme *Valkyrie* received \$6.5 million from the German Federal Film Fund (DFFF). *Valkyrie* demonstrated the key features of Cruise's persona, principally an evasive opposition to malign patriarchal forces; Hitler is figured as the ultimate terrifying father. Stauffenberg is surrounded by a group of collaborators who, relative to him, appear elderly and so underscore his youth (although he is in his forties).

Paternal threat is a thread of Cruise's persona that is absent from his next film, *Knight and Day*, which offers the clearest example of a 'problematic fit' in Dyer's model for the star persona. Cruise plays government agent, Ray Knight, who has been framed and is on the run from the U.S. secret service. This echoes *Mission: Impossible*, yet lacks a dominating patriarch to threaten Cruise or the menacing atmosphere that typifies the *Mission: Impossible* series. Another departure from his persona is the prominence of

the love interest, June Havens (Cameron Diaz), a girl-next-door figure who becomes embroiled in Knight's plans to protect the inventor of a self-renewing energy source and his invention. Unusually for a Cruise film, this relationship drives the narrative. The film is told from June's perspective and thus it is unclear for most of the film if Knight is in fact mad, as the secret service claims. This is a departure from previous films in which Cruise is clearly innocent. And where those explore the paranoia that Cruise experiences when faced by a hostile environment and his feelings of panic and entrapment, such elements are absent from *Knight and Day*. A key trait of Cruise's image is that he rarely kills people; this is true even in the *Mission: Impossible* series where his role would plausibly require shedding blood. (*Mission: Impossible II* does reflect director John Woo's Hong Kong action cinema origins insofar as Cruise's character Ethan Hunt is more violent than in the other two films in the series.) The only exceptions are deviations from the persona such as *Interview with the Vampire* and *Collateral*. This is overturned by *Knight and Day*. An early scene of the film shows him killing the secret agents that accompany him and June on a flight, while she is in the airplane toilet (the scene is presented as comic rather than frightening). The cartoon violence registers as a disquieting departure from his image.

*Knight and Day* was moderately successful in its reception, placing 27<sup>th</sup> in domestic US box office ratings, and a disappointment for its studio 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. Some cynical observers suggested that the American publicity poster for the film purposely used two silhouette cut-outs of Cruise and Diaz rather than risk using Cruise's face. Regardless of the claim's truth, it indicates that the star's perceived popularity (or lack of) remains a worry for studios reliant on Cruise's image for marketing their products. Fox's head of marketing, Tony Stella, was quick to take the blame for the performance of the film in the US. When the film was later released in the UK, British publicity posters did feature photographic images of the two stars). It is probable that the film's poor reception was as much a function of its deviation from Cruise's established persona and poor plot line, as the star's waning popularity. Yet *Knight and Day's* theatrical performance is an issue for Cruise's career: the star was passed over by Columbia Pictures to play the title role of CIA operative *Salt*, which went to Angelina Jolie.

## **Conclusion**

Cruise's persona is based on a paradox: the appearance of grown-up masculinity in juxtaposition with youthful vulnerability. Cruise's bravado is one indication that this is an unstable compromise; others include his failure to confront dominant men and his frequent reliance on women to rescue him. The withdrawal from Oedipal challenge to the father re-situates the mother as all-powerful and the father as a (albeit ambiguous) love object. This dynamic is played out different emphasis across Cruise's filmography. It has particular implications for the persona's exploration of ideological constructions of gender and sexuality, which will be the subject of the following chapter.

## Notes

1. Thanks to Christine Gledhill for her suggestions on this subject to Mandy Merck via email (5 August 2010).
2. E. Kaiser (2009) 'Economists see longest recession since World War Two', 10 January at *Reuters.com* Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5090QL20090110> (Accessed: 16 May 2011); R. Krasney (2008) 'SF Fed Economist sees longest recession since WW2', 23 December at *Reuters.com* Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE4BM49M20081223> (Accessed: 16 May 2011)
3. This is a not an infrequent alibi of male actors. Similar defences made by actors emphasise their masculine origins, in the case of Sean Connery and Arnold Schwarzenegger, in body-building.
4. The Wikipedia entry on Ray-Ban Wayfarers is available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ray-Ban\\_Wayfarer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ray-Ban_Wayfarer) (no author, undated) (Accessed: 26 October 2007)
5. M. August *et al* (1999) 'Through a Glass Darkly', *Time Magazine* 12 July Available at: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,991503,00.html> (Accessed 6 June 2011)
6. Shone argues that the term 'number one' film is a difficult one to quantify and often variously defined depending on who it suits. At the time, Stallone's *Cobra* was also claiming the title. *Cobra* had at that point grossed the most – having been on theatrical release for some time - but was also playing on twice as many screens as *Top Gun* when the latter first opened.
7. J. Ryan (2006) "'The Closet", the Controversy – and Cruise', 17 March at *EOnline.com* Available at: [http://uk.eonline.com/uberblog/b51903\\_quotThe\\_Closetquot\\_the\\_Controversy--and\\_Cruise.html](http://uk.eonline.com/uberblog/b51903_quotThe_Closetquot_the_Controversy--and_Cruise.html) (Accessed: 6 June 2011)
8. *Time Magazine* cover July 5 1999 Available at: <http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19990705,00.html> (Accessed: 6 June 2011)
9. E. Dutka (1993) 'Film Clips – A look inside Hollywood and the Movies: Interview with the Vampire's Picky Creator', *The Los Angeles Times*, 22 August Available at: [http://articles.latimes.com/1993-08-22/entertainment/ca-26172\\_1\\_tom-cruise](http://articles.latimes.com/1993-08-22/entertainment/ca-26172_1_tom-cruise) (Accessed: 9 June 2011)
10. E. Peretz (2002) 'Being Tom Cruise' *Vanity Fair*, January, p.72; pp.120-122
11. E. Helmore (2001) 'Meet the Enforcer', *The Guardian*, 3 June Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4197213,00.html> (Accessed: 6 June 2011)
12. Definition available at: <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=jump+the+couch> (Accessed: 6 June 2011) The phrase was adapted from 'jumping the shark' referring to the episode of *Happy Days* in which Fonzie jumps over a shark. It is the point at which a TV show becomes so desperate for ratings it pulls a stunt that puts it beyond the point of no return. The newly coined phrase alluded to a persons' behaviour, and their 'losing it' and the point at which their reputation takes a nose dive.
13. B. Shields (2005) 'The trouble with Tom Cruise' by Brooke Shields, *The Times* 3 July Available at: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/article539799.ece> (Accessed: 6 June 2011)
14. J. Walls (2005) 'Scarlett Johansson escapes Cruise's Clutches', 20 June at *TodayEntertainment.com* Available at: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/8133757/> (Accessed: 6 June 2011)
15. E. Helmore (2005) 'What's eating Tom Cruise', *The Guardian* 5 June Available at: <http://film.guardian.co.uk/features/featurepages/0,,1499693,00.html> (Accessed: 6 June 2011)
16. A.H. Weiner (2004) 'Risky Business', 26 March at *EntertainmentWeekly.com* Available at: <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,602411,00.html> (Accessed: 6 June 2011)
17. C. Gardner (2005) 'Cruise will go with pro', *Variety Magazine* 6 November Available at: <http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117932447.html?categoryid=13&cs=1> (Accessed: 6 June 2011)

18. 'Tom Cruise secures Beckham friendship', (no author) 21 June 2007 at *monstersandcritics.com*  
Available at: [http://people.monstersandcritics.com/news/article\\_1320549.php](http://people.monstersandcritics.com/news/article_1320549.php) (Accessed: 6 June 2011)
19. J. Walls (2006) 'Holmes could cash in on wedding to Cruise', 8 June at *TodayEntertainment.Com*  
Available at: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/13105677/> (Accessed: 6 June 2011)

## **Chapter Two: Male Bonding - Gender, Homoeroticism and the Performing Tom Cruise**

The star persona of Tom Cruise encapsulates a variety of unresolved contradictions regarding gender and sexuality. If his image is considered in relation to Richard Dyer's discussion of the star's apparent ability to resolve cultural 'instabilities, ambiguities and contradictions' (1998, p.31), Cruise has since the 1980s been one of the most 'successful' stars in latter day Hollywood. His persona reconciles - albeit problematically - the two seeming ideological oppositions of heroic adult masculinity and vulnerable, yet sexually exhibitionist, boyishness. He appears able to provide a comforting resolution to the problematic issue of latter day American masculinity. In his early films he is a fresh-faced all-American schoolboy yet simultaneously eroticised. He personifies that odd paradox, the soldier who does not fight. He is the hero who does not get the girl - or seem interested in the girl, even when he gets her. This chapter explores scenes of performance in which the Cruise persona is implicated and its relation to the constructed and performed basis of masculinity. The first half of the chapter focuses upon Cruise's military films and the soldier roles that illustrate the impossible ideal of a martial masculinity. This version of manhood is privileged over other masculinities and yet in its exaggerated form underscores the impossibility of the masculine ideal, with Cruise's characters repeatedly submitted to masculine competition and the possibility of failure. The second half of the chapter concerns the homoerotic performance of the narcissistic Cruise, usually for a male audience. Such scenes position his body as an object of spectacle, thus deviating from a 'masculine' position and threatening any claims of patriarchal support. Cruise's persona is premised upon performance, providing through his films an exploration of masculinity's constructed nature and the potential for failure in its citation.

### **Bonds Between Men**

Cruise's narratives are characterised by strong male bonds. They may take the form of father-son relationships, in which he plays the son to an ambiguous figure, or they may be founded upon a peer based dynamic. Cruise is destined to play the junior partner in the set-up. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's discussion (1985) of what she terms 'male homosocial desire' can be applied to Cruise's image. Sedgwick develops this concept in order to explore a pervasive dynamic in 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> century English literature, the changing structure of which reflects shifting class and gender relations over this period.



The term is for Sedgwick an oxymoron, created to divulge the contradictions inherent in the phrase and alert the reader to the ideological issues at stake. ‘Male homosocial’ refers to masculine bonds, which are characterised in modern society by homophobia. Her intention, in coining the phrase ‘homosocial desire’, is to ‘draw the “homosocial” back into the orbit of “desire”, of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual – a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted.’ (1985, pp.1-2)

Sedgwick begins with a discussion of the powerful structuring device of the relationship triangle within the novel, employing René Girard’s work on folk-wisdom and erotic triangles (1965). Taking from Girard that in such a rivalry ‘the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: that the bonds of ‘rivalry’ and ‘love’, differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent’, (Sedgwick, 1985, p.21), Sedgwick links this to Freud’s explanation of the Oedipus complex with father-mother-(male)child bonds forming the three sides of the first erotic triangle. She notes the problematic symmetry that Freud and Girard assume in their supposition that the basis of the triangle is little affected by a change in gender of the child – from male to female – when social and cultural factors impact considerably upon this substitution. If, as Adrienne Rich argues, there is a continuum between ‘women acting in the interests of women’ and ‘women loving women’ in contemporary Western society, no such equivalent operates between men. Where the female child’s femininity is reinforced by her initial union with her mother, the male child’s sense of masculinity is formed in opposition to it. The structure of the male-male-female triangle is a rendering of larger social structures and power relationships – those that do not appear to include women nevertheless affect the inscription of gender upon them. Sedgwick concludes that ‘in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between the homosocial (including the *homosexual*) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power: a relationship founded on an inherent and structural congruence’ (p.25). At different historical points this expresses itself through male homophobia or, conversely, idealised male homosexuality (such as in Ancient Greece); in both instances power is co-opted by men. Patriarchal heterosexuality, Sedgwick suggests, citing an essay by Gayle Rubin (which in turn draws on Levi-Strauss and Engels), is best defined in terms of ‘one or another form of the traffic in women: it is the use of women as exchangeable,

perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men' (Sedgwick, pp.25-26).

What are the implications for the persona of Tom Cruise? Although his films features close male relationships, the 'traffic in women' that Sedgwick describes rarely occurs. This is in part due to the Cruise character's often marginal social position and pre-Oedipal figuring; he has little status to secure. His characters are narcissistic and demonstrate a proclivity towards exhibitionism, reflecting his deviation from hegemonic masculinity. In tandem with this are heterosexual romances that, when they exist at all, are subordinated by a relationship between Cruise and another man. The female love object is maternally-inflected, in the psychoanalytic sense, and can be understood in terms of the Kleinian archaic mother. The heroine of the star's films does not function to secure male bonds - she rarely has a connection to both Cruise and the man with whom he is involved. *Top Gun* (Tony Scott, 1986) is the exemplary film in this regard. Exceeding its homosocial 'remit' of a group of young air cadets bonding through manly displays, *Top Gun* exudes homoerotic energy with its ready display of male flesh, while appearing to protest this with homophobic dialogue. Sedgwick's concept of a broken continuum of homosocial desire does not provide a model to explain the positioning of a male subject who has so ambiguous a claim on hegemonic masculinity.

Such sexual exhibitionism and concomitant homoeroticism have the potential to become a point of anxiety in the consolidation of a masculine persona for Tom Cruise. Tests of his masculinity dominate his filmography. His films are preoccupied by the 'performance of performance' often featuring a performer in a formal space of exhibition, e.g. a lawyer in court, a self-help guru on stage, or a soldier on the parade ground. At certain moments it seems that the act of performance is reflexively acknowledged in Cruise's own performance and the *mise-en-scène*, with these set pieces appearing excessive in their execution. This is exaggerated by the star's unaccomplished acting in the early films; like his characters' performances it can often seem awkward, inept and just 'too much'. This 'gap' - the reflexive space - that appears between the performance act and the performer (who *may* be aware of the act which he delivers to the crowd) has much to offer in terms of scrutinising gender. What happens when attention is drawn towards a performance and its 'artificiality' is highlighted? Where does that put the performance and the performer? How is his gender to be understood?

## Performing Masculinity

In highlighting the role of the performer, Cruise articulates something about the character of masculinity, its 'nonnaturalness' or constructed character. Gaylyn Studlar suggests that the masculine identity that Cruise demonstrates, focusing as it does on his physicality, means that 'authentic masculinity is also held up for scrutiny as a construction, a masquerade' (2001, p.176). This leads to a consideration of 'performativity' of gender put forward by philosopher Judith Butler, initially in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble*, but reconsidered later in *Bodies that Matter* (1993). In her most recent preface to *Gender Trouble* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2006) Butler concedes the difficulty in providing an exact definition of 'performativity', in part due to her own changing viewpoint in response to criticism, but also because of the growing body of others' work in formulating further meanings of the term. Nevertheless, she limits gender 'performativity' to the repetition of acts, gestures and words that *create* what we understand as gender, as opposed to *expressing* a pre-existing nature. This ritual 'achieves its effects through its naturalisation in the context of a *body*, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration.' What is considered as internal is created by the sustained repetition of acts, 'posited through the gendered stylization of the body' (2006, preface xv). Butler affirms the need to consider the relation between performativity in its linguistic and theatrical dimensions. It is this connection that allows one to contemplate the significance of the speech act, which in its invocation of the power structure it draws upon to consolidate its force, has both elements of the linguistic and theatrical (2006, preface xxvi). Gender identity does not exist to be revealed as the source of acts of gender, a pre-existing internal reality; rather it exists only through their production. In this vein she argues that drag as female impersonation, 'implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency' (p.187). Drag's structure is imitative, yet there is no original to imitate – all performances of gender are citations of citations, copies of copies. The political implications for a transformation of gender can be found in the 'possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction' (p.192).

In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler situates performativity in the linguistic context of authoritative speech, in which certain speech acts effecting a change simultaneously invoke the power structure that legitimates them. She cites philosopher J.L. Austin's example of the wedding ceremony ('I now pronounce you...'), while noting that it

‘suggests that the heterosexualisation of the social bond is the paradigmatic form for those speech acts which bring about that what they name’ (1993, p.224). The hegemonic order upon which most performatives – marriage ceremonies, legal sentences, statements of ownership and so forth – draw is revealed to be heterosexist. But in relating the speech act to her earlier discussion of drag, she argues that all performativity cannot be understood as drag (p.230) and that one cannot reduce performativity to performance (p.234). Gender ‘performativity’ is the forcible reiteration of the citation of gender, which exceeds the performer, unlike the chosen performance of cross dressing.

How may Butler’s definitions of ‘performativity’ help with an understanding of what is taking place in Cruise’s gender citations? In his overstated performances of masculinity, there is something of the parody that Butler suggests, in which the citation of masculinity is open to subversion. In *Undoing Gender* (2004), discussing citations of gender, she states that they ‘can be significantly deterritorialised through the citation. They can also be exposed as non-natural and non-necessary when they take place in a context and through a form of embodying that defies normative expectation.’ (2004, p. 218) Cruise’s excessive performances of masculinity at these particular moments highlight their artificiality. There is an undoing or interrogation of the performance that subverts the claims of masculinity cited. The imperfect citation, the citation which in some way fails and is revealed, can be linked with the youthful male figure, one still being shaped to perform adequately in gendered terms. Cruise’s particular performance style relates to his positioning as a young male: he is a boy playing at being a man.<sup>1</sup>

Young men’s performances of masculinity are demonstrated for, and judged by, other men - usually paternal figures (who may be supportive or hostile). Michael Kimmel describes the scrutiny young males fall under in their attempts to gain acceptance as men: ‘We test ourselves, perform heroic feats, take enormous risks, all because we want other men to grant us our manhood. Masculinity as a homosocial enactment is fraught with danger, with the risk of failure, and with intense relentless competition.’ (2005, p.33) Cruise’s films embody that potential for failure, the necessity of competition, and (at least in the movies) the triumph of the masculine self. Kimmel also suggests that if the pre-Oedipal boy identifies with his mother, he must to some degree see his father from his mother’s point of view, and passing through the Oedipal stage will regard his father ‘with a combination of awe, wonder, terror, *and desire*.’ (p.34) What follows is

the attempt to suppress this homoerotic desire: 'Homophobic flight from intimacy with other men is the repudiation of the homosexual within – never completely successful and hence constantly re-enacted in every homosocial relationship.' (p.34) Performances of masculinity are repeated attempts to pass muster as a man, to measure up. If the father is the first man whom the male child loves, he is also 'the first man who evaluates the boy's masculine performance, the first pair of eyes before whom he tries to prove himself. Those eyes will follow him for the rest of his life.' (p.34) If the attainment of the masculine ideal is, by its very construction, an impossibility this does not prevent doomed attempts at its fulfilment. Kimmel suggests that masculinity and its associated 'exaggerated set of activities' (p.35) are an attempt to prevent oneself from being exposed as fraudulent. Men are afraid of being unmasked and humiliated by other men. (Cruise's films often feature literal masks and public humiliation – *Eyes Wide Shut* [Stanley Kubrick, 1999] is one example.) Thus Tom Cruise's films are preoccupied with masculine competition and challenge, evaluation by other men - especially older men – and by a very real fear of failure. The typical Cruise character doubts his ability to meet the challenge he is faced with; the films depict a crisis of confidence<sup>2</sup>, which must be overcome. Vulnerability and doubt are disguised by an exaggerated performance of masculinity that only underscores his fear of inadequacy. The final success achieved by Cruise fails to dispel the doubt about 'being a man' that is expressed throughout the film.

### **Figuring the Soldier**

A privileged figure of masculinity is that of the soldier, and one that may seem to be most difficult to accomplish. If the Cruise character is concerned with the struggle to attain masculinity, it is significant that his military roles define his image. Four films spanning Cruise's career share military narratives, though set in different eras and countries. These are *TAPS* (Harold Becker, 1981), *Top Gun*, *A Few Good Men* (Rob Reiner, 1992) and *The Last Samurai* (Edward Zwick, 2003). Cruise has also starred in the 'quasi-military' *Mission: Impossible* series (1996, 2000, 2006), which present martial themes and national security issues in a fantastical fashion. Military films present masculinity as something to be struggled for – failure always looms in the background - and something that is 'performed'. The norms in question, different in each film, are striking in their narrow definition and artificiality.

*TAPS* is set in a boy's military academy, run by General Harlan Bache (George C. Scott<sup>3</sup>). The institution is viewed with hostility by the town's youth, which leads to a fight in front of the school; in the fracas a local boy is killed and General Bache is shot and hospitalised. Following this incident, a decision is made to close the establishment. The cadets, rebelling against this news, take over the school to prevent its closure. Scenes of boys, often no older than 10, marching in file and saluting their headmaster and older cadets, convey the notion that soldiers and their codes of behaviour are institutionally created. Women are absent, save a few mothers who petition to remove their young sons from the besieged school.

Cruise plays David Shawn, one of the more 'intense' of the young cadets at the school. He cuts an extreme figure, even by the standards of the school: his body is stocky but muscular and his outlandish behaviour even in early scenes invokes an excessive citation of masculinity. In *TAPS* Shawn's overblown masculine presence reveals the excesses of the militaristic masculine ideal, including his pumped up body, which is framed as the film's primary spectacle. Holding out against the National Guard that has been brought in to end the occupation, the cadets relax in their dorms as a young soldier wanders the corridors looking for ammunition. He stops at Shawn's dorm, where the latter is weight-lifting. The first shot is from the boy's vantage point: Shawn in profile, lifting weights. He wears a skimpy vest, giving him the appearance of being topless, as his shoulders are bare. His biceps and shoulders are emphasised in profile and his muscles bulge as he lifts the weights to his chin. The young cadet asks if he has any grenades. A medium shot shows Shawn turning and glaring at the young cadet who, stunned, scurries from the room. For us, if not for the young cadet, the excessive body is framed an object of erotic spectacle. (The diegetic soundtrack features 'Slow Hand' performed by The Pointer Sisters. The song's lyrics: 'Open your eyes, looking into mine. Seeing what you wanted to see.... I want a man who's strong and...I want a man with an easy touch' suggest an economy of desire based on looking, one which is structured as heterosexual and female. Cruise is its visible object.) This body is not passive, straining as it does in physical exercise. But the display of strength is narcissistic, for the labour is undertaken in vanity, rather than utility.

Shawn's 'excessive' body is matched by his behaviour; his initial brave acts are seen later as destructive – the extreme of masculine behaviour. In the climactic scene Brian Moreland (Timothy Hutton) and his best friend Alex Dwyer (Sean Penn) surrender their

weapons and walk out to the front yard, where the National Guard is waiting for them. Loathe to end the 'game', Shawn, poised with a semi-automatic machine gun at a window above the yard, opens fire on the soldiers at the gate. Fire is returned and chaos ensues. Under a hail of bullets the two boys run up to Shawn's room to stop him. A wide shot shows Shawn firing a semi-automatic weapon on a tripod propped on layers of sandbags; he is rotating the weapon from side to side, gleefully shooting. A close up shows him turning, a maniacal gleam in his eye as he cries 'It's beautiful man!', letting off another round, 'Beautiful!', and turns back to firing. Moreland dives for him just as the National Guard hurl a grenade, killing both boys. The closing shots show a sobbing Dwyer carrying the body of Moreland through the courtyard as the smoke settles. The flashback that follows shows the decorative parade that the cadets took part in at the beginning of the film. This juxtaposition emphasises the devastation caused by militarised masculinity, the destruction that belies the aesthetics of martial display.

In *A Few Good Men* (Rob Reiner, 1992), martial masculinity is also problematic. Its title refers to an American Marine advertisement from 1779 that would later be popularised by the Corps as a recruiting slogan.<sup>4</sup> This film asks to which of the characters does this phrase apply? *A Few Good Men* concerns a military trial at the now notorious US naval base in Guantanamo Bay in which Lance Corporal Dawson (Wolfgang Bodison) and Private Downey (James Marshall) are accused of killing Private William 'Willie' Santiago. Their lawyer, Lieutenant Daniel Kaffee (Tom Cruise), comes to suspect that they were ordered by Colonel Nathan Jessep (Jack Nicholson) to administer a disciplinary punishment and are guilty only of obeying orders. At stake is a masculinity that prioritizes hierarchy over individual ethics. Unlike *TAPS*, here Cruise does not play the excessively masculine male; this role is reserved for the bad 'Oedipal father' Jessep<sup>5</sup> in contrast with Cruise's 'feminine' son. Kaffee is framed as a failure by the military code and this leads to conflict between him, Jessep and Lieutenant Kendrick (Kiefer Sutherland). As Marines, the latter two are coded as more macho than Naval officers like Kaffee. Moreover, Kaffee is a paper pusher, a lawyer based in Washington D.C., whose rank was not earned by active service. He gets travel sick in aeroplanes and, to the amusement of his colleague Lieutenant Commander Joanne Galloway (Demi Moore), on boats. The film is about the negotiation of masculinity, with Kaffee's individualism offered as an alternative to Jessep's destructive masculine institutionalism.

The use of uniform in this film, as a visual flagging of masculine identity, is of even greater importance than in *TAPS*. In the latter film, military fatigues are worn by the boys throughout the film with a few exceptions, such as the parade. In *A Few Good Men* the visible distinctions made by military attire are of greater symbolic import. Here uniforms denote identity and role, signalling the potential difference between the men in and out of livery. If clothes make the man, then identity is a performance. The attention to such formal dress suggests narcissism and spectacular display. The range of uniforms worn by various characters, or by the same character at different times indicates this. Kaffee is first seen on a baseball diamond, in full kit: navy cap, two tone white/navy baseball shirt, grey leggings, black batting-gloves. He chats with a uniformed navy lawyer discussing a plea bargain while putting in batting practice. Being a lawyer is as much a game for Kaffee as baseball is. The combination of uniform and behaviour suggest simultaneously jock, lawyer, child. Kaffee shores up these possible identifications by expressing his disinterest in the case Galloway presents him with – he prefers the sports field to grown up pursuits. Kaffee’s childishness is suggested repeatedly, such as in his clutching of his baseball bat when working on the case – a phallic comforter - and eating in inappropriate contexts. He chews on an apple when he first meets Galloway in her office. When Kaffee steps into the role of soldier and lawyer, he is playing at being a man.

In the courtroom’s final cross-examination scene, which leads to Colonel Jessep’s admission of his part in Santiago’s death, Kaffee mimics Jessep in his aggressive style:

Jessep: You want answers?  
Kaffee: I think I’m entitled to them.  
Jessep: You want answers?  
Kaffee: I want the truth!  
Jessep: You can’t handle the truth!

Jessep’s final echoing of Kaffee’s angry statement ‘I want the truth’ indicates that Kaffee is now playing at Jessep’s level, demonstrating the mannerisms of an aggressive masculinity that Jessep recognizes. This is not Kaffee’s first impersonation of Jessep. Earlier in the film he mockingly repeats Jessep’s speech: ‘I eat breakfast 300 yards from 4000 Cubans who are trained to kill me’ to Galloway and his friend Sam Weinberg (Kevin Pollack) as they study the case in his home. This mimicry establishes two things: firstly, the excess of Jessep’s masculine performance, which can be so easily impersonated; secondly, what it is that divides Kaffee and Jessep as men. Jessep is a



dominating 'man's man', Kaffee is softer, with an ambiguous sexuality. Despite the possibility implicit in the casting of Demi Moore, there is no attempt to create a romantic subplot out of Galloway and Kaffee's working relationship. Kaffee's donning of naval whites garb supports Cruise's spectacular image. Naval whites are eye catching, showing off his physique in a way that khakis do not. They recall Cruise's dress wear as Maverick in *Top Gun*, which he wears to the bar where he first meets Charlie (Kelly McGillis). Whites are unique to the Navy and connotative of the 'queer' associations of the service in popular culture. Jessep alludes to this when he disparages Kaffee's 'faggoty white uniform'. (It seems likely that Stanley Kubrick had a version of Cruise in mind when he had Kidman's character fantasize about the sexual attentions of a man in Navy whites in *Eyes Wide Shut*.) Whites also signify tropical dress, suggesting Kaffee's view of the trip to Guantanamo Bay from Washington D.C. as a vacation rather than an assignment. But this choice of uniform is a gaffe as the Marines, including Jessep, all wear khaki, observing the requirement of wearing camouflage so close to the Cuban border. Kaffee's preferred apparel is both decorative and impractical – perhaps even dangerous to its wearer – shoring up the notion that he is involved in role play as a soldier. It is worth noting that it is his friend Weinberg who advises him to pack his 'whites', at the same time reminding him to take his Dramomine for travel sickness, all while pushing his baby daughter along the pavement in her pushchair. Weinberg is coded as a masculine failure: in addition to his mothering of Kaffee and nurturing role towards his child, he is the one who voices his anger at Downey and Dawson's bullying of Santiago. (Weinberg is also Jewish, thus stereotypically associated with intellectual and verbal ability, rather than the physical strength of WASPish hegemonic masculinity.) Galloway, on the other hand, admires the protection that the military swears it will guarantee to the general populace. Yet she is a token woman in the military and subject to an attempt at humiliation by her misogynist superior Jessep. In this world the weak, the feminine and the female are all vulnerable to the domineering masculine force that he represents.

The implicit theatricality of the courtroom lawyer role is supported by Kaffee's exaggerated performance in court. He shrugs his shoulders theatrically, raises his eyebrows, opens his mouth in disbelief and draws out individual words for emphasis. As he questions Lieutenant Kendrick he paces up and down, putting his hands in his pockets in a casual fashion. This over-stated performance culminates in the climactic scene between Jessep and Kaffee. In aping Jessep's performance style, Kaffee's own is

revealed *as* performance: it is Cruise mimicking Nicholson, Kaffee mimicking Jessep. Kaffee's performance as a lawyer is exposed, but so too is his performance of manliness. At one point, it seems as if his façade might crack: Jessep goads him with the claim that Kaffee has little more than circumstantial evidence with which to accuse him. A close up of Kaffee reveals him at breaking point: his eyes glassy, as if on the verge of great emotion, he seems to fade away, turning to look for support from his colleagues. Jessep steps down from the witness stand, declaring 'Thanks, Danny. I love Washington,' a dig at the paper-pushing world of military bureaucracy. Not a moment too soon, Kaffee snaps back into performance mode, ordering Jessep back to the podium, as hand shaking, he gulps back a glass of water: the mask is donned again.

This loss of nerve highlights Kaffee's vulnerable position in relation to the avenging Oedipal father represented by Colonel Jessep. In the witness box, Jessep is in the perfect place to observe and mock Kafee's (failed) attempts to perform adult masculinity. However, his own excessive masculinity means that Jessep is unrecoverable by a civilian world (much like Shawn in *TAPS*) and in the scene that follows the Colonel's institutional logic is revealed, leading to his downfall. Kaffee is positioned on the right in a wide shot of the courtroom. Also visible are two pillars and the frame of a painting, as well as the lawyer for the prosecution, Captain Jack Ross (Kevin Bacon). Kaffee appears to be 'of the court', part of its apparatus, with the law on his side (the pillars of justice behind him). The painting, a man's portrait, has featured in previous shots of Kaffee, suggesting the law and male privilege are on Kaffee's side. He is, after all, both the son of a successful courtroom lawyer and a Harvard graduate. Jessep, on the other hand, is framed in close up shots against dark wood panelling, disassociated from the courtroom setting (the legal world is not his natural habitat). Slamming his fist into his hand, Kaffee accuses Jessep of ordering a forbidden 'Code Red' disciplinary action, then trying to cover up Santiago's consequent death. Ross, visible in the background, shouts at Kaffee to stop; the judge tells Kaffee he is in contempt of court. Kaffee, framed in a wide shot, strides up to Jessep, moving into a low, tight close up, for a second time shouting 'Did you order a Code Red?' In a low close-up Jessep bellows back 'You're goddamn right I did!' matching the febrile intensity of Kaffee. This is Jessep's 'It's beautiful' moment, the expression of the excessive masculine, unrecoverable by society. Moments later, he is hauled away by the military police. Jessep has failed to recognise the wisdom of Lance Corporal Dawson: 'We were supposed to fight for people who couldn't fight for themselves. We were

supposed to fight for Willie.’ The military is there to protect society’s more vulnerable elements. As Dawson leaves the courtroom, Kaffee tells him ‘You don’t need to wear a patch on your arm to have honour.’ Dawson responds with ‘Ten hut! There’s an officer on deck’, saluting Kaffee who returns the gesture. His role play as a soldier has reached its objective: acknowledgement as an officer in command. It is an affirmation of the film’s suggestion that it is the US military’s duty to defend the weak instead of oppressing them.

### **The Other’s Martial Masculinity**

Where *A Few Good Men* proposes a humane military that protects the weak, *The Last Samurai* represents the US army of the 19th century as brutal in their exploits. It is the Japanese samurai, under physical and philosophical attack from the Westernisation (and industrialisation) of 1800’s Japan, who are counter-posed as noble warriors. Cruise plays Captain Nathan Algren, a troubled former soldier from an army that has spent much of its time putting down the rebellions of the Native Americans. Traumatized by his memories of slaughter, he is a broken man. As a mercenary in the pay of the Japanese government, he and Colonel Bagley (Tony Goldwyn) travel to Japan to train its disorganised army to fight the samurai, who have rebelled against the Emperor. Algren is suspicious of the mission and hostile towards Bagley, whom he holds responsible for the massacre of a Native American tribe, which he witnessed as a soldier under Bagley’s command. Taken captive by the samurai after a battle with the Japanese army, he undergoes samurai training and embraces an alternative masculine ethic. *The Last Samurai* indicates that the hero is both natural born *and* created (illustrating Dyer’s claim about the contradictions at the heart of stardom). This American war hero’s reinvention as an honorary samurai is marked by scenes of performance and learning. The acquired nature of this identity is made explicit by the extreme ethnic ‘otherness’ of the samurai. But although the samurai version of masculinity is presented as a performance for Algren, there is the suggestion that he possesses a ‘natural’ heroism beyond that which can be learnt.

The film opens with panoramic images of the Japanese landscape as an authoritative English (‘old world’) voice - later revealed to be that of Simon Graham [Timothy Spall], Algren’s friend - tells of the mythical founding of Japan. A coral sword, pulled from the ocean by the ‘old gods’, released four drops of water; falling from the blade back into the sea these drops formed the islands of Japan. The speaker disputes this myth:

I say, Japan was made by a handful of brave men. Warriors, who were willing to give their lives for what has seemed to become a forgotten word. Honour.

Just before he says the word 'honour' the image changes to reveal a meditating figure upon a hillside. Further shots showing a hazy scene of Japanese warriors fighting a white tiger, followed by the image of a banner featuring the same animal, are indicated as part of the meditator's vision. A close up of this man cuts to a close up of the tiger's eyes, suggesting the link between beast and man, then cuts back to him as his eyes snap open. This image fades to black, as a white Japanese title and the words *The Last Samurai* in red, overlaying the Japanese characters, fade up. This visual overlay suggests the meshing of Western and Japanese cultures (as well as genres and markets). An accompanying change in the soundtrack from Eastern woodwind to a jaunty military brass band is jarring. The incongruous sounds anticipate the distinction between the prior scene of spirituality with what follows: a tracking shot to the right reveals a slumped Nathan Algren surrounded by wooden boxes, strewn with rumpled American flags and symbolising the corruption of the ideological values which the flag represents. The refined voice-over of the Englishman has been replaced by that of an American salesman: 'Ladies and Gentlemen! Winchester, America's leader in all forms of armament used by the United States Army, celebrates our nation's centennial by bringing you a true American hero' – on cue Algren takes a slug from his hip flask – 'one of the most decorated warriors this country has ever known.' The contrast between the heroism and spirituality of the ancient Japanese ways and the corrupt and commercial American culture is striking. It seems impossible that this man can be a hero.

Dragged on stage, the intoxicated Algren proceeds to give a histrionic speech to the crowd. He seems less of a real draw than the mechanical model of 'cowboys and injuns' which cranks into gear as he relates how he slaughtered Indians at the Battle of The Little Big Horn, with the help of his Winchester rifle. His drunken rendition turns bombastic, drawing attention to the gap between the promised entertainment and the performer's traumatic memories. The scripted performance – complete with prompt cards for the inebriated Algren – breaks down, as he relates his experience of the massacre that he witnessed of an Indian encampment. In a final act of anger, he takes aim and fires shots above the crowd that want war dramatized for their entertainment. It

is Algren's pangs of conscience that separate him from the brutality demonstrated by his fellow soldiers during the massacre. (A later flashback confirms his true heroism as well as the moral corruption of Colonel Bagley).

The opposition between ignoble victory and heroic loss is demonstrated by Algren's sojourn with the samurai, who are on the brink of being wiped out by a Japanese government bent on Westernisation. There is a distinct anti-technology bias to this narrative. Algren's drunken performance takes place at a centennial exposition, which presents martial success underpinned by the mechanical. He implies that the American army's victory over the Native Americans was due only to their advanced weaponry – hence his diatribe on the amount of damage a rifle can do – and that such a victory is inherently *ignoble*. The same forces threaten the samurai, whose demise is hastened by their refusal to take up firearms. Algren comes to identify with this 'other' - just as he has been sympathetic to the cultures of the Native Americans. Becoming an honorary samurai, he chooses to ride with them into a battle that they are bound to lose against the newly armed Japanese military. (However, Algren does not die in this battle, unlike most of the samurai.) Algren's adoption by the samurai, which culminates in his donning their dress and joining them on the battlefield, is a performance in learned behaviour, skills and dress, its artificiality marked by a Caucasian male demonstrating an elite Japanese tradition. Following his capture the film follows the training involved in becoming a samurai warrior, through the teachings of Katsumoto (Ken Watanabe), head of the samurai, and the brutal fighter Ujio (Hiroyuki Sanada). At the same time Algren is marked as a natural hero, 'fated' for this destiny. The predetermination of his heroic status is suggested by the meditating Katsumoto's visions. His dream illustrates the predetermination at the heart of samurai philosophy, as do the discussions Katsumoto has with Algren on the nature of fate. That Algren also has visions, but in the form of traumatic flashbacks, suggests a link between the two men; Algren is an inverted image of Katsumoto. Only under the latter's guidance does Algren find foresight; this is underscored when he is finally able to visualise the possible moves of sparring competitor Ujio, leading him to 'draw' with his opponent in sword play.

In Katsumoto's initial vision he sees a white tiger, defending itself against the samurai that surround it. The scene in which Algren and the Japanese army first fight against the samurai is thus predicted, with Algren replacing the tiger in his vision. A similar blue and grey hue as that featured in the dream sequence colours this scene, as the

samurai gallop out fearlessly from the forest. In the ensuing battle Algren is felled from his horse, and one by one he tackles the samurai on foot. Now without a sword, he uses a spear wrested from a samurai that carries the flag of the white tiger. He swings the spear like a sword then stabs it through the armour of one warrior. Katsumoto approaches on horse, drawn to the scene. He wears black samurai armour and a mask shaped in a fearsome grimace. Dismounting, Katsumoto pulls down his mask in interest; his face now visible, he is familiar as the figure on the hillside from the earlier scene. It is clear he recognises this combat from his vision. A medium shot of Algren is accompanied by the roar of a tiger over his breathing: he is the white tiger. The image now is in slow motion, exaggerating the predetermination of his every movement.

Algren is aligned with the white tiger, a mythical figure fearsome in battle and taken as the symbol of the samurai. In addition to the 'fatedness' of the hero (itself 'preordained' by the casting of film star Cruise in the role) is the labour represented in Algren becoming a samurai. In the convention of the martial arts film, which follows the progress of the student, Algren practices his sword kata by the setting sun. His first humiliating failure occurs when he finds himself pitted against the best swordsman in the village. In this failed performance, Algren is challenged by his host's eldest child Higen (Sosuke Ikematsu) to sword play. Though playful, it is an act of symbolic importance: Higen's samurai father was killed in battle by Algren, who is now being given hospitality by his mother, Taka (Koyuki), Katsumoto's sister. The 12 year old Higen and his friend have already demonstrated their skilled sword play, sparring together. With wooden weapons they mimic adult training, previously seen conducted in the central field of the village. This development of skills and strength is under great public scrutiny, particularly that of other men. Higen blocks the moves of the other, smaller, child under the watchful eye of his mother. When Algren picks up the sword of the losing child, he is invited by Higen to test him. A group of men gather to watch, as well as the concerned mother Taka. Algren holds his sword in the Western fashion, with one hand, while the child holds it in the Japanese, two handed, style and takes repeated lunges at him, which Algren blocks and evades. As Higen lifts his sword for one last cut, Algren puts his hand against the blade to indicate that play is over, uncomfortable at taking on a boy. By this time Ujio and his friends have gathered, their ominous appearance marked by thunder and heavy rain. Ujio has already indicated his hatred of Algren, and has been denied permission to kill Algren by Katsumoto. Walking towards Algren, Ujio orders him in Japanese to put down his sword. Algren

ignores him, holding onto his sword, and turns to meet Ujio face on, squaring up to him. Ujio walks closer towards him, his wooden sword now resting on his shoulder: he is ready to fight. Shots of various villagers looking on suggest the aggressive nature of this challenge and the scrutiny under which demonstrations of masculinity fall. Ujio swings, hitting Algren in the stomach, who falls to one knee before being struck over the head with Ujio's sword. Three times Algren staggers to his feet, refusing to concede, and each time he is beaten with increasing brutality. On Algren's final attempt, the samurai grabs his sword (a mimicry of Algren's earlier action with Higen) and cracks him over the neck. Ujio throws the sword back to Higen, who has witnessed the whole thing. The exchange is humiliating and painful for Algren, yet at each stage he refuses to concede defeat. In the Cruise filmography this scene is an early demonstration of violence upon his body, which although evaded in his youth, becomes more evident with the aging of the star. The juxtaposition with Higen and the other child at the beginning of the scene implies that Algren's training is really a form of child's play, and that masculinity, especially a martial masculinity, is something to be learned and performed. Algren will grow into a samurai under the watchful eye of Katsumoto, a benign father figure, and Ujio, his more sadistic paternal counterpart (the patriarch split into good and bad).

In a later episode of sparring between Ujio and Algren, their combat takes on aspects of the visualisation of the meditating Katsumoto and hint at Algren's increasingly samurai-like nature. This time it is spring, the sun is shining on the green fields and cherry blossom trees, in contrast to the rainstorm of the last brutal beating. Algren now wears the Japanese tunic and divided skirt, showing his integration into the community. He holds the sword with two hands and its movements reflect his new training. In this match, Algren loses the first two points. He pauses: in order to defend himself against this experienced warrior, he must anticipate how his attacker will move. He closes his eyes and visualises Ujio attacking. Opening his eyes he takes the first cut. The scene plays out in slow motion, exaggerating the seeming predestination of each move, and the muscularity of the two fighters, in particular Algren, whose forearms are revealed as he lifts the sword above his head. Finally, they reach a draw, each holding a sword to the other's throat. Algren has become the heroic equal of his teacher; Ujio bows his head, indicating his respect. The earlier images of the white tiger indicate that Algren's heroic status is predestined, yet he is learning not only swordplay but also Shinto philosophy; this hero is being created moment by moment. The 'performance' of this

fight is stressed: villagers gather to watch the two swordsmen with some placing bets on the outcome. Algren is relearning masculinity – or rather, is learning a different masculinity - having put his faith in an American manhood that has proven damaging to himself and its indigenous people. Yet the alternative he has chosen has little future: the samurai way has already been marked as part of the past by the voice-over at the film's opening.

Going into battle against the Japanese army, Algren dons Taka's deceased husband's armour with her help. He is literally filling the boots of her husband, and she is helping to reanimate his masculinity. As Algren steps out of the house, Katsumoto is anointing a soldier in the village, and raises his eyes at the figure of Algren in full Samurai dress standing on Taka's balcony. Ujio rushes up to him; staring for a moment he puts his hand on the breast plate and tugs it. He nods approvingly, and motions towards Katsumoto. Algren approaches Katsumoto, who presents him with a sword. Algren bares the blade, asking the meaning of the Japanese inscription; 'I belong to the Warrior in whom the older ways have joined the new.' 'Old' and 'new' in this context also refer to different ethnicities: Japanese and American. This relates back to the myth described at the opening of the film about the ancient spiritual foundations of Japan; modernity is associated with the United States, including its corruption of the Japanese army through technology. If the 'samurai's sword is his soul', as Katsumoto says, Algren has successfully adopted the soul of samurai masculinity, the reward being to ride out to his certain, yet noble, death on the battlefield. Yet he lives: unlike that of the samurai who must die, Cruise's masculinity can be renewed through appropriating the other. Algren goes on to successfully negotiate with the Japanese authorities, finally returning to the samurai village and to Taka. She forms a typically superficial example of heterosexual closure in Cruise's films. Taka is the third point in the erotic triangle of herself, her brother Katsumoto and Algren, legitimising the much closer bond between the two men, despite the closing clinch of the film. This is one of the rare examples of the homosocial traffic in women to appear in Cruise's films.

Cruise's military films are preoccupied by his struggle to achieve an especially demanding form of masculinity, that of the soldier. This narrative only reiterates the gap between the boy and idealised man. It explains why Cruise plays *young* military figures so often: his markedly youthful performances shore up the 'surplus' of the military masculine ideal, as surely as his uniform indicates its artifice. In *TAPS* the



process of becoming a soldier is exaggerated by boys performing the actions of grown men: there is something discomfoting about the sight of two children in army fatigues confiding in each other that they miss their ‘moms’ and want to go home. In *A Few Good Men* the question of proper military conduct (and thus how masculinity should be defined) ends up in court: should the weak be protected or sacrificed? Cruise is the softer, more feminine – *childish* – male, in opposition to the hyper-masculine father figure Colonel Jessep, whom he must find the strength to resist. Here, Cruise is the boy who plays at being a soldier *and* a lawyer. It is as a lawyer he performs best; the memory of his father, a successful (and morally upright) lawyer whose reputation he must live up to is ever present. His finest moment comes in his mimicry of Jessep, which he uses to simultaneously defend the values of his real (good) father, and overthrow the bad.

By contrast, Nathan Algren in *The Last Samurai* mimics heroic behaviour – sent to Japan as an American mercenary he adapts to the samurai way and develops their fighting skills. The arduous construction of their idealised manhood is intensified by its foreign nature. Cruise’s performances highlight the artificiality of this citation of masculinity and the lack beneath it. Each of the films suggests that the martial masculinity that is presented, though it may be an honourable ideal, is no longer recoverable. The cadets in *TAPS* find their military school is to be shut down after an incident in which a teenager is killed; Colonel Jessep is arrested for manslaughter in *A Few Good Men* in spite of his embodiment of military masculine ideals; the samurai’s struggle in *The Last Samurai* is futile as their codes of honour and skills in weaponry are overwhelmed by the fire power of an industrialised Japanese army. Yet doomed as it may be, the struggle of the boy-child Cruise to enact masculinity is still preferable to the subordination to femininity that is the only, horrible, alternative.

### **Making an Exhibition of Oneself**

Tom Cruise’s films are characterised by performances that put his youthful body on display. Yet a lack of clarity regarding his potential audience, and the exceeding of heteronormative constraints in his onscreen representation, adds to the ambiguous sexuality of his persona. Many of his early films exhibit, within the constraints of a Hollywood narrative, considerable appeal for both female heterosexual and male homosexual sensibilities. His masculinity is coded as insufficient, needing to be shaped into a more mature virility, one that is less spectacular. A grown-up masculinity, the

ideology of the films conclude, is based on heterosexual coupling – at the expense of self-pleasuring and showing off to men – and masculine competition which takes the form of capitalist struggle, not showmanship.

A film scene opens with two boys playing soccer: one of them, in cutaway shorts and a vest, elbows the other as they run down the pitch. Losing the ball he stops, allowing play to continue without him. With a wave of his hand to dismiss the game, he saunters over to the edge of the pitch where his friends are in discussion. Peeling off his vest to reveal a developed yet stocky torso, the boy lies down in the grass: meet Tom Cruise. This first appearance of Cruise, as ‘Billy the Arsonist’, in the film *Endless Love* (Zeffirelli, 1981) signals the contradictions that would develop in his star persona. He begins the episode active and competing, ending it by lying languorously in the grass. In this scene he instructs the protagonist, David (Martin Hewitt) in how to behave like a hero: in childhood he set his house alight then put the fire out, to win the admiration of his mother. To this day she considers him a hero for his bravery. He suggests David do the same to impress his girlfriend Jade’s (Brooke Shields) parents. Here are the beginnings of Cruise’s ambiguous image: a masculine active youth, yet with a proclivity for self-conscious display towards a male audience and, crucially, an enjoyment of his own body. Consider the story he tells, that he fashioned his own image as a hero and how it is *based on a falsehood*. This is an undercurrent that runs through the films of Cruise: the creation of an image of heroism, based on a peculiarly adolescent idea of what a man should be. Tom Cruise plays a *boy*: a male but not quite yet a man, who has a fantasy of what grown-up masculinity consists of. His identity is based on a sense of performance and bodily exhibition. The spectacle is available for all to enjoy.

Cruise’s presentation as an erotic spectacle is indicative of cinematic phenomena which complicate Laura Mulvey’s account (1975, republished 1992) of classical Hollywood and its patriarchal forms of looking, in which only women on screen are defined by their ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’ (1992, p.27), where cinema is structured by patriarchal codes of looking. Nor is Cruise in command of the male gaze – he cannot be described as active in his looking relations. Equally, the star’s objectification cannot be explained by Steve Neale’s (1993) discussion of men’s bodies in genres such as the action film and western. Neale points to the disavowal of bodily pleasures that many action heroes undergo via torture and suffering in narratives ‘marked by sado-masochistic phantasies and scenes’ (Neale 1993, p.15), an inflection absent from Cruise’s early films. As

explored in the previous chapter, Cruise's persona comes closest to those youthful stars of the 1950s, Brando, Clift, Dean and Newman who were characterised by their erotic appeal, based on an appealing physicality that was also highly theatricalised (Cohan, 1997, p.203). Their positioning as erotic spectacle is permissible only because of their status as 'boys', young men who have little power. Veronika Rall (1993) indicates a later trend in the cinema of the late 1970s and 1980s towards a greater display of the male body. *Saturday Night Fever* (John Badham, 1978) and *Grease* (Randal Kleiser, 1978), starring John Travolta, are two such examples, though she acknowledges that both are musicals, traditionally a film genre associated with the presentation of the male eroticised body. However, she also suggests that *American Gigolo* (Paul Schrader, 1980), starring Richard Gere, is representative of a trend later established by the new generation of young exhibitionist stars in the mid-1980s.

The early personas of Travolta and Gere are key precursors to that of Cruise, close enough to be considered for the same parts: Travolta turned down the main roles in *American Gigolo* and *An Officer and a Gentleman* which eventually went to Gere. (Like Cruise, both have endured persistent rumours over their alleged homosexuality – indicative of their respective personas' deviation from hegemonic masculinity.)

Travolta came to fame as Tony Manero in *Saturday Night Fever*, a film set in the Brooklyn disco scene of the 1970s. His persona immediately became synonymous with exhibitionism: not only does he dance but the disco music he enjoys has its roots in the gay sub-culture of metropolitan New York. He is presented as unashamedly narcissistic: one famous scene shows Tony getting ready for a night out, coiffing his hair while posing in the mirror, wearing only his tight-fitting black briefs (a scene which, in its auto-erotic teen exuberance, is the antecedent of Cruise's moment of spectacle in *Risky Business*). The outfit he favours is a tight-fitting white flared suit that draws attention to his physique as well as his dancing. Such attributes closely parallel Cruise's own youthful figurations.

Exhibitionism in the form of dancing continues to be part of the Travolta persona, such as in the musical *Grease* (Randal Kleiser, 1978) and *Staying Alive* (Sylvester Stallone, 1983), a sequel to *Saturday Night Fever* that follows Tony's attempts to make it as a dancer on Broadway. The youthful Travolta persona is referenced in *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994) in which the star, playing assassin Vincent Vega, takes to the dance floor with his boss's wife Mia (Uma Thurman). Where he differs from Cruise is

that his persona seems less ‘queer’ than Cruise’s – this may be partly because his earliest roles fall into musical or quasi-musical territory where the genre’s established norms allow a heterosexual male more potential for spectacle without the same risk of feminisation. Nevertheless, his early roles are indicative of an alternative mode of gender looking, with E. Ann Kaplan stating that ‘stars like John Travolta have been rendered the object of a woman’s gaze and in some of the films (e.g. *Moment by Moment*) placed explicitly as a sexual object to a woman who controlled the film’s action.’ (1983, p.29)

In *Moment by Moment* (Jane Wagner, 1982) Travolta plays a young drifter who falls into a romantic relationship with an older woman. (Given that the film apparently celebrates the [heterosexual] woman’s gaze, it is interesting to note that the film was written and directed by a lesbian film-maker and starred her partner, Lily Tomlin.) The film is exemplary of a dynamic which has significant implications for Cruise: ‘Travolta’s vulnerability physically often parallels an emotional and/or intellectual vulnerability marked by a series of roles as a working-class man in love with a wealthier and/or smarter woman (*Saturday Night Fever*, *Grease*, and *Look Who’s Talking*)’ (Depoe, 2006, p.34). This is also the case in *Pulp Fiction*, in which his character Vincent becomes involved with the wife of his gangster boss (indicating Tarantino’s exploitation of the persona). Travolta is coded as working class, specifically Italian-American working class, where Cruise is white collar and this is a real difference in their respective images. However, Travolta’s class is less important per se than how he is positioned vis-à-vis a more powerful (wealthier/smarter/older) woman – and in this regard his roles anticipate those of Cruise.

Richard Gere’s persona follows a different trajectory from Travolta’s. His earliest film part was as a pimp in *Report to the Commissioner* (Milton Katselas, 1975); his first significant role was as Tony, the psychologically unhinged lover of Theresa Dunn (Diane Keaton) in *Looking for Mr Goodbar* (Richard Brooks, 1977). Although he is not responsible for her eventual murder, his eccentric behaviour points towards psychological trauma (he is a Vietnam veteran). This includes dancing around Theresa’s apartment in nothing but a jock strap while clutching a fake glow-in-the-dark knife: the double-phallus of jock strap and knife are a hysterical distraction from his exposing performance. As Linda Ruth Williams notes, here he is ‘a dangerous love object, a profile which is developed in Paul Schrader’s *American Gigolo*’ (1995, p.78),

a film in which he plays a male prostitute accused of killing a client. In *American Gigolo* vicious patriarchal forces turn against Julian (Richard Gere) – anticipating Cruise’s vulnerable position. Julian, or ‘Julie’, an appellation that flags the character’s feminine position, is a male gigolo who specialises in sex with older wealthy women and is managed by a ‘madam’. When he is accused of murdering a client, Mrs Reiman, he is marginalised by the Beverley Hills community where he previously operated. He is only rescued from a murder sentence by his lover Michelle (Lauren Hutton), the wife of a US senator, who intervenes to provide him with an alibi.

As Julian, Gere anticipates the Cruise persona’s narcissistic enjoyment of his own physicality and interest in material goods. Savouring his sports car, expensive tailoring and interior décor, he is more of an aesthete than Cruise who is lower middle class in his tastes. Yet in his refinement Julian is clearly performing, evident in the shifting manner in which he speaks to different characters. This underlines that his job is to ‘perform’ sexually for his female clients, while performing (faking) sexual interest in them. Gere’s association with performance thus anticipates Cruise. His exhibitionist physicality is also privileged by the *mise-en-scène*, though it is offset by showing the body in action: an early scene shows him clipping his ankles straps into an over-head bar and doing pull-ups (like Cruise’s, his body tantalisingly hangs in space, engaging in vigorous but ultimately fruitless labour). Peter Lehman suggests that this scene has a special function: ‘All the fragmented body shots emphasize the muscles either poised for action or in action... the scene can be read as hysterical preparation/ and over compensation for the static, passive display of Gere’s body in the lovemaking scene.’ (Lehman, 1994, pp.8-9) The passivity of his embodiment in this scene reflects the powerless situation Julian finds himself in: he must rely upon a rescue facilitated by a wealthier (and slightly older) woman. That is to say, the maternally-inflected woman who populates Travolta’s films is equally ubiquitous in Gere’s, in combination with the exhibitionist male body. Both predict the dynamic that characterises Cruise’s persona.

*An Officer and a Gentleman* (Taylor Hackford, 1982) continues Gere's association with the upward mobility and aspirational status established in *Gigolo*. It also presents the eroticised romantic hero in uniform that anticipates Cruise – both stars play naval aviation officers, characterised by their dashing appearance in naval whites. The film follows Zack’s (Richard Gere) entry into Aviator Officer Candidate School and his attempts to complete the programme. Zack antagonises Marine Sergeant Foley (Louis

Gossett Jr), the head drill instructor, who believes Zack lacks the character to become an officer. It is through this ambivalent paternal relationship with Foley that Zack comes to maturity and graduates. Zack's real father Byron's (Robert Loggia) low status is indicated by his position as a Navy boatswain's mate, and explains the class ascension that Zack longs for. *An Officer and a Gentleman* provides a precursor to Cruise's persona: featuring the milieu of a naval training environment and a brash young pilot who wishes to shake off his father's reputation to receive the validation of authority, the film is a prototype for *Top Gun*.

The figuring of the body – active without purpose, suffused with pleasure – so apparent in Gere and Travolta's early roles is a defining feature of Cruise's persona, one which Veronika Rall considers at length. Discussing the photographs by fashion photographer Herb Ritts of Cruise splashing about in the sea as 'playing on the model's narcissism and exhibitionism' she argues that they 'risk both male homo- and female hetero-erotic desires' (1993, p.96). Thus, Cruise's figuring as a visual spectacle is characterised by its transgressive nature, one which Gaylyn Studlar (2001) suggests exists beyond his onscreen representations. This quality 'can be discerned in the slippage between the construction of his onscreen desirability as both a homoerotic and a heteroerotic sign and offscreen fan inscription of him as the object of gay desire coupled with media innuendoes to the effect that he is gay' (2001, p.174). But although Cruise's body is put on display and is the site of a desire in excess of heteronormative dictates, it is recuperated by the narrative into the hegemonic order from which Cruise may have, at least temporarily, escaped. His films work hard to contradict certain images, and much of their ideological work involves reining in his exhibitionist proclivities and transgressive possibilities, insisting that Cruise grow up and take his place offstage. *Risky Business* (Paul Brickman, 1983) and *Cocktail* (Roger Donaldson, 1988) illustrate the Cruise character's relation to an adult masculine ideal underpinned by capitalist competition. *Magnolia* provides an extreme form of Cruise's historic persona, which alludes to the coping mechanism, in the form of a manic defence, which Cruise's spectacular masculinity provides. Here, bodily display and masculine posturing are presented as a response to *adolescent* masculine trauma – his misogyny caused by his troubled relationship with his father.

This exhibitionist trait of Cruise's persona is stabilised in *Risky Business*, which presents him dancing around his living room in underpants and shirt, brandishing a

poker at his crotch. It is a teenage display of egocentrism and self-pleasure, one that laid the groundwork for the persona of the young Cruise <sup>6</sup> and shot him to fame. When teenager Joel Goodson's parents go on vacation and leave him home alone, he sets about entertaining himself. He sits down to a ready meal, pouring himself a large whisky and coke. But despite the appearances of adulthood, he cannot even heat dinner for himself, biting into a still frozen meal. In the scene that follows, he starts up the stereo that his father has designated off limits. As he hums to himself Joel pushes the base up to max. A wide shot reveals the living room with a double doorway opening out onto the hall. It is framed like an empty stage. Applause is heard – coming from the stereo – followed by the opening piano notes of a song. As the first bar finishes, Joel slides into view, wearing shirt, underpants and white socks. Cue the performance, as Joel turns on the ball of his foot to face the imaginary audience and begins lip-syncing Bob Seger's 'Old time Rock 'n' Roll' into the candlestick he clutches, wagging his thumb emphatically towards himself. Another shot follows which frames his back as he struts into the living room. Gripping the fireplace, bouncing on his toes, he whirls round and throws the candlestick onto the sofa. Continuing to dance, he then picks up the poker from the grate. The shot changes to a tighter framing of Joel, side on, as he steps up onto the coffee table, revealing his mid-section and legs as he grinds the poker against his crotch like an imaginary guitar; another shot from the front shows him stepping along the table. He leaps from the table onto his knees where he throws his head back and sings into the poker. Moving between high angle and closer shots, Joel jumps up and down before hurling himself on the sofa, kicking his legs high in the air and flashing his underpants. He rolls over, jerking his body. Finally he leaps back up, and in an instrumental interlude in which the roar of the crowd can be heard, flicks up his collar, wiggles his bum, turns round and plays air guitar. An exterior of the house shows Joel's dancing silhouette in the window.

David Ehrenstein claims the sequence 'offered [Cruise] up as a fully eroticised vision the likes of which hadn't been seen since Marilyn Monroe's famous encounter with a subway vent in *The Seven Year Itch*' [Billy Wilder, 1955] (1998, p.321), indicating the scale of the scene's departure from typical Hollywood figurings of the male body. The sequence reveals the narcissistic nature of Cruise's performance: though there is no audience for his moves he imagines a captivated crowd (whose roar the spectator hears) to whom he exhibits himself. This is typical of the persona. The performance is also aspirational, like a teenager in front of his bedroom mirror. It highlights the gap

between desire and reality, and the insufficiency that the adolescent boy feels in relation to a masculine ideal. Fantasy and lack structure the film, whose erotic narrative could be interpreted as a product of Joel's imagination. His rock act is imagined for a captive crowd, yet within the diegesis it is performed for himself, a typical teenage fantasy. A later episode in the film confirms this predisposition towards self-indulgence. Lying in bed, he places one hand under his duvet. The shot is bathed in pulsating red light, as though the illumination comes from a neon sign, suggesting a sleazy motel, and literal 'red light' connotations. The images that follow are framed as fantasy: Joel lies down with an unidentified attractive young woman. A siren roars, the same red flashing light bathes the couple; looking through the blinds, he sees a SWAT team pile out of a van and a number of police cars, their blue lights flashing. A middle aged man speaks through a loudspeaker, telling him not to throw his life away on the babysitter. Next his parents appear, his mother snatching the loudspeaker, imploring Joel with the same appeal, followed by the babysitter's father's threats. He has been 'caught in the act', indulging in a masturbatory fantasy that has been interrupted by his superego. The lighting to connote sexual fantasy is used later in the film, and frames the narrative that follows as unreliable.

In a practical joke, Joel's friend Miles (Curtis Armstrong) sends a black transvestite prostitute to Joel's home. Having demanded his cab fare and extra for his trouble, he gives Joel the phone number of Lana (Rebecca De Mournay), saying 'it's what every white boy off the lake wants'. Jackie (Bruce A. Young) is marked as triply 'other', a prostitute, black and a transvestite. Worse still, this 'other' is infiltrating the suburbs. This corruption of the suburbs is a recurring theme of the film, starting with the opening titles. The credits open over a view from the elevated metro, as it travels through parts of downtown Chicago; a woman's heavy breathing is heard on the soundtrack. (This is later attributable to Lana, who takes Joel for a midnight sex session on the metro while her pimp empties his family's home.) But in spite of this initial exposure to transgression, and Joel's exhibitionist self-display, the film recuperates any extra-normative possibility on offer. Hereafter only women are made objects of sexual display, commodified for the purchase of middle class straight white boys.

Following some procrastination, Joel calls Lana. He sits in the corner of his bedroom, the red light flashing on and off (now shown as emanating from a neon sign in his room), matching it to the masturbatory fantasy of a few scenes before. As he talks to



her, he pulls his hockey mask down over his head, a paranoid act that refers back to the shaming exposure which ended the last fantasy. It also marks the scene as comic, again echoing this earlier scene. The entrance of Lana is marked as fantasy. After phoning her, Joel returns downstairs to the lounge, falling asleep with a book (another clue that this is the dream world). Shots of the house's exterior show a strong breeze blowing the autumn leaves and knocking over a bicycle (suggesting Lana as a sexualised Mary Poppins – another fantastical figure of wish-fulfilment). She sashays through the lounge door and pauses by the French windows to fix the strap of her sandal, asking if he's ready for her. Joel approaches with implausible confidence for a gawky teenager and she swiftly disrobes. Just at this moment, the French windows are blown open by a gale, scattering leaves everywhere, thus exaggerating the fantastical element of the scene. The suggestion that this is a dream is given further plausibility by Joel's earlier account of a recurring dream in which he finds his way into a neighbour's house and discovers a young woman showering; the dream ends in an examination hall where he has arrived hours late for an important test (however, there is no scene shown in which he wakes up from his first encounter with Lana).<sup>7</sup>

*Risky Business* is filled with this teenage boy's attempts to become a man: he struggles to lose his virginity<sup>8</sup> and longs to drive his father's Porsche. When Joel borrows the car, against his father's express instructions, it rolls into Lake Michigan (possibly sabotaged by Lana) and he has to pay for it to be dredged from the water, indicating his (comic) failure at this citation of manhood. His struggle to behave like a man is clearest in his encounter with Princeton entrance interviewer Rutherford (Richard Masur), the gatekeeper of patriarchal privilege. Joel is desperate to attend an Ivy League school; his father has arranged a home visit from a Princeton representative. Rutherford arrives in the middle of a party Lana and Joel have engineered to introduce her prostitute contacts to Joel's friends. Joel ushers him into a quiet room, attempting to hide the fact that he has just stumbled into an ad-hoc brothel. As Lana interrupts with requests to use the room for business, Rutherford reviews Joel's mediocre scholastic achievements. While he explains that he is not quite Ivy League standard, Joel shoots an anxious look at an unphased Lana. After a moment, Joel turns, puts on his sunglasses and says, 'Sometimes you just have to go, what the fuck? Make your move.' He stands up, declaring to Lana 'Looks like University of Illinois!' and grins, the chasm of his mouth opening wide, a hysterical performance of nonchalance. But in the following scene, while Rutherford chats to Lana's girls, Joel hides in the basement with his toy train set –

another indication of his childishness – and shamefully tells Lana ‘I don’t think I’m going to say ‘what the fuck’ anymore’. Here Joel’s bravado hides his vulnerability, an attempt to stand up to the older male which fails, and his failure to be a man. He does however succeed in another adult masculine pursuit, making money, by running a brothel. (His entrepreneurial success is eventually compromised: returning from his late night trip with Lana on a metro car he finds his house has been stripped of furniture by her pimp Guido. In order to secure the return of his parents’ belongings he has to hand over his entire profits for the evening.) The amoral Lana is Joel’s mentor: ‘shameless pursuit of immediate material gratification ... What a capitalist!’ Joel says with admiration. The Princeton interviewer (who stays to socialise with Lana’s girls) confirms his business promise, later telling Joel’s father that Princeton ‘could do with a man like him.’ Joel’s entrepreneurial ability is what finally ensures his access to the grown up world – or the training ground for the grown up world, college – and sees him leave behind his teen exploits of self-display. The film ends, not with the raunchy exploits of Joel and Lana having sex in a metro-car, but taking a stroll through the park after dinner together in a restaurant. When Lana expresses her interest in spending the night with Joel, he jokingly asks how much she has on her and a financial negotiation ensues. Joel’s voice-over declares ‘I deal in human fulfilment. I grossed over \$8000 in one night,’ yet the possibility remains that it is he – Tom Cruise - who is the real sell.

### **‘Being the Best’ – the Erotics of Male Competition**

If the capitulation of the exhibitionist boy to a heterosexual happy ending is uncertain in *Risky Business*, *Top Gun* (Tony Scott, 1986) is even less concerned with containing the narcissistic impulses of the Cruise persona. The film cements fundamental persona traits, both the masculine role play and the displays of spectacle that characterise his other films. The transgressive quality of his onscreen embodiment is endorsed by the male relationships he enjoys and their discernable homoerotic energy. Above all, the narcissism of Cruise’s character Maverick defines the film and the character’s appeal, being ‘allowed a certain polymorphous perversity, to appear to desire everything and everyone, because he is at the autoerotic centre of the universe’ (Simpson, 1994, p.234). When Maverick and his flying partner Goose (Anthony Edwards) enter an elite naval flight training academy, Maverick’s goal is simply to ‘be the best’. Although he may be a member of the armed forces, the activities he engages in over the course of the film are training – role play. Maverick and his team can flirt with a martial masculinity without taking on the full responsibility of manhood. While they may perform in the

air, they do not truly act upon the world— i.e. attacking enemy planes in a real-life combat situation. Thus their acrobatics are characterised as spectacle – Maverick is a show-off, criticised for his unnecessarily flamboyant displays of piloting. The exhibitionism demonstrated by Maverick is also manifested by the eroticisation of Cruise’s body, as well as its projection onto other male characters in *Top Gun*. This is supported by a mise-en-scène that favours the display of young beautiful male bodies, such as in the locker room scenes, which present the naval pilots in various levels of undress. Kenneth MacKinnon, in his brief discussion of the film, states that in these scenes such eroticisation ‘threatens to become all-out homoerotic objectification ... (and perhaps goes all the way in the volleyball sequence, which looks as it could have been directed by [gay photographer] Bruce Weber)’ (2002, p.87). The volleyball sequence in question depicts Maverick and his peers on the beach, topless in cut-off Levis and shorts, lunging for the ball, posing and clapping team-mates on the back in celebration of point-scoring. The nature of the competition is unimportant: there is scant indication of which team is winning, nor any drama invested in the game. What is privileged is the presentation of visual spectacle in the form of beautiful young male bodies, a projection of the exhibitionistic Cruise. Veronika Rall notes that the volleyball sequence is only one instance in many films which give Cruise the opportunity to show off – others she mentions include *The Color of Money* as he dances round the pool table with his cue; his performance in *Cocktail* as a bartender; playing baseball in *A Few Good Men*. While she notes that such scenes may be indicative of sexual displacement or sexual inhibition, the spectacles they contain also ‘denote excess in that they intentionally interrupt the narrative’ (1993, p.97). The lack of emphasis in Cruise’s early films on story or dramaturgy, she suggests, supports this notion. Nevertheless, Cruise’s films do explore psychodynamic issues which depend on certain narrative structures in addition to the visual spectacle.

Such moments of spectacle are often characterised by Cruise’s physical isolation from others – though the volleyball sequence of *Top Gun* is an exception to this. As Manola Dargis notes, Cruise is never more appealing ‘than when in splendid erotic isolation, whether in *Risky Business*, Paul Thomas Anderson’s *Magnolia* or hanging by a thread of plausibility in *Mission Impossible II*’ (2000, p.93), a tendency which supports his figuring as narcissistic and auto-erotic. Yet although he may be physically separated in his exhibitionistic display, nevertheless a diegetic audience is often provided, and this audience is typically all-male. This is true of *All the Right Moves*, where he performs a

dance routine in front of his football co-players, in *Jerry Maguire* where he shows his star player Rod Tidwell 'the money', in *Magnolia* where he conducts his theatrical men's self-help seminar on stage. However, it is in *Top Gun* that Cruise's display for his male peers is really highlighted and so attached to his developing persona. This is exaggerated by the projection of his persona traits onto the characters of the other pilots. For what is evident from the volleyball sequence and the aerial scenes is that these young pilots perform for each other. The structures of looking between Maverick and his peers, especially his main rival Iceman (Val Kilmer), complicate masculine competition and eroticism. On his first day in class, Maverick looks around at his peers to size up the competition. Iceman smiles broadly at him as he chews gum and a series of looks are exchanged. Unnerved by Maverick's boldness, Goose asks him what he is doing; 'Just wondering who is the best'. Mark Simpson suggests that this, and the other 'long cruisy looks' that Maverick and Iceman exchange confirm that 'masculine competition is presented as erotic, and masculine eroticism as competition' (1994, p.234). In addition to a *mise-en-scène* of eroticised male bodies and an all-male environment, the dialogue is fraught with homoerotic innuendo. During a lecture on 'dog fighting', aerial combat between two pilots, one student remarks to another, 'This gives me a hard on', to which the other replies 'Don't tease me'.

While Maverick and Iceman compete against and for each other, Maverick's closest male relationship is with his navigator Goose. In this sense homoerotic interest and emotional attachment is split between the figures of Iceman and Goose (both characters look similar, tall and broad with blond, bouffant hairstyles). In Cruise's other films, such as *Cocktail*, *Interview with the Vampire* and *Jerry Maguire*, these impulses are usually directed towards the same character. Goose is not engaged in (erotic) competition with Maverick, mainly because he is his navigator – they are team-mates and Goose holds an inferior position to Maverick's. The navigator is the more 'passive' of the flying team, and this supported by Goose's nickname as 'Mother Goose' associating him with the feminine and the maternal. (Goose provides emotional reassurance to Maverick when he is troubled, and Maverick reminds him that 'you're the only family I've got'.) They perform together, both in the sky but also in the film's only staged performance, in the bar where Maverick meets Charlie. This begins as a bet between Maverick and Goose, suggesting that Charlie is merely the object of exchange that allows the two to perform together. The pair approaches Charlie in a rehearsed interchange that culminates in a performance of 'You've Lost that Loving Feeling'.

Although this begins as a duet between Maverick and Goose, within two lines all of the pilots in the bar join the performance of singing to Charlie. Finally Charlie invites Maverick to sit down. Ostensibly performed to win Charlie's attention and provide Maverick with an 'in', in reality the song demonstrates the bond between the flying partners and the pilots as a unit. The *mise-en-scène* supports the men's presentation as spectacle and the series of looks which frame them remain unattached to Charlie. It remains unclear who the diegetic spectator is. Charlie, on the other hand, is visually marginalised. In contrast to Maverick, Goose and the other pilots who wear attract naval 'whites', Charlie is dressed in a rather dowdy fashion: jeans, polo shirt and loose sweater. Although she later appears in a smart fitted suit and heels, she seems of little specular interest to Maverick and his peers. Instead, she is presented as a maternal figure, older than Maverick and in a position of seniority as his teacher. Her seniority in relation to the Cruise character figures her as the Kleinian 'archaic' mother of early infancy, who is experienced by the baby as omnipotent in her ability to give or withhold nourishment. This psychoanalytic framework supports Maverick's position of narcissism, which is effectively 'pre-Oedipal' or pre-genital; in this psychodynamic phase the woman (mother) is not yet figured as an object of desire, which does not happen until the male child passes through the Oedipal stage.

There is an attempt made by the film for Maverick to overcome his narcissism, which is premised on an over-identification with his father, a pilot who was shot down over Vietnam in circumstances indicating pilot error and whose name is thus dishonoured. Lynda Boose argues that in the film 'What was simultaneously under recuperation was the reputation of the U.S. military, likewise sullied in Vietnam' (2006, p.281). The redemption of Maverick's father parallels a coming to terms with the war and a reinvigorated pride in the American nation's military might. Only once Maverick discovers that his father died as a hero, information not shared with his widow because of national security issues, does Maverick mature. His conversation with Mike (Tom Skerritt), his trainer and a former colleague of his father's, allows Maverick to have 'his idealised view of his father reinforced', according to Stella Bruzzi (2005, p.142). He is able to take the place of the father though, as Bruzzi notes, only through narcissistic identification (p.142). From this point onwards, he can congratulate Iceman on his attainment of the 'top gun' trophy and even takes part in a real naval assignment, where he successfully sees off the threat of Russian fighters who appear after a US communications ship strays into foreign waters. However, this apparent maturing is

only possible with the death of his partner Goose, who dies in an accident when he breaks his neck upon ejecting from their airplane. As well as coming to terms with his father's memory, he must also let go of his attachment to Goose. However, it appears that one figure of male attachment is replaced by another. When Maverick returns from his expedition he is reunited with a jubilant Iceman, who declares 'You! You are still dangerous! You can be my wingman any time!' Maverick's response 'Bullshit, you can be mine!' indicates the continuing erotics of competition. His emotional homecoming and Iceman's declaration far surpass the following reunion scene with Charlie. She turns up in their bar in the final scene, playing 'You've Lost that Loving Feeling' on the jukebox. The song invokes the memory of Goose, as does Maverick's reiteration of the phrase that the last time he tried a similar pick-up he 'crashed and burned' (a reference to their first meeting in the club, and now an allusion to Goose's demise). The shot freezes on Maverick caressing Charlie's cheek in silhouette; there is no final, climatic kiss. Bruzzi argues that this scene, with Charlie the substitute mother, shows how vulnerable this position of narcissistic identification is (2005, p.142). The final shot of the narrative freezes at their encounter - not on their embrace. Each of the pair is still physically separate. Moreover, the final image of the film over the credits is of two jets flying together, the male pilot couple still united at day's (and life's) end.

Gaylyn Studlar notes of Cruise's next film *Cocktail* that 'intensity of commitment and feeling is displaced from the heterosexual to the homosocial to the homoerotic' (2001, p.177), a phenomenon she indicates is also apparent in *Top Gun*, *Days of Thunder*, *The Color of Money* and *Mission: Impossible*, indeed is present throughout his career. *Cocktail* explores the relationship between young Irish-American Brian Flanagan (Tom Cruise) and his friend and mentor Doug Coughlin (Bryan Brown), 'barman-philosopher'. Brian has left the army and returned to his Irish working class roots in Queens to visit his uncle Pat Flanagan (Ron Dean) who runs the local saloon. He initially takes a job in Doug's Manhattan bar to make ends meet while studying at a community college but soon comes to enjoy the bar routine and drops out. Brian's plan to start his own bar is sneered at by Doug, who prefers to wait for an 'angel' - a rich woman - to take care of him. Doug would rather evade the masculine and capitalist competition that should be the proving ground of every American man and accept the attentions of a rich woman (figured psychoanalytically, he recedes from Oedipal threat to enjoy the protection of an all-powerful mother - and the father as love object).

When Brian begins his first shift as a barman he is flustered, under pressure from the crowds, the bullying barmaids, and the cash register, which Doug seems to spring open just as Brian is reaching down for drinks. But as he becomes more proficient, he begins to synchronise with Doug's movements behind the bar. Eventually they perform as a team, mimicking the other's movements, throwing bottles in the air together and to each other, entertaining the busy crowd. As Studlar indicates, Doug's attachment to Brian 'gets caught up in the film's insistent focus on the latter's body'. No diegetic spectator is indicated as the source of the looks at Brian's body, so they remain 'free-floating looks, open, that so both males and females can attach fantasies to the eroticized male body whose exhibitionist performance marks him/ it as being "captured" by another's gaze' (2001, p.177). Doug and Brian's increasingly intimate friendship is temporarily threatened by the appearance of a woman. Brian is approached by Coral (Gina Gershon), a photographer, who wishes to take his picture for a news story. (Like many of Cruise's women, Coral is more powerful than Brian – as a photographer she holds a higher social status than a barman - and she commands the 'gaze' through her camera.) Focused only on Brian, she pushes Doug out of the frame when he poses with the younger man. By this means, Brian's display is directed towards an active female spectator and the male audience is negated. But Coral's influence and subsequent romantic involvement with Brian is short-lived for he shares a deeper emotional intimacy with Doug. Studlar notes the affection between the two and its symbolic consumation: 'One sequence offers everything for a night of seduction between the two: alcohol, laughter, mutual appreciation, the morning after in-the-kitchen tête-à-tête in which they lay out plans for their future together. The only thing elided, of course, is the sexual act. Everything else is there to construct a "queer reading" of the film.' (2001, p.178) In one of these 'morning after' scenes, Coral joins the pair. Brian tells Doug about his plan to start their own bar, 'Cocktails and Dreams'. It is Brian's attempt to move him and Doug away from being showmen – mixing cocktails for a metropolitan crowd in spectacular fashion – into businessmen. He unrolls a poster of a buxom beauty in a wet t-shirt and holds it against his body: his head tops this ultra-feminine figure. Proposing that they will save money by bartending in 'Jamaica, mon', Brian spouts a faux-Caribbean voice, as he wiggles his hips back and forth towards Doug, inviting him to look at him. The latter reaches out to the image and Brian coyly slaps his hand away as he moves out of reach. This feminine masquerade barely conceals the real nature of Doug's homoerotic longing. Coral is literally sidelined in the scene and is out of frame for most of the interchange. In short, her filmic function is that of a 'beard', used to

camouflage the dynamic between Brian and Doug. (This is very different from Sedgwick's examples of women being exchanged in order to cement manly bonds between men.) Doug is swift to expel Coral and reinstate the primacy of his relationship with Brian: he tells Coral that Brian has been bragging about their sexual exploits behind her back; she sleeps with Doug to get revenge. Significant efforts are made by Doug to undermine Brian's chances at any heterosexual relationship. When Brian meets a new love interest, Jordan (Elisabeth Shue), while bar-tending in Jamaica, Doug bets him he cannot 'hustle' a rich female holidaymaker – distracting Brian from Jordan and the threat she poses to the duo.

The ending of the film provides a cautionary tale. Although in love with Jordan, Brian takes Doug's advice and seduces a rich older (i.e. maternal) woman; Jordan leaves Jamaica heartbroken. Moving into this woman's apartment, Brian waits to be offered a role in her business, a promise that never materialises. Realising his error, he tries to make amends with Jordan and returns to Doug asking for a job. He brings with him a bottle of vintage port, his forfeit from their latest bet in which Doug predicted that Brian would come back to him. On his yacht, Doug confesses that he is hugely in debt; he has traded on his wealthy wife's money to start a business and it is 'all gone'. Since Doug is too drunk to drive his wife home, Brian does instead, whereupon she tries to seduce him. He rejects her and returns to Doug, only to find he has slashed his own neck with the broken shards of the port bottle. Later, he receives a letter left for him by Doug, confessing that his philosophies and arrogance were all a sham, as insubstantial as his cocktail mixing. It is enough to make Brian realise the error of his ways. He finds Jordan and they run away together from her wealthy and disapproving father. The film ends with Brian and the now pregnant Jordan toasting the opening of their new bar (his uncle's, now refitted). This is the real American dream, the family and its small business. Doug's flamboyant display and homoerotic threat have been successfully repelled in favour of heterosexual closure - however unpersuasive.

### **'Passing' as Men**

If a homoerotic relationship between Doug and Brian and their positioning as objects of spectacle are apparent in *Cocktail*, a predilection for the homoerotic and framed performance is marked in Neil Jordan's adaptation of *Interview with the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles* (1994). Robert Lang suggests that the vampire movie is the most homoerotic of film genres, or sub-genres, which 'authorise a search for love between



men' (2006, n, p.349) (an exploration of these genres is the project of his book). The vampire film 'frequently permits explorations of male-male emotional and sexual intimacy in a way which is unique in popular cinema.' Discussing *Interview with the Vampire*, he suggests that it is a 'logical culmination of the theme of the main character trying to find enduring intimacy with another man, which we find in almost every film that Cruise has made.' (n, p.349) Cruise's flamboyant turn as the dandy bloodsucker Lestat and Brad Pitt's suffering vampire-with-a-conscience Louis provide alternative models of masculinity by which the erotic, the homoerotic and performances of various types are explored. Their story is framed by the narrative recounted by Louis to a young journalist, Malloy (Christian Slater), who ironically describes himself as a 'collector of lives'. It is Malloy who first appears as the hunter – albeit for a good story – and admits that he has followed Louis in order to secure an interview. The vampire tells him that he in turn has been watching Malloy as a potential target. Louis alludes to the film's novelistic origins, asking Malloy 'Shall we begin like David Copperfield? I am born. I grow up.' By the close of the film, Louis's true motivation for telling his story has come into question.

The literary figure of the vampire dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, combining aspects of romanticism, the gothic and sexual 'deviance'. One early fictional vampire, Lord Ruthven, was the creation of Lord Byron's physician's John Polidori, who is said to have drawn liberally on his employer's flamboyant character in creating his own (Williamson, 2005, p.36). These attributes included Byron's aristocratic status, aesthetic sensibilities and his libertinism, the latter most notably embodied by the poet's character Don Juan. The sexual deviance attached to Byron – of sibling incest as well of bisexuality - marks a tradition of the rapacious libertine that goes back to the Marquis de Sade (and his ideological defence of such practices). Sexual deviance as it figures in the homoerotic relationship between Louis and Lestat (and later with the vampire Armand) is embedded in Anne Rice's novel. As Kenneth Gelder notes of the book, the relationship between the two is marked as 'queer': 'Rice flaunts the gayness of her male vampires; they cohabit together as "queer" parents, with vampire children; at other times, they may be bisexual or sexually "polymorphous"' (1994, p.109). The vampire's body can be thought of as a 'type of polymorphousness and androgyny founded on the disappearance of the markers of sexual and reproductive difference' in which erotic pleasure and the ability to reproduce are located orally (Gordon and

Hollinger, 1997, p.98). It is thus unsurprising that the star Tom Cruise came to be cast as Lestat, given the homoerotic elements of his star persona.<sup>9</sup>

The structuring of the novel and film, in which the vampire 'other' presents his own story positions the interviewer as 'thoroughly pacified, standing as the image of the converted reader, the fan' (Gelder, 1994, p.109). In the book Malloy is referred to only as 'the boy', underscoring his relative youth. This narrative of disclosure slides between illusion and disillusion, maintaining the conviction that vampires do indeed exist, while simultaneously turning vampirism 'into something akin to a posture or style, a *simulation* of the real' (Gelder, 1994, p.110). The undead simulate human life and this idea is used by the film to explore the meanings of performance. The first of these is the performance of 'passing' as a human, which is given double significance by the story's 18<sup>th</sup> century opening in a slave plantation and the representation of identity as that which is visible.<sup>10</sup> The second is the performance necessary by vampires to lure potential victims with a plausible reason for their detainment – in the film it is usually sexual, such as socialising with prostitutes. The women's sale of their bodies (an exchange which ends in their deaths) is mirrored by the slave economy that provides the backdrop to the narrative. Both forms of exploitation are made literal by the consumption of their bodies by the vampires. Although Lestat is parasitical, living off human blood, it is the southern economy, supported by slave labour, which is the greater parasite. The third meaning of performance is found in the ritual – and spectacle – of creating a vampire, which Lestat relishes.

Lestat is excessive in movement, gesture and speech, affecting the style of a dandy and embracing the theatrical. (In the novel's sequel, *The Vampire Lestat* [1985], he forms a rock band. It is a fitting occupation for such a character.) Milly Williamson notes his inclination towards conspicuous consumption (2005, p.36). Existing outside the human world, Lestat also exists outside the heteronormative order; one of the few things vampires cannot do is reproduce in the conventional fashion. He offers Louis erotic delights, devoid of reproductive purpose. In the film, Louis has very much been part of the normative order, losing his wife in childbirth half a year before the story begins. By contrast, in the novel Louis grieves for the death of his brother, more in keeping with the male-male bonds privileged by the rest of the narrative. This change in detail by the film suggests a – largely failed – attempt to assure Louis's positioning as heterosexual. Louis, first in his mourning and secondly through his transformation into a vampire by Lestat, finds himself in circumstances not of his own making, and so can be considered

a melodramatic rather than a tragic hero (Williamson, 2005, p.40). As Williamson notes, Louis remains passive in his transformation into a vampire which aligns him with the heroine of melodramatic fiction, as does his accompanying moral anguish at his situation: ‘reluctance and the refusal to ‘feed’ has become an important development in the conventions of the sympathetic sub-genre of vampire fiction and are symbolic of the vampire’s misrecognised innocence’ (p.40).<sup>11</sup>

Louis lacks the theatricality of Lestat, though both dress in decorative clothing and wear their hair long, fitting their status as gentlemen in 18<sup>th</sup> century New Orleans society. The New Orleans setting is pertinent, given its associations with excess<sup>12</sup>: this is the home of the U.S.’s most famous Mardi Gras celebrations, a Christian ritual of excess before the self-denial of Lent. The city is a favourite locale of novelist Anne Rice, describing in the novel a rich mixing of cultures, ‘filled not only with the French and Spanish of all classes who had formed in part its peculiar aristocracy, but later with immigrants of all kinds, the Irish and the German in particular’ (2006, p.45), what Gelder terms the ‘global exotic’ (1994, p.110). New Orleans is a ‘magical and magnificent place to live. In which a vampire, richly dressed and gracefully walking through the pools of light of one gas lamp after another might attract no more notice in the evening than hundreds of other exotic creatures’ (Rice, 2006, pp.45-6). Lestat and Louis, in terms of their hair, costume and physicality are visually appealing, and Louis becomes more striking yet upon his birth as a vampire: his skin more translucent, his eyes lighter and more piercing. Here, the usual appearance of the stars is much altered. The dark haired muscular Cruise becomes an extremely slender blond with pale skin,<sup>13</sup> closely fitting the description given by the novelist Rice. Brad Pitt, by comparison, has unusually dark hair as Louis, partially to contrast with Lestat’s golden locks.<sup>14</sup>

Gaylyn Studlar suggests that in this film there is a shift away from the erotic objectification of Tom Cruise, a move which is ‘ironic because *Interview* creates the most homoerotic frame of reference for Cruise’s embodiment of masculinity’. Instead, ‘the camera’s interest in the youthful male body as erotic object plays out the contradictions and possible pleasures of male erotic spectacle across the body of Brad Pitt (2001, p.179). It is a trend that Studlar notes extends to Cruise’s later films such as *Jerry Maguire* (Cameron Crowe, 1996) and *Eyes Wide Shut*. (However, later films such as the *Mission: Impossible* series, *The Last Samurai* and *Knight and Day* (Roy Miller, 2010) continue to offer up Cruise’s body as an object of spectacle.) In the case of

*Interview*, this is emphasised by the fact that Louis is looked upon desiringly by Lestat. If Louis takes the position of erotic object so often marked out for female performers, he is also feminised by his positioning as melodramatic suffering hero and his vulnerability to Lestat. The vampire's first spotting of Louis and his subsequent stalking of him aligns Louis with the horror genre's female victims. Lestat is the voyeur spying on his feminised prey. He looks at Louis from a balcony in a tavern as the latter theatrically invites a man whom he has just cheated at cards to shoot him. Lestat's view is that of a spectator in a theatre box. He follows Louis outside and through the port as he takes a turn with a prostitute, moving in to attack as the woman's pimp puts a knife to Louis's throat. The rescued victim is shown in close-up lying unconscious on the ground. In an ecstatic erection Lestat pulls Louis high into the air, to the top of a ship's mast, as a series of close-ups show Louis' eyes open and lips part in anticipation. The reverse shot reveals Lestat's hunger in a close approximation of the climactic moment of the kiss in classical cinema. Finally satiated, still dangling Louis in the air, he asks, through lips reddened with blood, 'Do you still want death? Or have you tasted it enough?' At Louis' mumbled 'Enough' he lets him go, and Louis falls through the air, landing with an ejaculatory splash in the river. Later visiting Louis in his bedroom, Lestat appears behind the curtains of his four poster bed, fingering the white gauze. The billowing curtains suggest a liminal space between light and dark, life and death.<sup>15</sup> Lestat offers Louis an alternative life, one free from sickness and death: 'Don't be afraid'. I'm going to give you the choice I never had.' This speech, coming as it does after an attack on Louis, which has left him weak, appears sinister rather than comforting (the dialogue does not appear in Rice's book). Shots which frame Lestat at a low angle and Louis from high up emphasise the threatening presence of the vampire and Louis's vulnerability, both physical and emotional. As well as presenting him as a victimiser, Lestat's lines also suggest his own prior victimised status. Here the vulnerability of the Cruise persona is projected onto Brad Pitt's Louis and Cruise becomes the abusive father.

The scene of Louis's transformation into a vampire is infused with homoeroticism. In the family graveyard at sundown, Lestat pulls him to the ground, lying on top of him as he bites into his neck. Drained of blood to the point of death, Louis is offered immortality and Lestat cuts open his own wrist to feed him. Louis greedily feeds, while Lestat's face is increasingly distorted by pain. Finally, Louis releases Lestat's arm and both are thrown back upon the ground in post-coital release. The physical proximity,

contact and powerful facial expressions of pleasure and discomfort – and accompanying sounds of oral satiation – all suggest sex. The moments of the film in which Louis and Lestat feed together are also presented erotically. In one such scene, the first time Louis tastes human blood, the two drink from the veins of a light-skinned black prostitute. Her skin tone provides a visual reminder of the sexual violence of enslavement and its ‘mixing’ of blood. Louis bites her neck, while Lestat feeds on her wrist. (This might be read as a particularly graphic representation of the triangulation of desire discussed by Sedgwick, with the victim literally coming between, and standing in for, each of the two desiring men, no more than an object of exchange). The *mise-en-scène* is painterly: the lighting is *chiaroscuro*, a palette of rich reds and browns contrasting with pale flesh tones. Lestat and Louis’s feeding upon this woman is intercut with a play being staged in the tavern in which they drink. It is a bawdy one, depicting fornication and its bastard progeny, which underscores the transgressive nature of vampirism and the performance they have taken part in to lure their prey. This theme is returned to throughout the course of the film. Finding himself in Paris, Louis discovers a group of vampires who disguise themselves as humans performing as vampires on stage. Their *pièce de résistance* is one in which a female victim is killed in front of the audience.<sup>16</sup>

Like homosexuals, vampires must pass to avoid exposure. This becomes pressing for Louis as a plantation owner whose slaves believe in the undead. Lestat has taken advantage of Louis’s wealth by moving in with him (it is indicated in the book that he is attracted by Louis’s fortune). The pair performs the ritual of taking meals together, though neither eat, as part of their attempt to appear normal. Serving at the dinner table in Louis’s opulent dining room, his slave Yvette (Thandi Newton) implores her master to eat while he stares hungrily at her wrist.<sup>17</sup> An exasperated Lestat on her departure asks, ‘Can’t you pretend, you fool? You’ll give the game away. We’re lucky to have such a home,’ as he gestures at the furnishings, for what is Louis’s is now also Lestat’s. Their closeted arrangement appears not a little gay. The pair is later triangulated by the addition of the child vampire Claudia (Kirsten Dunst) to their group. After Louis gives into hunger and attacks a little girl orphaned by the plague circulating New Orleans, his only way of saving her life is by changing her into a vampire. This relationship is structured in a way to suggest Lestat as her father and Louis as her mother; the film shows Claudia initially sharing Louis’s coffin before insisting on her own, suggesting a child’s growing independence. It is Claudia who finally kills Lestat – or appears to – and frees Louis from his grasp. The two flee antebellum New Orleans for Paris, where

they meet Armand (Antonio Banderas) and the vampires of the Theatre des Vampires. Armand makes clear his desire for Louis.<sup>18</sup> Claudia jealously notices this, declaring ‘He wants you as you want him.’ Armand tries to persuade Louis to stay with him and send Claudia away, as she risks being killed by his troupe in revenge for the death of Lestat. Enchanted by Louis, he declares, ‘Vampire with a human soul, immortal with a mortal’s passion. You are beautiful, my friend. Lestat must have wept when he made you.’ Louis lingers on in Paris and the vampires kill Claudia and her new companion – a woman who has lost her own daughter – by exposing them to daylight. Grief-stricken, he cannot forgive Armand and shortly after leaves Paris, first setting fire to the vampires’ coffins while they sleep. Armand pulls him into a carriage as he stumbles out of the theatre, rescuing him from the dawn. He seems unconcerned at the fate of the vampire troupe but longs for Louis to stay. Louis’s act of revenge does little to undermine the strength of the erotic bond between them. Nevertheless, Louis chooses to leave Armand.

Now alone, Louis wanders the old world in search of meaning, and does not return to America until the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There he visits the cinema and sees, as he puts it, his ‘first sunrise in centuries’. Each film he watches shows the sun at sundown, sunrise or from space. The choice of films reflects the narrative of *Interview*, as well as film history: *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* (1927), directed by F.W. Murnau, a German director who was openly gay; *Nosferatu* (F.W. Murnau, 1922), Murnau’s Dracula adaptation; *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939), perhaps the most famous cinematic depiction of the antebellum south; *Superman* (Richard Donner, 1978), a film by *Interview*’s studio, Warner Brothers, which also represents superhuman powers. Louis is shown leaving a cinema where the marquee banner reads *Tequila Sunrise* (Robert Towne, 1988) another, more recent, Warner Brothers film. This episode presents Louis as a cinema spectator but also reminds the spectator of the film of her own status, as a film viewer and a historically located being (it is this historical specificity, and mortality, that the vampire escapes).<sup>19</sup>

In modern day New Orleans Louis comes across a decrepit and Lestat, hiding out in an abandoned house, terrified by the sound of police helicopters and the brightness of their searchlights. Admiring Louis with his straight long brown hair and well cut taupe linen suit, Lestat remarks, ‘Still beautiful, Louis. You always were the strong one.’ He is, however, fearful of Louis, starting at his appearance and drawing back from him when

he first approaches. Low angled shots of Louis walking towards the sitting Lestat recall the early scene of the latter's intrusion into Louis's bedroom. When Louis declares he means him no harm, Lestat asks 'You've come back to me then?' Lestat begins to reminisce about his old powers of attraction:

Lestat: You remember me as I was... no-one could refuse me,  
not even you Louis.

Louis: I tried.

Lestat: Yes, and the more you tried, the more I wanted you.

Lestat's vulnerability is emphasised by his solitude, unlike Rice's hero in the novel, who has found a young companion, though he still hopes for Louis's return. In the film, Louis leaves Lestat in his decrepit state, and it is at that point his story ends. Malloy, in frustration at there being no meaning, no cathartic denouement to the story, demands that Louis make him a vampire. In anger, Louis pins him against the ceiling, and dropping him on the floor, vanishes. Malloy runs to his car and playing back the tape, hears Louis's introduction: 'I was 24, younger than you are now, but times were different then. I was a man at that age, the master of a large estate.' His opening hints that Louis is grooming Malloy for the role of a new companion. A moment later, Malloy is grabbed from behind by Lestat, declaring theatrically: 'I assume I need no introduction', accompanied on the soundtrack by notes from a harpsichord. The old, flamboyant Lestat is back. He dives for Malloy's throat. A low angled close-up shows the colour returning to his face, as Malloy lies drained of blood. As Lestat touches the tape player to turn off Louis's narrative, Malloy shudders in fright and Lestat gently touches his cheek. 'Don't be afraid' he tells Malloy, 'I'm going to give you the choice I never had.' This dialogue does not appear in the novel. Its addition here underscores the cycle of abuse that Lestat perpetuates in attacking Malloy, projecting Cruise's historically vulnerable persona onto younger men.

### **Hysterical Performances**

The figure of the exposed young man, vulnerable at the hands of one older than him, finds its apotheosis in *Magnolia*. Cruise plays Frank TJ Mackey, a sex guru who advises desperate men on how to seduce women. The film features a multiple narrative of interrelated lives in the Los Angeles area and one night in which the stories come to a climax. Most of its characters have suffered paternal abuse: there is the survivor of incest, Claudia (Melora Walters), whose father is the host of a popular children's TV

quiz; the child Stanley (Jeremy Blackman), whose father bullies him to study for the same show; Donnie (William C. Macey) who as a child won this TV competition, but is still plagued by insecurities (which it is implied, are the result of an abusive paternal relationship). Mackey is the estranged son of Earl Partridge (Jason Robards), a man whose apparent omnipotence is indicated by his TV empire and his 'extended dominance of the film's various narrative strands' (Bruzzi, 2005, p.188), in both Mackey's story and his own narrative. At the opening of the film the elderly Partridge is on his death bed, and his son is a brash showman. Mackey performs a swaggering masculinity, both on stage and off, which only shows signs of cracking when he is confronted with the memory of his father. The title of the workshop, 'Seduce and destroy', indicates the misogynistic message of the seminars he presents and indicates their male-only audience. The first we see of Mackey is in a TV advertisement near the opening of the film: his performance is targeted at men but it is Claudia who is shown watching the commercial and later seen on a television in the house where the young Stanley gets ready for school. These are the two most vulnerable figures in the film: Claudia, in her descriptions of sexual abuse at the hands of the father, and Stanley in the bullying he is subjected to by his father. It is fitting that it is they who are connected with Mackey's hyperbolic masculine performance - it suggests both the ugly side of abusive masculine dominance, but also ties these figures to Mackey as fellow victims of patriarchal abuse.

In the TV advertisement Mackey is in a studio, with lights in the background, framing this presentation as a performance. As he talks to the screen, the explicit sexual swear words that he mouths are replaced in the audio track by politer equivalents, emphasising the mediated nature of this performance. The image cuts to male nurse Phil (Phillip Seymour Hoffman) with Mackey's bedridden father Earl. Phil learns from Earl that Mackey is his rejected son and that he wishes to make amends with him before he dies. The only way Phil is able to reach Mackey on Partridge's behalf is by purchasing the pornographic magazines where he advertises. Phil must then go through the sales switchboard to contact him, a lengthy process, indicating the extent to which Mackey has barricaded himself from vulnerability. (This takes place over a series of scenes that are intercut with the other narrative threads of the film.) One wide shot shows the nurse and Earl in a large spacious bedroom. Over this image the opening chords of Strauss's 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra', his composition on the theme of the Nietzschean superman, play out, accompanied by loud whoops and cheering. The full, overpowering music jars



with the image of the dying man. The next image is of a male figure cloaked by darkness. He is facing the audience, in an almost phallic pose, with his arms held out to his side, forming a strong, conical outline. As the music continues, he extends his arms further, bringing them in and out rhythmically to the music, as if gathering energy towards his groin. This image of masculinity is so starkly contrasted with the frailty of Partridge in the last scene that its artificiality seems tragi-comic. The theme music alludes to the film that re-popularised it, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968) and its phallic black monolith (as well as its appropriation by rock stars – The Rolling Stones used the music in their concerts in the 1970s).

The music stops abruptly and with it the audience's whooping and clapping. The light changes and we can see a man's face, figure and costume. Mackey's face is steely; the severity of his expression is matched by that of his hairstyle, his hair scraped away from his face. It is a contradictory mix of self-adornment and masculine severity: his greasy ponytail suggests biker wear as do his tight black jeans, the brown shirt that clings to his torso and his leather waistcoat. This is an outfit that demands its wearer be seen and feared. As the lights go up, a banner descends, revealing the slogan 'Seduce and destroy' beneath which a cartoon wolf stands on the tail of a cartoon cat. At this moment, Mackey intones 'Respect the cock.' Rushing to the edge of the stage, he whips his arm round his head and pointing to the audience, he cries 'And TAME the cunt!' The ecstatic crowd, shown for the first time, are revealed as plain looking, ordinary men. The lights, the music, the entire presentation of Mackey construct a fiction of masculinity, a falsehood of masculine omnipotence, undermined by the human frailty on display in the previous scene.

This demonstration of masculinity has little to do with women, in spite of its evident misogyny. Once again, the eroticism of Cruise's self-presentation does not require the presence of a woman. Instead, he imitates femininity, his mime of 'Big titted Mary Jane' (a remembrance of schoolyard rejection) involves him heaving up his imaginary bosoms and sashaying across the stage. This parody of femininity, reminiscent of Cruise's imitation of the Jamaican beach babe in *Cocktail*, is no more artificial than his mimicry of masculinity, for both are masquerades. Minutes later, he appears to be aroused by an imaginary figure giving him a blowjob while he grinds his hips in moves suggestive of those in the dance scene of *Risky Business*. He has no actual partner and

is surrounded only by male onlookers – a typical scenario for Cruise’s auto-erotic display.

Following this performance, Mackey is interviewed by a black female reporter (April Grace) – a double other – who challenges him on the life story he has presented to the media. She has sat through his routine with the male audience, and her appearance signals that his masculine façade is about to be penetrated. Back stage there is no longer a divide between the showman and audience, nor the sound and lights that frame his display. He attempts to intimidate her with his sexual overtures. Stripping down to his underpants, he does a handstand against the wall, before changing into a new pair of trousers and a shirt to conduct the interview. In a series of evenly lit two shots, and in wide close-up, Mackey’s machismo appears untenable. He evades her questions by snapping back into his stage persona and sexually intimidating her, panting like a dog. But she cuts through the act, telling him to ‘Calm down, be a good boy’ in disconcertingly maternal tones. She reveals her knowledge of his personal history: his father left the family in his childhood, forcing the teenage Mackey to care for his mother as she died of cancer. The exhibitionism demonstrated in the previous scenes, Stella Bruzzi indicates, ‘betrays Frank’s need to repress the centrality of his own father to how he understands and perceives himself, hence the fictionalised account of his past.’ (2005, p.189) In Mackey’s reimagining of his family – a mother very much alive and a late father, whose passing he mourns – he invokes the notion of Freud’s family romance. Here, the child imagines a fantasy family free from the stresses of its real life equivalent. As Bruzzi suggests ‘the rebellious child’s imaginative hostility towards the father in particular is based upon a contradictory impulse to exalt and continue to idealise him.’ (2005, p.189) In Mackey’s case, the loving deceased father disguises a living and negligent patriarch. Confronted with the reality of his origins, his persona of hyper-masculinity begins to crumble. When he returns to the stage and his enthusiastic audience, following the interview, he is unable to continue the performance. He gets confused about which booklet to turn to and his speech becomes garbled as he loses his pose of phallic strength. Mackey is an exaggerated version of Cruise’s other cocky, arrogant young men. In the final reunion with his father, the self-assured savage has disappeared; now he is even afraid of the dogs that guard the entrance to his father’s house. The softer masculinity of the male nurse is contrasted to that of Mackey and his father, whose irritable interactions with strangers and intimates alike are punctuated by ‘cocksucker!’ Even now, Mackey attempts to restrain his emotions, declaring to his

father that he is ‘not going to cry for you ... cocksucker’, before breaking down, weeping. In the final analysis, it is clear from Mackey’s on stage demonstrations that, ‘while emphasising his own possession of the penis, the son’s hysterical performances of hyper-masculinity fail to mask the realisation that the power of the phallus eludes him’ (Bruzzi, 2005, p.189). This is a lack that is not resolved by the close of the film, even upon the patriarch’s demise.

### **Conclusion**

It is clear from *Magnolia* that Cruise’s hysterical masculine performance is a defence against the abusive father, created to defend against castration threat. The film provides an extreme version of the narcissism that the Cruise persona demonstrates elsewhere, which goes in tandem with his figuring as an object of male spectacle. This is symptomatic of an earlier psychosexual stage: the Cruise character has evaded the castrating power of the father by regressing to the pre-Oedipal position of infantile narcissism. Such regression explains the marginalisation of his female co-stars as romantic interests and their maternal figuring as more complete, more powerful figures than Cruise. The conceptualisation of the Cruise persona within an infantile economy is convincing, explaining as it does ‘his attractive vulnerability, the absence of a desire to ‘act’ according to the law of the father, but indulgence in exhibitionism and narcissism’ (Rall, 1993, p.99). It also explains the eroticisation of his relationships with other men, as the pre-Oedipal stage is characterised by the male child’s desire for the father (as well as his identification with the powerful mother). In resorting to this psychosexual stage the Cruise character can evade challenging the father – withdrawing from castration anxiety and Oedipal pressures. At the same time, Cruise plays the part of a grown man – soldier, lawyer or samurai – and so gives the impression that he is an adult. Cruise appears to have overcome the patriarch and obtained the phallus, but in reality has reverted to a pre-Oedipal identification with the mother and desire for the father. His role play as a man remains just that.

## Notes

1. This is the case in *Born on the Fourth of July* (Oliver Stone, 1989), which opens with a young Ron Kovic playing at soldiers with his friends.
2. Comedian Rich Hall performs a sketch that illustrates this pattern: 'Tom Cruise plays a cocktail maker... a pretty good cocktail maker too, until he has a crisis of confidence and can't make cocktails anymore. Then he finds a good woman who restores his faith in cocktail making. Tom Cruise plays a race-car driver...'
3. Scott had starred as the titular *Patton* (Franklin J. Schaffner, 1970), as well as serving in the Marine Corps from 1945-49, thus his association with the military forces in the public mind was well established.
4. 'William Jones, captain of Marines in the Providence (the 28-gun frigate, not the 12-gun sloop) then at Boston, advertised in the 20 March 1779 Providence (R.I.) Gazette the need for 'a few good Men' to engage in 'a short Cruize' and gave the Marine Corps a recruiting slogan it would be using two hundred years later. ' from E.H. Simmons (1974) *The United States Marines: A History*, Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, p. 17
5. A Freudian allusion to a troubled father-son dynamic is indicated by Jessep's threat to Kaffee 'I'm gonna rip your eyes out' (though Oedipus blinds himself, the connotations are nevertheless evident).
6. As a testament to the scene's erotic energy it now features on YouTube as a download from 'celebrity sex videos'. It also features in a Guitar Heroes game advertisement, with the ad recreating the scene from the film, but significantly with a young shirt-clad woman in place of Cruise.
7. As Joel walks through the house he comes across an open textbook on the dining room table, beside a cup of tea, a wristwatch, a pair of thick rimmed spectacles and a cigar smoking in an ashtray – the latter two items are references to the Freudian interpretation of dreams.
8. The film is also one of a popular genre of teen movies about losing one's virginity. The same year Cruise appeared in *Losin' It* (Curtis Hanson, 1983) about four teenagers who go to Mexico to have sex for the first time.
9. The book was optioned several times; it was first published in 1976 but the film was only released in 1994. Both John Travolta and Sting were linked to the project at various stages, the latter's song *Moon Over Bourbon Street* is an allusion to the book. [Silver and Ursini, p.205]
10. The director Neil Jordan is preoccupied by issues of 'passing': his previous film *The Crying Game* (1992) centres round the love story of a transvestite and a straight man who only realises his lover is biologically male after falling in love with him. His erotic interest is awakened when he sees him performing in a night club, misrecognising him as a woman.
11. This trend is also demonstrated in the novel *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer (first published by New York: Little, Brown and Company 2005, reprinted by London: Atom Books, 2006), in which the teenage vampire Edward is tortured by simultaneous physical craving for and the moral reluctance to feed on human blood.
12. This excess is often depicted as sexual transgression and is associated with the sultry culture of the southern states. Recent film examples include *The Big Easy* (Jim McBride, 1986) and *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (Clint Eastwood, 1997) set in Savannah, Georgia (based on the 1994 non-fiction book by John Berendt [New York: Random House]).
13. Cruise's skin tone varies considerably from film to film. While he sports a deep tan from the opening of *Mission: Impossible II*, to convey the rugged out-door nature of his character Ethan Hunt as he free-climbs the Nevada mountains, he appears considerably paler in the first of the *Mission: Impossible* films, perhaps to fit director Brian De Palma's noir palette more closely.
14. A reversal of this colour scheme appears in the DVD extras of *Interview with the Vampire*: Cruise wears a dark brown pony tail; Pitt a dark blond one. Both sport light tans in contrast to their paleness in the film.

15. The billowing curtains recall the scene from director Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* (1992), which also features a gauzily decked out bed and a different moment of revelation, the 'unveiling' of the penis.
16. This 'Theatre of Vampires' may be an ironic reference to the French writer Antonin Artaud's theorisation of a 'Theatre of Cruelty', set out in *The Theatre and Its Double* (1994) trans. Mary C. Richard, New York: Grove Press
17. This moment between Louis and Yvette alludes to the first feature length vampire film, *Nosferatu* (F.W. Murnau, 1922).
18. Armand is played by Antonio Banderas, who came with his own gay connotations in Hollywood at the time of the film's release; he played the lover of Tom Hanks in *Philadelphia* [Jonathan Demme, 1993] the year before the release of *Interview*.
19. This brief reflexive montage reminds us that film itself is 'a kingdom of shadows', reanimating the long dead. The phrase was coined by Maxim Gorky after seeing a performance of the Lumières' cinematograph in 1896. It is referenced in *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1992) when Dracula visits the cinematograph in London.

### Chapter Three: Male Bonding – The Racial Other

An easy bodily expressiveness, coupled with a proclivity towards spectacle, positions Tom Cruise's image alongside Hollywood's depiction of the racial other, specifically the black man.<sup>1</sup> As Yvonne Tasker argues, 'Stereotypically defined through the body and through a variety of kinds of performance, blackness is already coded in terms of spectacle' (1993, p.35). Historically, cinematic representations of the African-American man have presented him as physically demonstrative and as a conduit of excess affect. Emotional expressiveness has been attached to the figure of the black subordinate in fiction, whose purpose has been to provide moral guidance for the white protagonist. *Jerry Maguire* (Cameron Crowe, 1996) is one of Cruise's films that exploit this stereotype, and its incarnation of the black counterpart in biracial buddy films. Sports agent Jerry's (Tom Cruise) client Rod Tidwell (Cuba Gooding Jr.) proves to have a lasting influence on his emotional articulacy, returning the character to a closer resemblance of Cruise's earlier roles. The buddy dynamic in *Jerry Maguire* also raises cultural anxieties regarding the homoerotic undercurrent of such onscreen male bonds, extending concerns expressed in 1980s buddy films such as the *Lethal Weapon* series (Richard Donner, 1987; Richard Donner, 1989; Richard Donner, 1992) and *Die Hard* (John McTiernan, 1988). Conversely, *Collateral* (Michael Mann, 2004), subverts this black-white hierarchy, positioning the black character as the protagonist and moral centre of the film. Cruise's character Vincent, a hit man who takes taxi driver Max (Jamie Foxx) hostage, pushes him to acknowledge his own self-defeating behaviour, and thus inhabits the place usually occupied by the black sidekick.

This chapter will show how Cruise is represented in relation to his black counterparts and how culturally deemed traits of 'blackness' are assigned to his character. Issues of gender and homoeroticism will also be considered in relation to *Jerry Maguire* and its inheritance from 1980s biracial buddy films. An analysis will follow of these films in terms of their preoccupation with and - at least partial - endorsement of a capitalist economic model. This ideology is linked to depictions of race in the films presented. Racial categorisation functions as a means of subordination within capitalist societies such as the U.S., whose history is founded on the intersection of race and economic exploitation.

## Filmic Contexts

The relationship between Jerry and Rod in *Jerry Maguire* is influenced by the biracial buddy films prevalent in the 1980s. Cuba Gooding Jr's performance as Rod is inflected by the persona of comic Eddie Murphy. In Murphy's 1980s action films he is paired with a white buddy (Guerrero, 1993, p.241). In *48 Hours* (Walter Hill, 1982) he stars as a convict who tracks down a killer with white cop Nick Nolte. The police milieu which Murphy enters is the opposite of his own criminal world; disparities in local culture and class replace differences in race and racial experience. *Beverly Hills Cop* (Martin Brest, 1984) reprises the theme: police detective Axel Foley (Eddie Murphy) travels from his native Detroit to Beverly Hills to solve the murder of an old friend and confronts the alien (i.e. white and affluent) culture of Beverly Hills. Axel begins the film undercover, as an illegal dealer in cigarettes. It is only following a police chase, while held at gun point by four white officers, that he is recognised as a police detective. Moving through the Beverly Hills landscape Murphy, uprooted from his black Detroit community, is stripped of any cultural context. This is a process which is repeated throughout Murphy's films targeted at a 'mainstream' (i.e. white) audience, such as *Trading Places* (John Landis, 1983), *48 Hours*, *Beverly Hills Cop I and II* (Tony Scott, 1987), in which his characters are 'deterritorialised from a black milieu and transferred to a predominately white world' (Diawara, 1988, p.71), making the streetwise Murphy less threatening to a white audience. Murphy cannot escape the trajectory of the black facilitator. He too is depicted as the emotive black male able to invigorate the stuffy white Beverly Hills police force with 'spiritual substance' (Pines, 1975, p.19). Simultaneously, Foley appears desexed.<sup>2</sup> This follows a trajectory of black men being depicted as either asexual and kindly or as dangerous sexual predators (lusting after virginal white women such as in *The Birth of a Nation* [D.W. Griffiths, 1915]). There is no hint of a romance between Foley and the leading lady Jenny (Lisa Eilbacher).

In *Jerry Maguire*, as professional football player Rod, Gooding Jr. inherits a measure of Murphy's buffoonery and his predilection for mimicry, though this is limited to mocking Jerry. Tidwell is a family man who provides support to an anxious white man, invoking Sergeant Roger Murtaugh (Danny Glover) in *Lethal Weapon*. Where Murtaugh owns a house in the suburbs and is married, his partner, the white cop Martin Riggs (Mel Gibson), is a volatile outsider, the titular 'lethal weapon', drafted in to help Murtaugh with his case work. Black racial stereotypes are thus split between the two characters. Unlike Murtaugh, Riggs has no family (his wife's death is cited as the basis

of his emotional problems) and lives in squalor in a caravan. Though both have served in Vietnam, Riggs' experience in the Special Forces aligns him with the stereotypical veteran of a war defined in part by its large representation of black soldiers. Sharon Willis notes that the pair 'figure the legacy of Vietnam in the split between the 'good' Vietnam veterans and the 'bad' ones' (1997, p.36). Riggs is also fast-talking: an invocation of the jive-talker. He is a soulful reservoir, who weeps over the photo of his dead wife. (Even Gibson's acting style invokes racial stereotypes: one of his facial mannerisms as Riggs is the excessive rolling of his eyes.)

Like Foley in *Beverly Hills Cop*, Riggs, a representative of the law, impersonates a criminal: his first scene shows him masquerading as a drug dealer. So successful is his pose that he is not believed by his criminal client when he flashes his police badge. Back at police headquarters, Murtaugh misrecognises Riggs as a felon when the latter goes for his gun; Riggs has already wrestled Murtaugh to the floor before he is told by a colleague that this is his new partner. *Lethal Weapon* is one of Willis's three examples of 1980s films in which 'A battered white man collapses in the protective arms of a black man' (1997, p.27), the other two being *Lethal Weapon 2*, and *Die Hard*. Each illustrates precursors to the dynamic in *Jerry Maguire*. Given the place such embraces take in the films' narratives, it unsurprising that they generate homophobic anxiety. In the *Lethal Weapon* series, some labour is undertaken to highlight, then dispel, these impulses through the mise-en-scène and dialogue. Willis suggests that '*Lethal Weapon 2* exhibits a particularly – and jocularly – anxious fascination with its own homoerotic subtext, expressed in Riggs's jokes on two occasions'. In the second example she cites, at the close of the film, 'we find Murtaugh holding the wounded Riggs in his lap, as they wait for the police to arrive. Riggs quips 'Give us a kiss before they get here.' (1997, pp.28-29) Discussing the same moment, Yvonne Tasker argues it is framed as a parody of the war movie death scene, 'picking up on the cinematic convention which only allows men to embrace if one of them is dying, the film both plays with and averts the possibility of desire between the two men' (1993, p.47).

As with Murphy's Axel Foley, Murtaugh's sexuality is kept in check:

firmly contained by the family; he is connected to erotics only through his anxious fatherly surveillance of the flirtations between his daughter, Rianne, and Riggs. His role, then, is a spectator's: it calls attention to Riggs as a sexual object, abetting



the displacement from homoerotic bonding to heterosexual  
erotics.

(Willis, 1997, p.37)

A similar slide from the homoerotic to the heterosexual may be witnessed in *Jerry Maguire* in the displacement of the relationship between Jerry and Rod to that of Jerry and Dorothy. In *Lethal Weapon*, Riggs' positioning as a sex object aligns him with the objectified characters played by Cruise. A deflection from the homo- to the hetero-erotic is, however, only one method of containing the threat of masculine bonding – racial difference is another. The *Lethal Weapon* series is involved in an ideological sleight of hand:

the secrecy of masculine intimacy and vulnerability is sustained  
in these films by the 'marriage' of racial others, such that the  
transgressions of black-white difference displaces homosexual  
anxiety.

(Fuchs, 1993, p.203)

The biracial buddy dynamic represented in the *Lethal Weapon* films simultaneously elides a real history of racial difference (and injustice) *and* distracts from homoerotic implications of the male-male embrace.

Beyond *Jerry Maguire* and *Collateral*, Cruise's other films reveal marginal, yet 'catalytic' roles taken by black men – and less often black women. The roles take two overlapping forms. In *All the Right Moves* (Michael Chapman, 1983), as a teen football star, Cruise dances in his high school locker room alongside two of his African-American team-mates, and soon the rest of the locker room joins in. This intimate space, the supposed locus of homosocial bonds, becomes homoerotic. Although Cruise's thrusting hips allude to coitus with his girlfriend, he is surrounded only by scantily clad teenage boys. Even in the relentlessly elite, white Southern world of *The Firm* (Sydney Pollack, 1993), Cruise cartwheels down the street with a young black performer, indicating the innocence threatened by the illegal dealings of his law firm. The black character's alternative function in Cruise's films is as moral role model.<sup>3</sup> It is *Magnolia*'s (P.T. Anderson, 1999) African-American female reporter, the 'double other', who confronts Frank TJ Mackey (Tom Cruise) about his personal history, dispelling the illusions constructed around his persona as male sex guru. *Born on the Fourth of July* (Oliver Stone, 1989) utilises the figure of the black man as political

educator of Ron Kovic, who becomes an anti-war campaigner. Although African-Americans are not visible in the small town where Kovic grows up, and do not figure as central characters, at each crucial moment in his moral development – often when in danger - a black man emerges to rescue him. On the battlefield, when he is shot, a young black soldier carries him to safety; in the hospital where he is treated, a black male nurse tells Kovic about the real nature of the war and the U.S. government's exploitation of (mainly black) youth. It is a black demonstrator who picks up Kovic and carries him to safety when he is assaulted and his wheelchair overturned by police at a demonstration in Washington D.C. (Simpson, 1994, p.243).

*Jerry Maguire* and *Collateral* place the black-white buddy relationship in rather different configurations at the centre of their narratives. Each work is influenced by the black-white cop films that preceded it. *Jerry Maguire* features wide receiver Rod Tidwell, who teaches Jerry Maguire about his concept of the 'kwan': 'It means love, respect, community. And the dollars too, the entire package.' Tidwell is the morally superior, but subordinate, black guide to a supposedly ethical capitalism. While the money driven world of sports agencies is shown as exploitative - the economic vulnerability of those who risk their bodies to earn their living in sports is apparent - the film argues that a solution can be found in approaching business with an attitude of authenticity. *Collateral* is more ambiguous. The film complicates the racist attribution of expressiveness and virtue to African-American characters: Max, although black, is positioned as a white-coded neurotic opposite Cruise's sociopath Vincent. The moral evolution of the white protagonist is reversed: it is Max who learns his lesson from Vincent. He is a nihilist who urges Max to action, and the latter inherits something of Vincent's capacity for violence. *Collateral* is conflicted on political economy. Max's daydreams of owning a limousine company are shown to be unrealistic, but less because of economic realities, than his own apathy. Vincent berates his lack of entrepreneurship but the film is ambiguous on this point. Nevertheless, Vincent is also presented as the brutal, if logical, end point of a business model that literally kills the competition.

### ***Jerry Maguire*: 'I'm Mister black people'**

In 1997, Cuba Gooding Jr. won an Oscar for 'Best Supporting Actor' in the film *Jerry Maguire*. At the awards ceremony, he became tearful as he energetically thanked his family and well-wishers, delivering the kind of exuberant, over the top performance that nine years later was less endearing when displayed by Tom Cruise on the couch of

*Oprah*. Gooding Jr.'s persona in *Jerry Maguire* multiplies that of Cruise in this star vehicle. In Cruise's later films a younger man often undertakes the physical exploits or sexual objectification in the place of the star. This has intermittently been a feature of his films since *Interview with the Vampire* (Studlar, 2001, p.182); here Brad Pitt's body bears the weight of spectacle associated with Cruise (though Pitt is only one year younger than Cruise). *Jerry Maguire*'s project is the use of Cuba Gooding Jr. to take much of the burden of Cruise's expressivity. Rod shows Jerry how to live more authentically, while endorsing the sports business that allows him and Jerry to make a fortune from his labour. Maguire's love for Dorothy (Renee Zellweger) and friendship with her young son Ray (Jonathan Lipnicki) are also seen as transformative, but his moral development is assigned to Rod. It is their relationship that is privileged, despite the familiar closure of heterosexual coupling.

But as the film cleverly admits, Rod's figuring as a moral example to Jerry is problematic, insofar as it reiterates the cinematic stereotyping of the African-American man. He is, after all, a performer of the most spectacular variety - a professional sportsman - in spite of his claim: 'I am an athlete. I am not an entertainer.' (The product endorsements that Rod so longs for are only possible because pro football is such a lucrative entertainment industry.) Rod invokes the racial history of America when he accuses Jerry 'You're telling me to dance.' Though he may complain about Jerry's attempts to fashion him into a flashier performer on field, he spends much of his time being just that: he bounces around to music, he sings at Jerry's wedding to Dorothy, and he mimics Jerry ('Help me to help you!'), all with exuberance. He indulges in energetic monologues, which are influenced by comics such as Eddie Murphy. There is a considerable debt to Murphy's performance as Axel Foley; Foley's attempts to imbue the Beverly Hills Police force with expressiveness parallel Tidwell's success in getting Jerry to loosen up. But Tidwell's comical expressiveness, like Foley's, undermines him as a serious character.

Jerry is also a performer, but of a sort that is presented as contrived. In the film's opening scene, a wide shot reveals a wall of TVs, all playing key moments of a football game, in which one player after another is tackled and brought down. Jerry springs out from behind the TVs, launching into a round of handshaking and chatting to agents and players. These images connect him with the mediated transmission of American football, its spectacular qualities emphasised by its on screen TV. The overall

impression is that he is 'behind it all' - the puppet master of this carefully crafted mass entertainment. His appearance in this scene is distinguished by his tailored suit, shirt and tie as well as his gelled hair: he is literally oily. This suspicion is confirmed moments later when he tells a client: 'I've got to go to a meeting right now and you know what we're going to talk about? You. Cause I'd kill for you, I'm an animal for you!' as he performs his trademark sign of raising his index fingers in the air and pointing them at his client (Bordwell, 2006, p.65). As he backs away, he raises his hands and salaams repeatedly, feigning deference. Such insincerity is framed as morally suspect; Jerry's inauthentic relationships must be replaced with ones of true feeling.

In contrast to his slick persona and the sleazier elements of his job is Maguire's passion for sports and young sports stars, as indicated by David Bordwell (2006, p.68). He is troubled by allegations of a client committing statutory rape, another turning down an autograph for a kid who has the wrong brand of baseball cards, and a son worried by the multiple concussions suffered by his hockey playing father. In the last instance the boy confronts Maguire. The hockey player, upon waking up in his hospital bed, says he must play the following weekend's match, as he needs 65% attendance at his games in order to obtain his bonus. Asking 'Shouldn't someone tell him to stop?', the son is told by a distracted Jerry, looking at his pager: 'It would take a tank to stop your dad. It would take all five Super Trooper Warriors.' Jerry invokes an image of impossible heroism and phallic strength - in the service of commerce - while the sportsman's son makes an appeal to human vulnerability. The film critiques the world of business that denies the fragility of men. It also aligns grown men with children, suggesting that adults (almost always adult men) are vulnerable like children, and that finding a place in the world is dependent upon a regressive revisiting of the father-son relationship.

In the examples of client misconduct that trouble Jerry, ethical codes are distorted, or displaced by, the thirst to make money. The client accused of statutory rape will be protected (through the purchase of a skilled lawyer) because he remains a valuable asset. Conversely, the well-being of the injured hockey player and his family are neglected in the pursuit of financial gain. The crisis of conscience that follows compels Maguire to write the 'mission statement' which leads to his dismissal; the memo advocates the restitution of childhood innocence ('check out what pure joy looks like') that has been compromised by material interests. As he writes he seems more like the

youthful players he represents than one of the 'out of shape agents' he claims to be: dressed in t-shirt and shorts, he does a hand stand as he takes a break before returning to his laptop. Maguire's return to adolescent idealism is underlined by his voiced statement that 'Even the cover looked like *The Catcher in the Rye*.'<sup>4</sup> and is noted by Bordwell. The mission statement inspires his colleague Dorothy to leave her job and become Jerry's secretary, a collaboration that will lead to their marriage, but his PA declines to come with them, confessing she's 'three months away from the pay increase'. Yet Jerry's manifesto does not demand radical change to the agency's economic structure. It merely promotes a form of 'caring capitalism', in which the pursuit of money is tempered by individual attention: 'The answer was fewer clients. Less money. Caring for them and caring for ourselves.'

The film's ultimate endorsement of capitalism, including the exploitation of athletes for huge profits, is confused and this confusion extends to Jerry. He claims to want fewer clients, and better working relationships with each one, but as writer Robert Lang argues, what he really craves is not fewer clients, but the affection of one man. The film implies that 'a man not only needs the love of a good woman but to secure the confidence and love – the *recognition* – of a man as well' (2006, p.265-6). The possibility of an intimate bond of this sort is suggested by Jerry's relationship with Rod. However, this is complicated by the fact that not only does each feel that his labour is commodified, so too is their friendship (p.267).

Jerry craves the love of a good man, and this is bound up with the need for the affection of a father figure. His old mentor, former agency head Dicky Fox, was an idealised paternal substitute who claimed that the basis of happiness was relationships – which also support a patriarchal capitalism (although Jerry was fond of Fox, he was the latter's employee). Upon writing his mission statement, Jerry declares in the voice over, that 'It was the me I'd always wanted to be... I was my father's son again.' The film is more interested in male subjectivities and father-son relations – of Jerry, Dorothy's son Ray, Rod and his son Tyson (Jeremy Suarez) – than those of its female characters, indicating that an authentic masculine identity requires a father's love (Lang, 2006, p.275). The male intimacy of the kind Jerry is looking for is linked to the recreation of his childhood through fatherhood rather than through love for a woman and the Dorothy-Jerry relationship is ambiguous. Jerry is aligned with Dorothy's son Ray, and through this association will move towards a rediscovery of his own innocence. Again Cruise's

capacity for childishness contributes to his youthful persona. Rod too is coded in childish terms, and it is his influence which instigates Jerry's reconnection with his inner-child. Fittingly, Rod also has a little boy, Tyson, spontaneous and energetic – just like Tom Cruise. Rod's childishness is, however, presented as problematic, suggesting that this African-American man is stereotypically immature. In comparison, Jerry appears like a grown-up.

However, where fakery and deceit are represented as white attributes, straight-talking honesty is embodied by blacks, principally Rod and his wife Marcie (Regina King). Jerry's first interaction with Marcie cuts through his attempts at spin: he enters his office to find Tyson destroying it and a frazzled Marcie waiting for him. She declares 'Jerry, this is humiliating and I am pregnant and I am incapable of bullshit. Where is our offer from Arizona?' As critics Robert M. Entman and Andrew Rojecki point out, the 'contrast between the aggressive, abrasive Marcie and Jerry's docile, worshipful Dorothy constructs a hierarchy of racial desirability, at least for most white male audiences' (2001, p.187). More concerning is that both Marcie and Rod are shown to be dependent on Jerry's expertise, appearing 'powerless without their agent's economic wisdom' (2001, p.187). Bell hooks discusses similar representations of black men longing for white men's approval. To occupy the dominant position, 'black males (and white females) must spend their lives striving to emulate white men' (1996, p.84). The film implies that Rod would do better if he listened to Jerry's advice rather than following his own path (when he does follow Jerry's guidance, he is rewarded with a high paying contract).

But even if Jerry has expertise upon which Rod must rely, he struggles to support himself as an agent. Fired at a lunch meeting, following his circulation of his mission statement, he races back to his office to start calling clients in a frantic bid not to lose them to rival Bob Sugar (Jay Mohr). The difference between the old and newly reformed Jerry Maguire is striking: the aptly named Sugar sweet talks each client, adjusting his ethnic patter for each - calling one 'home boy' and asking another 'como estas?' Jerry tries to be genuine: 'What does your heart say?' and fails to persuade. Some of the sports stars are as superficial as their agents: one girl weeps for Jerry on the phone, then puts on a perky voice when she transfers to Sugar's call – only to discover she is still talking to Jerry. At each turn, Jerry appears under pressure and increasingly panicked. There is little loyalty in this corporate world and former colleagues are now

out to sabotage him. Professional relationships count for little; the only bonds that one can rely on are family (Lang, 2006, p.295). Over the course of the film he passes through empty public spaces, contrasted with the warmth of the family home (the final embrace between Dorothy and Jerry takes place in her living room). Even his friendship with Rod is insufficient, compared to the pull of the family. Yet in this treacherous corporate world Rod turns out to be his only loyal client: he expresses material concerns, such as his worries about supporting his family after he has retired from football. He is honest about his motives for playing professional football: ‘Show me the money!’ His transparency is juxtaposed to Jerry’s star player Frank Cushman (Jerry O’Connell) who disingenuously claims ‘I just wanna play football’, while enjoying the fruits of his various product endorsements: boxes of Reeboks piled high in his hotel room and baseball caps sporting ‘Team Cushman’. Jerry soon loses Cushman to Sugar. Intercepting a call meant for Cushman, he is told by Sugar that ‘this is business, not friendship’. Jerry wrongly looks for paternal love from Frank’s father. Rod, by contrast, remains faithful, as he too craves the male bonding that only Jerry is able to provide.

On the phone to Rod, trying to persuade him not to leave him as client, Jerry sits at his desk, mainly framed in static close-ups. A medium shot shows him pinned behind his computer, surrounded by piles of papers on his desk. He is alone, whereas Rod’s family – his wife, son and brother – are visible in the background of many of his shots. Rod is always standing, and spends much of the scene walking from room to room, the camera fluidly following his movements and gliding between wide, medium and close-up shots. His is the epitome of performance-based masculinity: his spectacular athlete’s body clothed only in a pair of sweatpants, he punches the air and bounces from side to side to the music he plays on his stereo as he tells Jerry to repeat after him ‘Show me the money’. (This ‘call and response’ dialogue is reminiscent of gospel music, another African-American cultural reference.) In this performance, bodily masculinity is coded as ‘gangsta’ by the clothing that Rod and his brother wear: the latter’s t-shirt sports a slogan protesting ‘Do not arrest this man!’ The music that Rod moves to is rap, connoting a violent and materialistic urban black masculinity.<sup>5</sup>

To underline Rod’s cultural proclivities, he insists on Jerry yelling ‘I love the black man! I love black people!’ to him down the phone. By this point, Jerry is animated, moving from side to side in his chair in mimicry of Rod, who is seen in a medium shot

thrusting his hips in time with the music. In turn, Jerry's vocal performance gets the attention of his whole office, forecasting the display that will follow as he makes his departure from the building. Rod's 'black' influence on Jerry's development is intimated early on: speaking to a black athlete who has just spoken with Sugar, Jerry exclaims 'he said I don't know what it's like to be a black person? I'm mister black people!' The mimicry Jerry is drawn into has its effect: immediately after the call to Rod, he exits his office for the last time, pausing to make a speech to his curious colleagues. He says that he will go without a fuss, claiming that he will not 'flip out', then thrusts his arms in the air and throws his body about like a rag doll – making just the scene that he says he will *not* make. This is an atypical performance for the agent: its excessiveness suggests he's miming someone else's emotions. Jerry, at this point, is still performing a role. It will take the length of the film, and Rod's enduring influence, for him to become capable of spontaneous emotional expression.

The juxtaposition of the 'fake' white man's performance – in this case from the world of the sports agency – and the genuine performance of the black man, recalls the stereotype of the African-American as emotional conduit. An analysis of *White Men Can't Jump* (Ron Shelton, 1992) by Norman K. Denzin explores how the two lead characters Billy Hoyle (Woody Harrelson) and Sidney Deane (Wesley Snipes) define themselves differently in the game of basketball they play. For black players, so goes the premise, looking good is as important as winning. They eschew the functionalism of the white players and go for style. This style is deeply rooted in the black player's identity and feelings. For Denzin, *White Men Can't Jump's* director Shelton 'constructs an essential gendered black and white racial self: black men have soul; white men have angst' (2002, p. 61). *Jerry Maguire* also distinguishes the good, 'deep' performance of Rod from the inauthentic performance of the sports agent and it is Jerry's moral journey to come to appreciate the former. In *Jerry Maguire*, as in *White Men Can't Jump*, the white man can only discover his authenticity through the black counterpart who is willing to be his facilitator.

The film develops, and to some extent critiques, Rod's figuring as a moral guide and undermines Rod's vanity. During the same phone call in which he forces Jerry to shout 'Show me the money!', Rod declares 'Boom! Touchdown! I make miracles happen!' At one point, Rod stands in front of a circular window, through which the sun streams, in a halo of white light. The paintings in his hallway, which depict him catching a ball,



are also mockingly suggestive of religious frescoes. Later, on the football field, the score board lights up with phrases such as ‘In Rod we trust’ playfully affirming his apparently supernatural powers. More crucial is Rod’s place as Jerry’s very own miracle worker. But both the narrative and mise-en-scène work hard to present Rod as an object of amusement. When he calls Jerry to discuss a business transaction, a wide shot of Rod reveals he is taking a bubble bath with his son, complete with foamy bubbles on his head.<sup>6</sup> This parallels the presence of Ray when Jerry receives the call. The scene is made more ridiculous still by Ray’s insistence on answering the phone, and conducting the conversation with Rod, in Jerry’s place. As Rod continues his mantra, close-ups of Ray, who finally hangs up on him, are countered with those of a drunken Jerry, who silently sniggers at the comedy. A later scene shows Rod on a commercial shoot, appearing with a camel. Framed in a medium close-up with the camel visible behind his shoulder and a comical giant fez perched on his head, he argues with the director, telling him to place the camera low to make him more powerful looking. Rod is presented as both vain and comical. He is, as Robert Lang notes, narcissistic, but this is a trait he shares with Jerry, as ‘both wish to be seen, recognised, acknowledged, *loved*’ (2006, p.268). Rod covets the celebrity status that better known sportsmen enjoy, as much as their large pay cheques and commercial endorsements.

Despite this mockery of Rod’s narcissism, he is the film’s moral heart. He and Marcie enact an idealised coupledom. Always affectionate and considerate of each other, they throw the lack of authenticity in Jerry and Dorothy’s marriage into stark relief. As a *married* man Rod evades the stereotypes of the asexual African-American servant and, conversely, the sexually predatory black man. Moreover, Rod’s happy marriage codes him as unequivocally heterosexual, allowing his and Jerry’s friendship to escape the taint of homoeroticism. Dorothy marvels at the couple’s connection, asking Jerry ‘What were you thinking tonight, watching them go through the entire human emotional experience?’ after dinner at a restaurant is cut short when the pregnant Marcie goes into labour. When Jerry is considering marriage to Dorothy, it is Rod who suggests that he explain his ambivalence honestly to this vulnerable single mother (though it is not spelt out, hers is in part an *economic* vulnerability). Jerry ignores his advice. During the wedding party, at which Rod presciently sings ‘What’s going on?’, it is he who spots on the playback of the ceremony – along with Dorothy – Jerry’s nervousness at the altar. He gives Dorothy a reassuring smile, before whispering in Jerry’s ear ‘You didn’t have the talk, did you?’ He then physically brings the couple together (‘Mr and Mrs

Maguire, everyone!'), clapping Jerry on the back painfully, in a gesture of physical chastisement.

Rod's real gift to Jerry, though, is to cultivate in him an emotional reservoir. Rod exclaims to Jerry that 'we are going to be one on this', in their shared goal to make money. His phone monologue to Jerry is couched in romantic terms:

You should be dreaming about me, baby. I should be on your mind constantly. My agent should be thinking Rod Tidwell. That's when the big dollars are gonna flow. That's when we will truly materialise the kwan.

Rod and Jerry both repeatedly substitute love and money for each other. The former, fed up that he is not getting the product endorsements he desires, complains to Jerry that he is getting 'no love' from Pepsi, or other potential advertisers. After the successful presentation of Tidwell to an assembly of sports broadcasters, retailers and assorted business people, the pair has the following interchange:

Rod: You're loving me now, aren't you?  
Jerry: I'm not about love, I'm about showing you the money!  
Rod: I was just testing you, but to hear you say that makes me love you, baby!

Jerry's confusion of business and pleasure extends to Dorothy too. While out for dinner, a Mariachi band approaches their table suggesting 'a song for the lovers', while the pair try to explain that they are just colleagues. Jerry tells them: 'This is like an office meeting' – yet the two end the evening in bed together.

The substitution of love for money is demonstrated in the locker room, when Jerry tries to persuade Rod to inject more enthusiasm into his game. Rod's angry retort 'You're telling me to dance... I am an athlete! I am not an entertainer!' is misunderstood by Jerry, but not the spectator. It is an uneasy moment, for Rod's muscular torso reminds us of the commodification of his body, which in turn raises the spectre of American slavery. (Lang, 2006, p.290)

Jerry turns away from Rod, angrily shouting 'Fine!' as he throws his arms in the air and kicks his right leg out; the effect is almost like a dance move. He repeatedly yells

‘Fine!’ each exclamation punctuated by flailing limbs. This moment recalls the episode in which Jerry vacated his office - a sequence that also took place after he talked to Rod. Swinging round to face him, he punches the air repeatedly, finally kicking the wall in rage. He tells Rod ‘I am out there for you!’, echoing the words that he spouted in the opening scenes of the film, but this time he means it. He implores Rod to ‘Help me help you!’, almost getting down on bended knee. Again, this reflects the opening scene of Jerry and his bow to a client. In his trademark move (Bordwell, 2006, p. 65), index fingers in the air, he points to Rod, pleading with him. An amused Rod mimics Jerry, repeating the ‘Show me the money’ scene in which Jerry parroted Rod; now it is Rod who mimics Jerry. ‘I’m happy to entertain you!’ Jerry shouts, throwing his arms out in a gesture that is more suggestive of Rod than himself. The scene ends with an exasperated Jerry exiting the locker room, with the whole of Rod’s naked back, buttocks and legs visible in the foreground as he watches Jerry leave. Rod’s body may bear the weight of spectacle — but Jerry is as much a performer in this scene.

Rod reprises his mimicry – and is joined by Jerry – in a later scene, in which Jerry confesses to Rod that he has married Dorothy out of loyalty. Imitating a game show host, Rod cries: ‘Tell him what he’s won, Bob. A beautiful marriage!’ (Jerry has this marriage, but it is with Rod.) Angry, Jerry replies: ‘You know, friends can tell each other anything, right? I’ll tell you why you don’t have your \$10 million. You play for the money. You play with your head, not your heart.’ The crowd want the illusion that the game is played for the joy of it. Jerry – and the film – seems confused about the relationship between affect and profit, a relationship articulated by his mentor Dicky Fox, who declares that ‘Unless you love everybody, you can’t sell anybody’. They continue to bicker and Jerry angrily mocks Rod, parodying the falsetto notes he reaches in moments of excitement. Stung by this (racial) mockery, Rod declares he no longer wants to be friends with Jerry – a rift perhaps more significant to the film than that between Dorothy and Jerry.

It is fitting that the film’s key moment should involve the performance of the African-American man. On the field Rod is tackled by two larger players, flips over in the air and is knocked out. The audience – watching on TV at home and in the stadium – waits for him to regain consciousness. For the first time in the film we see Jerry run, sprinting through the stadium underpass to reach the edge of the football field, an expression of his attachment to and concern for Rod. (Depictions of Cruise running feature

prominently in his films, usually as the object of the chase. The scene is reprised later, when Jerry is shown running through an empty airport, marking his urgent wish to return home to Dorothy.) When Rod regains consciousness he is keen to savour the attention of the stadium crowd and those at home, 'Wait, wait. Let me enjoy this for a moment.' Finally rising to his feet, he delights the crowd by literally dancing, picking up his feet and stepping nimbly from side to side, capitulating to the role of entertainer. He spins on the ground in a break dance, before climbing up the barricade to shake fans' hands. When Rod reaches the stadium exit, Jerry is waiting, along with a crowd of photographers. Rod glances around for Jerry and he returns his affectionate look, pointing at Rod as he wells up with tears, and the two embrace. This sequence is an intriguing inversion of what Sharon Willis has observed in relation to embraces of black and white men which:

raise the question of what connections the films are working to establish through the figure of racial difference. Inevitably, it seems, this figure connects the mutilation of the white male body to social and erotic bonding.

(1997, p.29)

In this instance, it is the black man's body that is injured. If we postulate that Gooding Jr. as Tidwell stands in for Cruise, bearing the weight of 'spectacularisation' normally demanded of the star, he also invites the physical threat that Cruise is often confronted with. Although Tidwell takes part in a football game rather than a fight, his injury still results from male aggression, albeit in a highly ritualised sporting form.

This embrace is the culmination of 'an ambiguously close friendship, which the films knows (as the characters seem to know) covertly authorises a search for love' (Lang, 2006, p.288). Then Rod's pager goes off, breaking up the couple and reuniting Rod and Marcie, a moment which seems to justify James Baldwin's statement: 'A black man and a white man can come together only in the absence of women: which is, simply, the American legend of masculinity brought to its highest pressure, and revealed, as it were, in black and white.' (1976, p.599) Jerry is literally pushed out of the frame; nevertheless, the embrace of black and white (men) remains 'the film's strongest form of closure' (1997, p.28) as Sharon Willis notes of *Lethal Weapon 1* and *2* and *Die Hard*. When Jerry rushes home to Dorothy to declare his feelings it seems this would not have been possible without Rod's guidance. But these feelings have been redirected from

Rod to Dorothy, from a figure of homoerotic desire onto an acceptable heteronormative love object.

The figure of the emotive black man resurfaces once more before the close of the film. Earlier on, Jerry and Rod have watched sports commentator Roy Firestone (playing himself) interview a tearful black celebrity; this interviewer is known for his ability to provoke an emotional response from his guests that Rod declares ‘bullshit’. At the film’s end it is Rod who is the interviewee, hearing the struggles of his early family life recounted: a father that left the family home on Christmas Eve and a mother who scrubbed the steps of the local prison to pay his college tuition fees.<sup>7</sup> Rod listens to descriptions of his mother’s early struggles with poverty and his brother’s accident without emotion, but breaks down when given news of his new \$11M contract, thus finalizing the film’s project of linking financial success to authentic feeling. As a mark of gratitude, the emotional Rod thanks his family and team-mates, saving for last his thanks to Jerry, his ‘ambassador of kwan’. (This performance was echoed on Oscar night in Cuba Gooding Jr.’s acceptance speech.) The black man, personified by Rod, is an emotional reservoir, but Jerry too has a soft look and a teary eye. However, the pair has been separated. Jerry must turn his craving for intimacy towards the family, and the film ends, in something of an anti-climax, with the nuclear trio walking through the park. Like the romance between Dorothy and Jerry, this narrative closure seems emotionally flat. The tone of the scene only alters when Jerry witnesses Ray throwing a ball, and speculates on his future as a sports player – and the promise of the bond that he and Ray will forge in this shared activity. Jerry must forget his attachment to Rod – rationalised as a commodified bond established only in the pursuit of capital – and make the family his future.

### ***Collateral***

*Collateral* takes the stereotype of the emotional black man in service to the white protagonist and subverts the black-white buddy dynamic.<sup>8</sup> Black taxi driver Max overcomes sociopathic white hitman Vincent, but only after Vincent has goaded him into performing various acts which prepare him for his final rebellion. The multiple highways of Los Angeles reflect the urban setting, where different communities travel side by side but rarely interact in a city of extreme wealth and poverty. Only two figures cut across these disparate worlds: the taxi driver, who appears invisible, even to those in his cab, and the white, well spoken contract killer. Each, in their own way, are

alienated from those around them. In almost every instance, Vincent's victims are blacks and latinos (at the bottom of the country's racial and economic hierarchy). As though to compensate for this, the best educated and most middle class character of the film is Annie (Jada Pinkett Smith), the black prosecutor of a drugs case who turns out to be one of Vincent's intended victims.

Unlike *Jerry Maguire*, in *Collateral* it is the white character, Vincent, who provides the stimulus for African-American Max's emotional growth. Vincent retains elements of Cruise's star persona but much of the actor's 'spectacular' appearance is suppressed: he looks older, in a grey suit, with silver hair and stubble. The beard is indicative of greater seniority. The clothes and hair give Vincent a monochrome appearance, invoking 'the man in the grey flannel suit', with all its connotations of a military-adapted psyche translated into corporate anonymity as well as the product of a very *white* America. If Vincent claims to be 'taking out the trash' then his garbage is the multi-ethnic citizenry of L.A., the very ones that keep the city – and America - supplied with cheap labour. His short hairstyle is reminiscent of a similar traveller in the L.A. landscape, D-Fenz (Michael Douglas) of *Falling Down* (Joel Schumacher, 1993), a character confused by the 'alien' nature of his own city. But the grey tones make Vincent seem almost spectral. The dark sunglasses he wears in his first scene hide his eyes, almost hollowing out his skull-like visage. There is nothing of substance here, only façade – and the suggestion of death.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, the grey hair and silver suit of Vincent indicate the association of whiteness with death. Richard Dyer in *White* (1997) discusses the dead white body as symbolic object, from artistic representations of Christ on the cross (p.208) to North Europeans as bringers of death in their colonial adventures to the spectre of the Ku Klux Klan (p.209). In modern culture, Dyer points out, 'the idea of whites as both themselves dead and as bringers of death is commonly hinted at in horror literature and film' (p.210), reaching its culmination in the figure of the vampire. The pallor of the vampire's skin often has an aesthetic quality as well as indicating his 'undead' status. It also suggests the aristocratic heritage - and latterly bourgeois status - that resonates with the vampire's exploitation of the common man. Franco Moretti suggests that the figures of the worker and the owner in 19<sup>th</sup> century society can be understood through the fictional characters of Frankenstein's monster and an earlier literary vampire creation, Dracula: they are 'the two horrible faces of a single society, its *extremes*; the disfigured wretch and the

ruthless proprietor. The worker and capital' (Moretti, 2005, p.83). Count Dracula is simultaneously an aristocrat and a member of the bourgeoisie: his move to England involves buying up large swathes of property in the London area. Dracula himself, for Moretti, is imbued with a 'clear-headed bourgeois rationality' (p.251, n.13). For rationality is another ideal of whiteness; Dyer observes that 'purity and absence of affect [are] the essence of the aspiration of whiteness' (1997, p.213). (However, I would suggest that absence of affect is a specifically *masculine* white ideal.) This returns me to the juxtaposition of white masculine reason with black masculine emotionality discussed earlier in this chapter. Absence of affect exists closer to the locus of power – i.e. mature white bourgeois men (with non-whites, the poor and women positioned as irrational). Cruise's emotionality is typically an indication of his powerlessness. That Vincent is so associated with whiteness, including the unfeeling rationality so indicative of capitalism, suggests the partial deviation from Cruise's persona that this character takes.

If Vincent's grey appearance connotes whiteness, it also invokes the notion of silver as money. Underling this is the advertisement on Max's cab for Bacardi Silver; beside a photo of the drinks bottle is a pair of female eyes (dark brown against olive skin – of undetermined ethnicity), above which are the words 'SILVER'. It is money that keeps Max's taxi moving and Vincent killing. The latter is a businessman, a fact that links this character to Cruise's previous white-collar workers in *Rain Man*, *The Firm* and *Jerry Maguire* amongst others. In the opening moments of *Collateral*, walking through Los Angeles International Airport (a space which is isolated from the outside world, sanitized of any cultural context and in this depiction populated mostly by white men), another white businessman in a suit bumps into him and both drop their briefcases. Each picks up the other's case, in the film's first example of displacement and twinning. The laptop that Vincent finds in his briefcase contains the information he needs in order to make the hits for which he has been hired.

A freelancer, Vincent is a postmodern service worker, detached from his employer, who has never met him. There are parallels to the taxi driver, who spends little time in the cab depot and is himself 'for hire'. Vincent asks Max if there are any benefits to his job – such as pension and sick pay – suggesting the precarious nature of his employment (and it is a question that Max later asks Vincent about his own line of work). Max's livelihood is at the mercy of the market. More profound power hierarchies are indicated

at moments in the *mise-en-scène*. Steven Rybin observes that as Max's taxi pulls out of the taxi depot, his supervisor watches from an elevated balcony; the cab and Max in it are positioned directly underneath him, making visible the power differentials in their relationship. Furthermore, the mural on the wall opposite the entrance of the depot depicts a cowboy on a white horse lassoing a black bull. (Rybin, 2007, p.175)

Vincent's position is better, though he remains an employee – albeit of a unusual sort – and this notion of being 'for hire' is typical of the Cruise persona, demonstrated in film such as *Jerry Maguire*, *The Firm*, *The Last Samurai* (Edward Zwick, 2003) and *Eyes Wide Shut* (Stanley Kubrick, 1999). In these examples Cruise struggles against the system – though in *Collateral* Vincent remains indifferent. Here the drugs cartel he works for represents big business. Drug dealing is an extreme example of global commerce on the capitalist model – beyond government restriction and concerned only with profit. Vincent's killing of key witnesses in the prosecution of the cartel is not so far removed from the heavy handed tactics certain corporations employ to bully whistle-blowers in their own industries. (Michael Mann also directed *The Insider* [1999], a film about the machinations of the tobacco industry.) Vincent is the personification of this system.

A visitor to Los Angeles, Vincent has no personal connections to the city, which further detaches him from his surroundings. It is curious that he relies on a taxi to conduct this journey around LA: in this vast urban sprawl, it would be more plausible to hire a car, providing less margin for human error. But as screenwriter Stuart Beattie observed in interview [attended by the author; Curzon Soho, London, 12 February 2005] the device of a taxi ride implicates two risky behaviours – picking up and taking a lift from a stranger - formalised as a commodified service. Vincent's use of Max and his cab has several functions, including an alibi: it is later revealed that he has previously made a trip to L.A. and framed (and murdered) the cab driver for the killings. The taxi can pass through different areas of the city without being noticed, from the business district to the ganglands. Max is shown speaking Spanish to a gas station attendant with little difficulty, indicating he is able to move amongst different communities with ease.

Unlike Vincent, a man of action, Max is a fantasist. Nevertheless, there is an explicit parallel between Vincent's expertise and Max's own (Rybin, 2007, p.172). Passenger Annie asks Max 'Do you take pride in doing what you do well?' When she instructs



him to take a certain route to her destination, he tells her an alternate, quicker, way. He knows to the minute how long each journey will take, indicating his own intelligence and efficiency. He is, however, crippled by procrastination. Although he tells Annie that he is driving a cab to save for his own limousine business, we later discover that he has been doing the job for twelve years: his failure to succeed depends more on his hesitation than on a lack of 'collateral' to secure a loan. He views most of life from his taxi cab; even his customers are divided from him by a pane of glass. The scene in the taxi depot where Max is first seen is noisy and chaotic. All this stops as soon as he shuts his car door. For him, the cab is a sanctuary from the world. When his passengers disturb his peace - as with an arguing couple at the opening of the film - he has a fantasy escape: a postcard of a desert island, attached to his sun visor. It is fitting, then, that Vincent's first act of disruption is to force Max out of the cab. Vincent stops at his first address of the evening, having just agreed with Max that he will drive him to five addresses across L.A. for \$600. While Vincent is inside, Max flicks through a Mercedes brochure and eats a sandwich. But he is jolted out of his day-dream when the body of Vincent's first victim crashes onto the cab. At Vincent's command, he helps put the body in the taxi's trunk. Vincent's initial coercion commences a series of events that will lead to Max's self-determination, culminating in rescuing Annie and overcoming Vincent.

Vincent proves to be the catalyst for Max's development, which switches the roles usually allotted on the basis of race. However, their differing skin tones visualise the real difference between them in class terms, which is as significant as racial difference. This power differential is realised in the most brutal fashion, for theirs is a master-servant relationship: Max literally becomes Vincent's slave on the journey around Los Angeles, held against his will, at one point with his hands tied to his steering wheel. Much as African-Americans have functioned in U.S. economic history, his body becomes a commodity, 'collateral' – a financial guarantee for Vincent's investment of time and energy. A further definition of the term is 'running in parallel to', which suggests the disparate communities of Los Angeles that never meet. The film's many aerial shots display the city's elaborate network of parallel highways. Finally, 'collateral' may mean having an ancestor in common but descending from a different line, invoking the unacknowledged 'miscegenation' between slave owners and slaves.<sup>10</sup>

As the evening continues, and Vincent kills untargeted individuals, the terminology ‘collateral damage’ is also invoked; Vincent warns Max that ‘you attract attention, you are going to get people killed who didn’t need to be’. Screenwriter Stuart Beattie has indicated that an earlier draft of *Collateral* included Vincent’s boast that he had only caused two collateral hits in the length of his career – that is to say, only two accidental deaths – and is why the film is titled thus (Goldsmith, 2004, p.52). This reference to civilian casualties caused by the military relates to Vincent’s previous employment on the other side of the law. When Max asks him how long he has been in his line of work he replies ‘Private sector? Six years.’ An FBI agent later explains how private sector security companies have taken to employing ex-special forces personnel<sup>11</sup> (reminiscent of Riggs in *Lethal Weapon*, also ex-special forces, and his inability to readjust to civilian life). Vincent has simply transferred his marketable skills from war zones to the profit-making sector. But if his disregard for the people he kills makes him a sociopath, then so is the city; he explicitly compares himself to L.A.: ‘sprawled out, disconnected, that’s me’. Los Angeles is the ultimate edifice of a capitalism that alienates human relationships to the degree that a dead man can ride around on the city’s underground for a day, unnoticed. After reciting this urban legend to Max, it is Vincent who ends his life this way.

Yet if L.A. represents extreme social and ethnic segregation (a black jazz club, a Hispanic cowboy hangout and a Korean nightclub are shown in the course of the film) the white populace are not recognisable in this depiction of the city. This community is almost invisible, suggesting white flight to the suburbs. Max is a symbol of this segregation and alienation, driving around in his steel cage: most of his customers hardly notice him, and he has no connection to those that work with him – he is never shown interacting with his colleagues (other than dealing with the bullying radio interchanges of his supervisor). Throughout the film close-ups are reserved for interactions between Vincent and Max, and at times the spaces Vincent invades to hunt down his prey. The aerial traffic shots of the city give little sense of its street life or its inhabitants, turning roads and buildings into grids, ‘abstracting’ Max from his own life. Every drama he witnesses, whether in the street or in the back of his cab, is separated from him by a sheet of glass. It is this passivity that Vincent challenges. The distinction between the two is that Max is inhibited by his fears, whereas Vincent does not *appear* to feel vulnerable at all. (Annie is the ideal in this respect. She confesses to Max that the evening before a big trial she gets very nervous, filled with feelings of

inadequacy, but spends the night ‘working my exhibits’ and in this way prepares herself for the following day. Max on the other hand, allows fear to prevent him from pursuing what he desires.)

Like Rod does for Jerry in *Jerry Maguire*, Vincent forces Max to face his feelings and act on them. And like that film, *Collateral* flirts with suggesting that the right attitude is enough to succeed in America. When Max’s boss at the taxi depot radios him to say that he will be liable for damage to the cab (following Vincent’s first misdemeanour), Vincent defends Max, posing as a federal prosecutor. He reminds the supervisor that his demand is illegal, as the damage will be covered by their insurance: ‘How can I not get excited when I hear you trying to extort a working man?’ He then tells Max what to say to his superior: ‘Tell him, he pulls this shit again you’re going to stick this yellow cab up his fat ass.’ Max: ‘And next time, you pull any shit, I’m going to have to stick this yellow cab up your fat ass.’ Thus, Vincent’s relationship with Max is complex, both protective and persecuting by turns. Up until this point in the film, all shots of Vincent and Max have shown each man separately, in his own close-up or medium shot. In this scene two close-ups and a wide shot frame Vincent and Max beside each other. One close-up frames Max in profile, with Vincent’s silhouette outlining his, almost like a shadow. This begins a pairing of the two men, imbuing Vincent with a doppelgänger-like quality. The linkage becomes exaggerated as the film progresses, as Max is pressured into imitating Vincent. It culminates in Max absorbing enough of Vincent’s persona that he finds the will to shoot Vincent in self-defence.

Like Mel Gibson’s Martin Riggs in *Lethal Weapon*, Vincent evidences certain stereotypical ‘black’ traits absent in Max. Employed by (Mexican) drug dealers, he carries out the violence most often projected onto the young urban black man. When Max is coerced into mimicking Vincent, he is a black man imitating a black stereotype - successfully. Vincent is correlated with performance: he passes as a businessman and dons various roles in the course of his evening in LA. The association is one that is over-determined by casting Cruise in this part. Following the damage to the taxi cab, and the acquisition of a corpse in Max’s trunk, Vincent speaks of the need to improvise: ‘We’re into Plan B... we got to make the best of it, improvise, adapt to the environment. Darwin. Shit happens. I Ching. Whatever man, we gotta roll with it.’ Like capitalism, Vincent invokes the rationale of survival of the fittest to justify his predation. In what appears to be a reconciliatory gesture, Vincent asks Max if he likes jazz – defying racial

stereotype, Max doesn't – and offers to buy him a drink in a jazz club. There all the band members are black, as are the patrons. Vincent, with his white skin and light suit, appears incongruous. This is one of the segregated communities in this film's representation of an atomised L.A. It is Vincent who gives Max advice on how to listen to jazz: 'It's off melody. It's behind the notes. Not what's expected. Improvise, like tonight.'

Vincent is the one associated with black culture and behaviour, albeit the intellectually 'hip' one of jazz. Following the band's performance, he invites trumpet player Daniel (Barry Shabaka Henley), who owns the bar, to have a drink with them. As the three drink together, Daniel tells them stories about Miles Davis, with whom he played. At the end of the story, by which time Max has visibly relaxed, Vincent says he looks forward to telling 'the folks in Culiacan and Cartagena that story', revealing that he works for the drug cartel whom Daniel has informed upon to the FBI. Daniel retorts 'Just when I thought you were a cool guy' and Vincent replies 'I am a cool guy. With a job I was contracted to do.' Vincent gives Daniel one chance to save his own life: by answering a jazz question – a white man usurping knowledge of black culture<sup>12</sup>. When Daniel answers incorrectly, Vincent shoots him dead. The content of the question and answer seem curious: Vincent asks Daniel where Miles Davis learned music. Davis was sponsored by his wealthy dentist father – who had made money in agriculture – to go to Julliard music school. This fact raises issues regarding father-son relationships - especially the issue of the father's financial support (something we suspect neither Max nor Vincent have had). But Daniel is only half right: Vincent, after shooting him, informs Max that Davis dropped out after a year and went in search of Charlie Parker, who mentored him. Vincent prefers an answer that subverts the system – and defies paternal authority.

We later discover Vincent's own troubled filial relationship with his father, a drunk who regularly beat him. His mother, he tells Max, died before he could remember. Director Michael Mann has claimed Vincent is suffering from some type of 'dissociation dysfunction' caused by paternal abuse (Feeney and Duncan [eds.], 2006, p.176). True to form, the Cruise character has suffered childhood trauma. The flights of fancy that allowed him as a child to survive psychologically, lead to profound disconnection as an adult. Vincent uses human attachments to manipulate others. When Max's cab is pulled over by police - by which time they have a corpse in the trunk – Vincent tells him

to get rid of them. Vincent speculates that one of them is 'probably married... Maybe that one's got kids. Probably his wife is pregnant' to motivate Max to talk his way out of trouble. Max himself has personal attachments that make him vulnerable: when his supervisor radios him to complain about his pestering mother - he has missed his daily visit - Vincent insists that they go to see her in hospital, to preserve Max's routine and thus avoid suspicion. He insists that Max buy her flowers, in a comically disconnected observation: 'People buy flowers. Buy flowers'. When meeting Max's mother, Ida, he appears disconcerted by her compliments, before he re-establishes a charming veneer. He later uses Ida as leverage to fulfil the orders he has given Max by threatening to kill her (she becomes Vincent's 'collateral' in negotiating with Max).

Disguising himself as a client of Max's (who has told his mother that he already runs a limo business, in his own presentation of a false self), Vincent spends much of the film being misrecognised; in an inversion of the black cop who is misidentified as a criminal, the white contract killer is mistaken for a law-abiding businessman. To further this false recognition, he forces Max to impersonate him, a moment in the film which contributes to Max's later resistance. When Max throws Vincent's briefcase into the freeway in his first act of defiance, Vincent insists that he must obtain the details of his remaining victims from his disgruntled client. Giving his name as Vincent, Max passes through security to enter into the Sinaloan (a state of Mexico) club where his client and entourage have gathered. This is another private space, with a very different community to that in the jazz club; several of the drinkers wear western hats, suggesting a Central American costume. On the stage, guitar players wear cowboy gear and strum Mariachi melodies; a mural of famous 'corrido' singers decorates the wall. Max meets with drug baron, Felix (Javier Bardem), in a private room, surrounded by his thugs. Furious at 'Vincent's' incompetence, Felix asks him if he believes in Santa Claus. He describes his children's preference for Santa's helper Black Peter, with his list of naughty children, which he parallels to Vincent's hit list. (This indicates that even Felix has personal connections, and potential vulnerabilities.) The reference to Black Peter is striking. Thought to have once been a slave, this traditional figure is the white St. Nicholas's servant. It also indicates how Felix views Max, as a racial subordinate, an employee in a business. This is underscored, in comical fashion, when Max offers Felix a 25% discount on his services for the inconvenience caused by his inefficiency; 'hell, make it thirty-five' he says, in a small act of revenge on Vincent.

Following Felix's initial display of bullying, Max transforms himself from a mild-mannered spectacle-wearing taxi driver into a streetwise 'homeboy'. He takes off his glasses, changing his posture. Performing this particular stereotype of the violent urban black youth underscores the gap that exists between it and himself. Most uncannily, Max does Vincent: he stares intently, almost manically (invoking other Cruise performances). He tilts his head, slowly turning it to the side and back again. He talks of saving Felix's 'Hermes faconable [sic] sorry ass', and sneers, just like Vincent. (His remarks on Felix's designer couture question his purported masculinity.) Max also makes threats in Vincent's violent style: 'I think you should tell the guy behind me to put his gun away before I take it and beat his bitch ass to death with [sic].' Then he takes his glasses off and quotes Vincent directly: 'But hey, shit happens. Gotta roll with it, adapt, Darwin, I Ching.' The drug dealer buys the performance and Max leaves the club alive, with the information he needs. As he departs, he tells Felix that Daniel is sorry for informing on him – a plead for the personal in this brutal business world that leaves Felix unmoved.

In an inversion of the black helper, who is the channel for the white protagonist finding his soulful nature, the white sociopath Vincent ushers the black protagonist Max through an extreme version of assertiveness training. Now mistaken for Vincent by the law, in some sense Max becomes Vincent. A telling scene frames the two character's visages together inside the cab. Max is on the left, Vincent's face slightly further in the distance, visible behind green lettering on the glass partition. An exterior wide shot of the cab shows Vincent just visible behind Max's figure, his silvery shadow. Directly and indirectly Vincent encourages him to *act*. 'Life's short. One day it's gone. If you and I make this out alive you should call her. [Annie] That's what I think.' This moment of sympathy between the pair is short lived. In the following scene Vincent's target is the head of a Korean nightclub, who is surrounded by security. Police arrive at the same time, and thinking Max is Vincent (following their viewing of CCTV footage showing Max's entrance to the Sinaloan club) go after him. The gunfire causes a mass stampede, with Vincent killing a number of guards and finally taking out his hit. He shoots one member of security who aims his gun at Max – saving his life – then kills the only policeman, Fanning (Mark Ruffalo), who believes Max's story, forcing his return to the taxi - protecting then enslaving him by turns.

When the livid driver challenges him over his murder of Fanning (invoking Vincent's own logic that 'the guy had a family'), Vincent responds 'There's no good reason, there's no bad reason, for whether you live or die.' In return, Vincent ridicules Max's spectatorial passivity:

'Some day. Some day my dream will come.' One night you'll wake up and discover it never happened. It's all turned around on you and it never will and suddenly you are old. It didn't happen and it never will. Because you were never going to do it anyway... and you'll push it into memory, zone out in a Barca lounge being hypnotised by daytime TV for the rest of your life.

This is the moment of Max's self-realisation: 'you know what, that's the one thing I gotta thank you for bro', because until now I never looked at it that way.' Ignoring the gun that Vincent points at his head and his increasingly desperate pleas to slow down, he speeds up the taxi, ploughs into an intersection and flips it over. Vincent escapes, but rather than run away, Max grabs his discarded gun and pursues him to the office where he has gone to kill Annie. Max finds his way to the office block where she works, managing to call her from his mobile. Still a spectator, he sees Annie working in her office above and Vincent hunting for her a few floors below. As the phone goes dead, he abandons spectatorship to rescue her, no longer viewing but acting. When Vincent finally corners Annie, he is surprised to find Max at her side. Telling Vincent not to shoot, he retorts 'What you gonna do? Shoot -' as Max does just that, and his bullet grazes Vincent's ear. The cut streams blood down his neck, the first splash of colour in his otherwise monochrome appearance.

Fleeing the office block, Max and Annie escape onto a metro train, with Vincent in pursuit. He chases them through the carriages until they reach the last car and can run no further. Max feebly clutches his gun, while Vincent reminds him of his professional status, against which he cannot possibly complete: 'Max, I do this for a living!' Max stands in mirror image to Vincent; both begin to shoot. The lights in Max's carriage go out. By the time they flicker back on, and Vincent steps through into the carriage where Max and Annie stand, it is unclear if either has been shot. Slowly, a red patch appears on Vincent's white shirt. With little ceremony he sits down to die, his performing persona drained. He asks Max: 'Guy. Gets on a subway. Dies. Think anyone will notice?' It is a final plea by Vincent that, in spite of it all, he wants to be significant in

the lives of others. Max and Annie depart into the sunrise, leaving Vincent's body on the train.

It is a bleaker picture than that drawn by *Jerry Maguire*, but each film suggests that only in this heterosexual coupling can shelter be found from the brutal demands of a capitalist world. Rod Tidwell, as an African-American man, and Cruise as the hitman Vincent, each depict something of 'the other' – referring equally to the threatening affective bond between men as the former's racial 'otherness'. Although the pairing of black and white men in each narrative – and their shared affect, of whatever sort - may have proven transformative for both men involved, they are separated by the film's end. Their relationship is replaced by a union that underpins the established order and supports the continuance of the capitalist model: the heterosexual couple.



## Notes

1. The Cruise persona is undermined by web postings of his dancing, both from 2006. The first is from Black Entertainment Television, in which Cruise attempts to do a 'Kanye' [West] (in his own words) as he mimes riding on a motorbike, mimicking urban dance moves (May 2006). Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqlyQZkq2Ug&feature=related>. (Accessed: 10 June 2011) A later example is on the Ellen DeGeneres's Show, in which he leaps on stage and begins dancing with her, performing similar moves to those on BET (12 May 2006). In each, the dancing appears stilted and uneasy; it is a marked attempt at sabotage of Cruise's image.
2. This is complicated by sexually attractive black male stars such as Denzel Washington and Will Smith. Their star personas each negotiate the question of black racial stereotyping in a complex way that requires further analysis.
3. This figuring of the black helper still finds expression in Hollywood films: in *The Green Mile* (Frank Darabont, 1999) the giant John Coffey, played by African-American Michael Clarke Duncan, is wrongly accused of child murder. Not only is he innocent but he is in possession of faith healing powers. Coffey pits the two most defined stereotypes of black masculinity against each other: the black buck versus the god-fearing Uncle Tom.
4. The protagonist of *The Catcher in the Rye* (J.D. Salinger, 1951, New York: Little Brown and Company), Holden Caulfield, has a fantasy, following a mishearing of Robert Burns' poem 'Comin' Through the Rye', of himself as a 'catcher'- protecting children running through rye fields from falling over the cliff's edge.
5. This is a problem that it is not limited to Hollywood film-makers. J. Davies and C. R. Smith point out in *Gender, Ethnicity and Sexuality in Contemporary American Film* that even a scholar such as Manthia Diawara 'comes close to taking for granted the universal applicability of the experiences of young urban black males for all African Americans'. (1997, p.60)
6. This scene recalls an earlier scene from *Lethal Weapon*, where Murtaugh (Danny Glover) is greeted by his children, while in the bathtub, and presented with a birthday cake.
7. Such biographical details necessarily appeal to cliché: Entman and Rojecki note that 'by making Rod the rare (if not unique) NFL star who excelled in football at a major college program without receiving a scholarship, the movie sacrifices realism to connect with the stereotypes' (2000, p.187).
8. Director Michael Mann went on to film *Miami Vice* (2006), which has the black-white buddy cop pairing of Ricardo Tubbs [Jamie Fox] and Sonny Crockett [Colin Farrell]. As in the *Lethal Weapon* series it is the white cop who is volatile and the black partner who is dependable.
9. Cruise's trademark use of Ray Bans is evident in films such as *Risky Business* (Paul Brickman, 1983), *Top Gun* (Tony Scott, 1986), *Rain Man* (Barry Levinson, 1988) and is parodied in *Jerry Maguire*.
10. In *Die Hard* the black and white pairing of Agent Johnson and Special Agent Johnson are introduced, with the parenthesis 'no relation' as the gag. Willis suggests it invokes the history of slavery and race relations in the United States, where a white slave owner and his slave would bear the surname (1997, p.38).
11. This links to Cruise's quasi-military persona demonstrated in films such as *Top Gun* (Tony Scott, 1986) or *A Few Good Men* (Rob Reiner, 1992).
12. The question regards biographical details of the jazz musician Louis Armstrong. He was himself a prodigious marijuana smoker and had mafia associations.

## Chapter Four: Tom Cruise, *Minority Report* and the Repetition of Abuse

The patriarch's domination of the son is a pivotal theme of Cruise's films. At the centre of the narratives is a protector-persecutor father against whom the vulnerable Cruise character must defend himself. The trauma represented in these films is unlike the incidents of child abuse characterising the plots of *Sleepers* (Barry Levinson, 1996), *Mystic River* (Clint Eastwood, 2003) and *Bad Education* [La Mala Educación] (Pedro Almodóvar, 2004).<sup>1</sup> In contrast to these portrayals of contemporary social ills, Cruise's films operate on a symbolic level, exploring features of male psychosexual development. The classical Freudian concept of the Oedipus complex is useful for an understanding of Cruise's persona and films. Freud argues that the male child's first love-object is the mother, an attachment with various psychosexual implications that he terms the 'Oedipus complex'. It recalls 'the Greek legend of King Oedipus, who was destined by fate to kill his father and take his mother as his wife' (1917, S.E. XVI, p.330). The unconscious desire of the male child to commit parricide and partake of incest with his mother is complicated by the fear that his father, learning of his son's desires, will inflict punishment by castrating him. These impulses are reflected in Cruise's narratives of father-son competition. Yet there are in the Oedipus complex two different modes of relating to the father: the 'active' version in which he takes his father's place and has intercourse with his mother or the 'passive' version in which he takes the place of his mother. (1917, S.E. XVI, p.176) Freud indicates that the male child's acknowledgment of the possibility of castration is the catalyst for the dissolution of the Oedipus complex. For both positions:

entailed the loss of the penis – the masculine one as a punishment and the feminine one as a precondition. If the satisfaction of love in the field of the Oedipus complex is to cost the child his penis, a conflict is bound to exist between his narcissistic interest in that part of his body and the libidinal cathexis of his parental objects. In this conflict the first of these forces normally triumphs: the child's ego turns away from the Oedipus complex.

(p.176)

The trauma experienced by the Cruise character can be understood as an expression of the young boy's castration anxiety. The Freudian paradigm of primal Oedipal fantasies is fundamental to this analysis of *Minority Report*. Freud's discussion of masochism in 'A Child is Being Beaten' (1919, S.E. XVII) and 'An Economic Problem of

Masochism' (1924, S.E. IXX) will also be applied to the feminine and masochistic elements of Cruise's persona illustrated by *Minority Report* and his other films.

There are two different aspects of *Minority Report* to consider: the actual trauma suffered by the Cruise figure and others, and the psychological reality that such moments resonate with. In 'The Theme of Three Caskets' (1913, S.E. XII), Freud argues that the manifest content of a work of literature may resonate with a psychological reality in a way that is not immediately obvious. Shakespeare's *King Lear* not only explores father-daughter relations but also one man's fear of death; the three daughters represent the three fates: 'the woman who bears him, the woman who is his mate and the woman who destroys him.' (S.E. XII, p.301) The term 'trauma' is traced back by Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis to its original Greek meaning 'wound', derived from the term 'to pierce'.<sup>2</sup> Three ideas are implicit in this definition: a violent shock; a wound; its consequences on the subject's entire psychological organisation (Laplanche and Pontalis, 2004, p.466). For Freud, the experience of trauma cannot be explained by his governing concept of the 'pleasure principle', which dictates that the subject typically works to avoid unpleasure and maximize pleasure, in order that 'unpleasurable tension' is reduced: 'unpleasure corresponds to an *increase* in the quantity of excitation and pleasure to a *diminution*' (S.E. XVIII, p.8). Yet in certain circumstances the pleasure principle is put aside in favour of 'tendencies *beyond* the pleasure principle, that is, of tendencies more primitive than it and independent of it' (p.17). One of these exceptions is demonstrated in the 'compulsion to repeat' (p.19) in which the subject repeats repressed material through the creation of his current circumstances; he does this in the place of remembering specific troubling events from his past. Such a compulsion 'recalls from the past experiences which include no possibility of pleasure' (p.20). This phenomenon demonstrates how trauma is processed by the mind. Freud uses the biological metaphor of the cell that has an outer protective structure that defends against invading foreign objects. He defines as traumatic any event that is strong enough to break through this protective wall, a disturbance that provokes comprehensive defensive measures on the part of the organism (p.29). The pleasure principle is put out of action, and the task of the mental apparatus becomes one of mastering the stimuli and 'of binding them, in the psychological sense, so that they can then be disposed of' (p.30).<sup>3</sup> In *Minority Report*, Anderton's intervention to prevent others' tragedies works through the trauma of losing his own child. This is the most explicit representation of a phenomenon that occurs in residual forms in Cruise's other films, and can also be

understood in terms of the fantasy life of the child. Within the discourse of psychoanalysis all psychosexual development is by its very nature traumatic. The castration anxiety demonstrated in the Oedipus complex points to traumatic affects in the course of normal development.

Freud's early work in psychoanalysis attempted to 'explain and thereby cure hysterical and obsessional symptoms, by tracing them back to repressed memories of sexual scenes in early childhood'. (Fletcher, 1999, p.5) At this stage in his career, he located the source of hysteria in his female patients as the result of an actual sexual seduction. In 'A Project for a Scientific Psychology' (1895, S.E. I), he describes the case of a woman named Emma, which illustrates the psychical phenomenon of deferred action, 'nachträglichkeit' or 'afterwardsness'. The young woman has a phobia about going into shops alone. Freud links her hysterical outbreak to a remembered scene when she ran out of a shop at the sight of two laughing assistants. This Freud traces back to an earlier scene of sexual molestation that Emma experienced at the age of eight, when she had been sexually touched through her dress by a shopkeeper. (S.E. I, pp. 354-5) The earlier memory is not initially repressed, but remains in limbo. John Fletcher explains that memory 'undergoes repression, however, from the moment of the second scene when it is translated into the sexual understanding of puberty, produces a sexual release which is both displaced onto the laughing assistant of the second scene, and is transformed into anxiety and its phobic reaction' (Fletcher, 1999, p.8). Laplanche and Pontalis suggest that with 'the pressure of puberty having stimulated the physiological awakening of sexuality, there is a sense of unpleasure, and the origin of this unpleasure is traced to the recollection of the first event, an external event which has become an inner event, an inner "foreign body", which now breaks out from within the subject.' (1968, p.4)

Freud abandoned the 'seduction theory', to replace it with his general theory of infantile sexuality. In Elizabeth Cowie's summation, he was to conclude that 'the fantasy and its attendant traumas were not the *result* of a seduction but of the *wish* for a seduction, implying a sexuality already there motivating the wish.' (Cowie, 1990, p.154) This discovery was to inform Freud's entire theory of childhood psychosexual development. Jean Laplanche suggests that this shift to a theory of a pre-existing sexuality resulted in the loss of Freud's concept of 'afterwardsness'. What is lost is the sense of human sexuality premised on an intrusion from the outside, something 'proffered by the other... afterwards retranslated and reinterpreted' (1999, p.265), what he calls the

‘implantation of the enigmatic message’ (p.265); this can only be interpreted by the subject later on, at the point of puberty upon recollection of the hitherto unprocessed erotic experiences of infancy. Laplanche emphasizes the origins of human sexuality as exogenous and traumatic, provoked by the adult’s desires forced upon the infant. However, the expression of these desires, such as the typical behaviours of mother-child bonding, is quite normal. Laplanche considers these actions seductive only because ‘they convey something enigmatic’ (1999, p.128), beyond the child’s ken (and in their sexual content also remain obscure to the adult). The enigma of the other’s desire is one that poses a problem to be solved by the infant and the ‘primal fantasies claim to provide a solution to the enigmas confronting the child’ (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1968, p.11). Laplanche’s emphasis on the primal fantasies is thus quite different from Freud’s, whose reliance upon these phenomena as explanation of the phylogenetic nature of infantile sexuality is much greater. Laplanche and Pontalis describe the three primal fantasies laid out by Freud as follows: ‘Fantasies of origins: the primal scene pictures the origin of the individual; fantasies of seduction, the origin and upsurge of sexuality; fantasies of castration, the origin of the difference between the sexes. Their themes therefore display, with redoubled significance, that original fantasies justify their status of being already there.’ (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1968, p.11)

### **Cruise’s Punishing Fathers**

The fantasies of the developing child have a psychological reality, although they do not take place in the external world. *Minority Report* can be understood both as a depiction of the trauma occasioned by abuse and the trauma of normal psychosexual development. Cruise’s films are characterized by attempted bonding with the protector-persecutor father; repression of the father’s persecution/ trauma (often being ‘blind’ to the father’s betrayal); literal disorientation, conveyed through the *mise-en-scène*, as well as flashbacks, dreams and confusion over identity (the latter sometimes employing the literal use of masks). These father-son relationships tend towards exploitation by the older man. On occasion, the Cruise character is the patriarch’s representative, carrying out the father’s intentions while ignorant of the machinations of power - though he may be framed for the father’s own crimes, such as in *Mission: Impossible* (Brian De Palma, 1996) and *Minority Report*.

Sometimes the father is relatively benign, leading Cruise’s character through competition to maturity and the realisation of his ambitions. This is most common in

the coaching relationships of *All the Right Moves* (Michael Chapman, 1983), *The Color of Money* (Martin Scorsese, 1986) and *Days of Thunder* (Tony Scott, 1990), in which Cruise's sporting talents are nurtured. But even these relationships are fraught, with the manipulative patriarch exploiting his prodigy. In other films, the exploitation is more brutal, with Cruise threatened with punishment when he challenges the patriarch.

There are also instances of an absent father casting a shadow over the life of the son. These divide into idealized and punishing fathers. Stella Bruzzi notes that there are two typical Cruise narratives: 'the son, having felt unworthy, eventually proves himself equal to a dead father he has lived in the shadows of' and 'the son who feels rejected by the father and subsequently, as a defense mechanism, adopts an outwardly swaggering masquerade to hide his vulnerability' (2005, p.142). Both provoke a narcissistic defence on the part of Cruise; maturation is accomplished through coming to terms with the father. The idealized patriarch features in films such as *Top Gun* (Tony Scott, 1986) and *A Few Good Men* (Rob Reiner, 1992) where the son has followed the deceased father's career choice and is influenced by his reputation. In *Top Gun*, this is a negative reputation, put to rest by a trainer of Maverick, who calls Pete Mitchell Sr. 'one heroic son-of-a-bitch', thus allowing his son to stop compensating for his father's supposed cowardice. In *A Few Good Men*, Daniel Kaffee's father has been a highly regarded civil rights lawyer and his son must give up his plea-bargaining ways to gain integrity. In other films the punishing father continues to exert his negative influence on the Cruise character in spite of his absence. This patriarchal legacy is felt in films such as *Rain Man* (Barry Levinson, 1988) and *Magnolia* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999). In the first Cruise plays a luxury car salesman who kidnaps his autistic brother in order to extort the half of his father's \$3M fortune that he has been denied; in the second his character is a misogynistic self-help sex guru, Frank TJ Mackey, who learns his estranged father is dying. The strong maternal presence so often a factor in Cruise's films does not feature here. Instead the mother has been absent (deceased) or weak (ill) during his upbringing, with the child left exposed to paternal maltreatment. In *Rain Man* Cruise's character Charlie Babbitt loses his mother at a very young age; in *Magnolia* Mackey's father abandons the family and the teenage boy must nurse his mother through terminal cancer.

*Rain Man* depicts Charlie's revisitation of his childhood, triggered by the death of his father, Sanford Babbitt. Only by making this emotional journey – paralleled by a road

trip across the US with his autistic brother Raymond (Dustin Hoffman) - is he able to come to terms with his past. According to Bruzzi, the attainment of maturity for Cruise is ideally reached through becoming the father (2005, p.242), which he does here in his relationship with his brother. However, this ascension to the paternal is incomplete - his parenting of Raymond is inadequate and terminated at the close of the film. Cruise retains elements of role play in becoming the father - a part which remains unconvincing. The start of *Rain Man* establishes the narcissistic posture that Charlie has adopted in response to rejection by the father. It opens in a Los Angeles dockyard where luxury cars are being hoisted in by crane. The red hood of a Lamborghini glitters in the sun, reflecting the face of Charlie Babbitt. It is the film's first image of Tom Cruise, a recognition – or a misrecognition – of the star and his perfected image, reflected across the ultimate symbol of American freedom, wealth, and the phallus. The Lamborghini is a luxury item, redolent of the decade of conspicuous consumption in which the film is set; the car's chassis is a phallic signifier that evokes the Father. The materialism and salesmanship so linked with the Cruise persona will be interrogated in this film and the car - not Cruise's imported Lamborghini but his father's American Buick - will represent paternal authority. A failed struggle against patriarchal law defines Charlie Babbitt, both in relation to his deceased father and the institution, Walbrook, which looks after his brother. Borrowing his father's Buick in an act of teenage rebellion has earlier led to Charlie's incarceration in jail for two days, providing the catalyst for him to leave home for good. The father's punitive rejection of Charlie continues to define him: there is a peculiar significance in his choice of sales as his occupation, trading upon a signifier whose possession has eluded him.

His father's decision to leave him only his Buick in his will - along with his prize rose bushes<sup>4</sup> – implies that Charlie has a chance of becoming a father. The car functions, as Bruzzi suggests, as a 'fetish object for the father-son bond. The Buick is an equivocal symbol, both liberating and repressive' (1995, p.143). It is also the means by which Charlie discovers that he has a brother (Raymond recognises the car when Charlie visits Walbrook to identify the recipient of his father's estate). The car functions as the means of Charlie's emotional development: it is the journey they take together, from Cincinnati to Los Angeles, which leads to his growing attachment to his brother. The development of a paternal bond with Raymond allows him to overcome his narcissistic defence. Yet it remains a partial victory. He has formed an attachment to a brother with whom he cannot enjoy an intimate emotional relationship, due to the latter's

autism. Nor can he challenge his deceased father. His malign influence continues to inflict damage on Charlie long after the patriarch's death.

'To abuse' can mean 'to deceive' and deception of Cruise by the father, of which *Rain Man* is one example, is common in his films. Such narratives explore the restriction of knowledge and paternal culpability. Cruise remains ignorant of the patriarch's guilt and this is likened to blindness - such films often exploit Oedipal motifs of impaired vision. This includes deception by the symbolic father as corporation or institution in *Top Gun*, *A Few Good Men* and *The Firm*. In *The Firm* Cruise's character Mitch McGee, a new law graduate, is recruited into what proves to be a corrupt Memphis practice. Although Mitch is initially thrilled with the comfortable life he and his wife Abby (Jeanne Tripplehorn) are provided with, he soon discovers that the firm is involved in money laundering for the mafia - and killing potential whistle-blowers within the organisation. When the FBI coerces Mitch to inform on the firm, his employers threaten him with photographs of an extra-marital liaison he engaged in on a business trip.<sup>5</sup> He is then called to a meeting where his colleagues stand looking solemn: apparently outed, he is braced for his imminent humiliation. But the lawyers then smile and toast his success in his bar exam, the results of which have just been announced. His wife appears out of the crowd and Mitch drops the envelope containing the offending photos at her feet. His firm mentor Avery (Gene Hackman) comes forward, pleading 'guilty' for inviting Mitch's wife to the celebration. Thus the figure of the imposing older male and public humiliation - linked to sexual shaming and guilt - are tied together in these scenes. Although Mitch may have cheated on his wife, there is little indication of him viewing women erotically. Abby dresses in frumpish clothing: cardigans, high cut t-shirts and pearls. He seeks her reassurance in all matters, claiming that things don't seem real until he confides in her. Thus framed as maternal, Abby plays an important part in saving Mitch, by helping to obtain important files that give him leverage over the firm. He seems unable to save himself. When his contact at the FBI tells him over the phone that the firm has learned of his betrayal, Mitch is in the firm's offices. Cornered by one of its henchmen, he stands on the step below looking tiny in comparison. He then flees. Mitch spends much of the film out of his depth, manipulated both by the firm and the FBI. Only through the intervention of other forces (amongst them his brother Ray and Abby) is he able to escape danger.



The later film *Eyes Wide Shut* (Stanley Kubrick, 1999) presents the most extreme instance of Cruise as an exploited party at the hands of the ruling elite. He plays Dr Bill Harford, a doctor to various rich Manhattanites, including Victor Ziegler (Sydney Pollack). Harford and his wife Alice (Nicole Kidman) attend a lavish Christmas party given by Ziegler. There his status as a servant to the wealthy is revealed when he is called to Ziegler's rooms to deal with a young model, Amanda (Julienne Davis), who has overdosed (a victim of the sexually exploitative Ziegler). Later, following an argument about sexual jealousy with Alice, Bill decides to attend an exclusive orgy that he has been told about by his friend Nick Nightingale (who, in disclosing this information, 'sings' for him). Nick (Todd Field) is a medical-school buddy who is now a professional piano player performing at Ziegler's party – thus also in his service. When Bill attends the orgy uninvited, in the cloak and mask he has been instructed to wear, his identity is exposed. Taken to the master of ceremonies, who is also masked and wearing a red cloak, he is told first to take off his mask, then his clothes. This moment of sexual humiliation in front of a male audience recalls the earlier scene from *The Firm*. Before Bill can object, a young woman intervenes, pleading for the leader to 'take me'. She will be sacrificed in his place. The same woman had warned Bill that the party's organisers knew of his presence, begging him to leave while he could. (She and the other masked young women at the orgy are naked but for their masks, underpants and heels, while the men wear suits and cloaks as well as masks; this underscores the women's exploited position in this society.) Bill escapes and returns home. Later he discovers that Amanda, the young woman he saved from over-dosing at the party – and who may be the woman who intervened on his behalf – has been found dead. Once again, a woman has stepped in to save the vulnerable Cruise. Summoned by Ziegler, he is confronted about turning up to the party, told 'you've been way out of your depth for the last 24 hours'. When Bill asks about the dead girl, Ziegler replies that she was merely a 'hooker' who overdosed: 'it was always going to be just a matter of time with her... you said so yourself'. The truth of Amanda's death is never established in this dark rendering of an exploitative ruling class. In *Vanilla Sky* (Cameron Crowe, 2002), Cruise's David Aimes is fearful of patriarchal scheming in a manner typical of his characters in films such as *Eyes Wide Shut* and *The Firm*. The film deviates from this model in suggesting that the conspiracy that David imagines is a paranoid fantasy. The film is structured by David's confusion: amnesia, alteration of identity and at times even physical disorientation. His bewilderment is represented in a discontinuous narrative and occasional jarring fast cuts. David is overshadowed by a

deceased father whose success in publishing has allowed him to live the life of a playboy, contributing to his arrested development. The father's autobiography is called *The Keys to the Kingdom*, establishing a fairytale element. This is emphasised by David's reference to the directors of his father's estate as 'the seven dwarves', whom he believes are plotting against him. An orphan, David seeks to recreate familial bonds elsewhere, seeking a maternal girlfriend – repeating a familiar pattern in Cruise's persona. When they first meet at a party, the romantic lead, Sofia (Penelope Cruz), is dressed in masculine jeans, brown shirt and fawn jacket (similar to the one which David wears throughout the film). She also wears a large coat which dwarves her. David's casual girlfriend Julie (Cameron Diaz) arrives at the same party in a revealing dress and heels, and later appears in David's bedroom wrapped only in his duvet. Following the party, David and Julie are involved in a car crash that kills her and puts him in a coma. The remainder of the film plays out a disorientating narrative of flashbacks and contradictory plot elements, which suggest David may or may not have killed Sofia – played in his hallucinations alternatively by Cruz and Diaz - and be standing trial for her murder. Talking to his prison psychiatrist McCabe (Kurt Russell), David becomes convinced that the 'seven dwarves' are involved in framing him. What appears as paranoia here echoes real episodes of scapegoating by paternal forces in his other films. Furthermore, the possible murder of Sofia by David reverses the typical alignment of Cruise with other vulnerable characters, providing a troubling distortion of his persona.

More often, Cruise is depicted only as powerless to protect others. The presence of vulnerable figures is also a projection of the trauma associated with the Cruise image. In *Minority Report*, Jon Anderton's (Tom Cruise) vulnerability is displaced onto his son Sean, kidnapped in circumstances that imply paedophile abduction. But the event is recalled within the movie in a way that emphasises Anderton's own trauma. The traumatising father-son relationship in *Minority Report* can be explored via a series of oppositions: protector vs. abuser; security vs. fear; trust vs. suspicion; sight vs. blindness; movement vs. stasis; growth vs. corruption; fertility vs. sterility. These oppositions indicate that a figure that should be protective is instead threatening. The sight versus blindness opposition is a central conceit in *Minority Report*, which features three psychics or 'pre-cognitives' who 'see' the future.

## Unconscious Masochism and Cruise

The father-son struggle is linked to metaphors of sight and knowledge that play out in the Oedipus myth. Stasis and movement – with a *mise-en-scène* that depicts Anderton as constrained - link him with other abuse victims, especially his son and the ‘pre-cogs’ who live out their lives in a containment pool. Restraint features throughout Cruise’s films. As Ethan Hunt he is suspended in *Mission: Impossible*, dangling from a wire as he attempts the intricate theft of a disc of sensitive data. The opening sequence of *Mission: Impossible II* (John Woo, 2000) depicts Hunt climbing in the Grand Canyon, hanging from a rock. *Mission: Impossible III* (J.J. Abrams, 2005) opens with images of him bound to a chair. He is often physically confined in a vehicle, such as a jet plane in *Top Gun*, or a car in *Days of Thunder*, *Rain Man* and *Collateral*, or in a ‘theatrical’ space such as behind a bar (*Cocktail* [Donaldson, 1988]), in a court room (*A Few Good Men*) or on stage (*Magnolia*). He may even confine himself in a coffin (*Interview with a Vampire*). In counterpoint to his figuration as a runner, driver or pilot, images of restraint dominate Cruise’s filmography.<sup>6</sup>

Stasis can be related to screen depictions of abuse in illuminating ways. Being bound suggests an infantile vulnerability. It may signal masochism, with bondage present in any list of masochistic practices. Stasis may suggest paralysis, through fear of an impending attack. It can also be invoked in its psychological definition. Repetitious fantasising is a form of psychological stasis, employed as a psychical ‘escape’ in circumstances where physical flight is impossible. Thus, the subject emotionally escapes the impact of the trauma experienced. The consequence is that the trauma is not ‘worked through’ and is likely to ‘return’ in other ways, such as in flashbacks well after the threat has passed. In *Minority Report* trauma is experienced both in the form of flashback, suffered by Anderton and the pre-cognitive Agatha (Emma Morton), but also as a ‘flash-forward’ in which an event is perceived before it happens.<sup>7</sup>

Freud divides masochism into three types: erotogenic, feminine and moral. Erotogenic masochism, pleasure in pain, states Freud, is the basis of the other two forms as well (‘The Economic Problem of Masochism’ [1924, S.E. XIX]). Silverman suggests that feminine and moral masochism bleed into each other at the point they adjoin the erotogenic form (1992, p.186). In Freud’s discussion of feminine masochism, he indicates that ‘the manifest content is of being gagged, bound, painfully beaten, whipped, in some way maltreated, forced into unconditional obedience, dirtied and

debased. The obvious interpretation, and one easily arrived at, is that the masochist wants to be treated like a small and helpless child, but, particularly, like a naughty child.’ (Freud, S.E. XIX, p.162) Many examples from Cruise’s filmography, involve some sort of physical restraint or forced obedience. Cruise is positioned both as a young man and as a young boy – ‘small and helpless’ as well as ‘naughty’. In Freud’s writings certain elaborated fantasies indicate the positioning of the subject in a ‘characteristically female position; they signify, that is, being castrated, or copulated with, or giving birth to a baby’ (S.E. XIX, p.162), which has implications for this reading of *Minority Report*.

Moral masochism is explored at length by Silverman in relation to Freud’s concepts of the super-ego and introjection. Introjection can be understood in its ‘imaginary’ and ‘symbolic’ forms.<sup>8</sup> In the first stage, ‘once loved figures are taken into the self as subjective models or exempla’; in the latter ‘the subject is subordinated to the Law and the ‘Name-of-the-Father’ (Silverman, 1992, p.192). The super-ego is created by symbolic introjection; the ego-ideal is designated by imaginary introjection. Silverman, discussing *The Ego and the Id* (1923, S.E. XIX), indicates that the child, in passing through both a negative and a positive Oedipus complex, will experience an identification with both the ‘imago’ of the mother and the father – typically the stronger identification will be in line with positive Oedipus complex. This introjection desexualises these parental images, with the positive and negative Oedipus complexes cancelling out the object-choice of the other: ‘The father-identification will preserve the object-relation to the mother which belonged to the positive complex and will at the same time replace the object-relation to the father which belonged to the inverted complex: and the same will be true, *mutatis mutandis*, of the mother-identification (S.E. XIX, p.34). In terms of the workings of the super-ego, ‘when object-libido changes to narcissistic libido... the aggression which was earlier commingled with that libido also loses its purchase and turns around upon the subject’s own self. No longer in the protective custody of eros, that aggression falls under the jurisdiction of the super-ego, which directs it against the ego’ (Silverman, 1992, p.192). Silverman highlights Freud’s emphasis on the super-ego’s connection with the father - ultimately it is ‘a substitute for a longing for the father’ (Freud, S.E. XIX, p.37). This, asserts Silverman, is what is at stake in the dissolution of the Oedipus complex, the ‘male subject’s *homosexual attachment to the father*. The relationship of the male ego to the super-ego would seem to grow out of, and ‘ideally’ undo, the romance between father and son –

or, to be more precise, the libidinal economy of the negative Oedipus complex, which hinges upon desire for the father and identification with the mother' (Silverman, 1992, p.194). This creates an absolute impossibility for the position of the male subject for:

the only mechanism by which the son can overcome his desire for the father is to transform object libido into narcissistic libido, and in doing so attempt to *become* the (symbolic) father. However, this metamorphosis is precisely what the super-ego prohibits by decreeing: "You may not be like [your father] ... you may not do all that he does; some things are his prerogative." The paternal law thus promotes the very thing that its severity is calculated to prevent, a contradiction which must function as a constant inducement to reconstitute the negative Oedipus complex.

(1992, p.194)

In 'A Child is Being Beaten' (1919), Freud argues that the masochist's beating fantasy reveals the desire to be beaten by the father as punishment for his/her wish for (genital) love from the father. But at the same time it is a substitute for this love itself: the act of beating is both punishment and substitute for this desire: *'It is not only the punishment for the forbidden genital relation, but also the regressive substitute for that relation'* (S.E. XVII, p. 189, italics in the original). The guilt that the Cruise character suffers in narratives of an innocent man wrongly accused relates to a masochistic dynamic of his star persona. Freud suggests such guilt finds expression in the manifest content of masochistic phantasies; the subject assumes that he has committed some crime (the nature of which is left indefinite), which is to be expiated by all these painful and tormenting procedures' ([1924], S.E. XIX, p.162).

The guilt experienced by Cruise also relates him to the figure of Oedipus. As Freud explains 'there can be no doubt that the Oedipus complex may be looked upon as one of the most important sources of the sense of guilt by which neurotics are often tormented' (S.E. XVI, p.331). The fate of Oedipus was foreseen by the Oracle of Delphi and came to pass despite his father Laius's order to abandon his infant son to die. Just as rejecting the Oracle's prediction is opposing destiny, the father who attempts to prevent his son's ascension to power opposes the natural order. In *Minority Report* the inventor of pre-crime Lamar Burgess (Max Von Sydow) – aided by Anderton - intervene in the temporal order of cause and effect to change 'destiny'. To overcome Burgess, Anderton must abandon the technology that allows him to see events which have not yet happened

and separates him from the cycle of reproduction, represented in the film's themes of foetal life, birth and abortion.

Technologies that subvert the natural order figure large in Spielberg's immediate film after *Minority Report*. *Artificial Intelligence AI* (Steven Spielberg, 2002) was a project developed by Stanley Kubrick for 20 years, before he decided to pursue *Eyes Wide Shut*. The film is set in an eco-devastated future. Only the elite are allowed to breed ('orga' children) if licensed to do so. Others must be content with the purchase of android ('mecha') children. The story centres round the artificial boy David (Haley Joel Osment) bought by parents grieving for their biological son Martin (Jake Thomas), left comatose by an incurable illness. David has been modelled on the deceased son of inventor Professor Hobby (William Hurt), who declares that 'ours will be a perfect child, caught in a freeze frame, always loving, never ill, never changing'. This freeze frame repeats the hologram images of Anderton's son Sean in *Minority Report*, with its similar themes of grief for the lost child. The robot in *AI* is programmed to desire the love of his parents, in particular his mother (with associated Oedipal implications). When a cure is found for Martin's illness and he emerges from the coma, he becomes jealous of David and plots to have him expelled from the house. David is abandoned by his 'mother' Monica (Frances O'Connor) in the woods, a fairytale version of young children's terrors. He is found by Gigolo Joe (Jude Law), an android whose function is to provide sexual fulfilment for lonely women. Both androids have been designed to satisfy various human desires, existing only for these reasons. Rather than posing a threat to humans, as is typical of the genre, it is they who are vulnerable. Joe and David witness a group of people at a 'flesh fair' ripping up derelict 'mechas' and burning them on a pyre. The threat of abuse is ever present.

### ***Minority Report* and the Pre-cognitives**

Set in 2054, *Minority Report* centres round John Anderton, the chief officer of the Washington D.C.'s 'pre-crime' unit. Three youths, the brain-damaged offspring of drug addicts, have been discovered to possess predictive powers that allow them to foresee murders. These 'pre-cogs' are kept in a containment pool, nicknamed 'the temple'. Their names allude to famous detective fiction writers: Agatha (Christie), Dash (-iell Hamnet) and Arthur (Conan Doyle) and relate to their perceptive powers – they are called 'detectives', an active description for their passive existence. Each has his or her head attached to electrodes that channel their shared visions onto large

screens. Law enforcement centres on the close scrutiny of the pre-cogs' visions and apprehending those individuals who intend to commit murder before they succeed. It is an apparently benign version of an Orwellian future: technology is employed to protect the populace. But technology in *Minority Report*, and specifically Anderton's relation to it, is transformed from protection to threat. Much of this technology is implausible, with the function of the pre-cognitives' pool never made clear. But the implications of amniotic fluid and the birthing pool have symbolic resonance. Trapped in their infantilized existence, the pre-cognitives are forced to live in service to the state. They are represented as foetuses: hairless, in form-fitting flesh coloured clothing. Inactive but cognitively over-developed, they evoke the representation of the foetus as capable of perception prior to birth (one deployed by anti-abortion campaigners). *Minority Report's* depiction of foetal existence also ties into the issue of child abuse. The pre-cognitives are the children of 'Neuroin' addicts (a fictional street drug, the name of which connotes both 'Heroin' and 'neurological'). Their talents of prediction are described as a 'cosmic joke', an ironic side effect of their mothers' addiction, by pre-crime co-founder Dr Hineman (Lois Smith). As children they were already victims of abuse *in utero*, poisoned by their mothers.

*Minority Report* opens with a distorted, watery, monochrome image, seen *as* an image, finally discernable as that of a couple kissing - if not the actual moment of procreation, then its symbolic counterpart (especially true in cinema). Further distorted visuals are accompanied by abrasive sound effects: a pair of scissors on the floor, a man putting on his glasses, a figure in a bathtub, a woman being stabbed by a pair of scissors, eye holes being cut in a mask, and a figure ascending a flight of stairs. Here the film references the works of Hitchcock: the stabbing with scissors suggests *Dial M for Murder* (1954) and the high angle shot of a man climbing the stairs alludes to *Suspicion* (1941), and the scene in which Johnnie (Cary Grant) carries up a possibly poisoned glass of milk to his wife Lina (Joan Fontaine). Following these disturbing images and sound track - the dialogue accompanying the pictures seems to be muffled by liquid - is a silent close-up of an iris which opens out to reveal the head of a woman, entirely hairless, emerging from the water she is immersed in. The previous pictures have been generated by her. The image of the eye communicates that 'seeing' is the key theme of the film. In the next shot a cube of wood is sculpted by two lasers and lacquered. The finished product is a red ball, which rolls down clear plastic tubing to its end destination, where it is spun round to reveal the names of the murder victims seen in the images. This process is

repeated for a brown ball showing the name of the murderer. The balls suggest human eggs and their journey through the plastic tubing their progress through the fallopian tubes. During her later predictions the pre-cog Agatha flails around in the pool, recalling the manner of a woman giving birth. There is a hint that her creative power is being farmed and stolen – Anderton arrives in the lab and seizes the red ball for further inspection. The birth metaphor is extended by the offices at the pre-crime lab, all glass walkways. As Anderton walks up the elevated corridor he greets a heavily pregnant African-American co-worker with ‘any contractions?’ a question that is met with the response ‘only the ones you give me’. A flirtatious interaction, it nevertheless raises the possibility of Anderton taking an infantilised position. Later in the film he will be caught by his own pre-crime force and placed in ‘storage’; there, with his head shaven and in restraints, he resembles a foetus *in utero*.

Anderton continues into the viewing chamber; circular in shape with large curved transparent screens, it extends the uterine theme. Another African-American colleague, Jad (Steve Harris), summarises Agatha’s ‘pre-visions’ before Anderton examines the red ball.<sup>9</sup> Anderton puts on black leather gloves that cover his thumb, index and middle fingers while leaving his palms exposed. These have LED lights at the finger tips. The chamber in which the three pre-cognitives live is shown: it is also a circular enclosure, with a pool at its heart. The three pre-cognitives lie on individual raised platforms in the water. Anderton looks down at them through a glass panel at the top of the enclosure. This sets up the detached specular relationship he conducts with others, which must be abandoned before he can return to a productive role – as a father – by the film’s end. When he turns back to the screen, he uses the gloves to manipulate Agatha’s images. Stretching individual frames of each sequence of images, separate from the viewed by time and place, he is much like the cinema spectator. Yet his use of music while he ‘works’ and the conductor-like poses he strikes, extending his arms and pointing, also position him as the spectacle. It is as though *he* is creating the narrative, choosing from the material he has been provided with by the pre-cogs, putting the images into place *on screen*: he is the director of the scene. The use of images imagined by Agatha gives these scenes an aura of fantasy. Agatha imagines the murder and so does Anderton. Elizabeth Cowie describes fantasy as ‘the *mise-en-scène* of desire, the putting into a scene, a staging of desire’ (1990, p.149), arguing that this structure may permit multiple points of identification. Anderton is thus spectator, spectacle and director of the spectacle. As victims of trauma Anderton and Agatha<sup>10</sup> demonstrate a



repetition compulsion in which they repeatedly recall their ordeals. Anderton's involvement in the pre-crime project can be understood as the wish to re-write the narrative so that the moment of trauma is un-written - loss is avoided and the love object is restored. This is reminiscent of Freud's observation that the compulsion to repeat is revealed in the play of children, who 'repeat unpleasurable experiences for the additional reason that they can master a powerful impression far more thoroughly by being active than they could by experiencing it passively' (S.E. XVIII, p.31).

### ***Peeping Tom***

The intersection of cinematic scopophilia, fantasy and the trauma of the child in *Minority Report* displays thematic links to *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960). *Minority Report* includes two characters who take their names from the screenwriter of *Peeping Tom*, Leo Marks: Leo Crow and Howard Marks. *Peeping Tom*'s protagonist is also named Mark. The opening shot of *Peeping Tom* is of a closed eye that blinks open (accompanied by a staccato plucking of string instrument, creating a sense of unease). This is paralleled in *Minority Report*'s close-up of Agatha's eye, which in a matching cut is linked to the lifeless iris of the murder victim she 'sees'. *Peeping Tom* also anticipates *Minority Report*'s themes of scopophilia and childhood development. The film tells the story of Mark Lewis (Karlheinz Böhm), an assistant cameraman at a film studio, who murders women while filming them, stabbing them through the throat with a long spike concealed in the tripod of his camera. It opens with Mark, concealing a camera in his jacket, visiting a prostitute. She is unaware of being filmed until he reveals his murderous intentions. Later, he kills a stand-in actress at the studio where he works, following her agreement to pose for test-shots. His final victim is a woman who poses for his pornographic pictures.

After his murder of the prostitute, Mark forms a friendship with one of his lodgers, Helen (Anna Massey), who asks to see some of his films. She is shown footage of Mark as a boy filmed by his father, Dr Lewis (Michael Powell, the film's director). A scientist investigating the psychology of fear, his father is shown frightening Mark and filming his response. He even captures him on film at the side of his dead mother. Other footage shows Mark receiving his first camera, an instrument he now carries with him compulsively. Kaja Silverman lists each of these events as key moments within the Oedipal narrative: the castration threat, indicated by the father frightening Mark; the primal scene, suggested by the filming of Mark upon waking; the loss of the mother and

access to paternal legacy, represented through the gift of the camera (Silverman, 1988, p.33). The fright that Mark experiences in regard to Dr Lewis represents the fear the male child has that his father will castrate him, in response to his desire for his mother (castration being the ‘solution’ that children find to explain sexual difference). Images of Mark awakened allude to the child being disturbed from sleep by the sounds of his parents engaging in sexual intercourse. The death of Mark’s mother symbolises the loss of identification with the mother that the male child must go through to identify with the father and access patriarchal rights – in this case, the power to control the look (through the camera). However, through filming Mark ‘Dr Lewis firmly locates him on the side of spectacle, within the boundaries of filmic fiction’ (Silverman, 1988, p.33), and in a position of powerlessness. This confirms his son’s subordination, which Mark attempts to displace onto the women that he kills, ‘subjecting them to a lethal castration’ (p.33).

Helen realises that Mark remains traumatised by his childhood, but it is only her blind mother (Maxine Audley), who perceives the full extent of his illness and comes to suspect his involvement in the killings.<sup>11</sup> When Helen realises that he is guilty, she confronts him and he confesses. Not only does he film the victim at the point of her death, but he also holds a mirror to her face, so that she sees her own fear before death. He implores Helen with ‘don’t let me see you afraid!’ but when she insists on standing in front of the camera, at the end of the impaling spike, he is unable to kill her. With the police about to break down the door, he puts on a recording of the screams his father recorded of his own fearful response – screams that echo those of his victims. He shines a bright light in his own eyes, mimicking the light shone in his eyes by his father as child to wake and frighten him. He declares ‘Helen, I’m afraid!’ and he walks into the tripod spike, impaling himself through the throat.

Psychoanalyst Isla J. Bick’s interpretation of *Peeping Tom* draws on a more eclectic psychoanalytic methodology than Silverman’s. She argues that the child’s exclusive bond with the mother is broken by the addition of the gaze of the father. The child becomes an observer of the mother and father as a couple – as an observer of the primal scene – and this moment enforces separation (Bick, 1994, p.181). Mark’s project is to ‘first identify with the look of the father, both the father of sexuality *and* as a displacement for the mother’ (p.181) - the scrutinising father who looks upon the child at the moment of his witnessing of the primal scene and the displacement for the loving look of mother-child bonding. Mark identifies with the look of the father in his

preoccupation with the film camera and sadistic looking which is turned from his own self onto another. Disruption of sleep features throughout the film (p.183), often disorientating the viewer in the manner that a child might 'react when, abruptly awakened from sleep, she stares into the darkness of her parents' bedroom' (p.182). In 'The Sexual Theories of Children' (1908, S.E. IX) Freud explains that the child hearing these sounds comes to a 'sadistic view of coition' (S.E. IX, p.220), imaging it as forcibly inflicted by the stronger on the weaker. He discusses the child being woken up, as Mark is: 'And so the child who is believed to be asleep (or who is pretending to be asleep) may receive an impression from his mother which he can only interpret as meaning that she is defending herself against an act of violence' (p.221). As a consequence the scene 'gives rise to sexual excitation in the child while at the same time providing a basis for castration anxiety.' (Laplanche and Pontalis, 2004, p.335)

### **The Traumatized Son**

The basis of Mark's pathology is the abusive treatment he received at the hands of his father, justified as scientific experimentation. Compare this to the fate of the pre-cogs in *Minority Report*. The pre-crime system is talked about as a scientific project. They too wake up frightened from their 'nightmares' of murder. Both Mark and the pre-cog Agatha attempt to master their trauma, through repetition - in the case of Agatha by replaying the events of her mother's murder, in Mark's by turning the camera away from himself and onto another victim. Unlike Agatha, Mark takes the position of the father and is thus able to identify with this powerful figure. This also follows the line of fantasising by the masochist in Freud's work 'A Child is Being Beaten' (1919, S.E. XVII). Freud indicates that there are a number of stages to this fantasy (one stage remains unconscious and can only be inferred by psychoanalysis), which vary depending on the gender of the subject. In the female version, the first stage is represented as 'my father is beating the child', which Freud states is 'the child whom I hate' (S.E. XVII, p.185). The adult carrying out the beating is initially not identified, but eventually named as the father. The following stage, never made conscious but rather a construction of analysis, alters the position of the child, who is now recognised as the subject of the fantasy: 'I am being beaten by my father'. The fantasy is experienced as highly pleasurable and is now recognisably masochistic. In the third stage the scenario has returned to that of the first: a child is being beaten by an adult, not the father, but a representative of the father. The child being beaten is no longer the

subject; often in the fantasy there are a number of children being beaten. When asked where the subject is herself, the reply is 'I am probably looking on' (p.186).

Freud interprets the first stage of the fantasy as indicative of sibling rivalry, in which the child being beaten is the hated sibling seen as a competitor for her parents, in particular her father's, affections. The incestuous love impulses demonstrated towards the father by the little girl, which form part of her psychosexual development, are thus articulated:

"He (my father) loves only me, and not the other child, for he is beating it." The sense of guilt can discover no punishment more severe than the reversal of this triumph: "No, he does not love you, for he is beating you." In this way the phantasy of the second phase, that of being beaten by her father, is a direct expression of the girl's sense of guilt to which her love for her father has succumbed.

(S.E. XVII, p.189)

Freud understands the subject's desire to be beaten by the father as punishment for her wish for (genital) love from the father, but at the same time also as an eroticized substitute for this love itself. In the male variation of the above, the sequence and depiction of the stages differs. In the male fantasy the subject is being beaten by his mother. However, this is not the primary stage. There is a preliminary unconscious stage, 'I am being beaten by my father', which corresponds to the second stage for females. Here too being beaten stands in for being loved, 'in both cases the beating-fantasy has its origin in an incestuous attachment to the father' (p.198). But 'the boy evades his homosexual object choice by repressing and remodelling his unconscious fantasy: and the remarkable thing about his later conscious phantasy is that it has for its content a feminine attitude without a homosexual object-choice' (p.199).

The third person positioning in the first stage of the fantasy – i.e. 'a child is being beaten' - also reflects that of the diegetic spectator, Mark as he views the films of his killings and Anderton who watches the predicted murders. Anderton's distance from human relationships is linked to his control of technology – he rearranges the images on screen like a military commander planning his strategic attack. As he does so, Anderton folds his fourth and fifth fingers down, so only his thumb, forefinger and middle finger are stretched out. His pointing forefinger recalls Michelangelo's painting in the Sistine Chapel of the creation of Adam. Anderton – along with Burgess – is playing God. This

theme of the sacred is reinforced by the nickname given to the space in which the three pre-cogs are housed: 'the temple'. The sacralization of the pre-cogs as the 'three fates' can be implied, as well as Agatha's alignment with the mythical figure of the Oracle of Delphi. Anderton's gesture also alludes to the popular image of the film director forming the rectangle of the film frame with thumbs and forefingers.

The rest of the sequence cuts between Anderton interpreting the images, his rush to get to the scene before the murder can be committed, and the events leading up to the crime. Howard Marks (Arye Gross) is first seen retrieving a newspaper from his lawn. He spots a man in a trench coat standing in the playground on the opposite side of the road. Agatha's pre-vision has identified this man as the lover of Marks' wife. Marks' suspicion is alerted, but so too is the spectator's: a trench-coated stranger lurking near children stereotypically suggests a paedophile, anticipating later events in the film. Although the playground is full of children, including a child on a roundabout, by the time the pre-crime team arrive it is eerily empty. Marks returns inside to the breakfast room, his wife Sarah (Ashley Crow) and his son. The latter wears a short sleeved shirt, a waistcoat and tie, in mimicry of his father's outfit. He sits at the breakfast table, cutting holes in the eyes of a mask of Abraham Lincoln while reciting the Gettysburg address. It is an intriguing image: the young boy rehearsing the role of national patriarch, making himself a mask to inhabit the persona. It is also an act of violence against the father, for the boy blinds Lincoln (an inversion of the fate of Oedipus). Later, when his father takes the scissors with him into the bedroom where his wife and her lover are engaging in foreplay, he positions himself as symbolic son. He crouches on the floor at the foot of the bed, in a childlike distressed pose, invisible to the lovers in this primal scene. As the cuckolded husband, Marks may feel castration anxiety, but it is he that makes the castrating gesture, trying to stab his wife and her lover. The sex act that threatens to break the marital union is disrupted by the threat of another infringement of paternal 'law' – that of the prohibition against murder. The husband puts on his glasses, which he has forgotten ('you know how blind I am without them' again invokes Oedipus) as he holds up the scissors, then lunges at her. Anderton bursts through the window and grabs the man's wrist, only just preventing the crime. The would-be murderer is then 'haloed' – a metal band placed round his head that renders him unconscious – and taken from the building. (Haloing suggests enforced virtue. His crime averted, the would-be murderer is set on the course of redemption.)

This primal scene is the film's first example of a man taking the place of his son. It will be repeated by Anderton's alignment with his missing child. Anderton is devastated by the kidnapping of Sean from a swimming pool six years previously; the imagery of the pre-cogs' pool links Sean to Agatha (and back again to Anderton). Here the Cruise figure has failed in his paternal capacity to protect his son, repeating the persona's characteristic inability to defend others from harm. As the narrative progresses, Anderton is matched with his missing son and the film's other victims, the pre-cogs. Unable to allay his grief, he runs through the city's dark streets by night, under bridges and through underpasses; these images of enclosed spaces are suggestive of both the birth canal and his figurative 'blindness'. He buys drugs from a blind peddler who hides in the shadows. A close-up of Anderton shows half of his face cloaked in darkness. Completing his sale, the seller declares that 'in the kingdom of the blind the one-eyed man is king', moving into the light to show off his empty eye-sockets. The horrific image anticipates the invasive surgery that Anderton will later undergo and confirms the Oedipal theme of the film.

Following this chilling exchange Anderton returns to his apartment, which, like the pre-crime lab, is high-tech and sterile. (In contrast, other locations, such as Marks' house, the offices of Burgess and the cottage of his former wife Lara [Kathryn Morris], feel homely and old-fashioned.) In his living room he watches a hologram of his son, frozen at the age of the recording. He watches a further hologram of Lara, while inhaling the drugs he has bought. She implores him to put down the camera and come to bed – an indication that even at this earlier time his scopophilic tendencies may have impeded human relations. At first she appears three dimensional, but as the hologram shifts, the light source and flatness of her image are revealed. Anderton reaches out to her and the file finishes. The separation between him and those related through the holograms is stark.

No longer married, Anderton's only sustained personal relationship is with his boss Lamar Burgess (Max Von Sydow), an elderly, white haired man of impressive stature, who bears more than a passing resemblance to John Huston as *Chinatown's* (Roman Polanski, 1974) Noah Cross (a film which explicitly conflates the abuse of social and familial power). As the co-founder of the pre-crime system he is the de facto lawmaker; Anderton enforces the law on his behalf. Burgess considers himself above the law, having committed murder to ensure the continuance of the experiment. He is

responsible for the exploitation of the pre-cognitives and the later framing of Anderton. Suspended in their pool, Agatha, Dash and Arthur are both detectives and victims of the pre-crime system put in place by Burgess. Their confinement establishes the stasis that is developed in relation to Anderton and others. In the opening scenes of the film, Anderton is highly mobile as he views the pre-cogs' visions for clues and pursues the accused. Yet when the pre-cogs predict that he will kill a man that he has never met, Leo Crow, and he finds himself hunted by the pre-crime unit, imagery of immobilization begins to feature more frequently.

When Agatha replays the images of one woman's murder repeatedly, imploring Anderton with 'do you see?', he visits the prison where pre-crime convicts are held. Guarded by a technician-like figure called Gideon (Tim Blake Nelson), it is a vast, cavernous space, its full extent hidden in darkness. Here the thwarted criminals are incarcerated, each in a physically upright position, his or her head enclosed in a halo. Gideon tells Anderton that in spite of the inmates' physical stasis, inside they are 'busy, busy, busy'. Physical stasis is cruelly juxtaposed with mental activity, as the prisoners replay images of past events. Anderton is unable to discover the identity of the convict he is seeking. Before he is able to proceed any further, the pre-cogs predict that Anderton will kill Leo Crow, an event that forces him to go on the run. Hunted down by his own team, Anderton becomes increasingly frustrated. On the freeway his car is recognized by the city's computer surveillance system that remotely steers it back downtown and towards the police. Technology fails him, just at the point he is calling Burgess to seek help. It is later revealed Burgess has set up Anderton, arranging a meeting with Leo Crow to entrap him. Exploiting Anderton's grief, Burgess has Crow pose as Sean's kidnapper. For the crime that Anderton investigates is Burgess's own: the images recalled by Agatha are those of her mother Anne Lively's murder, drowned by Burgess because Lively wanted her child back, an action that would have ended the pre-crime scheme.

Escaping on foot, Anderton is chased down an alley, where he attempts to escape the pre-crime team by piggy-backing on an agent's jet-pack. It goes nowhere but up, in a comically fruitless movement. He evades his hunters in a car factory, only to be pinned down by the seats being installed by robots. But moments later, as a car rolls off the assembly line, Anderton is shown in the driver's seat and escapes the factory. Fleeing to the countryside in the newly built car, he finds his way to the home of Dr Iris

Hineman, co-inventor of pre-crime: its 'mother' to Burgess' 'father'. Scaling the wall to her house, he is attacked by her poisonous vines, which first wrap themselves round his limbs, restraining him, then cut his skin, enabling their deadly sap to enter his bloodstream. Bred by Hineman against intruders, the vine is another example of nature perverted and resonates with her own role in pre-crime. Anderton, choking, staggers into the greenhouse where Hineman tends her plants. Showing little concern she nevertheless feeds him the antidote, a perversely maternal action.<sup>12</sup> The Oedipal relation is underscored when she kisses him on the mouth, before going on to tell him about the phenomenon of the 'minority report'. The report is a vision sometimes created by the 'most talented' of the pre-cogs, Agatha, which predicts a different future for the accused, thus challenging the scheme's reliability. In spite of his own seniority, this is information to which Anderton has not been privy. Hoping to uncover his own minority report, Anderton decides to break into the pre-crime offices to kidnap Agatha. But he runs the risk of being 'i-dented' – by retinal recognition – and caught. So he visits a backstreet surgeon to remove his eyeballs and replace them with donor eyes.

The surgeon's premises are reminiscent of an illegal abortionist's den. As a film concerned with the 'abortion' of future possibilities – pre-crime prevents future events from taking place – the comparison is apt. Anderton assumes the role of the pregnant woman. His feminine positioning realises Freud's description of the feminine nature of male masochism: 'masochistic fantasies place the subject in a characteristically female position: they signify, that is, being castrated, or copulated with, or giving birth to a baby.' (S.E. XIX, p.162) Anderton's operation can be considered simultaneously as a castration, giving birth *and* having an abortion. Here he is confronted by the messiness of corporeality, the organic world that conflicts with the sterile surroundings he is first shown in. Not only is the place filthy, but the surgeon Solomon Eddie (Peter Stormare), suffering from a cold, sneezes into his hand moments before he is due to operate on Anderton. Eddie tells Anderton not to worry: he could 'sew a dead cat' (dead foetus?) into Anderton's body and he would not be infected, given the strength of the antibiotics he is about to receive. Anderton is given a tranquillizing injection that he attempts to resist as he becomes disorientated. Eddie's grotesque nurse, Greta Van Eyck (Caroline Lagerfelt), is a middle-aged blonde with a growth on her lip. First seen in a distorting mirror sitting on the toilet, she stands up and adjusts her trousers, adding to the general sense of contamination and gender violation. She mumbles to herself in Swedish, contributing to Anderton's confusion. She is also sexually aggressive: as she helps him



into the operating chair, she squeezes his backside. Eddie jokes that 'Miss Van Eyck is smitten. She only has eyes for you', which beyond the literal (Van Eyck holds the eyeballs that Anderton will receive) indicates that Anderton is now the object of a female gaze. Dr. Eddie appears with an ornate contraption to stabilise Anderton's head, which looks like an implement of torture. The device references *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1971). When sociopath Alex (Malcolm McDowell) is caught by the authorities, he is 'reprogrammed', forced to watch violent images, which are accompanied by electric shocks as negative reinforcement. To ensure that this visual assault is inescapable, his eyelids are pinned open. Setting Anderton's head in a similar restraining device, Eddie confesses their prior acquaintance: when living in Baltimore, Anderton helped jail the surgeon for setting fire to his female plastic surgery patients. As Anderton's eyelids are stretched back, the surgeon recounts his time spent in prison. His 'patient' is now still, lying back in the operating chair and his head restrained, forced to listen. Eddie takes pains to recount the threat of rape he faced daily in jail. As a victim of abuse in prison, he even mentions the word *confinement*.

Eddie made videotapes so that he could review his assaults. This is a grotesque reversal of what Freud noticed as the victim's tendency to recall trauma (S.E. XII, p.151). It also refers back to the process of film-making referenced throughout *Minority Report* and *Peeping Tom*. Anderton is tilted back, horizontal in the operating chair. He is exposed, and one of his eyes – a vulnerably soft body part, but also the principal sensory organ – is shown being manipulated before its ultimate removal. The orb suggests the spherical shape of the fertilized egg as well as that of the testicles. As both a man undergoing castration and a woman undergoing an abortion, Anderton is at his most 'feminine' and powerless. He is shedding one identity for another: he receives another person's eyes – those of a Japanese man – and with this body part takes on this person's identity. The next time he is 'i-dented' it will be as a stranger, as an Asian 'other'.

Recovering from the operation, Anderton lies in bed, his eyes bandaged. It is at this point of blindness that he dreams of the last moments that he saw his son alive at a public swimming pool. The remembered scene visually doubles father and son. Anderton sits at the pool's edge, as Sean lowers himself under water to be timed holding his breath. Emerging, the son challenges his father to the same feat. Anderton drops into the swimming pool, lifts his son up to sit at the side of the pool and hands him the stopwatch: they have physically changed place. A shot from Anderton's point of view

shows Sean seen through the water, as Anderton descends further. This image is reminiscent of Ann Lively's drowning, in which her face is shown sinking into the depths. It also recalls Agatha pushing her face through the water to cry 'murder' before dropping back into the pool. The distorted image of Sean also resembles the holograms that Anderton projects of his wife and son, in which they appear ghostlike.

Under water, Anderton's movements are slowed. As a swimmer goes by he is momentarily distracted. The stopwatch drops into the pool, and emerging he discovers that his son has disappeared. The swimming pool becomes a sinister symbol, where a child can be snatched by a stranger.<sup>13</sup> A wide shot, almost identical to the scene's establishing shot of Anderton and his son, now reveals Sean's absence. This physical absence provides a powerful visual register of trauma. Agatha's lost mother and Anderton's lost child are memorialised only by empty space. Further examples include the empty playground seen at the opening of the film, photographs that Anderton's wife has taken of an empty swing park and later Sean's empty bedroom that Agatha visits. But the pool without Sean is also an evocative image of the empty womb, one repeated when Anderton escapes with Agatha from pre-crime premises, not through its doors, but by pulling the plug on the containment pool and being 'flushed out' – down the figurative birth canal. (He jumps into the pool beside Agatha as he did with Sean, only this time he is the kidnapper of the symbolic child.)

The recollected moment of trauma is linked to the countdown on the surgeon's alarm clock and back to Anderton's wristwatch (which has earlier been important in his pre-crime duties, as his alarm goes off at the moment the Marks murder 'would have' taken place). A shot of the clock cuts to the face of Anderton's watch, then to an image of Anderton crouching at the side of the swimming pool. Time is associated with his memory of his son – the first realisation that something is wrong is when the wristwatch is dropped into the pool (indicating that Sean has been snatched). Anderton repeatedly counts down to the moment of trauma – his son's disappearance - but can never move beyond it. Each pre-crime operation repeats the intervention in his son's kidnap, which he can never enact. Temporal reality gives way to the imaginative repetition of trauma to gain mastery over it. The ticking clock also echoes the prostitute's clock in *Peeping Tom* which 'precedes, is augmented in, and accompanies her murder... the emphasis given to such rhythmicity recalls the perception of rhythmic, repetitive sounds as auditory equivalents of parental intercourse.' (Bick, 1994, p.185)

(Recall that the first moment that we see Anderton's stopwatch and hear the ticking is when he interrupts the adulterous couple shortly before Marks is due to murder them, an interruption of the primal scene.)

With the help of Agatha, Anderton is able to confront both abusers, Leo Crow (Mike Binder), who he thinks has kidnapped and murdered his son, and Lamar Burgess. Both scenes carry the now established implications of sexual abuse. Anderton confronts Crow in a hotel room. The hotel bed – redolent of illicit sex – is covered by what one character describes as ‘an orgy of evidence’: photographs of Crow's previous victims, including Sean. Such photographs also reference the impulse of Dr Eddie to keep visual records of his crimes. As Crow and Anderton struggle on the bed – a violent repetition of the primal scene with which the film opens – Agatha, who Anderton has brought with him, thrashes about in psychic pain as she foresees the murder to come. Infantilized in her movements, she crawls off the bed to escape the fighting couple. The scene is structured by images of fracture and distortion: Anderton pushes Crow into a mirror, which shatters, the next shot reflecting the two in the remaining shards. But despite Anderton's violent outburst, he resists killing Crow, choosing to be subject to the law: he arrests him. Surprised by this, Crow grows angry, letting slip that his family will ‘get nothing’ if Anderton does not go through with the crime. He discloses that he has been employed by an unknown agent to stage the scene (his motivations also resonate with a paternal drive to protect his family – even if it means abandoning it). Before Anderton can learn that it was Burgess who hired him, Crow pulls the trigger of Anderton's gun, killing himself and thus making Agatha's vision come ‘true’. Anderton escapes with Agatha to his estranged wife Lara's (and his former marital) home, before being caught by the pre-crime unit. He now joins the pre-cogs in physical confinement. Stripped of civilian clothes, his head is shaved and he is ‘haloed’. Agatha is returned to her confinement pool and the foetal state.

Powerless, Anderton must wait for his wife to free him - repeating the well-established need in Cruise's films for his rescue by a maternal figure. (The film does not show the reunion of the couple and Lara remains only a mother in her identity. No attempt is made to glamorize her, aside from her image in the hologram; she dresses at all times in conservative clothing). Moments before Burgess is due to speak at an event celebrating the national adoption of pre-crime, Lara talks to him about Anderton's capture as well the images of Ann Lively that he had found. As she stands behind the seated patriarch,

tying his bow-tie in an act of daughterly intimacy, he promises that he will investigate the cases of any drowned women. Lara's hands freeze in the action of tying his bow: she tells him that she had never mentioned that the case Anderton was investigating involved drowning. Burgess stands, towering over her. Only his secretary's summons to make his speech saves Lara. Escaping, she breaks into the pre-crime offices, discovers where her husband is being held and, holding the technician Gideon at gunpoint, secures his release. Anderton finally exposes Burgess in front of the audience celebrating him for the success of the pre-crime project, a public shaming that culminates in his suicide. Moments before he turns his gun on himself, he implores Anderton with the appeal 'forgive me', an admission of the abuse he has perpetrated against the vulnerable son. In the closing moments of the film, a voice-over by Anderton reveals that the pre-crime unit has been closed down. The pre-cogs are taken to a house in the countryside, a place of benign nature (unlike Hineman's mutations), safe from the violence of the city, where they will be free of their traumatizing visions. Anderton has been reunited with his now pregnant wife, a figure who bodes new life and the promise of his reinstatement as a father.

### **Conclusion**

*Minority Report* is unique in the star's filmography for so explicitly yoking together child sexual abuse with the exploitation that the Cruise figure is typically subjected to by the patriarch. The antirealism of science fiction allows for the exaggerated depiction of elements typically present in more subtle form, which express the emotions of a particular psychodynamic stage through screen events. *Minority Report's* expression of castration anxiety goes the furthest with Cruise's character Anderton experiencing a symbolic castration through the surgical removal of his eyes. Although he finally exposes Burgess publicly, leading to his suicide, Anderton himself fails to overcome the patriarch. He is rescued by his wife, who is presented in maternal terms, and does not slay his father – unlike Oedipus. All of which suggests that Anderton does not truly stand up to the father and so fails to move beyond the Oedipal phase. This is typical of Cruise's characters. While appearing to challenge the father and assert a position of adult masculinity, they evade the father's rage through regression to a pre-Oedipal stage, shielded by the mother and still fascinated by their own image.

## Notes

1. The term 'abuse' has been identified in three major forms, with each form being emphasised at different historical points: physical, sexual and psychological/emotional (Browne, 1988, p.15).
2. The German word for trauma is 'trauma' and for dream is 'traum'. In spite of superficial similarities, the etymology for each term differs: 'traum' is related to the term 'truegen' – to betray - and has no link to the Greek term trauma.
3. Freud does not explicitly define 'binding' as a term and the meaning has to be inferred from its contextual use. 'Binding' is the means by which the free-floating energy produced by the mind is linked to ideas, thus giving excitations some tangible representation in the thinking processes. Laplanche and Pontalis suggest the term 'denote[s] an operation tending to restrict the free flow of excitations, to link ideas to one another and to constitute and maintain relatively stable forms' (2004, p.50).
4. The reference to rose bushes may be an 'in joke' regarding the nature of autism. Scientific discoveries (Courchesne *et al*, 1988) indicate that autism in part results from a failure to 'prune' the neural networks that grow and are normally pruned back around adolescence.
5. The script was co-written by Robert Towne, who uses explicit photographs as a plot device frequently – *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974) and *Mission: Impossible II* are two other examples of the same device by the same writer.
6. The suspension in Cruise's films hints at an unconscious masochism, supported by Freud's interpretation of masochistic fantasy and its application to Cruise. See appendix 3a for a longer discussion of active masochism and Deleuze.
7. The compulsion to recall the moment of trauma represents what Freud calls 'the task of mastering or binding excitations' (S.EXVIII, p.35). See appendix 3b for a fuller analysis of Freud's term 'afterwardsness'.
8. Although Silverman's discussion centres round Freud, the terms 'imaginary' and 'symbolic' are most associated with the writings of Jacques Lacan. See appendix 3c for further details.
9. Jad remains as Anderton's only loyal team-mate, continuing the theme of the supportive black man who appears in Cruise's other films.
10. The name Agatha derives from the Greek term 'good'.
11. This moment invokes the combination of blindness and insight, in which intuition compensates for lack of literal vision. Succeeding Helen's mother in *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960) is *Wait until Dark* (Terence Young, 1967) in which Audrey Hepburn stars as a blind woman who overcomes a group of burglars that invade her home.

12. This exchange of the maternal woman providing a man with a hot drink is used three times; each instance implies latent aggression and the good/bad mother binary. The first is by Burgess' wife who, when her husband claims he does not like the lemon and honey drink she has made to treat his cold, threatens to tip it onto his lap; the second is the above instance of Hineman and Anderton; the third occurs when Anderton's wife, visited by FBI agent Witwer (Colin Farrell), gives him a cup of coffee. When Witwer asks a prying question about Anderton she responds that she does not have the sugar for the coffee that he requested. Each example depicts, and to varying degrees subverts, the 'proper' nurturing role of the female.
13. The corruption of that which is innocent is echoed in the following scene. Waking up from this nightmare, Anderton blindly follows a rope to the fridge, where a sandwich and milk – symbols of domestic nurturance – have been left for him. But there is also a rotten sandwich and putrid milk sitting beside their benign counterparts, and this doubling of safe and dangerous underscore the abuse perpetrated by the protector and suggest the psychosexual trauma of poisoning by the mother. Furthering Anderton's own traumatic experience, he bites into the rancid sandwich and takes a mouthful of the moldy milk, before spitting out both.

## **Chapter Five: The Sacrificial Body of Cruise**

The previous chapter argued that Tom Cruise's films are typified by his characters' panicked response to a threatening patriarch and provided a Freudian framework within which to examine this dynamic. Investigating the onscreen embodiment of Cruise in his military roles (and those that may be considered 'quasi-military', such as the *Mission: Impossible* series) this chapter will consider how his characters are figured in terms of sacrifice and the avenging father, again suggesting how this might be understood in psychosexual terms. The trajectory of his star persona transforms the threat of punishment into visible marks of violence, as his body becomes brutalised in his later films. In these more recent roles, capitulation to the will of the sacrificing father is achieved, even if it means bodily damage. The historical film *Valkyrie* (Bryan Singer, 2008) is characterised by his voluntary self-sacrifice. On a social level, sacrificial violence can be understood as the bloodshed of war - patriarchy's demand that young men die on the battlefield in defence of the nation. However, it should be noted that Cruise's characters, including those in his martial films, are unwilling candidates for sacrifice. The actor came to prominence less than a decade after the Vietnam War; a conflict that marked an American departure from an ideology based on the heroism of war. Cruise's star persona can be seen as a compromise for a generation trapped between the notion of an outmoded martial heroism and the threat of feminisation in evading the call to arms.

### **Oedipus Rex**

A psychodynamic reading of paternal aggression in the myth of Oedipus Rex offers alternative possibilities for understanding the Cruise persona when reconsidered from the perspective of King Laius's actions. This focus emphasises the male child's fear of homosexual attack by the father in the Oedipal stage, rather than the son's own impulses towards appropriation of the mother. This impulse at the level of fantasy also has a real history in the man-youth pairings of ancient Greece – one that the myth of Laius evokes – and is a feature that appears in the development of *Männerbund*, the German fraternity movement that was exploited (before being rejected) by National Socialism. Military homoeroticism vis-a-vis National Socialism and the representation of the body will be considered in regards to Tom Cruise's role in *Valkyrie*.

The violence between father and son in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* is usually considered, psychoanalytically, in terms of Oedipus's parricide. Psychoanalyst George Devereux in his essay 'Why Oedipus Killed Laius: A Note on the Complementary Oedipus Complex in Greek Drama' (1995) focuses instead upon the paternal violence of King Laius. In Freud's brief but seminal account of Oedipus (1900), he describes his fate, following the Delphic Oracle's revelation to Oedipus's parents that Laius's son will grow up to kill him and marry his queen, Jocasta. Binding the infant's feet together with a pin – a castrating gesture – Laius instructs Jocasta to kill him. She in turn gives Oedipus to a servant, who leaves the child in the fields. Found by shepherds, he grows up as the son of a king in a foreign court. Reaching adulthood, Oedipus is told of the prophesy and leaves home, thinking that King Polybus and Queen Merope are his biological parents and desperate to avoid his fate. On a distant road, he encounters and quarrels with Laius over the right of way, striking him dead. He comes to Thebes, his place of birth, and solves the riddle of the Sphinx: '*What is the creature that walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three in the evening?*', to which he answers 'man'. Her enigma dissolved, the Sphinx throws herself off a cliff. Elected king as reward for freeing Thebes of the curse of the Sphinx, Oedipus marries Jocasta and has two sons and two daughters by her. Later, a plague breaks out, with the oracle declaring that the epidemic will cease only once the murderer of Laius is found. Oedipus investigates and discovers that the man he killed on the road was his father. Realizing the true identity of Oedipus, Jocasta commits suicide and he blinds himself.

Discussing *Oedipus Rex*, Freud cites Sophocles' acknowledgement that the 'Oedipus legend has its source in dream material of immemorial antiquity' (1938, p.309):

The Oedipus fable is the reaction of fantasy to these two/ typical dreams and just as such a dream, when occurring to an adult, is experienced with feelings of aversion, so the content of the fable must include terror and self-chastisement. (1938, pp.309-310)

Devereux suggests that the Oedipus complex is a consequence of the male child's sensitivity towards his parents' sexual and aggressive impulses (1995, p.228). He turns to the figure of King Laius, whose early history anticipates 'the male child's tendency to view his father as a homosexual ogre, and of his desire to exchange roles with the father also in this respect.' (p.229) This dynamic can be considered characteristic of the roles Cruise inhabits vis-à-vis the father figures in his films.



Central to the myth of Laius is his kidnapping of Chrysippus, son of King Pelops, during the sacred Nemean games. Devereux indicates that some ancient Greek sources name Laius as the inventor of pederasty (p.218). Chrysippus is linked with Oedipus, for Pelops places the curse on Laius that he should kill his son in punishment for the kidnap of his own child. Devereux discusses one version of the myth which suggests the ‘Sphinx was sent to ravage Thebes as punishment for tolerating Laius’ escapade’ (p.218). Devereux also suggests that the argument between Laius and Oedipus is a bowdlerized and symbolic version of a parallel account which indicates that they fought over the affection of Chrysippus (p.219), the latter figure representing ‘Oedipus’ own passive homosexual characteristics... aroused by Laius’ aggressive and homosexual impulses towards his son’ (p.219).<sup>1</sup> After killing Laius, Oedipus confiscates his sword and belt, both figuratively castrating and feminizing him (undoing a woman’s dress as a prelude to coitus) (p.220). His mother Jocasta becomes ‘representative of the now feminised homosexual paternal ogre’ (p.220) – that is to say, is another version of Laius.

One other point about Laius’s experiences, and the havoc he appears to create, regards the circumstances and motives surrounding Pelops’s curse. His rage, Devereux suggests, is tied to his own relationship to the father figures in his life and his ‘experience of [their] potential cruelty’ (p.223). As the son of King Tantalus, Pelops has suffered the unfortunate fate of being served up as ultimate dish at the king’s banquet, an act designed by Tantalus to test the omnipotence of the gods attending. The immortals discover his plot, but not before the goddess Demeter has eaten Pelops’s shoulder. Reanimated by the gods, he remains unchanged, save for an ivory shoulder (this figure of a prosthesis replacing a limb damaged – in this case indirectly – by the aggression of the patriarch anticipates Cruise’s injured body in *Valkyrie*). This moment invokes the eating of the totem meal – though here it is the son not the father who is served – and also indicates the child’s fear of engulfment by the mother. However, as Devereux indicates, Greek legend also stresses Pelops’s honouring of his father (that is to say, a split response to his father, with the negative half of his emotional response being suppressed). A second version of the legend suggests that the feast did not take place, and instead that the god Poseidon abducted Pelops, with whom he was in love (p.223). Citing Henry Bunker, Devereux suggests that the feast of Tantalus is a ‘disguised description of initiation rites’ (p.223). Each version of the legend privileges a different psychosexual stage. The first, depicting the banquet, suggests the fear of

engulfment by the mother; the second, in which Poseidon kidnaps Pelops, indicates an 'anxiously eroticised submission to a homosexual father figure' (p.224). Pelops's ambivalent relation to paternal figures is further indicated by his slaying of his father-in-law Oenomaus, whom he must defeat in a chariot race to win the hand of his daughter. He makes a deal with Oenomaus's servant to share sexual favours with his bride-to-be if he tampers with Oenomaus's chariot, before drowning him to renege on the deal. This narrative in its parricidal impulses further relates Pelops's plight to that of Oedipus.

Laius's deeds prior to the birth and story of Oedipus evidence the 'Oedipal homosexual hostility' (p.225) that is crucial to the Oedipus complex. This dynamic can be applied to Cruise's persona and the ambiguous father figures that populate his films. (The Sphinx, as the phallic mother, may also be considered as prototypical of the older dominant women of Cruise's filmography who invoke the figure of the Kleinian 'archaic' mother.) Differing versions resonate to give a more coherent understanding of the various stages of psychosexual development. Pelops's son Chrysippus is kidnapped during the sacred Nemean games, linking the sacred with the taboo (the kidnap of the son). The sporting event is linked to (homo)sexual aggression and appropriation, both in the case of Laius's kidnap of Chrysippus, and Oenomaus and Pelops's chariot race. Such violence is associated with the notion of the sacrificial meal, in the case of Tantalus offering his son Pelops up as a meal for the gods.

### **The Totem Sacrifice**

Freud considers sacrifice in 'primitive' societies in his work *Totem and Taboo* (S.E. XIII, 1913). In such cultures, each clan is said to identify itself with a totemic animal, which has implications for proscribed behaviour. Members of a given clan cannot form sexual relations with other members of the same totem, thus laying out the incest taboo. In addition, clansmen are 'under a sacred obligation ... not to kill their totem' (S.E. XIII, p.55). However, this taboo is broken under certain circumstances, i.e. when the totem animal is killed in sacrifice. Freud identifies the totem animal as the father figure, thus explaining the Oedipal elements of totemism:

though the killing of the animal is as a rule forbidden, yet its killing is a festive occasion - with the fact that it is killed and yet mourned. The ambivalent emotional attitude, which to this day characterizes the father-complex in our children and which often

persists into adult-life, seems to extend to the totem animal in its capacity as substitute for the father.

(S.E. XIII, p.202)

Freud then goes on to speculate on the possible origins of human societies, one in which the strongest male keeps a harem of sorts, driving away his sons as they grow up. This band of brothers unites to overthrow the father, killing and eating him: in the act of devouring him they accomplish their identification with him, and each one acquires a portion of his strength (p.203). The affection felt towards the father, previously suppressed, now expresses itself in feelings of remorse. The brothers' revoke the deed by forbidding the killing of the totem figure or forming sexual relations with woman of the same totem (p.204). Though Freud's venture into anthropology is questionable, its resonance in psychosexual terms remains more convincing. The totem meal relates to the first psychosexual stage, the oral phase, and the notion of identification through incorporation, which Freud refers to in a later edition of *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1915, S.E. VII) as 'cannibalistic'. The addition of this word highlights the aggression of the oral stage (Karl Abraham describes the second half of the oral phase as oral-sadistic [1924]). Here, 'the sexual *aim* consists in the incorporation of the object – the prototype of a process which, in the form of identification, is later to play such an important part' (S.E. VII, p.198). Freud indicates the oral phase's relation to mourning and melancholia – the assimilated object may confer its strength upon the subject's ego, or as in melancholia, the ego is subjected to attacks from within in the form of self-reproach (S.E. XIV, p.250) – both symptoms of the aftermath of the original totem meal.

The totem meal and the oral stage can be further understood via Freud's association of gay homosexuality with anality and orality, which Diana Fuss discusses in relation to *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991). Fuss observes that in the popular imagination, gay male sexuality is figured round anal and oral eroticism. The two body parts concerned are interrelated: 'mouth substitutes for anus, and anus for mouth, as each comes to symbolise the gaping, grasping hole that cannibalistically swallows the other' (Fuss, 1995, p.84). In the Freudian framework, the oral/cannibalistic phase comes first, then the sadistic/ anal phase, followed by the phallic phase. In adult sexuality these various impulses struggle to assert themselves simultaneously (1995, Fuss, p.85). Nevertheless, a classical psychoanalytic model of sexual perversion considers a fixation on the mouth and anus as erogenous zones (at the expense of

‘mature’ genital sexuality) suspect – not to mention homosexuality itself. Male homosexuality is represented as a failure to move past the oral/cannibalistic phase, refusing to give up its first object – the maternal breast and phallic substitutes. The incorporation of the mother permits a same-sex object choice and stimulates sadistic impulses: ‘violence, mutilation and disfigurement are structurally internal to the psychical act of identification’ (Fuss, p.85). Oral incorporation may work both ways, with ‘cannibal son or ogre father’ (Fuss, p.96); the latter invokes an omnipotent father who threatens to eat up the child. Thus the violent impulses the son feels toward the father in the process of identification may be projected onto a father figure who attacks his son.

If Freud’s exploration of the totem meal makes sense of sacrifice in a psychoanalytic framework, how might the concept be understood in a social context? Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle have claimed that nationalism is a secular religion, with war functioning as ritual sacrifice. They argue that society’s use and disposal of bodies is its fundamental mission. The longevity of any social group is dependent on the willingness of certain individuals to sacrifice themselves on behalf of the unit. That is to say, ‘society depends on the death of this sacrificial group *at the hands of the group itself*’ (italics in original) (Marvin and Ingle, 1996, p.771). To prevent internal violence destroying the group, it must be channelled towards a sacrificial victim and thus dissipated. Christianity can be understood in these terms, in which the Father sacrifices his treasured son: ‘the sacrificial promise is that the father’s desire for blood revenge against those who offend his power will be satisfied for all time by this execution’ (Marvin and Ingle, 1996, p.772). Without referencing Freud, Marvin and Ingle propose a totem principle, in which only God has the right to kill his own, and extend this to the general’s fatal orders to his soldiers (p.773). If society demands a victim from within its own group, in modern society this befalls the soldier class whom Marvin and Ingle describe in religious terms: ‘Soldiers live apart in monastic orders that discipline and purify themselves for ultimate sacrifice’ (p.775). This principle - that the group must cannibalise itself to resolve disunity – is not disclosed as the real explanation for the blood sacrifice of war. As Marvin and Ingle argue, the Vietnam War failed as a sacrifice because U.S. soldiers were not viewed as heroic martyrs but complicit in an unjustified imperialist war (p.775). A broader consideration of sacrifice can be found in Mark Pizzato’s book *Theatres of Human Sacrifice: From Ancient Ritual to Screen Violence* (2005). In it he surveys the performance of violence from ancient sacrificial

rites to modern sporting events and cinematic representation, through psychoanalytic and theatrical readings. Asking how human sacrifice may be sublimated in modern contexts such as sport and cinema, and in what ways these events may resemble actual sacrifice in previous cultures (2005, p.1), he argues that the representation of sacrifice on screen allows spectators to explore notions of their own mortality (p.2). Pizzato also suggests that stars may act as figurative sacrificial victims in the mass media, which both represents stars as ideal egos and attempts to destroy them with scandal (p.179). His argument that cinematic violence and sporting competition ‘gradually replaced the actual bloodshed of humans and animals in prior ritual performances with the fictional sacrifice of characters and the scoring of players’ (p.179) has applications for Cruise’s screen image.

### **Cruise as Sacrificial Son**

Cruise’s persona is a portrait of the sacrificial son in a post-Vietnam era. The breakdown of American nationalism discouraged individuals’ sacrifice in an unpopular war. This had problematic consequences for the channelling of violence. Cruise’s characters are neither ‘draft dodgers’ nor war heroes, but uneasy compromises between these equally problematic alternatives. Chosen for the role of sacrificial victim by the patriarch, he tries to evade his fate. Cruise’s characters are successful in avoiding injury in his early martial and sports roles, a contradiction made more explicit by the films’ settings in apparently violent contexts. (*Born on the Fourth of July* [Oliver Stone, 1989] is an early exception, in which the Cruise character, Ron Kovic, becomes paraplegic following military service in Vietnam.) But although Cruise may escape harm, those around him often suffer: his films are replete with individuals who are the victims who willingly put themselves in danger for him (typically women). As Cruise ages a new tendency emerges: increasingly, he is the recipient of actual or psychic harm. This split occurs around the release of *Eyes Wide Shut* (Stanley Kubrick, 1999). Three years divides the release of his previous film *Jerry Maguire* (Cameron Crowe, 1996) and *Eyes Wide Shut*, a lengthy period for a star whose persona hinges on his youth. In his later films, his vulnerability to harm seems exaggerated: *Magnolia* (PT Anderson, 1999) sees him break down at the deathbed of a rejecting father; in *Vanilla Sky* (Cameron Crowe, 2001) his face is ravaged and his psyche destroyed after a car crash; in *Minority Report* (Steven Spielberg, 2002) he suffers the trauma of losing his child. He is killed in *Collateral* (Michael Mann, 2004) and *Valkyrie*.

The threat of physical punishment is more explicit in Cruise's later films; even in the event of escape he may exhibit wounds that are absent in his earlier roles. This is at odds with the heroism that his persona, linked as it is with notions of militarism, would appear to offer. Yet despite the frequency of these early military settings, it is striking how rarely he is represented as a fighting member of the armed forces. He appears as a cadet (*TAPS* [Harold Becker, 1981]), a naval aviator in training (*Top Gun* [Tony Scott, 1986]), and a Navy lawyer (*A Few Good Men* [Rob Reiner, 1992]); none of these characters are directly involved in war. Only in *Born on the Fourth of July* is Cruise shown in combat, and the film is more concerned with the physical and psychological consequences of that fighting than the violence itself. As an uneasy compromise in representing the now problematic figure of the military hero, he is caught between running away and being subjected to physical punishment. Each in some way 'solves' the problem of having to fight, but at great cost to the masculine ideal.

*Top Gun*, the film that made Tom Cruise a star, catalyzes many of his star attributes. Here, his portrayal as a military man is curious; rarely depicted in combat, his positioning as a soldier seems symbolic, a way of avoiding appearing emasculated. The threat of feminisation must be avoided; attachment to family is dangerous. In the opening scene aviator 'Cougar' (John Stockwell) encounters a couple of enemy planes. Glancing at a photograph of his wife and children he is paralysed with fear and only 'Maverick' (Tom Cruise), piloting a nearby fighter, can successfully talk him into landing. This sense of threat is fully realised later in the film when Maverick's 'wingman' – navigator – is killed. Ejecting from the cockpit, 'Goose' (Anthony Edwards) is thrown into the cockpit canopy, snapping his neck. His lifeless body parachutes into the sea (itself a feminine metaphor). Goose's death occurs after scenes of Maverick's rebellious flying manoeuvres. He is criticised by his supervisors and chastised by his rival pupil, 'Iceman' (Val Kilmer), who sees his flying as erratic and dangerous. Goose's death can thus be read as a sacrifice to Maverick's rebellion. Maverick's own father, a pilot in the Vietnam War, has died in apparent dereliction of duty. His memory is fraught with the disgrace that hangs over Maverick's head. Only when supervisor 'Viper' (Tom Skerritt) reveals to Maverick that his father died a hero does he agree to return to flying. Viper provides a suitable role model for the younger pilots: he too is known by his call sign and visually he matches them in terms of height and build. He is even participates in training exercises in which he 'plays' the enemy. The aggression of the figural father is defused into role play. Although the film is book-

ended by two scenarios of 'real life' hostile aerial encounters, most of it takes place at a school in which the students are learning about warfare rather than participating in it. Moreover, the nature of such interactions is drastically detached from the brutal reality of hand-to-hand combat – delivering on the promise of Reagan's Star Wars that military technological sophistication evades the necessity of fighting a land war, which proved so disastrous in Vietnam.

*Born on the Fourth of July* is the clearest example, until *Valkyrie*, of Cruise's positioning as the sacrificial victim. Here the young man's role as willing soldier suggests a contract between himself and the ruling order: he will offer up his body in service – and at the threat of death or mutilation – to stake a later claim to a position of power. Cruise's Ron Kovic demonstrates the rage of male youth in response to the patriarchy's breaking of that contract. Kovic's literal mutilation indicates the exploitation of young men by the old in colonial wars. The ideals of heroism presented in the opening Independence Day parade are consigned to a former era, a nostalgic valour that is contrasted with the brutal reality of the battlefield. Joining the Marines – after a recruitment drive at his high school – Kovic is drafted into service in Vietnam. An injury on the battlefield leaves him paraplegic. His only consolation is that he behaved as a hero (though in truth, he is responsible for the accidental death of another young American soldier). However, returning to the U.S. from Vietnam, Kovic does not receive a hero's welcome. This is the moment of ideological fracture in which American soldiers become 'baby killers', rendering Cruise's military characters ambiguous. After a period of self-destructive drinking in Mexico, Kovic is inspired to join the anti-war movement, and ends the film onstage addressing a political rally, having come to terms with himself. The film suggests the perils of the outmoded ideals of heroism that contrast with the reality of war.

Later Cruise films depict a quasi-military world, which allow his characters to explore similar conflicts without the burden of representing a modern martial context. The trilogy of *Mission: Impossible* films, which features an organisation called 'Impossible Mission Force' (the acronym IMF so redolent of the real life International Monetary Fund, perhaps alluding to its stealthy involvement in geopolitics) run by the American government to undertake operations involving international security. The strategy sessions of their missions are a famous part of the series – a narrative and visual motif of the series later invoked by *Valkyrie*.<sup>2</sup>

This physical manifestation of a seat of power – where figural fathers make decisions about the fate of their sons – is depicted in an early scene of *Mission: Impossible* (Brian De Palma, 1996). Jim Phelps (Jon Voight) directs a young group of IMF operatives, explaining the mission they are about to undertake. He will stay in the ‘crow’s nest’, the safe house, while the others are out in the field. (The patriarch’s all-encompassing vision, and the unrestricted access to the mother that he enjoys, is referenced here. In the film’s opening scene, while on board an airplane, Phelps looks at a photograph of his young wife Claire (Emmanuelle Béart). The airhostess offers him a videotape to watch, which turns out to be an IMF briefing document. The text ‘For the eyes of Jim Phelps’ flashes up at the start of the video; the photograph of his wife is thus linked to this restriction.) Phelps is the figural general sending his troops into battle. All of the operatives but Ethan Hunt (Tom Cruise) and Claire are killed during the mission, sacrificed by arrangement of the father. (Later in the film it is revealed that Phelps is responsible.) The first member of the group to die is Jack Harmon (Emilio Estevez), closely aligned to Hunt as the only other young man in the team. Jack is killed when the elevator that he is sitting above – providing remote IT assistance to Hunt and another team-mate – is activated and hurtles towards the top of the lift shaft; a piece of metal cabling swings down and stabs him through the eye. The Oedipal resonance is unmistakable, and further evidenced by Hunt’s romantic attachment to Claire.

Hunt suffers from symbolic blindness, another intimation of the film’s Oedipal theme. Knowledge obtained through sight is often false (the theatrical nature of set pieces indicates the importance of performance in the *Mission: Impossible* series). He sees his team-mates’ deaths as they happen on screen, as each is wired up to a POV camera. He also ‘sees’ Phelps die. As the only team member left alive Hunt is the prime suspect for their deaths, forced to go on the run. His figural blindness is expressed in visual imagery: meeting a potential contact who may lead him to the guilty party, Max (Vanessa Redgrave) insists on anonymity by blindfolding him before she meets with him. At various moments he wears glasses that record visual data (such as when he breaks into IMF headquarters to obtain the ‘NOC’ data list which he has promised Max). Knowledge obtained through sight is often falsified: masks are donned by Hunt at various points in the film to impersonate others. He wrongly assumes from what he saw on the night of the botched operation, that Phelps was killed by an anonymous agent. Finding that Phelps is still alive his relief at seeing him still alive soon turns to



suspicion. In a series of flashbacks – traumatic recalls - Hunt recalls the night of the mission and replays the ‘truth’ of what happened, finally ‘seeing’ how Phelps orchestrated the deaths of his team-mates.

Hunt’s revolt against the IMF and Phelps is undertaken by penetrating IMF headquarters to steal the ‘NOC’ data list. That Hunt is able to break into this location indicates his ability to undermine the institution, which he does using his physical, as well as strategizing, skills. It is a covert operation, designed to avoid (in keeping with Cruise’s usual evasion of conflict) capture by its agents. Here, there is a slight rise in the seniority of Cruise from previous films - he now assembles his own team in order to clear his name. One sequence shows Hunt explaining his strategy for breaking into IMF HQ (a son defying the will of the father to gain entry to the physical seat of power, echoing Oedipus’s solution of the Sphinx’s riddle and entry into Thebes). It includes flash-forwards of moments that have yet to be staged (and will later be seen onscreen in their actual execution). These strategy sessions are a well-known feature of the *Mission: Impossible* films and the original TV series upon which they are based. They indicate the martial subtext to *Mission: Impossible*, in a manner acceptable to post-Vietnam audiences (the TV series aired between 1966 and 1973, at the height of the conflict in Vietnam). The sequences have a highly theatrical element: the plan will include elaborate staging, distraction techniques and deception, all to create a convincing performance. This may involve mask wearing, dressing up and role play of the team participants, elements which reflect and extend key traits of Cruise’s persona. Such sequences are premised on technological expertise and the deployment of gadgets, which also supports the star’s image (while reflecting the wider generic tendencies, so evident in the *Bond* films). Each set piece is completed by a variety of acrobatic stunts – typically performed by Hunt – that are essential for the operation’s success. This display of athletic prowess, often highly balletic as in the first *Mission Impossible*, lacks any violent impulse and extends the contradiction of a martial context stripped of the brutality of warfare characteristic of Cruise’s films.

The acrobatic stunts in *Mission: Impossible* also point towards stasis in the Cruise persona. In the first film’s break-in to IMF headquarters, Hunt is lowered harnessed to a wire into a high-security facility to download the NOC list. His tight black clothing privileges the athletic Cruise body, made more spectacular by its contrast with the room’s bright white background, yet its restriction in a harness points to other

tendencies. Cruise's persona can be understood in terms of unconscious masochism, and as an expression of passive homosexual desire typical of 'negative Oedipal' impulses. His persona, however, does not point towards an active sexual masochism, which his association with stasis might indicate. The stasis represented here, and elsewhere in Cruise's films (most notably the other films in the *Mission: Impossible* series) point towards a regression to the oral/cannibalistic stage's preoccupation with the engulfing mother described by Melanie Klein, in which the infant fears he or she will be swallowed up (Orality is also indicated by his high verbal acuity.) In this scene of *Mission: Impossible* he is connected to a wire, which could be read as a figurative umbilical cord and return to the womb). The subsequent films in the *Mission: Impossible* series similarly feature Hunt in positions of stasis: hanging from a rock face, dangling from a rope, strapped to a chair, all of which point towards infantile regression. This ambivalent relation to the mother may also result in aggression against women – overt or latent. Cruise's characters often leave the women around them exposed to danger. Hunt fails to protect Claire, who is shot by her husband Phelps in the film's denouement. Claire is the only other member of the IMF team who is not killed by Phelps in the film's opening; it is implied that Hunt subsequently forms a sexual relationship with her (albeit one never depicted onscreen). When Hunt realises that Phelps is alive and guilty of his team's murder, he begins to suspect Claire of being her husband's accomplice, a fact ultimately confirmed by Phelps himself. Her death can be seen as due punishment for her (sexual) betrayal of Hunt with Phelps, the father.

Sexual jealousy and a marked inability to protect Hunt's female love interest also characterises *Mission: Impossible II* (John Woo, 2000). In this film, his mission involves obtaining a deadly 'Chimera' virus, which has been stolen by defecting IMF agent Sean Ambrose (Dougray Scott). Having recruited thief Nyah (Thandi Newton) to join his team, and entered into a sexual entanglement with her, Hunt is called to a meeting with IMF head Swanbeck (Anthony Hopkins) in Seville. They meet in a dark, cavernous room, with grey stone walls and heavy wooden furniture. It has connotations of the refined but also of the monstrous: Hopkins's role as serial killer Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991) appears to be referenced (another role which invokes the infant's fear of being devoured by the parent). Swanbeck informs Hunt of Ambrose's defection then tells him that he wants Nyah to resume a prior romantic relationship with Ambrose (duplicating the fate of Ingrid Bergman's character in Hitchcock's 1946 *Notorious*). When Hunt objects he shows him

photographs of the plane explosion caused by Ambrose, and of the pilot's corpse: 'Stuffed into a rather small suitcase, considering his size.' Swanbeck's dry approach to this man's death and fascination with the details of his disposal recall Hopkins's Lector, as does a close-up of Swanbeck in which he smiles wryly at Hunt, tilting his head quizzically.<sup>3</sup> The gold braid on the pilot's uniform alludes to Cruise's persona, which is under attack here. Hunt is powerless to defy his superior's instructions. When he objects that she is not suitably qualified his superior's retort is: 'What, to go to bed with a man and lie to him? She's a woman. She's got all the training she needs.' Hunt's early involvement in the mission is limited to spying on Nyah and Ambrose as she re-embarks on her relationship with him. This echoes the opening of the film in which Hunt is an object of surveillance by Swanbeck, linking Hunt to Nyah as objects of visual interrogation.

The triangulation of the Hunt-Nyah-Ambrose bond is less Oedipal than in the first *Mission: Impossible*: Ambrose and Hunt are figured as peers, where the age difference and bond between Hunt and Phelps in the prior film is presented in filial terms. Nevertheless, the sexual jealousy experienced by Hunt in *Mission: Impossible II* is expressed in aggression against Nyah. He fails to defend her against the violent Ambrose, who cuts off the finger tip of his henchman Stamp (Richard Roxborough) in an act of castrating violence, when the latter questions Nyah's trustworthiness. She actively sacrifices her own safety for Hunt's sake. When Hunt finds himself in a stand-off in the laboratory which houses the Chimera, she injects herself with the virus to distract Ambrose. Hunt escapes by parachuting out of the building, leaving Nyah in the hands of Ambrose. Even when Hunt has obtained the antidote she needs, he does not rescue her, choosing instead to pursue Ambrose for a final show-down. (Unlike the first *Mission: Impossible*, the denouement between hero and villain is a graphically physical fight, displaying the director John Woo's Hong Kong action film origins). Released by Ambrose, Nyah stands on a cliff on the outskirts of Sydney contemplating suicide, as the only way of avoiding a city pandemic (another act of sacrifice). Only the intervention of Hunt's team mates, who arrive by helicopter with the antidote, prevents her from going through with the deed.

If the theme of sacrifice is less explicit in the next film of the series, *Mission: Impossible III* (J.J. Abrams, 2006), Hunt's inability to protect those around him is still apparent. Villain Owen Davian (Philip Seymour Hoffman) kidnaps a female IMF

operative, Lindsey Ferris (Keri Russell), trained by Hunt. Early in the film an unsuccessful mission to recover her leads directly to her death. Hunt also fails to protect his loved ones: Davian seizes his new wife Julia (Michelle Monaghan) and takes her to China, using her as a pawn to coerce Hunt into stealing the mysterious 'rabbit's foot' (we never learn what this item is). The film emphasises his bodily vulnerability, opening with the sounds of his torture by electric shock. Its first image is a close-up of Hunt's face, bruised and bloody. This is a vulnerable male body lacking any protective phallic power. Wider shots follow, revealing Hunt handcuffed to a barber's chair, incapable of escape. Davian points a gun at Julia's head, demanding to know where the rabbit's foot is. Hunt tries all of the usual Cruise manoeuvres: he struggles, wheedles and persuades, he threatens. Nothing moves Davian, who shoots Julia in the head (later we learn it is not Julia he has killed, but another woman wearing a mask).

For the third time in the *Mission: Impossible* series, Hunt fails to protect the woman he loves. His failure of masculinity becomes apparent in the final scenes of the film. In the closing fight between him and Davian, Hunt struggles, disabled by a detonator implanted in his brain. He reels, allowing Davian to beat him badly (in spite of Davian's portly build). Struggling, they roll into the street and Davian is hit by a car. Hunt returns to Julia, desperate to deactivate the device in his head. He instructs her to give him an electric shock and then resuscitate him (it has been established that she is a nurse). As he lies unconscious, Davian's men come looking for them. Spotting one gunman in the reflection of a cabinet, Julia manages to load Hunt's gun and shoots both of her assailants. Returning to his unconscious body, she gives him CPR and he sits bolt upright, gun poised to defend them both. Then it dawns on him that all of the attackers are dead. Disorientated and surprised, all he can manage is 'you did this?' The male body is no longer required for defensive purposes.

The *Mission: Impossible* trilogy reinforces Cruise's depiction as a martial hero who avoids negotiating the ethically troubled terrain of war. Similarly, films such as *Top Gun* depict Cruise in an armed forces setting but in peace time, with a few references to the continuation of the 'cold war' (in the shape of the enemy MiG planes). In *A Few Good Men* Cruise is a naval lawyer, associated with the military but on its fringes, investigating an act of brutality of one of its own. Alternatively, placing the military context in a historical setting, as in *The Last Samurai* (Edward Zwick, 2003) or *Valkyrie*, allows military themes to be explored without depicting modern warfare.

*Lions for Lambs* (Robert Redford, 2007) performs a neat reversal of the Cruise persona, with the actor playing the powerful father and younger men playing the sacrificial soldiers. It reiterates the compromise, which the Cruise persona offers for a post-Vietnam era: good soldiers led by a bad government. The film contains three separate story lines, the first of which follows two young graduates, Arian (Derek Luke) and Ernest (Michael Peña) who are inspired by their idealistic college professor Dr Malley (Robert Redford) to enlist in the Army. A second plot line follows Dr Malley's attempts to motivate a talented but listless young student Todd (Andrew Garfield) to apply himself to his studies. The third narrative strand features Cruise as Senator Jasper Irving, who invites journalist Janine Roth (Meryl Streep) to document his announcement of the government's new military strategy for Afghanistan – one which will end the lives of recruits like Arian and Ernest. The film ends with the revelation of their death in the Afghan mountains; the implicit message is that it is figures like Irving who are to blame. Cruise has become the punishing father, Ernest and Arian his figural sacrificial sons. (Nevertheless, Cruise maintains his typical verbal acuity and physical energy: although he is limited to an office space he spends most of his time on his feet, engaged in what seems to be a sales pitch to the hesitant Roth.)

*Lions for Lambs* references a quotation usually attributed to General Max von Gallwitz, Supreme Commander of the German forces in World War One: 'Nowhere have I seen such lions led by such lambs' ('Ich habe noch nie solchen löwen gesehen die solche lamer gefurht werden'), made during the Battle of the Somme. It in turn references Alexander the Great's proclamation: 'I am never afraid of an army of lions led into battle by a lamb. I fear more the army of lambs who have a lion to lead them'. The lamb in question may be British commander General Douglas Haig, whose tactics at the Somme contributed to the heavy allied casualties suffered in this battle. The provenance of the film's title indicates that men such as Senator Irving are irresponsibly sacrificing young men's lives in rash military adventures.

A similar reversal of Cruise's traditional persona is offered in his cameo in the comedy *Tropic Thunder* (Ben Stiller, 2008). Cruise plays film studio boss Les Grossman, who refuses to ransom lead star Tugg Speedman (Ben Stiller) when he and his co-stars are kidnapped by heroin smugglers while filming a Vietnam movie in the Laos jungle. Hollywood has spent many years representing the trauma surrounding the Vietnam War on screen; it appears the subject is now appropriate for a comic treatment. Nevertheless,

the casting of Cruise is significant in regard to his own previous performances of a martial masculinity. In this instance, the performance is diegetic: actors performing soldiers. Cruise again is the abusive father who exploits his figural sons: asked by Speedman's agent Dick Peck (Matthew McConaughey) to pay the ransom demanded by the 'Red Dragon' gang, Grossman screams abuse down the phone at the gangsters before daring them to kill his star. Hanging up the phone, he announces that 'we do not deal with terrorists' to a round of applause from his studio lackeys. He and his assistant explain that as a falling star Speedman is worth more to them dead in the insurance claim than alive. Grossman proceeds to engage in a victory dance, grinding his hips and shaking his corpulent body in a grim parody of Cruise's earlier auto-erotic teen movements in *Risky Business* (Paul Brickman, 1983). Literally a 'gross man', he is fat, balding and hirsute, his chest hair protruding from his half-unbuttoned shirt. The cameo 'works' as a comic performance because it inverts so many aspects of the Cruise persona with which we are familiar.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Valkyrie***

In *Valkyrie*, a drama about the attempted assassination of Hitler by German army officers, Cruise returns to a role in which his relation to power is more tenuous. As Wehrmacht Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg, he is a member of a band of outsiders trying to overthrow the ultimate sacrificing father: Adolf Hitler. Although Cruise performed the role at the age of 46, he portrays one of the very youngest of the German conspirators. Badly wounded on the African front, losing an eye and a hand, Stauffenberg becomes disenchanted with the Nazi leadership, and the horrors that they have perpetrated in the name of Germany. He masterminds the plot that will see Hitler's operation 'Valkyrie' used against him. 'Valkyrie' ensures that if Hitler is in personal danger, a Reserve Army will be gathered to defend him. Stauffenberg manages to persuade Hitler to sign documents that alter the operation, excluding the S.S. ('Schutzstaffel' or 'Protection Squadron'). The plan is to assassinate Hitler, frame the S.S. for his death, use the Reserve Army to arrest its leaders, and eventually form a new government. Stauffenberg succeeds in planting a bomb in Hitler's war room (an isolated location hours from Berlin), but it only wounds Hitler. The Reserve Army is nevertheless told that Hitler has been assassinated in an S.S. coup, and that its members must be arrested. All goes according to plan until Hitler makes contact with the head of the Reserve Army, who realizes that he has been involved unwittingly in the plot. Stauffenberg and his fellow conspirators are rounded up, arrested, and executed.

*Valkyrie* reiterates the Cruise persona in a number of ways. Firstly, there is Stauffenberg's presentation as a sacrificial victim, one that is privileged by the director's reliance on religious symbolism, including blood, baptismal fonts and crucifixes. Stauffenberg's broken body invokes the figure of the brutalized Christ, but it also represents the mutilation of Germany. Tying into National Socialist depictions of the idealised male body to symbolize the strength of the nation, it also extends the Cruise's onscreen embodiment as one of (homo)erotic interest. Here the German privileging of homoerotic bonds in the military prior to the advent of National Socialism (which was a profoundly homophobic, though homosocial, ideology) also needs to be considered. 'Homosocial', the term coined by scholar Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, refers to male-male bonds, that exist in part to fend off homosexual impulses, and are often accompanied by homophobic attitudes (1985, p.1). 'Homoerotic' refers to depictions of same sex desire that are not expressed through sexual acts, 'homosexual' to same sex desire that is literalised through homosexual identification and/or practice. Relations between military men in the Third Reich were promoted as 'homosocial' only, drawing on a tradition of male bonding experienced during the trench warfare of the First World War. By contrast, the homosexual leader of the S.A.(Sturmabteilung or 'Storm Detachment'), Eric Rohm, was the victim of a 1934 putsch, the 'Night of the Long Knives', apparently designed to rid the National Socialist party of its morally degenerate elements. (In reality it was a power struggle between different factions of the party; the issue of Rohm's sexuality was a justification to dissolve a group that had become too independent for Hitler's liking.)

*Valkyrie*, however, alludes to homoerotic relations between some of the soldiers, amongst them Stauffenberg and his aide, and as such draws on an eroticized martial ideology, espoused by the historical Stauffenberg. The director of *Valkyrie*, Bryan Singer, is openly gay, which may explain the film's overt depictions of male physical aestheticism and its engagement with, and extension of, homoeroticism in the Cruise's persona. One of the few commentators making the link between the homoeroticism present in *Valkyrie* and Cruise's sex appeal is the gay critic Mark Simpson [2009]. He remarks on the 'spectacularly cute and devoted young blond male *aide de camps* resplendent in Hugo Boss tailoring that all the generals have tagging along' as well as the extreme fetishism of the film, due in part to the aforementioned uniforms. Simpson also suggests that the motif of Stauffenberg's damaged body works only because he is

played by Cruise, whose persona is so founded on his physical attractiveness and narcissism.

The film's homoerotic relations take place in the almost entirely male environments that the characters find themselves in. Stauffenberg is first seen on the African front, where he is involved in the explosion that badly injures him. Most of his recuperation upon returning to Germany is shown as taking place in hospital, not at home. He is rarely shown in a domestic setting, in spite of his apparent paternal concern for the future of his children. The only scene of significance that takes place in the Stauffenberg home is when the family takes cover during an air raid, included because it shows the genesis of the idea for the Valkyrie plot. Other family scenes are limited to one in which his wife visits him alone in hospital and their farewell, when she and the children depart to the countryside for safety should the plot fail (again, the Cruise character is incapable of protecting those he loves). Their departure allows Stauffenberg to devote his time to implementing the Valkyrie plot with his male co-conspirators. His most significant relationship is the friendship he forms with his young aide, Lieutenant Werner von Haeften (Jamie Parker), who remains loyal to him to the end.

That is not to say that the relationship between the co-conspirators is not without difficulties. This band of brothers may plot together against the tyrannical father, but it is Stauffenberg who is left most vulnerable by the older figures with whom he makes the deal: he is the one to plant the bomb, he is the one who will be immediately implicated if the plan goes awry. Olbricht's (Bill Nighy) hesitation in responding to the news that the bomb has detonated puts Stauffenberg in danger; as Olbricht's aide accuses him: 'he did his part and now you're abandoning him!' Olbricht's stalling is seen as a cowardly attempt to back out of what has already been put in motion. In this regard, Stauffenberg is ironically heroic. Hitler (David Bamber) admits this much when he first meets Stauffenberg, to sign the Valkyrie paperwork, telling him he is honoured to meet a soldier who has suffered so much: 'If only there were more like you... an ideal German officer'. This is ambiguous: is he an ideal in spite of his injuries or because of them? This patriarch appears to express his approval of the son's willingness to suffer and be mutilated. Hitler tells Stauffenberg that he knows his Wagner, alludes to his opera *Die Walküre*<sup>5</sup> (*The Valkyrie*) and the Nordic myth of these handmaidens of the Gods, who chose which soldiers would live and which would die, sparing only the very bravest.



Stauffenberg is braver than the more senior officers around him, and he takes most of the risk in the conspiracy. But the fact remains that it is a covert operation. In keeping with Cruise's previous military and quasi-military roles, we never see Stauffenberg fighting. His real triumphs are persuasion: getting Hitler to sign paperwork, winning senior military figure Ludwig Beck (Terence Stamp) around with his argument that Hitler must be killed rather than deposed, persuading other officials to join the conspiracy. It is a victory of salesmanship, communications and bureaucracy (the telephone and the telegram office are central to the operation) not force. One scene of Stauffenberg on the telephone persuading others to join the revolt echoes Cruise's role in *Jerry Maguire*; yet again he plays the salesman. He is also shown explaining the plot to the senior military men in a montage that references the *Mission: Impossible* series: describing how the operation will take place, a flash forward shows the Wolf's Lair, co-conspirator Fellgiebel (Eddie Izzard) cutting communications, followed by the Reserve Army being dispatched, all accompanied by his voice-over describing the plan. So self-conscious are the allusions to Cruise's prior films that Mark Simpson dubbed the film *Mission: Impossible IV: the Fuhrer's Trousers* (2009).

Structured around the impending punishment meted out by the tyrannical father, the film has a psychodynamic, as well as historical, certainty - Hitler will punish this band of brothers personally for their revolt. (The predestined failure of the assassination parallels the role of prophesy in *Oedipus Rex*, and in Old Testament anticipations of Christ's crucifixion.) The conspirators' loyalty to Hitler is couched in personal terms. The oath taken by Nazi soldiers to Adolf Hitler is shown in German and English titles (and spoken in German) in the opening shot of *Valkryie*. The characters are white, in a typesetting evocative of fascist propaganda posters, on a background of red. As the words fade, the shot appears to swivel round, drawing out to reveal the red material of a flag, which is finally identified as the swastika.

This is the oath in full:

I swear by God this sacred oath that I shall render unconditional obedience to Adolf Hitler, the Führer of the German Reich and people, supreme commander of the armed forces, and that I shall at all times be ready, as a brave soldier, to give my life for this oath.

The words allude to the sacred nature of the obedience sworn to Hitler, vividly demonstrating the religious theory of nationalism proposed by Marvin and Ingle. In the terms of this pledge, the soldier is a potential object of sacrifice. The power of an absolute Father over his obedient sons is established in the opening moments of the film. However, the oath also suggests another ritualized promise: the vows taken in marriage. In this way the relationship between Hitler and his soldiers is eroticized, as it is in the Oedipus mythology, and in the homoerotic relation between soldiers that the film portrays.

In *Valkyrie*, Stauffenberg rejects the ideology to which he has committed himself as a German officer: again the Cruise character refuses to sacrifice himself to the corrupt Father. In the earliest scenes of the film, set on the North African front, he is shown in his quarters, writing his journal. A voice-over, which begins in German and cross-fades into English (an oral equivalent of the visual transition in the presentation of the oath described above) expresses his deep concerns about the loss of civilian lives, and the horrors of the concentration camps.<sup>6</sup> He describes the Nazis' crimes as a 'stain on the honour of the German army', whose mission is now to 'save human lives'. He signs off by indicating that 'We can serve Germany or the Führer, not both.' Stauffenberg is figured as a loyal German who now perceives Hitler as a threat to the country.

In the scene that follows, Stauffenberg is shown with a senior military officer, querying Hitler's strategy of sending so many soldiers to fight in North Africa rather than in Europe. It is this kind of trouble-making that got Stauffenberg assigned to North Africa in the first place: even as a Colonel he is an outsider, on the edge of power. Moments after this interchange, there is an Allied aerial attack on the camp, and this senior official is killed. Stauffenberg pulls an injured young soldier (note that it is a youthful figure, not the aging official whom he rescues; later he will be closely associated with a younger male colleague) into the back of his car. As he attempts to start the engine, a plane swoops down to fire. The car explodes and he is thrown to the ground. A close-up shows his injured body, revealing a wounded arm and blood seeping into the sand from his eye. Figured Oedipally, Stauffenberg is symbolically castrated immediately after challenging the will of the Führer.

Stauffenberg's wife Nina (Carice van Houten) visits him in hospital where he recovers. Entering the ward, she sees him lying in bed, with a bandaged head and

amputated hand. He appears unconscious, consigned to passivity, as she stands with the doctor, discussing his injuries. It is one of the few scenes in which Nina figures, as she soon leaves town with their children for fear of reprisals should the plot go wrong. In the following scene Stauffenberg struggles to dress himself behind a curtain in the ward; not only incapable of fighting, he finds even the most basic physical tasks difficult. In his dress uniform he hands out medals to bedridden soldiers. His voice-over over these images declares 'I have nothing to leave my children'. A wide shot of the hospital cuts to a statue of Christ, then to a shot of Stauffenberg in a church pew, talking to a co-conspirator. The latter departs, leaving Stauffenberg alone, as a wide shot reveals a ruined cathedral, its ceiling blown off to reveal huge swathes of sky. Like Christ, Stauffenberg will be sacrificed – not for the future of man, but for the hoped-for redemption of the nation state. It is for his children, the future of Germany, that he commits treason.

Stauffenberg's injury is markedly debilitating. When he hastily assembles the bomb intended for Hitler without the help of his aide, he struggles to repack the satchel to prevent discovery. However, he also uses his amputation in an aggressive fashion. When he and General Olbricht go to see General Fromm (Tom Wilkinson) in a failed attempt to persuade him to join the coup, Fromm insists that Stauffenberg salute the portrait of Hitler he has hanging on the desk behind him. When he raises his amputated limb, it is clear that Germany has been figuratively mutilated by National Socialism. Later Stauffenberg purposefully cuts himself shaving, an act which allows him the opportunity to change his shirt in private at the Wolf's Lair and assemble the bomb which he will plant in the war rooms. That a tiny blood stain on his shirt is considered unacceptable in the presence of Hitler, reveals that the military dress worn by senior military men is only decorative. When he attempts to escape the Nazis who have come for him and the other conspirators, he is shot in the shoulder, and the untended wound bleeds down his hand and onto the floor as he stands silently, waiting to be sentenced. Blood is literally seen spilling in a sacrifice to the German nation.

In additional quasi-religious symbolism, Hitler's portrait is omnipresent, the image to which these soldiers salute as they depart, a grotesque idolatry. Olbricht hides the signed documents requesting Fromm's arrest in a safe hidden behind the portrait of the Führer; when the Valkyrie operation begins he must take down the portrait to retrieve the papers, the first indication of revolt. Ritual cleansing also plays an understated role

in symbolism of the film.<sup>7</sup> Cruise first attempts to dress himself behind a curtain in his hospital ward beside a sink (the pain of dressing leads him to be physically sick); he dresses for the second of his meetings with the Führer by a sink; Fellgiebel throws the ice from his drink, and with it Stauffenberg's glass eye, into a rest room sink; Reserve Army leader Major Otto Ernst Remer (Thomas Krestchman), upon receiving a second notice to assemble his troops, throws the telegram into the sink in front of him (as he is having his hair cut). The sink suggests a baptismal font, and the ritual washing away of original sin, possible only because of Christ's blood sacrifice.

Stauffenberg's mutilated body reflects the sacrifice he has already made for the nation and is one of the central objects of the film's visual attention. Though he wears an eye patch much of the time, he inserts his glass eye for important meetings, such as those with Hitler. The eye is kept in a small silver box, which he plays with absent-mindedly on the way to one visit with Hitler and other senior officials. It is also used aggressively, when he leaves it in the drink of a colleague, General Erich Fellgiebel, whom he wishes to persuade to join the plot. Played by the transvestite comedian Eddie Izzard, Fellgiebel is something of a military failure, first shown in a nightclub with a group of women. He wears glasses, another mark of physical inadequacy and foreshadowing what will be revealed as a total lack of foresight. He meets with Stauffenberg in the nightclub's toilet<sup>8</sup>, a space replete with homoerotic undertones. The casting in this film, while appearing counter-generic, also serves the queer undertones of the film. Terence Stamp, who plays Ludwig Beck, is well known to contemporary audiences for his turn as a drag queen in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Stephan Elliot, 1994). Even Tom Wilkinson, who plays General Friedrich Fromm, gained success in *The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo, 1997), the famed British comedy of failed masculinity. These military men seem inadequate in their roles, more half-rate bureaucrats than Third Reich role models, but all are suggestive of queer masculinities.

Homoeroticism marks the film in various ways, linking into a pre-existing mythology surrounding the military aspects of National Socialism. There are two, partially related, issues at stake here. The combination of sexual perversity and Nazism has, Ilan Avisar asserts, become a popular motif in modern culture, used to highlight 'both physical decadence and moral degeneracy, emphasising the inherent linkage between the two' (1988, p.158). This features most explicitly in pornography, which uses a WWII setting

and Nazi trappings (p.163). This approach is, Avisar cautions, laced with potential moral problems. In her article 'Fascinating Fascism', Susan Sontag comments on how the black boots, leather and sharp tailoring of S.S. uniforms are fetishised<sup>9</sup>:

the SS was the ideal incarnation of fascism's overt assertion of the righteousness of violence, the right to have total power over others and to treat them as absolutely inferior. It was in the SS that this assertion seemed most complete, because they acted it out in a singularly brutal and efficient manner; and because they dramatized it by linking themselves to certain aesthetic standards. The SS was designed as an elite military community that would be not only supremely violent but also supremely beautiful.

(1980, p.99)

Sontag, like Avisar, discusses the link between fascism and sexual representations, as in certain pornographic output the 'SS has become a reference of sexual adventurism' (1980, p.102). She explicitly makes the link between fascism and sadomasochism, linking Genet's claim that 'Fascism is theatre' with the dramaturgy of sadomasochistic acts (p.103). More generally, fascist aesthetics 'flow from (and justify) a preoccupation with situations of control, submissive behavior, extravagant effort, and the endurance of pain; they endorse two seemingly opposite states, egomania and servitude.' (p.91) Following Siegfried Kracauer's prewar discussion of the mass ornament,<sup>10</sup> Sontag elaborates on the choreography and uniformed costuming of the masses:

The rendering of movement in grandiose and rigid patterns is another element in common, for such choreography rehearses the very unity of the polity. The masses are made to take form, be design. Hence mass athletic demonstrations, a choreographed display of bodies, are a valued activity in all totalitarian countries; and the art of the gymnast, so popular now in Eastern Europe, also evokes recurrent features of fascist aesthetics; the holding in or confining of force; military precision.

(Sontag, 1980, pp.91-92)

This aesthetic is cited in the lines of soldiers assembled at moments in *Valkyrie*, high angled wide shots showing off the graphic shape that the massed troops take. Less obviously, it is also indicated by the shapes that the women in the telegram office assume, their regular spaced desks forming a grid, their tap-tapping on their type-writers transforming their individual bodies into parts of a larger machine (these women are depicted onscreen for a longer period than Stauffenberg's wife).

In the homoerotic aesthetics of *Valkyrie*, the figure of Reserve Army Major Remer differs from the older military figures at the centre of the intrigue. Remer is a relatively young man, handsome in a blond Aryan fashion, and first seen swimming. As he emerges from the pool to read a telegram, his athletic physique is revealed. When he is interrupted with a second message telling him to gather his troops, he is at the barber's having his hair cut. He responds to the infringement of his grooming time by telling the messenger that 'in Ancient Greece you would have been killed for this', suggesting both his own vanity and an allusion to the homosexual culture of ancient Athens. His whole image is bound up in a homoeroticism linked to a military, and specifically Nazi, ideology.

The reference to Athenian culture is telling, as it invokes indirectly the sexualised bond between older and younger men privileged at one stage in the city state's history. This is a model that fascinated 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century German homosexuals, that and a 'male community linked by bonds of honour, something like knighthood, which would express the aesthetic sense through the veneration of beautiful, heroic young people' (Tamagne, 2004, p.96). The *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen* ('The Community of the Special'), formed in 1903 by Adolf Brand and Benedict Friedlander, drew heavily on themes of German romanticism in their depiction of 'Männerbund' or male camaraderie. They considered 'male bonding as the ideal of masculinity fundamental for cultural achievements, education and patriotic and military values' (Oosterhuis, 1991, p.119). A 1903 introduction to Brand's magazine 'Der Eigene' makes explicit the advantage of 'intimate relationships between youth and man', considered necessary for the former's 'physical and spiritual education' (Oosterhuis, 1991, p.122).

The philosophy of the *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen* was close to that of poet Stefan George, the 'high priest of homoeroticism... whose poetry celebrating the beauty of a young boy was reserved for a very limited elite readership' (Tamagne, 2004, p.266). One of his disciples was Claus von Stauffenberg, who along with his brothers Berthold and Alexander, formed part of the poet's close circle of acquaintances. Introduced in the spring of 1924, through Dr Maria Fehling who suggested 'at least two of the brothers were suitable for the circle' (Hoffman, 2003, p.22) – meaning Claus and Berthold (who also took part in the plot against Hitler) – all three brothers were soon

adherents of the poet's philosophy. Admission was sealed with a kiss, as indicated by Alexander's lines:

[...] my lips enquire  
Your eye was silent and see the circle round  
Is written only when from mouth to mouth  
The lips speak their silence answer

(Stefan George Archive, Stuttgart - Hoffman, 2003, p.24)

Alexander in particular took to writing passionate poetry to George. The attraction appears to have been mutual: well worn manuscripts of poems written by the brothers were found among George's personal effects. (Hoffman, 2003, p.22).<sup>11</sup>

The Männerbund sat uneasily with certain tenets of National Socialism. The glorification of male bonding and its attachment to nationalism had its roots in the comradeship of the Great War and as such 'several right-wing spokesmen, in memoirs and war novels, invested male friendship with nationalist virtues, as it was associated with communal sense, charismatic leadership, militarism and self-sacrifice' (Oosterhuis, 1997, p.198). However, the Männerbund undermined the concept of heterosexual family, another cornerstone of Nazi ideology. In a speech to S.S. officers, Heinrich Himmler declared that the push for militarism and masculinity could encourage homosexuality (Oosterhuis, 1997, p.201). (This was in 1937, only three years after the 'Night of the Long Knives'.) Both Nazism's homosexual history and aesthetic can be found in *Valkyrie*. Indeed, Wagner's opera is influential in his 'use of strong and healthy male physiques to symbolise national strength and his emphasis on male comradeship as the essence of national vigor' (Pursell, 2008, p.127).<sup>12</sup> The figure of Remer swimming is the film's representative of the National Socialist ideal. The real Stauffenberg had himself been handsome, vigorous, over six feet tall, a National Socialist ideal before his injuries.

Remer is the most homoeroticised figure in *Valkyrie*, but another young attractive blond officer, Lieutenant Hagen (Florian Panzner) is responsible for leading the S.S. to Stauffenberg and his co-conspirators and it is he who shouts the orders to the firing squad. Finally, there is Stauffenberg's young aide, Lieutenant Werner von Haeften, whom he persuades to join him in the plot against Hitler. The 'corruption' of young soldiers to take part in the coup can be seen as an allusion to the homosexual contagion the Nazis feared. Von Haeften is by Stauffenberg's side constantly, up to and including

his final moments. As Stauffenberg waits for death, he implores the others to look members of the firing squad 'in the eyes, they'll remember you', as if anticipating their status as heroicised martyrs. When Stauffenberg stands in front of the squad von Haeften rushes out in front of him, taking the hail of bullets meant for Stauffenberg. It is an act of homoerotic fellowship and martyrdom. Moments later, another round of fire hits Stauffenberg and he crumples to the ground, slumping on his side in the position shown after his wounding in North Africa. Although the final images of the film show Stauffenberg's wife, the last face he sees is that of von Haeften, before he is shot down.<sup>13</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Thus *Valkyrie* continues and intensifies the homoeroticism that is characteristic of Cruise's persona. It brings together the homoerotic bonds typical of his films and concomitant lack of heterosexual interest (exaggerated by the all male environment) with the terrifying patriarch from whom he is unable to escape. More than any of his films to date, Cruise's body is broken by the might of the patriarchy, first in the explosion that maims him, then in his assassination by firing squad. He is figuratively castrated by the patriarch, sacrificed to expel Oedipal aggression and dispel the threat which the son poses to the father. Even at this late date, Cruise is unable to overcome the patriarch and accede to a place of power.



## Notes

1. Eva A. Keuls discusses the practice of anal sex between man and (male) youth as an initiation ritual: 'In order to enter into adult society the novice undergoes certain ordeals of humiliation, toil and submission to his elders' (1985, p.276). He learns to take his place in the power hierarchy and will eventually be able to inflict this on the next generation. (p.276)
2. The concept of the board room/war room as the locus of power, and Cruise's tenuous access to this space, can be considered in relation to the 2007 film *Lions for Lambs* (Robert Redford). Cruise plays Senator Jasper Irving who, in his governmental offices, discloses to journalist Janine Roth (Meryl Streep) the latest government strategy in the Afghanistan war effort. It is from this bureaucratic space that military policy, which will determine the fate of young soldiers fighting abroad, is decided upon. In this instance Cruise has swapped positions as the representative of the patriarchy.
3. As in *The Firm*, Cruise's character is shown explicit photographs by a threatening older man which can be interpreted as form of abuse, through exposure to distressing imagery, and a reminder of the villain's powers. (Both films have a Robert Towne credit.)
4. The film also sends up the extremes of method acting preparation: star Kirk Lazarus (Robert Downey Jr.) undergoes a melatonin implant operation to darken his skin in preparation for playing an African-American soldier. This recalls Cruise's own method preparation for the part of Ron Kovic in *Born on the Fourth of July*, which included, according to press sources, Cruise spending time in a wheelchair to better understand Kovic's experience of the physical world.
5. Richard Wagner's 'Ride of Valkyries', from his opera *Die Walküre* (1856), was used in the score of *The Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffiths, 1915) (compiled by Joseph Carl Briel and Griffiths, it would have been played by an orchestra in live accompaniment to the film) and *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979). Its use in the former film, considered from a modern perspective, is deeply problematic in its association with white supremacism and questions the type of heroism the film seems to celebrate. In the latter film, its use is an ironic reflection on and sabotaging of the heroic ideal, in keeping with the film's subversive representation of the Vietnam War. Each film tackles issues of race and violence that define the American psyche on two of its most definitive historical moments: the epoch of slavery and the Vietnam War.
6. Invoking the Nazi concentration camps is filmic short hand for the evil of National Socialism. Director Bryan Singer directed *X-Men* (2000), a film which opens at the gates of Auschwitz-Birkenau. He also directed *Apt Pupil* (1997), an adaptation of a Stephen King novella, which charts the relationship between a teenage boy, Todd (Brad Renfro), and his neighbour who turns out to be a Nazi. The casting of gay star Ian McKellan, and the homoerotic undertones of the relationship between the much younger male and older man, invoke much of what has been discussed vis-à-vis National Socialism and the psychosexual dynamic played out in many of Cruise's films.
7. Water may also refer to the National Socialist concept of 'cleansing' the nation of impurities, including the Jewish population of Europe. Water suggests the shower blocks used for gassing victims in the Nazi death camps, and is referenced by Singer in *Apt Pupil*. See Picart and McKahan for further discussion of this film.
8. Cruise's earlier films feature two scenes based in the hand-basin area of the men's washroom: in *Top Gun*, following Goose's death, a distraught Maverick is reassured by his instructor Viper who tells him he was not to blame; in *Jerry Maguire* Jerry and his client Rod Tidwell have a heated argument following Tidwell's accusation that Jerry wants him to 'dance'. It is a unique space vis-à-vis masculine authority, being neither the battleground/sports field nor war room/locker room, but a liminal space.
9. In 1997 it came to light that the now famous clothes designer Hugo Boss was responsible for the tailoring of S.S. uniforms, only adding to claims of aesthetic rigors in the upper echelons of the NSDAP. 'Hugo Boss Acknowledges Link to Nazi Regime', (no author) 15 August 1997, in *The New York Times* Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/08/15/business/hugo-boss-acknowledges-link-to-nazi-regime.html> (Accessed: 11 June 2011)

10. Writing in 1927, Kracauer suggests modern spectacles - such as those performed by the 'Tiller Girls' dance troupe - are a 'mass ornament', abstracted and stripped of organic life: 'the bearer of the ornaments is the *mass* and not the people' (1995, p.76). The structure of the mass ornament reflects contemporary society for Kracauer: 'since the principle of the *capitalist production process* does not arise purely out of nature, it must destroy the organisms that it regards either as means or resistance' (p.77). People labour within the production process without grasping a sense of the totality: 'Like the pattern in the stadium, the organization stands above the masses, a monstrous figure whose creator withdraws it from the eyes of its bearers, and barely even observes it himself' (p.77).
11. The Stauffenbergs were appealing to George because of their physical beauty (in particular Berthold) and their supposed association with the imperial Staufen dynasty (Hoffman, 2003, p.23) and Emperor Frederick II (Hoffman, 2003, p.30). Claus's poems, dating from 1923, declare him and his brothers 'the blond heirs of the Staufens and Ottonians' (Hoffman, 2003, p.30). Their membership was to Stefan George's 'secret Germany', a phrase scribed by Karl Wolfskehl to describe the 'dormant forces out of which the Image of the Nation was beginning to rise' (Hoffman, 2003, p.33). This secret Germany had, his followers believed, been given life by George's visionary poetry. Hoffman asserts that 'George's teachings became a factor in Stauffenberg's decision in 1942 to kill the dictator because he had deceived the German nation and abused the volkisch ideology to draw the nation into complicity in unspeakable crimes and atrocities' (introduction, xiii).
12. Writer Tim Pursell draws attention to the ways in which Wagner and Wagnerism can be used or read 'queerly'. He indicates that in the opera *Siegfried* the title character stumbles across the sleeping Brunnhilde, mistaking her first for a man and frightened by his attraction towards her (2008, p.122), an ambiguity that remains even once she has been identified as female. In Wagner's series of operas featuring Siegfried, his body is used in the pursuit of the rebirth of society (Pursell, 2008, p.125).
13. Mark Simpson comments that 'Cruise sees Parker's handsome face instead of the muzzles of the firing squad. This, the film seems to suggest, is the right kind of male soldierly devotion. Devotion to ugly evil old Hitler is the wrong kind.' [2009])

### **The Star Persona of Tom Cruise: Conclusion**

Tom Cruise became a star at a time of economic and social flux in the United States. Gender norms were being renegotiated, influenced by the changes in the postindustrial labour market, the country's defeat in Vietnam and by the gains of second wave feminism. The popularity of his films both domestically within North America and internationally is, I believe, indicative of the success of his star persona to articulate and assuage modern social concerns. His persona reflects an ideological compromise, presenting a masculine identity based on a series of paradoxes: martial yet not engaged in combat; consuming luxury goods while competing with other men; physically active but not engaged in manual labour. Cruise's characters negotiate key anxieties regarding the male body and its figuring as an object of desire. This is exaggerated by their apparent lack of erotic interest in women and preoccupation with male-male relationships. These aspects of the Cruise persona allow for the apparent resolution of ideological conflicts, with the site of the star 'concealing prevalent contradictions or problems' within hegemonic ideology (Dyer, 1988, p.27).

What ideological conflicts specifically does the Tom Cruise persona negotiate? His military and quasi-military films present the paradox of the soldier away from the battlefield. *Top Gun* (Tony Scott, 1986), the film which made Cruise a star, presents a young naval aviator at the elite 'Top Gun' training school. In *A Few Good Men* (Rob Reiner, 1992) the star plays a naval lawyer who has never been engaged in active service, preferring the courtroom. In *The Last Samurai* (Edward Zwick, 2003) Cruise's character, Nathan Algren, reinvents himself as a samurai warrior, but does not fight until the closing scenes, in which he is saved from injury while his Japanese peers perish. In *Valkyrie* (Bryan Singer, 2008), his Colonel Stauffenberg spends most of the film planning a coup from the confines of urban Berlin, far from the battlefield. Cruise presents a martial figure rarely seen in combat – a perfect post-Vietnam hero.

The star's films are also characterized by his self-conscious performance and tendency towards explicit role play – this is apparent in the number of his films which involve staging or performing in some manner. In *Cocktail* (Roger Donaldson, 1988), *Rain Man* (Barry Levinson, 1988), *Jerry Maguire* (Cameron Crowe, 1996) and *Magnolia* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999) he plays a showman or salesman. In his action films Cruise dons idealised masculine identities (e.g. soldier, racing driver, secret agent) that highlight the enacted, imitative nature of gender. At the same time, his verbal acuity

and white-collar positioning are symptomatic of contemporaneous social trends: he undertakes the feminized service sector work of the modern era while retaining masculine qualities of competitive drive and skill. Yet, his performing body hints at the fraying of this gender compromise: Cruise is engaged in physical exertion which is unproductive (his is not a laboring body) and this positions him as an object of spectacle. This threatens to place his characters in the space typically reserved in Hollywood film for women, who are characterized by their 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (Mulvey, 1992, p.27). However, it is also a position assigned to the boyish man of cinema – Cruise's predecessors in this regard include 1950s stars such as Montgomery Clift, James Dean and Marlon Brando, characterized by their attractive appearances and social marginalization. Cruise's spectacular body is symptomatic of this marginal position vis-à-vis the hegemony, a point shored up by characters' alignment with black and Asian characters in various states of subordination.

Cruise's film relationships with men can be understood from a psychoanalytic as well as a social perspective. His opposition to patriarchal forces is indicative of the son's Oedipal struggle against the father. Figured in Freudian terms, his characters are repeatedly threatened by punishing fathers with psychological or physical aggression – the most terrifying instances occurring in *The Firm* (Sydney Pollack, 1993), *Eyes Wide Shut* (Stanley Kubrick, 1999), *Minority Report* (Steven Spielberg, 2002) and latterly *Valkyrie*. His response to paternal rage betrays the paradox his persona represents: he evades the father and in doing so regresses to an earlier psychosexual stage. This is why his films are populated by maternally inflected women, even and especially those in whom he apparently has a romantic interest. Conversely, while his films typically feature an aggressive patriarch, they also include men with whom Cruise forms a close bond. This is suggestive of the homosexual object choice which the male child forms in regression from viewing the father as a rival for the mother's affections.

Cruise's persona then, is absolutely predicated on his youth – both in terms of his appealing physicality and opposition to the figural father. The films which have departed from this model have merely projected these attributes onto another character: this is true of *Interview With the Vampire* (Neil Jordan, 1994), *Collateral* (Michael Mann, 2004) and *Lions for Lambs* (Robert Redford, 2007), in which other young men take the Cruise role (although in the example of *Interview*, Cruise's co-star Brad Pitt is only a year younger than him). It is used to comedic effect in his cameo as producer

Les Grossman in *Tropic Thunder* (Ben Stiller, 2008). What is less certain is if it is sustainable into later middle age. For it is clear that Cruise's aging appearance has closed down his casting opportunities. His youthful persona as Robert Pardi argues, 'is a juvenile conception, and fans to the contrary, it is an image which Cruise cannot go on revamping forever. That crooked grin could become as obsolete as Mary Pickford's curls' (2000, p.285). Meanwhile Cruise's body has increasingly remained clad, but more than that, it has become violated and damaged. Certainly, his appearance in *Collateral* was significantly muted in terms of erotic objectification, as it was in *Lions for Lambs* and *Valkyrie*. Gaylyn Studlar wonders 'if the mature body of Tom Cruise becomes "unseen", will we remain interested in the nonboy with the nonbody?' (2001, p. 182). Will audiences remain interested in a youthful persona projected by an aging individual? What was crucial to Cruise's success may be the key to his undoing. So then, Cruise's challenge is to shed the aspects of persona which are no longer tenable due to his age. The possible issues surrounding Cruise's aging physicality divide into two: his erotic appeal and his physically active nature. When other long-dormant action franchises have returned with an aging star he is typically paired with a younger double e.g. Bruce Willis and Justin Long in *Die Hard 4.0* (Len Wiseman, 2007), Harrison Ford and Shia LaBeouf in *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (Steven Spielberg, 2008), and, in a tongue-in-cheek gender inversion, Sigourney Weaver and Winona Ryder in *Alien: Resurrection* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997). An attempt at such a pairing was made in *Mission: Impossible III* (J.J. Abrams, 2006), with a greater emphasis on the whole team, in particular, the younger presence of Jonathan Rhys Meyers.

However, it should be noted that none of the star personas of Willis, Ford or Weaver are predicated on *eroticized* youth in the manner of Cruise. And although the younger stars may have shared some of the demanding stunts in these films, the senior partners remained physically active in their roles. Stars who play action hero roles are increasingly extending their length of their careers: figures such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone and Clint Eastwood have continued in this role long after their 50<sup>th</sup> birthdays. Thus, the capacity for physical endurance is not the reason for the crisis triggered by Cruise's aging. Films such as *Collateral*, which took great pains visually to age Cruise, or *Mission: Impossible III*, demand a high level of athleticism from the star. Indeed, in his more recent film, *Knight and Day* (James Mangold, 2010), Cruise's role as secret agent Roy Miller engages him in a number of physically

demanding scenarios (typically for Cruise's persona, reports on the film's production emphasized the star's commitment to performing his own stunts<sup>1</sup>). However, in this film the weight of erotic spectacle falls back on the female star, Cameron Diaz. That is the point: Cruise's growing older is not so corrosive to his status as a physically active hero as it might first appear. In fact, his early persona is not strictly speaking an action persona: in *Top Gun* and *Days of Thunder* (Tony Scott, 1990) he pilots a plane or drives a race car, but does not embark on physically grueling heroic tasks. He does not become an action hero proper until the first *Mission: Impossible* (Brian De Palma, 1996). What is at stake, however, is his figuration as an erotically imbued, highly theatrical, physical performer and this is Studlar's point. For although erotic spectacle can be projected onto another character there is no guarantee that the other actor fully embodies the auto-eroticism so fundamental to the Cruise persona (and it really has to be a male rather than a female star for the projection to work). At any rate, Cruise's maturing body is no longer able to bear the weight of physical objectification that it once did and this presents a real problem for the star.

There is also a second problem related to Cruise's aging. It is not only Cruise's physical appeal that underpins the success of his persona, but also his psychological positioning as the figural son evading the rage of the father. His characters work hard to avoid growing up – a compromise which has proven highly appealing to audiences. Cruise's figuring as the son inhibits his ascendancy to the position of patriarch – the only exceptions are in the conscious deviations from the persona, such as in *Tropic Thunder*, which works as comedy because of its very opposition to the abiding persona. In the few films in which he plays a father, he is characterized by his failure in the paternal role. In *Minority Report*, his character Jon Anderton's son has been kidnapped from a public swimming pool while in his care. In *War of the Worlds* (Steven Spielberg, 2005) he plays an irresponsible father who avoids spending time with his children. Although he safely returns his daughter to his ex-wife's (and her new husband's) care, he loses his son to a militia who set out to oppose the alien invaders. They are only reunited at the end of the film when the son finds his own way back to his mother. Cruise's figuring as an action hero outside the Oedipal dynamic has proven unpopular, as *Knight and Day* demonstrates. As the star ages his narratives of wish-fulfillment become more transparent. The mechanisms underpinning the persona are stripped bare; rather than providing enjoyment to the viewer in the form of a psychological 'compromise', they are exposed as ideological sleights of hand. While a

young man can present an image of evasion masquerading as bravery, ambition covering over social inadequacy, in an older man the contradiction is more apparent. (An older, impoverished man betrays the falsehood of the American dream.) If Cruise's persona is predicated on a certain kind of arrested development, the conceit has been outgrown by middle-age. The only recent films in which Cruise has been able to retain the persecuted son element of his persona and make the plot 'work' psychodynamically present the punitive father in terms of international or global threat. *Valkyrie* pitted Cruise's character Colonel Stauffenberg against the historically unrivalled malevolent 'father' Adolf Hitler. Here, Cruise's middle-aged soldier is the youngest member of the conspiracy plot against Hitler, so in relation to his peers appears junior. In *War of the Worlds*, vulnerable humankind is faced with an extra-terrestrial enemy that cannot be beaten; Cruise's blue collar hero is just one man among many trying to escape and thus his flight does not appear cowardly. (The film's director, Steven Spielberg, previously depicted the Oedipally avenging father in the form of a shark in his early film *Jaws* [1975].) In terms of evading a persecuting, unstoppable, force – the all-powerful father - *War of the Worlds* recreates a familiar scenario for the Cruise character. Yet these examples remain exceptional. Cruise can no longer be positioned in opposition to a punitive father figure as he has been throughout his film career. His youthful performing persona is untenable for his future films.

Moreover, the decline that Cruise's star persona faces is only based partly on his aging. His image successfully negotiated 1980s social issues, offering solutions to certain ideological crises: in *Top Gun* he triumphantly overcomes the ghosts of Vietnam to resuscitate American national pride and embodies the optimistic, and materialistic, zeitgeist of the 1980s. But his persona no longer captures the spirit of the age. The United States has moved to a darker place, having entered into overseas wars it cannot extricate itself from, as well as a traumatic attack on home soil. Following 9/11 and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the issues facing post-millennium America are radically different. These land wars have given the lie to the message of *Top Gun* that military might and technological superiority guarantee victory (already demonstrated in Vietnam but disavowed by the Cruise persona). Furthermore, the global financial crisis of 2008, triggered largely by U.S. banking practices, makes the glib consumerism of the 1980s that the Cruise image embodied seem even more dated and unpalatable.

Cruise's filmography takes a darker turn after the events of September 11, 2001, with most of his films demonstrating a military inflection after this time (more so even than in his earlier career). *Minority Report* deals with the trauma of loss and preordained guilt; *The Last Samurai* tackles the ignoble practices of the U.S. Army (albeit in period guise); *Collateral* hints at the brutalisation of those working in the Special Forces and the presence of private military companies in modern warfare; *War of the Worlds* deals with attack on home soil; *Mission: Impossible III* asserts the impossibility of getting rid of arms dealers who do business with terrorists (although Cruise's Ethan Hunt nevertheless tries to do so). *Tropic Thunder* poses Cruise as the malign father, leaving his troops (actors in this case) to die in the jungle. By a similar token, as Senator Jasper Irving in *Lions for Lambs* he sends young Americans to their death in a misguided Afghanistan campaign. Returning to his positioning as figural son in *Valkyrie*, his opposition to the father is framed as hopeless from the beginning: we know how this episode of history ends. His body is increasingly broken, from the forced castration/eye operation of *Minority Report*, through to his bloodied visage in *Mission: Impossible III* and the mutilated and shot body of *Valkyrie*.

Alternative versions of American masculinity are now being offered up by Hollywood, ones that are more damaged than the Cruise image could ever allow him to render plausible. Films of the last decade have demonstrated an increasing willingness to show their heroes in positions of extreme physical trauma. Even the *Bond* franchise, a touchstone of phallic strength across its fifty year history, shows Daniel Craig's Bond in an explicit torture scene in *Casino Royale* (Martin Campbell, 2006), as well as forming a romantic attachment to the heroine, evidencing emotional as well as physical vulnerability. The revivifying of the *Batman* series of films, with *Batman Begins* (Christopher Nolan, 2005) and *The Dark Knight* (Christopher Nolan, 2008), portrays a flawed human hero motivated to superhuman achievements by familial trauma and a failure of the system to protect its citizens (his parents are killed by hoodlums on the street after an evening at the theatre). Heroes on film are increasingly caught in government conspiracies that treat them as exploitable resources in service of darker geo-political machinations: the *Bourne* series of films (*The Bourne Identity* [Doug Liman, 2002], *The Bourne Supremacy* [Paul Greengrass, 2004] *The Bourne Ultimatum* [Paul Greengrass, 2007]) and *The Departed* (Martin Scorsese, 2006) are two cases in point (although the latter deals with domestic police operations in Boston). *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009), by 2011 the highest grossing film of all time, features a



paraplegic war veteran hero. Former marine Jake Sully (Sam Worthington) is only able to experience full freedom of movement when he dons an avatar – a piece of technology developed by the U.S. military industrial complex for the exploitation of extra-terrestrial natural resources. Together with research scientists, it is Sully's task to befriend the natives of the planet Pandora and study their culture. RDA, the corporation that has colonised Pandora, is using Sully to extract vital intelligence needed to continue mining the planet's mineral deposits. Sully only enters into the deal with Sec-Ops, the RDA's private security force, because its head Colonel Miles Quattrich (Stephen Lang) promises the company will provide him with the facilities he needs to walk again – a promise Quattrich soon reneges on.

In the science-fiction film *Source Code* (Duncan Jones, 2011), Captain Colter Stevens (Jake Gyllenhaal) remains in service to the U.S. military in spite of extreme physical mutilation following an assignment in Afghanistan. Although only his head and torso remain intact, kept alive in a sealed container, he is contracted back into virtual service by the military. Stevens awakens to find himself strapped into a harness in an unknown location (later discovered to be a product of his imagination). His mission is to go back in time to a Chicago commuter train that has already been blown up, to identify the terrorist and prevent a second bomb going off in the city. He has no choice in whether or not to continue the operation – and the implication is that this will be the first of many such missions. Thus, heroic bodies are mutilated, dissected and harvested in service of their country – typically without the consent of their owners. The leaders of the free world are quick to indenture their sons into extended service against their will. There has been a notable shift to an extremely psychologically damaged hero – often paralleled by severe physical mutilation, as evidenced by films such as *Avatar* and *Source Code*. Cruise's personification of American triumphalism no longer holds and his persona cannot fully incorporate these elements of physical and psychical damage (*Minority Report* comes the closest, but this is offset by overcoming the patriarch and the fact that Cruise's body, although symbolically castrated, is not permanently damaged). Today's younger stars such as Matt Damon and Jake Gyllenhaal better capture the symbolic mutilation of modern masculinity, which Cruise's persona at its pinnacle disavows. Their films tend to place them at the mercy of malevolent patriarchal forces, often irrevocably physically or psychologically damaged by their encounters, in a way that the young Cruise avoids.

Each star is noted for his sex appeal and ‘pretty boy’ looks - like Cruise. Extending beyond the older actor’s inscription of the homoerotic in his star sign, both have starred in films that cast them as homosexual: Matt Damon in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* [Anthony Minghella, 1999] and Jake Gyllenhaal in *Brokeback Mountain* [Ang Lee, 2005]. In each instance the character is engaged in an intense friendship that tips over into sexual desire. However, these relationships have tragic endings: Damon’s Tom Ripley murders his friend and later his lover and Gyllenhaal’s cowboy Jack Twist is killed by homophobes. Both feature gruesomely damaged male bodies. Ripley batters his (heterosexual) love interest Dickie (Jude Law) to death with an oar following his cruel rejection of him; Twist is attacked by a gang who beat him to death. While both films are set in the past – in what are framed as presumably more intolerant times - there is the underlying suggestion that any deviation from ‘hetero-normalcy’ will be met by swift punishment.

Certainly, such roles contribute to the aura of physical and psychological vulnerability that these stars project. For Gyllenhaal, this trait is established in his first film *Donnie Darko* (Richard Kelly, 2001). Donnie is a disturbed teenager who has a premonition that the world will end, accompanied by strange hallucinations. This psychological instability finds alternative expression in his later films, which often assert paranoia as the appropriate response to dark patriarchal forces. *Rendition* (Gavin Hood, 2007) casts Gyllenhaal as CIA agent Douglas Freeman, who is troubled by an assignment to question suspected terrorists - off U.S. soil thus exempt from American law (in this instance, the damaged male body is not his but that of the detainee). As a soldier in *Jarhead* (Sam Mendes, 2005), his character Marine Anthony Swofford questions the legitimacy of the American military’s intervention in Iraq, witnessing the trauma suffered by troops and the civilians caught up in the conflict. The damaged bodies of *Jarhead*’s martial campaign and the soldier’s distrust of those he takes orders from finds even more extreme expression in the science-fiction of *Source Code*.

In Matt Damon’s case, social and psychological vulnerability are present in early films such as *Good Will Hunting* (Gus Van Sant, 1997). The film casts him as a young man of considerable talents held back by class and the low self-worth that an abusive father has inflicted. Damaged, he is unable to take advantage of his genius, nor successfully conduct a romantic relationship. The star’s social position is little better in *The Talented Mr Ripley*. Yet in a twisted revision of the American dream, his social ascent

is enabled by his talent for deception and psychopathology; he fools the establishment, commits murder and evades police capture. However, the series for which Damon is best known is that of the *Bourne* films (Doug Liman, 2002; Paul Greengrass, 2004 and 2007), in which he is pitted against the secretive cell of the CIA that once employed him. Having wound down the illegal project for which he was trained he is now deemed surplus to requirements. Bourne – like Gyllenhaal’s Captain Stevens in *Source Code* - is useful to the state only so far as they can exploit him; his life is otherwise considered worthless. Furthermore, he is viewed as a danger to society, brutalized by the training regime he has undergone. In his service to the U.S., Bourne has already been stripped of his identity and humanity – and later, his memory - before successive attempts are made on his life. The assault faced by a character such as Jason Bourne reflects a wider trend, beyond the films of Damon or Gyllenhaal, of Hollywood film narratives that set their male protagonists against malevolent patriarchal forces which they have little chance of overcoming. For while Cruise’s persona may have successfully disavowed such threats, contemporary star images articulate a bleaker understanding of the pressures of modern masculinity.

The contradictions inherent in Cruise’s persona can no longer be contained by current culture; his image is buckling under the weight of biological and social pressures. An older man cannot play the paradox of the boy-man in terminal stasis, failing to fight while appearing heroic. At the same time, the compromise that Cruise presents no longer expresses the concerns of modern America; indeed, his persona’s association with conspicuous consumption seems drastically outdated following the global banking crisis of 2008 and subsequent economic recession. As the flag-draped coffins return from wars overseas, the image of the military hero once embodied by Cruise becomes too incredible. The depiction of a soldier mutilated yet drawn back into national service to exploit a foreign world for its natural resources, such as in *Avatar*, seems less fantastical than the alternative Cruise presents.

Beyond the issue of the star persona’s articulation of socio-historical concerns lies other social factors that have affected Hollywood’s economic structure. Tom Cruise’s career is exemplary of a number of shifts in the American film industry over the last 30 years. His nascent persona was the embodiment of youth at a time when Hollywood was becoming preoccupied with producing film content to appeal to younger audiences. This happened in tandem with the increased emphasis on producing ‘blockbusters’ to

remain profitable as an industry, films that came to be known as ‘high concept’ because of their reliance on a simple premise that was the basis of their marketing campaign. *Top Gun* was cited by writer Justin Wyatt as typical of the high concept films of the 1980s - ‘fighter pilot in love’ (2002, p.84) - taking advantage of cross-media promotion: the music video for the film’s song hit *Take My Breath Away* included excerpts from *Top Gun* and a *Pepsi* commercial was inspired by the film’s pilot school setting. More recently, Cruise’s career has proved to be a game-changer for how stars are remunerated for their acting services: his ‘gross participation’ deal on *Mission: Impossible* set out previously unheard of terms for stars’ earnings and made him one of the highest paid in the business. His career has thus closely reflected the changing nature of the film business in recent history.

The challenge to Hollywood now comes in the form of new media, which has significantly destabilized the cinema’s cultural hegemony and undermined its long established economic structures. It thus seems appropriate that Cruise’s star is waning at a time when the U.S. film industry’s status is itself threatened, which in turn is impacting on its star system. P. David Marshall argues that in the new media age, film stardom is diminishing in worth. The reasons for this are complex. If, as Marshall suggests, celebrity is a discourse of the self in which there is an emotional investment by the audience in the celebrity, this has been undermined by the advent of new media. He maintains that there has been a shift from a representational to a ‘presentational regime’ (2006, p.637), made possible by the internet and supporting digital technologies of production. This shift in culture is ‘generative of a new type of individualism: a will to produce that formulates a shifted constitution of desire and a different connection to the contemporary moment.’ (2006, p.638) As the former media ‘audience’ becomes able to produce media content there has been an expansion of the public presentation of the self, especially amongst the young, through blogs and popular websites such as Facebook and MySpace. At the same time, the increasingly interactive digital media enhances fans’ ability to communicate about and even with stars. As Marshall suggests, the gap between fan and celebrity has narrowed considerably, in part due to their perceived online accessibility, for example through celebrity websites that post a wealth of personal information or even responses to fan questions (2006, p.640).

This increased accessibility is reflected by the greater number of celebrities holding Twitter accounts, through which they ‘tweet’ short 140 character messages to followers

online. Hollywood's concern over the potentially destabilizing effects of new media was demonstrated in 2009 by reports suggesting that studios had moved to insert clauses into stars' contracts effecting a ban on sharing film information on social networking sites (though at least one online source contended the validity of the claim<sup>2</sup>). Two of the first stars supposed to be affected by this move were Mike Myers and Cameron Diaz over their anticipated voice work for animated feature *Shrek Forever After* (Mike Mitchell, 2010) (*The Daily Telegraph*, Ben Leach, 2009). This has since been contradicted by the evidence of a number of film stars, including Tom Cruise, holding their own Twitter accounts. In the case of Cruise the tweets are clearly written in a promotional style by an employee, rather than by the star himself, showing that the revelatory potential of Twitter can and often is usurped by more straight-forward advertising of celebrity product.

Nevertheless, there are indications of Twitter's potential for destabilizing the celebrity knowledge economy, an example of which was made apparent in May 2011. The UK's imposition of 'super-injunctions' - gagging orders to prevent the press from naming celebrities attached to high-profile scandals - threatened to be undermined by social media. Twitter recorded its highest ever day of traffic on the site on 9 May, following speculation by one user that Jemima Khan had taken out a super-injunction to prevent intimate pictures of herself and TV presenter Jeremy Clarkson from appearing in the press. A 'tweeted' denial by Khan herself prompted a surge in interest by Twitter users and extended speculation on the subject. Although each of the thousands of tweets was technically in concept of court, the legal system was never going to be able to police the super-injunction online.

Thus, the economy of knowledge surrounding the celebrity has been drastically transformed by new media. Where does this leave the Hollywood star, the most glamorous of celebrities? Marshall argues that if celebrities are a guarantor of 'economic value as audiences are bought and sold throughout the entertainment industry' (2006, p.642) this has been threatened by new media. The economic structure of the culture industries have been radically altered by the internet: this is discernable in the music industry which has suffered a collapse in recording sales. Its new economic model emphasizes live performances and collectors' items as the basis of profit generation, as file sharing and piracy have eaten into profits. Film too has been affected

by piracy (the introduction of the 3D format has been one tactic of the industry to make the illegal consumption of films more difficult) and by decreasing theatrical audiences.

Marshall suggests that ‘film is losing its centrality and its cultural cachet as the first window of the cultural commodities’ series of exhibitions’ (2006, p.642). As media platforms proliferate, the value of film stars has also been eroded, with a general public less beholden to their collective screen image. Thus, actors must now work harder to promote their own star images, staying in the public eye, as well publicizing their film product. At the same time, new media ensure that the star has much greater difficulty in controlling his image. Marshall suggests that in an era of over-saturation, stars struggle to stay in the news, leading them to perform increasingly daring – or embarrassing – stunts in an attempt at recognition. He cites Cruise as a casualty of this altering landscape: his publicity stunts, such as his declaration of love for Katie Holmes on the couch of *Oprah* in 2005, are suggestive of a desperation to stay newsworthy and recognised. The fact that Marshall uses him as an example of the Hollywood star’s decline is further proof of Cruise’s career as a litmus test for the changing nature of Hollywood. Marshall is not the only writer to have drawn attention to the waning appeal of Cruise as symptomatic of a declining star system. Writing in *The Guardian*, journalist Tanya Gold recounts a 2009 meeting with the ‘bouncing narcissist’ Tom Cruise at a Leicester Square premiere, declaring that ‘the role of the star in the movie is changing and may even wilt to nothing.’ Gold notes that if the highest earners of 2009 were star-free films such as *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* (Michael Bay), *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (David Yates) and *The Hangover* (Todd Phillips), then ‘the film concept has outshone the star, who has become an incidental, a detail, an extra stuck on to an improbability’ (8 Dec, 2009, p.5). Once again, Cruise proves to be the representative star of stardom itself. His predicament is indicative of Hollywood’s wider crisis, his decline a symptom of the industry’s obligatory shift to an alternative model of profit generation – above all, an indication that the era of the film star’s economic and cultural dominance may finally be nearing its end.

## Notes

1. D. Richards (2010) 'Cruise, Diaz revel in "Knight and Day"', *Chicago Tribune* June 27, 2010  
Available at: [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2010-06-27/entertainment/ct-ae-0627-dean-richards-cruise-20100627\\_1\\_stunts-new-skill-cameron-diaz](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2010-06-27/entertainment/ct-ae-0627-dean-richards-cruise-20100627_1_stunts-new-skill-cameron-diaz) (Accessed: 23 May 2011)
2. *Mike Myers and Cameron Diaz Deny Twitter Ban Rumors* (no author, undated) Available at  
<http://www.hiphogossips.com/mike-myers-and-cameron-diaz-deny-twitter-ban-rumors> (Accessed:  
23 May 2011)

## **Appendix 1 – Cruise’s Early Biography**

Tom Cruise Mapother IV was born on July 3, 1962, to Mary Lee (nee Pfeiffer) and Thomas Cruise Mapother III. He was the second of what would eventually be four children, and the only boy. Although his parents met and married in Louisville, where the eldest child Lee Anne was born, the others, Marian, Tom and Cass were born in Syracuse, New York State, where Thomas Sr. was posted as an electrical engineer with General Electric. It would be the first of many moves for the Mapother family: Tom estimated attending fifteen schools across the United States and Canada as he was growing up (Johnstone, 2006, p.55). Biographies emphasise the stress for the young Cruise in continually switching schools, being bullied by his peers and having difficulties fitting in. The standard narrative argues that these difficulties helped shape his character into that of a resilient and determined young man who set out to conquer Hollywood. Significant to the biography also is Thomas Jr.’s reputedly poor relationship with his father. Thomas Sr. was, in the official accounts, a petty tyrant and a bully, and his son was particularly exposed to his treatment. However, his influence in his son’s life was to be cut short when he and Mary Lee announced to their children in the summer of 1974 that they were divorcing. Worried that she would lose her children under Canadian custody laws, Mary Lee fled with her children in the middle of the night, returning to the U.S. After that night, Cruise is said to have seen his father only twice.

Mary Lee Mapother returned to Louisville with her four children, where she attempted to raise them single-handedly, employed in two jobs as well as relying on her teenage daughters’ earnings as waitresses. As the only male, Cruise was now, as the narrative terms it, the ‘head of the household’, and by accounts he took to patrolling his sisters’ choice of boyfriends very seriously. (There is perhaps a parallel to be drawn between this early involvement in his sisters’ lives with his reputation for control in his film career.) At the age of 14, Tom famously enrolled, with a full scholarship, at the Roman Catholic St Francis Seminary near Cincinnati. However, he stayed only for one year before returning to his family, apparently feeling that he did not have a vocation for the priesthood. Nevertheless, it was for Cruise ‘the best year I ever did at school.’ (Johnstone, 2006, p.61). Upon his return, he was sent to stay with his aunt and uncle, so impoverished was the Mapother family by that stage. This narrative is typical of Hollywood star biography, stressing Cruise’s working class roots, the traditional



starting point for a star's climb to fame and fortune, and rearticulating the rags to riches story more generally associated with the American dream. The star system is a particular manifestation of this success myth, as Dyer argues in *Stars*. In biographical narratives it helps smooth over internal inconsistencies or contradictions, encouraging the belief that anyone can succeed in America. Talent and hard work are counterbalanced by luck and personal aspiration. Individual stars may embody all of these traits, or only some (Dyer, 1998, p.42). Cruise's persona especially highlights his combination of childhood impoverishment and particular talent. The element of luck is underemphasized in his image, with the notion of his hard graft and consummate professionalism much more privileged.

Although Cruise and his family spent part of his early adolescence in relative poverty, these circumstances were to be temporary. A few years later, Mary Lee met and married Joe South, a plastics salesman, who moved the whole family to Glen Ridge, New Jersey, a comfortable suburb. Tom enrolled at Glen Ridge High, and there he discovered acting. The account is an important part of the mythology of Cruise, as it appears to yoke together dramatic performance with the more masculine activity of wrestling. The story goes that he was awaiting an important high-school wrestling match to be held the following day, but weighing himself at home discovered he was a pound over his weight limit. Running up and down the stairs in an attempt to rid himself of a few ounces, he tripped and fell, pulling a tendon in his leg, thus ending his wrestling career. Having previously expressed an interest in acting (his mother was particularly keen on amateur dramatics and was a member of a local society) he decided to pursue this physically less demanding pastime.

Upon joining his school's amateur dramatics society, Cruise played Nathan Detroit in a high school production of *Guys and Dolls* (the part played by Frank Sinatra in the 1955 film). According to biographer Iain Johnstone, his performance in this play helped him secure a New York manager, Tobe Gibson. It was Gibson who suggested he drop the name Mapother, going instead by the name of Tom Cruise. The assumed name became an important element of his star persona with 'cruise control' connoting both effortless progress and a homoerotic sexuality. The biographies claim that he went to New York aged 17, giving himself three years to succeed. In the event, he didn't have to wait that long. After a short time in New York chasing stage work, he fired Gibson (on a technicality: his five year contract was signed when he was underage, rendering it void).

Soon after, he was flown out to Los Angeles to audition for a new sit-com. On this occasion he was unsuccessful. Told later by an East Coast producer that ‘he was too intense and not pretty enough for television’ he was encouraged to try films instead (Johnstone, 2006, p. 72). In March 1981, on the recommendation of producer Stanley Jaffe, Cruise was signed by Michael Ovitz of Creative Artists Agency, (McDonald, 2000, p.96). At CAA Paula Wagner, later his business partner, became his agent. Later that year, aged 19, he won a small role in the Franco Zeffirelli film *Endless Love* (1981), a film that did moderately well financially, ranking 22<sup>nd</sup> in the American domestic box office chart of 1981. In the same year, Cruise appeared in the career defining *TAPS* (Harold Becker), as army Cadet Captain David Shawn. *TAPS* became a ‘word of mouth’ success. The film debuted on only three screens, but nevertheless went on to place 16<sup>th</sup> in annual domestic theatrical rankings.

## Appendix 2 - Historical and Filmic Contexts

The purported physical expressiveness of the African-American man has been constructed on film from the beginning of cinema. Many of Thomas Edison's early films depicted, in pseudo-ethnographic fashion, the dances of workers on plantations with titles such as *Three Man Dance* (c. 1894), *Negro Dancers* (1895), and *Dancing Darkey Boy* (1897). The last two titles indicate the racialised designation of the dancers – and in the first and third examples, their gender – as well as setting up clear generic expectations. These films were simple staged events in which the 'sense of movement was the primary factor to be exploited' (Pines, 1975, p.7), reflecting early cinema's attraction to spectacle prior to a shift towards narrative film-making. Pines argues that movie-makers were 'turning to black vernacular for plasticization', for the perceived physicality and mobility of blacks, with such moments representing the 'quintessence of iconic motion'. Plasticization broadly connotes properties of elasticity, alteration of shape and change in form, qualities which one can apply to dance. The history of black slaves dancing and singing for the white master's entertainment is both alluded to and recreated by these films. Pines highlights the pivotal influence of the Southern plantation myth upon such moving pictures and argues that it 'determined the form and content of all plasticized black images' (1975, p.7). Films of black movement and dance of this sort became irrevocably attached to considerations of subordination and oppression.

In such films, the black body is presented for the visual pleasure of the (white) spectator. Considering more recent Hollywood images, writer Gladstone Yearwood describes such representations as centring around:

the acquisition of the black body through symbolic domination and control, and involves (a) the constitution of the spectator in relation to the film, (b) the specific presentation of the black body within the narrative diegesis and (c) the ideological area which surrounds the development of cinematic languages and pictorial technology in the ways that camera and lighting, for example, function to attach semes of inferiority, fear or suspense to blackness. Hence, traditional cinema produces a structure of seeing within which the black body is constituted as the object of the look, thus reproducing traditional relations in society. (1983, p.143)

There are a number of issues to consider in relation to this statement. The black body (male or female) which occupies the position of object of the look, is correlated to that of the (defacto white) woman in Laura Mulvey's thesis of visual pleasure. Looking relations, as Yearwood indicates, reflect societal power structures. The white male heterosexual spectator looks at, and objectifies, all bodies that may be constituted as other in whatever way. The previous chapter indicated the degree to which Cruise is positioned as an object of the look, thus situating him in the place traditionally occupied by the female star (who could be black or white). This narcissistic exhibitionism that characterises the Cruise persona is based on evasion of castration threat. It indicates Cruise's lack of the phallus. The objectification of the African-American man similarly reveals his powerlessness in relation to white hegemonic masculinity.

Yearwood's mention of fearfulness in relation to the depiction of the racial other – the black male who is cowardly in relation to his white heroic counterpart – is also noteworthy. Fearfulness connotes immaturity and an inability to cope the adult world. It also implies an infantilisation claimed to justify the subordination of black people. This goes beyond the material dependence of the slave upon his/her owner, to the ideological invention of the child-like slave of limited intelligence, superstitious beliefs and emotional excess, suggesting arrested development and the slave's eternally child-like status. Such stereotypes, evident in the earliest days of cinema (and the literature which was adapted for the screen) has had a pervasive influence on the depiction of black characters in Hollywood that has yet to be expelled. The infantilisation of adult male black characters finds an echo in the Cruise persona with its own particular form of arrested development, youthfulness and inability to cope in moments of crisis. In addition to the elements of plasticization which link Cruise's expressive body with representations of black characters, is the childishness that they share, despite Cruise's status as the white hero.

The origins of the white hero linked to an enabling black subordinate can be traced back to the Uncle Tom figure from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, first published in 1853. The novel, a sentimental account of the life and death of Uncle Tom, a slave on a southern plantation, was a phenomenal success. The book was later adapted to the stage, with many different versions of 'Tom shows' in circulation. Such was the familiarity of the American populace with the narrative, that *Uncle Tom's*

*Cabin* was a popular and repeated choice for early silent films (Pines, 1975, p.14). (Thomas Edison adapted *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1903.) Yet although the figure of Tom was the object of much pathos, it created one of the most pervasive inscriptions of racial stereotyping. Uncle Tom is devoted to his kind master and fond of his master's children, shares the beliefs of his oppressors, and is a morally upstanding and committed Christian. Following on from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a later work which employed a character similar to Uncle Tom was Mark Twain's 1885 novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Runaway slave Jim escapes from his owner with protagonist Huckleberry Finn on a raft down the Mississippi River. It is he who is responsible for young Huck's safety, as they meet a variety of murderers, thieves and layabouts (all white) on their journey.

Simultaneously, an oppositional alternative to the Uncle Tom figure was popular at this time in American history. The figure of the over-sexed 'black beast', who lusts after the virginal white woman, is a pernicious stereotype that is fully developed in *The Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffiths, 1915). In the film Gus (played in 'black face' by the white actor Walter Long) threatens the purity of Elsie Stoneman (Lilian Gish) before she is finally rescued by the Ku Klux Klan. This stereotype reverses the traits of Uncle Tom or the black buffoon: childish and stupid is opposed to dangerous, unsexed to sexually animalistic.

A relation of the Uncle Tom, in the schema of racialist stereotyping, is the Uncle Remus figure. Donald Bogle deems Remus as a type of 'coon', an 'amusement object and black buffoon' (2003, p.4). The Remus figure 'distinguishes (him)self by his quaint naïve and comic philosophizing'. 'Coons', in addition to Uncle Toms, are the most common enabling side-kick of the white protagonist. Early examples of black actors from the 1920s and 1930s who played such roles include Stepin Fetchit (a contraction of 'step and fetch it', the master's command) and Clarence Muse. Fetchit played against white protagonist Will Rogers in a number of films including *In Old Kentucky* (John M. Stahl, 1927) and *Judge Priest* (John Ford, 1934), as the hapless, yet supportive, black subordinate. Such stereotypes proved pernicious even for an actor such as Paul Robeson, who distinguished himself in the New York theatre scene, starring in Broadway's longest run of *Othello*, but in film was denied the opportunity to feature in roles worthy of his talent. He found himself forced to capitulate to the familiar Uncle Tom type in most of his American productions, such as *Showboat* (James Whale, 1936).

The European films in which he starred such as *King Solomon's Mines* (Robert Stevenson, 1937) and *The Proud Valley* (Pen Tennyson, 1941) offered him the possibility of roles denied him by American films, but nevertheless tended to show him in loyal service to a white friend (Bogle, 2003).

In the 1950s the figure of Uncle Tom was reinvented and destabilised by Sidney Poitier, whose characters surpassed the limitations of the original stereotype (though Bogle notes that he was presented as curiously sexless across the body of his work [2003, p.181]). However, his place as black side-kick, who provided support to the white protagonist, continued a familiar dynamic in many of his films. In both *Edge of the City* (Martin Ritt, 1957) and *The Defiant Ones* (Stanley Cramer, 1958) Poitier sacrifices himself for his white friend, John Cassavettes and Tony Curtis respectively (Bogle, 2003, p.176). The latter film is an early example, theorist Sharon Willis suggests, of the homoerotic undertones present in the narrative closure of many biracial buddy films (1997, p.29). *The Defiant Ones* ends with the injured Curtis cradled in Poitier's arms, waiting for the police to catch up to them; a moment of self-sacrifice and eroticism.

One film that subverts this trend of black side-kick is *In the Heat of the Night* (Norman Jewison, 1967). It was released towards the end of the American Civil Rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s and is still remembered as one of Sidney Poitier's defining roles. Although in some ways a precursor to the black-white buddy detective films of the 1980s, the film positioned Poitier as the protagonist with a white side-kick. Passing through a Mississippi town on his way home from a visit to his mother, Philadelphia detective Virgil Tibbs (Sidney Poitier) is arrested in connection with the murder of a white businessman. When his identity as a police detective is revealed he reluctantly agrees to work the case with racist police chief Bill Gillespie (Rod Steiger). Tibbs becomes the moral compass for his partner and it is Gillespie's conscience which evolves (a familiar position for the black buddy onscreen). The theme of Tibbs as a racial and geographic 'outsider' shores up the concept of misrecognition so often employed in such films, in which the black lawman is wrongly identified as a criminal. The motifs of outsider status and misrecognition appear in many black-white buddy movies and are exploited in a rather different way in *Collateral*.

The Mel Brooks comedy *Blazing Saddles* (1974) interrogates, with humour, many of the stereotypes of earlier films, including the figures of the enabling black man and the

black outsider. The film documents the attempts of villain Hedley Lemarr (Harvey Korman) to destroy the town of Rock Ridge to make way for the building of the railroad. Knowing the local populace to be thoroughly racist, he appoints a black sheriff in the hope that they will drive him from the town - or lynch him. However, Sheriff Bart (Cleavon Little) turns out to be a sophisticated urbanite – the absolute outsider culturally and racially to the white westerners - and moral leader. He succeeds in saving the town, by persuading the townsfolk to lure Lemarr’s thugs into an ambush. He is also the mechanism for the moral awakening of his white sidekick Jim the Waco Kid (Gene Wilder), who is a desolate drunk. The film ends with Bart persuading people of all creeds and colour to live in harmony before riding off - in a limo - into the sunset. Thus, *Blazing Saddles* satirizes the enabling Uncle Tom figure as well as many aspects of the Western genre.

Comedian Richard Pryor, who co-wrote *Blazing Saddles*, was the definitive African-American comic of the 1970s, commanding a huge reputation with a remarkable critique of racial and class oppression. His film roles divide between black-orientated vehicles, which position him as the protagonist ‘negotiating politicized narratives focussed on social complexities of the Black world, or Black and White race relations’ (Guerrero, 1993, p.240), e.g. *Which Way is Up* (Michael Schultz, 1977) and *Blue Collar* (Paul Schrader, 1978), and those in which he is relegated to a variation of the slapstick buffoon e.g. *Superman III* (Richard Lester, 1983) or *See No Evil, Hear no Evil* (Arthur Hiller, 1989).

### **Appendix 3a – Active Masochism and Deleuze**

In her article 'Of Female Bondage' Parveen Adams asserts the importance of suspense to the 'dramatised, ritualised acting out' of masochistic fantasies. This 'involves a delay, a waiting; it is a state with no definite end-point; it is an endless postponement of gratification. Actually being suspended, being hung, is the most transparent sign of this dimension' (p.252). The scenes of suspension that typify the masochistic fantasy are evidence of the subject's disavowal (suspension) of any transgression of Oedipal law. As Gilles Deleuze argues in his introduction to Leopold Von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*, ultimately, 'the masochistic process of disavowal is so extensive that it affects sexual pleasure itself; pleasure is postponed for as long as possible and is thus disavowed' (p.33). This disavowal is the disavowal of sexual difference, the denial that the mother does in fact lack the phallus. Adams explains that 'the pervert has the puzzle of inventing sexual difference...he can construct and maintain a viable sexual difference only if someone colludes with his disavowal. This someone is the mother who remains blind to the disavowal; at first, it is the mother's look that lets itself be seduced and fascinated' (1989, p.253). The implication is that 'the seduction of the mother's look challenges the social and familial order' (p.253). Adams also relates this control to the function of stage manager that the masochist takes on, in charge of the scenery, roles and costume of the scene played out (p.253). Disavowal denies sexual difference, without which there can be no Oedipus complex, castration anxiety and regular psychosexual development. Phallic authority as it relates to the father is disavowed. This denial of difference therefore constitutes a transgression, a 'setting aside of Oedipal law' (p.254).

### **Appendix 3b – Freud and the Compulsion to Repeat**

A moment of trauma remains unprocessed, unworked through, until a second 'innocent' event triggers a traumatic response, and repression. The memory of trauma is a 'foreign body' that attacks from within; 'The ego's defences, orientated towards distressing perceptions coming in from the outside, as Freud points out, are caught unawares by the appearance of an internal representation, a memory that in the new context releases both a pleasure that is displaced and consequently anxiety.' (Fletcher, 1999, p.8) Related to this is 'the compulsion to repeat, which now replaces the impulsion to remember' ('Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through' [1914], S.E. XII, p.151). Freud locates this repetition, firstly, in the consulting room, where



transference takes place between the physician and his patient, but it extends to other parts of the patient's life, while the original source or memory remains repressed. For example, a patient may not remember his critical attitude towards his parents' authority, but he will act this out in the dynamic with his analyst (p.150).

This acting out will become more pronounced in resistance to remembering - typically while the patient is undertaking psychoanalysis. Freud returns to the notion of repetition in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920, S.E. XVIII) where he indicates that the patient is compelled to repeat repressed material in current experiences rather than remembering the original event that took place in the past (S.E. XVIII, p.18). The aim of the analyst is to 'get him to re-experience some portion of his forgotten life' (p.19) while retaining enough distance to 'recognise that what appears to be reality is in fact only a reflection of a forgotten past. If this can be successfully achieved, the patient's sense of conviction is won, together with the therapeutic success that is dependent on it' (p.19). He also indicates that in such situations dreams may be made use of 'with a view to binding of traumatic impressions' (p.33), so far as dreams follow the compulsion to repeat, rather than functioning in wish fulfilment. In his 'New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis' (S.E. XXII) he explains further: 'While the sleeper is obliged to dream, because the relaxation of repression at night allows the upward pressure of the traumatic fixation to become active, there is a failure in the functioning of his dream work, which would like to transform the memory-traces of the traumatic event into the fulfilment of a wish.' (S.E.XXII, p.29) In such occurrences, the dream expresses the traumatic memory that is consciously repressed, where in other circumstances it would be involved in expressions of wish-fulfilment.

### **Appendix 3c – Lacan, the Symbolic and the Imaginary**

The 'imaginary' order refers to the area of experience that is characterised by the involvement of the ego. One of his most significant writings on the imaginary order discusses the 'mirror phase'. The infant child, not yet in full control of his motor functions and up to that point experiencing a fractured sense of self, is held up to a mirror and mis-recognises himself as a more perfect and unified self than he is in reality. This moment establishes identification with an external image and the relation between the ego and ego-ideal. Phenomena that fall into the category of the imaginary are related to issues of the ego. The symbolic order has a linguistic dimension and is the realm of the signifier (the linguistic representation for a concept, the signified). The

symbolic includes the law on which this order is based. For example, the symbolic father is an agency that cannot be reduced to an actual entity but which nevertheless conveys the law. (The third category that Lacan describes, the 'real', is that which cannot be reduced to either the imaginary or the symbolic, and which remains unrepresentable.) Laplanche and Pontalis, 2004, pp.210; pp. 439-441

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Lieutenant Daniel Kaffee (Tom Cruise) is a young US Navy lawyer who specialises in plea-bargaining. He is appointed defence lawyer at the court-martial of two Marines – Private Downey (James Marshall) and Lance Corporal Dawson (Wolfgang Bodison) – who are charged with the murder of a Private Santiago while serving at Guantanamo Bay. Lieutenant Commander JoAnne Galloway (Demi Moore) has been assigned to the case along with Kaffee. She suspects the two soldiers were carrying out orders to subject Santiago to a ‘code red’, an off-the-record disciplinary action sanctioned by Marine superiors, and are now being scape-goated for the soldier’s accidental death. They confess to her that they were given orders from Lieutenant Kendrick (Kiefer Sutherland) to gag and bind Santiago, before beating him. Unfortunately, due to an underlying medical condition, when Santiago had the gag placed in his mouth he started to cough blood and suffocated.

Kaffee and Galloway clash over the former’s handling of the case – she questions his ability to handle a law case when he has never seen the inside of a courtroom, nor actively served in the Navy. It is revealed that he is the son of a famous civil rights lawyer, who feels over-shadowed by his father’s reputation. As Kaffee makes enquiries, notably meeting with Colonel Jessep (Jack Nicolson) to discuss the case, he realises something is amiss. Santiago, who was suffering physical ailments, was subjected to bullying and requested a transfer off the base. Marine command claims that Santiago was due to leave Guantanamo, having been granted a transfer, yet circumstances indicate that no such transfer had been arranged. This leads Kaffee to conclude that an attempt was made to cover up a prohibited ‘code red’. Unfortunately, he has little proof other than circumstantial evidence.

Kaffee is approached on the street by Lieutenant Colonel Matthew Markinson (J.T. Walsh), who has gone AWOL since court proceedings began. Markinson is Jessep’s Executive Officer. He confesses to Kaffee that Jessep had no intention of transferring Santiago off the base, but issued transfer orders as part of a cover-up some time after Santiago’s death. Kaffee tells Markinson he will have to testify as he has no other proof that this has taken place. Markinson, unable to handle the shame that this public disgrace would entail, writes to Santiago’s parents to express his regret at the death of their son. Getting dressed in his formal uniform, complete with regalia, he puts a pistol in his mouth and shoots himself.

Without Markinson’s testimony, Kaffee has little hope of winning Downey and Dawson’s case. On the witness stand, Jessep realises that Kaffee has no evidence against him. Nevertheless, Kaffee manages to draw Jessep out, rousing him to anger and in a moment of passion tricks him into confessing that he ordered the code red. Jessep is arrested and taken away. The two marines are found not guilty, though they are ‘dishonourably discharged’ from the Navy, owing to their conduct. Downey salutes Kaffee, finally recognising his Lieutenant status.

*All the Right Moves* (1983) Director: Michael Chapman

Stefen Djordjivic (Tom Cruise) is a high-school football star. His father and brother work in the Ampipe, Pennsylvania steel works and he sees a football scholarship as his ticket to a different life.

At a football game against the undefeated Walnut Heights, one of the players from Stefen's team fumbles the ball, which leads to them losing. Following the game, Coach Nickerson (Craig T. Nelson) confronts the deflated team and tells them that the player responsible should confess and quit. Stefan stands up for them, telling him that as the coach has already figuratively quit on them, he should be the one to quit. This brave stand is rewarded by Nickerson throwing him off the team.

Despondent at this turn of events, he falls in with a number of annoyed football fans at the local bar that set out to vandalise Nickerson's house. Stefen goes along with them before he realises what their intentions are. Unfortunately, he is the only one present when Nickerson comes out of his house as the guilty party flees, and is spotted. In revenge, Nickerson blacklists him among recruiting colleges, destroying Stefen's chances of a scholarship. At the same time, Stefen sees his friend Brian (Chris Penn) jeopardise his future, when his girlfriend falls pregnant and he chooses not to go to college.

Finally, Stefen confronts Nickerson, explaining that he is innocent of any wrong-doing. Nickerson realises that Stefen is telling the truth, and he has been wrong to jeopardise the boy's chances of a college education. Telling him that he has accepted a coaching position at California Polytechnic, he offers Stefen a scholarship. Stefen accepts.

*Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) Director: Oliver Stone

The young Ron Kovic grows up playing soldiers with his friends in the woods of rural New York State, watching Fourth of July military parades with his parents. The soldier is a heroic figure, war is glorious.

As a teenager, Kovic (Tom Cruise) participates in the high school wrestling team, where his coach tells them they must 'sacrifice, sacrifice, sacrifice'. His domineering mother (Caroline Kava), a religious woman, tells him only that 'as long as you do your best, that's what matters to God'. But at a wrestling match, in which he is badly beaten by an opponent, he sees her deep disappointment at his loss and is filled with shame. Marine recruiters visit his high school and Kovic sees an opportunity to regain his masculine pride: he enlists. His mother is pleased, saying it is 'God's will' that Communism is stopped. His father (Raymond J. Barry) says he hopes he is posted somewhere safe like Europe or Korea. Kovic fails to ask the girl he has a crush on, Donna (Kyra Sedgwick), to the prom and she goes with someone else. On prom night, he finds himself packing to go on leave. Suddenly, he runs out into the rain and to the high school, where he finds Donna sitting alone. He asks for a dance, to which she agrees, and they kiss.

Now in Vietnam on his second tour of duty, Kovic leads his men to a village where he thinks members of the Viet Cong are hiding out. Kovic sees no rifles are visible from his position, but sends in his men anyway. All of the villagers are killed, except for one crying baby, which the soldiers leave to fend for itself. It is a sound which will haunt Kovic later. Withdrawing from the village, they are attacked by Viet Cong. Seeing what he thinks is a Vietnamese soldier in silhouette, but blinded by the sun, Kovic shoots and kills him. Approaching the figure, Kovic realises that he has just shot one of his own privates, a new recruit.

Confessing his error to a senior officer, he is told to bury it – nobody cares.

On another mission, walking through the jungle, they are attacked by Viet Cong. Kovic is shot, first in the heel, then in the chest and neck. An army helicopter arrives and takes the critically injured Kovic to hospital. The place is squalid – blood and guts everywhere. Staff members are disenchanted and ignore the cries of the patients. A priest arrives to give Kovic his last rites.

Kovic wakes up, attached to a drip. He will live but is told he will never walk again, nor father children. As he is rehabilitated, his African-American male nurse tells him of the anti-war protests taking place back in the U.S. Kovic tries to make progress with his rehabilitation, but relapses.

Finally he is sent home. His parents welcome him back into the family home. Meeting up with old friends, they offer him a job, but tell him the war is 'bullshit'. At a 'Welcome Home Our Veterans' event in honour of Kovic, he is called to the podium to

speak. But overwhelmed by traumatic recall – of a crying baby, and the sounds of a helicopter - he cannot speak. Later, he meets up with his old high school flame Donna at her college and agrees attend to a Kent State vigil with her; but at the protest she and her peers are arrested and Kovic is knocked out of his wheelchair by police. Increasingly disenchanted with his life, he snaps when his brother goads him with his anti-war beliefs and he turns against his mother, telling her that her values mean nothing – that in spite of supposed Christian beliefs, his soldiers killed children.

He travels to Mexico, where he meets other vets living the high-life of drink, drugs and sex with prostitutes. Kovic takes up with a prostitute who he falls for, and wants to marry but thinks twice when he sees her with another client. His friend Charlie (Willem Dafoe), also a wheel-chair user, argues with a prostitute who mocks his lack of sexual functioning and Kovic suggests they move to another village. En route, they have an argument, competing for who committed the most crimes in Vietnam, which ends when they wrestle each other out of their chairs.

A humiliating turning point, Kovic decides to return to the U.S. He visits the widow and parents of the young Private he accidentally killed to tell them the truth about his death. His mother cannot forgive him, but the father, a WWII veteran, accepts his penitence.

Now an anti-war protestor, Kovic and other veterans gate-crash a Republican party convention where Nixon is speaking and are kicked out. Outside the protestors are arrested and Kovic is tipped from his chair by police; an African-American protestor picks him up and takes him to safety.

Four years later, an African-American man on stage talks about civil rights. Kovic is back-stage, in a suit, waiting to go on stage. As he passes people in the corridor, people shake his hand, one asks for an autograph. As flashbulbs pop, he remembers his childhood, his teenage kiss, playing baseball. His eyes well up. How does it feel to be addressing the entire nation, asks an African-American female reporter? He replies it is an overwhelming honour and that it just feels as if he is coming home. Loud, rousing band music plays as he wheels himself on stage and the screen fades to white.

*Cocktail* (1988)      Director: Roger Donaldson

Brian Flanagan (Tom Cruise) arrives in New York City, straight from the army, with dreams of becoming a successful businessman. He moves in with his Uncle Pat (Ron Dean) in New Jersey and goes to Manhattan to find a job. After several rejections he realises that he is going to have to gain some qualifications, so he enrolls in a community college. To survive financially, he takes a job in a Manhattan bar. There he meets fellow bar-man Doug Coughlin (Bryan Brown) who offers him wisdom in the form of 'Coughlin's laws' – which includes that he give up his studies and focuses on finding a rich woman to take care of him. Brian forms a friendship with Doug, and they become a successful double act in their bar, leading to work in a new Manhattan nightclub.

Unsatisfied with the lifestyle Brian suggests to Doug that they open their own bar, 'Cocktails and Dreams', funding their venture through savings earned while bartending in Jamaica. Doug is unconvinced. While working at the club, Brian meets photographer Coral (Gina Gershon), which threatens the pair's friendship. Doug bets Brian that the relationship will over by the week's end: this Doug secures by lying to Coral about Brian – who sleeps with Doug to gain revenge - an action which leads to the fracturing of the friendship.

Brian decides to go to Jamaica alone, to follow his dream, and there he meets aspiring artist Jordan (Elisabeth Shue), with whom he begins a romance. He runs into Doug, who is now married to Kelly (Kelly Lynch), a wealthy young socialite. Doug bets Brian that he cannot seduce wealthy older woman Bonnie (Lisa Baines) – Brian foolishly agrees to the bet. Unobserved, Jordan sees Brian and Bonnie canoodling, and goes home to New York, heartbroken.

Returning to New York with Bonnie and moving into her Manhattan apartment, Brian assured that she will find a way to get him promoted in her company. After several weeks of waiting, he gets fed up. Things come to a head at an art exhibition, where the artist insults Brian – alluding to his kept status – and he breaks up with Bonnie. He then looks up Jordan, who is working as a waitress to fund her artistic ambitions. He tries to approach her but she wants nothing to do with him. Brian then learns from her roommate that she is pregnant with his child; he tries to win her back. Previously unaware of Jordan's personal wealth, he is directed to her parents' Park Avenue apartment, where her father (Laurence Luckinbill) tries to buy him off.

Brian approaches Doug at a party he is throwing, bringing with him a bottle of aged port, the forfeit of their last bet (Doug wagered that he would return to him eventually). Alone together on Doug's yacht, he confesses that his wife's money is 'all gone', having been particularly unlucky in his stock market gambling. His wife returns and asks to be taken home. As Doug is too drunk to drive, Brian offers to give her a lift. Back at her apartment, Kelly tries to seduce Brian, but he resists her advances.

Returning to the yacht, Brian discovers Doug dead: he has cut his own throat with the shards of his port bottle.

Brian returns to Jordan's apartment and begs her forgiveness, explaining what has happened to Doug, and offering a life together. Jordan's father tries to turn him out but the young couple escape together. They end the film in Uncle Pat's bar, now refitted as 'Flanagan's Cocktails and Dreams', at their wedding reception, Jordan now visibly pregnant.



*Collateral* (2004)      Director: Michael Mann

Max (Jamie Foxx) dreams of owning his own limo service; unfortunately, he has driven a cab in L.A. for twelve years. It is just a normal night, which begins with his pick-up of lawyer Annie (Jada Pinkett Smith), with whom he strikes up a conversation. At the end of the journey she gives him her card - though it is indicated that he is too passive to call her. When he picks up Vincent (Tom Cruise) as a client, he is offered \$600 to drive round the city to make five stops. Only when a corpse lands on his cab roof, does Max discover that Vincent is a hitman.

Held hostage in his own cab, he forced to drive round L.A. as Vincent makes his hits before sunrise. Before long, L.A. cop Fanning (Mark Ruffalo) is investigating the disappearance of his star witness in a drugs case, the man who is now the corpse in Max's trunk. After a visit to the morgue, he realises a professional hitman is killing each of the witnesses who threaten to put the drug dealer in prison. During a forced visit to see his mother, Max escapes from Vincent and throws his briefcase into the freeway below. Vincent forces him to go to the dealer's (Javier Bardem) nightclub to collect information on the further hits, and Max must perform as Vincent in order to get out alive.

The FBI is also chasing this dealer and thinks that Max is Vincent, after investigators view footage from the night club CCTV cameras. They go after Max in the Korean night club where Vincent's next hit is. Vincent's shoot out causes a riot and Fanning is killed by him; Vincent escapes, forcing Max to come with him. Finally, Max loses his temper and accelerates his cab into the intersection. Vincent escapes before the police arrive. Max realises that Vincent is going after Annie, the lawyer who he picked up earlier that night. He finds Annie and they escape from Vincent, who gives chase. They finally end up on the metro, where a shootout between Vincent and Max ensues. Max shoots Vincent in the chest, who sits down quietly to die. Max and Annie leave the metro, staggering out into the daylight as the subway car continues to the end of the line.

*Days of Thunder* (1990)      Director: Tony Scott

Cole Trickle (Tom Cruise) is an experienced racing car driver hired to race at NASCAR by tycoon Tim Daland (Randy Quaid). Retired crew chief Harry Hagge (Paul Newman) is persuaded to lead the team. Cole has difficulties to begin with, on account of the driving a different type of car (NASCAR using regular automobiles, not 'open-wheel' vehicles), the NASCAR terminology, as well as the bullying behaviour of driver Rowdy Burns (Michael Rooker) on the circuit. Hagge undertakes to train Trickle in the culture of NASCAR; this pays off with a win at Darlington, where Cole shoots past Rowdy to take first place.

The pair's rivalry intensifies until a multi-car pile-up on the circuit injures them both and puts them out of training. Cole is treated by neurosurgeon Dr Claire Lewicki (Nicole Kidman) and starts a romance with her. Cole and Rowdy overcome their rivalry to become firm friends. In the meantime, Daland hires another driver, Russ Wheeler (Cary Elwes) to take Cole's spot. When Cole returns to racing, Daland pits the two drivers against each other. At North Wilkesboro, Russ wins the race by 'spinning' Cole out on the track. In anger, Cole slams into Russ's car during the victory lap, leading to him and Harry being fired by Daland.

When Rowdy discovers that he has internal bleeding and must undergo brain surgery, he asks Cole to drive his car at Daytona 500. Cole agrees and convinces Harry to join him.

On the day of the race, the car suffers numerous problems, culminating in an oil leak which necessitates a change of engine, which Daland provides Harry with. Cole suffers further problems with his gears after being spun out by Russ. Finally, Cole and Russ are on the last lap. Russ predicts Cole will use a similar move to the one which he used at Darlington against Rowdy, but he surprises him with a different version and speeds past him to the finishing post. Cole pulls into the 'victory lane' to celebrate with Claire and his crew. He looks around for Harry, who is standing on his own. Cole walks up to him – challenging him to a race on foot.

*Eyes Wide Shut* (1999)

Director: Stanley Kubrick

Bill Harford (Tom Cruise) is a doctor to the rich of Manhattan. At a Christmas party thrown by one of his patients, Victor Ziegler (Sydney Pollack), he meets former medical school friend Nick Nightingale (Todd Field), now a professional musician, who is playing the piano at the function. Bill flirts with two models while his wife Alice (Nicole Kidman) is approached by a wealthy Hungarian businessman. Bill's encounter is interrupted with a message from Ziegler who requires his services. A young prostitute has overdosed and Bill must help revive her. He treats the girl, Amanda (Julienne Davis) and swears secrecy to Ziegler.

The following evening, while smoking a joint, Alice begins a conversation on the nature of sexual fidelity, having seen Bill with the two young women. Bill claims he never gets jealous of Alice, explaining fidelity in terms of gender differences and women's inherent loyalty. Angry, Alice confesses that she was sexually tempted by a young naval officer she spotted the previous summer while holidaying with him and their daughter. Bill cannot get the image out of his mind of Alice and a faceless uniformed man having sex.

Bill is called away to attend a patient, who is on his deathbed. At his apartment, the patient's daughter confesses her love for Bill and makes a pass at him. He hastily leaves and walking home, encounters a prostitute, Domino (Vinessa Shaw), whose offer to return to her apartment he accepts. Back at her home, they engage in kissing but are interrupted by a call from Alice. Bill takes this as a 'sign' and leaves.

He later meets with Nick, who tells him of a gig he has got playing at an out of town mansion. Supposed to be blind-folded, on one occasion the blind slipped and he saw an orgy taking place around him, full of cloaked and masked characters. Intrigued, Bill persuades Nick to give him the address and date of the next event.

Bill goes to a costumer called 'Over the Rainbow' where he witnesses the owner of the store catching his teenage daughter cavorting with two Japanese men. Outraged, the owner threatens to call the police. Bill continues on to the gates of the mansion where the party is taking place, and repeating the password which Nick has given him, is let in. Once inside the mansion, he sees cloaked men in masks engaged in public sex with young women, naked except for the high heels and masks they wear. He is approached by one woman who warns him that the organisers know of his presence and that he is in danger. Before he can act, he is called to the main hall where he is hauled in front of the master of ceremonies. Also masked, the master accuses him of breaking into the party. He makes him take off his mask and tells him that he must be punished: he demands that he fully disrobe. Suddenly, a woman intervenes, telling the leader to take her in Bill's place. He concedes and she is taken away. Bill quickly leaves the party and returns home to Alice, who recounts a nightmare she had.

The following day he tries to trace Nick. Going to the hotel he is staying in, he is told that Nick, his face covered in bruises, checked out with two large men earlier that day. Bill then takes the costume back to the fancy dress store. This time, the owner, in the presence of his daughter, asks if he can do him any favours. The Japanese men leave the store, with the owner hinting that he paid them off. Bill returns to the gated mansion house, where he is handed a note telling him to 'cease and desist' his investigations. Later, he returns to Domino's apartment with a gift. Domino is not there, but her roommate tells Bill that she has just been diagnosed with HIV. Leaving the apartment, Bill suspects he is being followed and heads for a coffee shop. Picking up the paper he sees that the young woman, Mandy, who he treated for the overdose at Ziegler's party has died of a drug overdose. He suspects this is the woman who offered herself as a sacrifice in his place at the orgy. Posing as her doctor, he goes to the hospital and is admitted to examine the body.

Ziegler summons Bill to his house and confronts him over his appearance at the orgy, claiming that he has been in over his head for the last 24 hours. When Bill asks him about Mandy, Ziegler tells him she was a 'junkie', that with her it was just a matter of time, 'you said so yourself'. Bill has no way of proving if Mandy's death was due to foul play.

Bill returns home and finds the mask on his bed and Alice asleep. The remembrance of the party and the traumatic events he has gone through (or narrowly avoided) provokes tears. Alice wakes up and Bill decides to confess the whole of his experiences to her. In the final scene they take their daughter Christmas shopping. As Alice reflects on the last few days she concludes that such events do not define them, but that they should go home to have sex directly.

*Far and Away* (1992)

Director: Ron Howard

1893: Joseph Donnelly (Tom Cruise) is an Irish peasant struggling to make a living off his father's land, owned by unscrupulous landlord Daniel Christie (Robert Prosky). When local farmers protest against Christie, his agent Stephen Chase (Thomas Gibson) and his men brutally quash their revolt, Joseph's father is accidentally killed. Chase proceeds to torch the Donnelly family cottage to force them off the land. Joseph vows to avenge his father and makes his way to Christie's property. En route, he meets a drunken Christie in the local pub, who he discovers is an affable aristocrat unaware of his agent's heavy handed tactics. Undeterred, Joseph sneaks onto Christie's property, but is discovered in the barn by his daughter Shannon (Nicole Kidman) who stabs him in the leg with a pitchfork.

Recovering from his injury, Joseph is nursed by Shannon's mother Nora (Barbara Babcock). Shannon is intrigued by this stranger in her home. When Nora is called away in the middle of tending the unconscious Joseph - naked save for a bowl over his genitals - Shannon cannot resist sneaking a peek under the bowl, at which point Joseph wakes up. Trying to escape from the Christie's house, he makes a scene in front of Nora's friends and is detained by Chase - also the fiancée of Shannon. Chase challenges him to pistols at dawn.

Shannon, who is growing restless of her dull existence as a landowner's daughter, has plans to run away to America, and sees Joseph as a useful companion. Moments before the duel, Shannon appears out of the mist driving a buggy and rescues Joseph from being shot. The pair boards a ship for America and Joseph reluctantly poses as Shannon's servant. A kindly man, McGuire (Barry McGovern), advises them that to claim free land, they must travel to Oklahoma to take part in the land race. But upon landing in New York, he makes off with Shannon's silver spoons, her only collateral (moments later he is shot by debtors and the spoons are scattered, quickly stolen by passersby). Joseph comes to Shannon's rescue.

They make their way to an Irish boarding house, where they tell the landlady that they are siblings so they can share lodgings. They manage to obtain jobs in a chicken factory, which Shannon despises. Shannon's snobbishness leads to unpopularity in the boarding house and continued bickering with Joseph, which conceals their mutual attraction. Watching Shannon undress, Joseph grows sexually frustrated. He escapes to a bare knuckle boxing venue, where he finds himself in the ring - and wins the match. Taken under the wing of local businessman Kelly (Colm Meaney), Joseph starts profiting handsomely from his boxing talents, making him something of a local celebrity. However, rather than save money for the land race, he spends it on clothing and hats, which fails to impress Shannon. Back in Ireland, the Christies find themselves

homeless after their tenants burn down their mansion. They decide to go to America to find Shannon, accompanied by Chase.

Following an argument about Joseph's spending, in which he claims Shannon will never earn as much money as he, he discovers her dancing as a show-girl at the local dance hall. Trying to pull her off-stage, he is propositioned by the crowd to fight an Italian boxer, and is offered \$200 by his backers to do so. However, once in the ring, he sees Shannon being groped by a businessman, and gets out of the ring to defend her. As he steps back into the ring he is punched by the Italian and loses the match. He is thrown out of the club and knocked unconscious. Coming to, he spots Chase making enquiries about the pair. Unseen by Chase, he races back to his lodgings to discover his former backers have stolen all of his savings – and proceed to evict him and Shannon from their rooms.

Now homeless, they break into a townhouse to shelter, where they pretend they are a married couple, leading a different life. Just as they kiss, the owner comes back and they flee; Shannon is shot in the back. Joseph takes Shannon to the lodgings where the Christies are staying. Reunited with her family, Joseph leaves her there. Months later, now working on the Transcontinental Rail Road, Joseph is confronted in a dream by his deceased father, who chides him for abandoning his dream of owning land. Taking it as a 'sign', Joseph heads to Oklahoma just in time for the land race. There, he runs into Shannon, then Chase, who tells him to stay away from Shannon or he will kill him.

On the day of the race, Joseph has troubles with his unruly horse but makes it to the start line. He follows Shannon and Chase, knowing that Chase has cheated (hiding a flag on the land to claim it ahead of time). Shannon is felled from her horse and Joseph rushes to her aid; seeing this Chase tries to shoot Joseph, but he pulls the gun from him and knocks Chase from his horse.

Continuing the race, Joseph has another run-in with Chase, who this time fells Joseph from his horse who is crushed by it. Shannon rushes to his side; disgusted, Chase gallops off to claim his land. Joseph begins to lose consciousness. On the point of death, he confesses his love for Shannon. He appears to die and Shannon weeps for him, telling him she loves him and has always loved him. Revived by her declaration, Joseph comes back to life, the pair reunited. They drive a flag into the land, claiming it as their own.

*Interview with the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles* (1994) Director: Neil Jordan

In present day San Francisco, interviewer Daniel Molloy (Christian Slater) asks the vampire Louis (Brad Pitt) to tell him the story of his life.

1791: Louis is a plantation owner in Louisiana, who has recently lost his wife in childbirth. He has lost the will to live, evidenced by his drinking and gambling and lack of care over his physical safety. Walking through the port of New Orleans with a prostitute, he is attacked, first by her pimp, then by a vampire who bites him. Recovering from his attack days later, he is visited by the vampire, Lestat (Tom Cruise), who offers to relieve him of his human misery, by making him immortal. Louis consents and Lestat turns him into a vampire. However, he soon finds that he cannot live by killing humans and is filled with guilt.

Wandering the plague-ridden streets of New Orleans, he finds an orphaned girl, Claudia (Kirsten Dunst), and overcome by hunger, drinks her blood. Lestat, amused by his transgression, transforms Claudia into a vampire and she joins their 'family'. Time passes and Louis finds comfort in having a 'daughter' to look after. But Claudia grows increasingly frustrated that she will never grow up, trapped forever as a little girl. Confronting Lestat, he merely laughs at her. Vowing to have her revenge, she tricks Lestat into drinking the blood of two boys already dead, then cuts his throat. Thinking he is dead, Louis helps her dispose of the body in a swamp. However, days later he returns, having fed on the blood of alligators to survive. Going for Claudia, Louis throws a lit lantern at Lestat and the whole house is torched, but Claudia and Louis manage to escape.

Fleeing to Europe, they spend years in Paris enjoying the old world. But Louis grows restless, wishing to discover the origin of vampires – Lestat has given him little knowledge of his own creator. He finally stumbles upon a coven of vampires led by Armand (Antonio Banderas). The coven operates under the guise of the 'Theatre of Vampires', which allows them to perform the killing of young women for an audience, who do not suspect that they are witnessing murder. Louis is repulsed by the group's crassness, but is attracted to Armand, who is similarly fascinated by him. Armand attempts to persuade Louis to leave Claudia and live with him instead. He also warns him that the coven knows of Claudia's crime and that it is forbidden for one vampire to kill another.

Sensing that Louis may abandon her, Claudia finds a woman who wishes to become a vampire, having lost her own little girl and seeking Claudia as a substitute child. Reluctantly, Louis agrees to transform Madeline (Domiziana Giordano). Not long after, the coven kidnaps Louis, Claudia and her new companion. Claudia and Madeline are locked up in a cell and left to die as the sun enters the chamber; Louis is put in a coffin

which is bricked up behind a wall. Armand rescues Louis but is too late to save Claudia and Madeline. In revenge, Louis torches the premises of the theatre of vampires, killing the coven. Armand arrives just in time to help him escape from the rising sun and once more asks him to join him, but Louis turns him down.

Louis wanders the globe alone, seeing many of the wonders of the world and the technological progress that sweeps through the developed world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, including the coming of cinema. Finally, he returns to America and in New Orleans he comes across an enfeebled Lestat, terrified of the modern world and artificial light. Louis comforts him, but refuses to return to him. Louis's story abruptly ends here, much to the annoyance of the interviewer Daniel, who demands there must be more and pleads with Louis to transform him. Louis attacks him and disappears. Daniel pursues him, jumping into his car. Playing the tape back in his stereo, he comes to the conclusion that Louis's aim was to turn him into a companion. Moments later, Lestat appears in the back of his car and attacks him, the colour returning to the vampire's cheeks as he grows strong again. Dizzy with lack of blood, Daniel sits prostate in the back of the car as Lestat takes the steering wheel from him. He tells him, repeating the speech he once made to Louis, he is 'going to give you the choice I never had'. He switches off Louis' interview and snaps on the radio as he carries across the Bay Bridge.



*Jerry Maguire* (1996)

Director: Cameron Crowe

Jerry Maguire (Tom Cruise) is a sports agent: slick, superficial and without moral integrity. One night, he has a moral epiphany and writes a mission statement for how sports agents should conduct their businesses with dignity. For this he is fired and loses all of his clients, except for football star Rod Tidwell (Cuba Gooding Jr.), who remains with him. One colleague, Dorothy Boyd (Renee Zellweger) comes with him, to the disapproval of her sensible sister Laurel (Bonnie Hunt) as she has a small child Ray (Jonathan Lipsicki) to care for. Jerry loses his fiancée Avery (Kelly Preston) and the chance to win back his most promising client Frank Cushman (Jerry O'Connell) – who is smooth talked into signing a contract by Jerry's nemesis and ex-colleague Bob Sugar (Jay Mohr) - but both Dorothy and Rod stay loyal. Dorothy and Jerry go on a date and end up sleeping together. By the next morning it is clear Jerry has fallen in love – with Dorothy's son Ray. Jerry proposes to Dorothy to stop her taking a job out of town, but it is clear he and Dorothy do not share the same passion as Rod and his wife Marcie (Regina King) do in their relationship. After an unsuccessful attempt at married life, Dorothy suggests they separate.

Meanwhile, Rod and Jerry fall out, Jerry accusing Rod of being a 'pay check player', the reason that he is not getting the contract that he wants. Finally, on the field Rod takes a rough tackle and is concussed. As he lies on the field he realises he is the centre of attention. He decides to play to the audience and gets up, dancing and saluting the crowd, who go wild. He and Jerry are elated. Jerry sees how emotional Rod is on the phone to Marcie, and realises how much he loves Dorothy. He goes home to Dorothy, declaring to her, in a living room full of Laurel's divorced women's group attendees, that 'you complete me'. Ultimately, Jerry gets the deal for Rod that they have been waiting for and potential clients are approach Jerry for his personal touch in business. Dorothy and Jerry close the film, walking through the park with Ray.

*Knight and Day* (2010)

Director: James Mangold

Roy Miller (Tom Cruise) is a secret agent working for the CIA who has gone 'rogue'; June Havens (Cameron Diaz) is a car mechanic and restorer. June is returning from a trip to Wichita to pick up a car part, as part of the restoration project of her father's vintage car which she plans to give her sister as a wedding present. At the airport, June runs into Roy. When she attempts to board her Boston flight, she is told it is overbooked – Roy tells her some things happen for a reason, as he sails past her to board. Moments later, she is told she also can board: looking at CCTV footage of the pair the CIA has assumed she is working with Roy.

Much to June's surprise, the flight is virtually empty with only a handful of passengers. She and Roy start talking and she finds herself attracted to him. She goes to the washroom to freshen up, during which time Roy is involved in a gun battle with the CIA agents, who make up the only other passengers. He disables and kills each of them in turn, as well as the pilot – leaving him to fly the plane. June returns to her seat, only to be told by Roy that everyone else on the plane is dead. Hitting a patch of turbulence, Roy decides to land the plane, and touches down on a highway, coming to a stop in a field. June and Roy escape the plane and he gives her a drink, which turns out to be a sedative. Shortly before she falls unconscious, he warns her not to get into any strangers' cars, and to be especially suspicious if they use the phrase 'secure facility, for your safety'.

June wakes up the following day in her home. Nothing is out of place, except for the post-its Roy has left, giving her instructions, such as to eat a good breakfast. A news report shows a plane crash – the one that June was involved in. She goes for a fitting of her bridesmaid's dress. In the street, men approach her and bundle her into a car, interrogating her about the whereabouts of Roy. Moments later, Roy stages a rescue mission. Confused about whom to trust, June manages to escape and seeks out her ex-fiancé fire-fighter Rodney (Marc Blucas) at the local fire station. She goes to a café with him to explain what has happened. He doesn't believe her until Roy turns up and kidnaps her, shooting him in the leg.

Roy explains to June why he is on the run – he is protecting a young genius Simon Feck (Paul Dano), who has invented a perpetual energy source, the Zephyr. A mole in the CIA has tried to steal the battery and kidnap Simon – Roy is the main suspect. Roy has removed Simon to a safe location in New York. However, upon turning up they discover Simon has been removed. He has left Roy a clue indicating that he has been kidnapped and taken to Austria. Moments later, the two are attacked by men employed by the Spanish arms dealer Antonio (Jordi Mollà) and abducted. Roy drugs June; she remembers only parts of their time in capture before Roy manages to free them and escape to a remote island location.

Frustrated by her circumstances, June attacks Roy but is overpowered by him. Resigned to her fate, she calls her sister on Roy's phone to reassure her that she is okay. Using his phone to pinpoint their location, Antonio's men attack with a remote aircraft. The pair just manages to escape on Roy's helicopter, but he is furious that his secret hideaway has been exposed. He drugs her for a third time and she wakes up onboard a train in Austria.

Wandering the train, she meets who she thinks is Simon, but turns out to be a German assassin who tries to kill her – she manages to fend him off and he is killed by an oncoming train. Removing her to a hotel in Salzburg, Roy leaves to make a rendezvous. June follows him to a meeting with an attractive brunette, to whom he promises sale of the Zephyr. Jealous and feeling betrayed, June returns to the hotel to meet the director of CIA anti-intelligence, who asks her to help them capture Roy. She agrees. When he returns, she activates a specially-designed pen to notify agents – they break in and chase after Roy. He jumps into the Danube and is given up for dead. June returns to her normal life. Reminded of Roy when she hears the song he used for his ring tone on the radio, she decides to visit the address she previously noted that Roy had under surveillance. It turns out to be the home of his parents, the Knights, who believe their son is dead having died in service as an Army Sergeant. (The Knights have enjoyed a mysterious string of good luck and have retired on lottery winnings from a competition they have no recollection of entering.)

June leaves the Knights and calls Roy's phone, declaring she has the Zephyr. Within hours, she is picked up by Antonio's men and transported to Spain. There, Antonio gives her a truth serum to force her to give up the Zephyr's location – then realises she has no idea of its whereabouts. Antonio realises he will have to pay rogue CIA agent Fitzgerald (Peter Saarsgard), the ransom he demands for Simon. June has embarked on this course of action only to be reunited with Roy. Sure enough, Roy – very much alive – stages a rescue operation. Roy and June escape on a motorbike, in pursuit of Fitzgerald and Simon. Antonio and his men pursue him, ahead of the town's running of the bulls, and are finally trampled to death.

Fitzgerald escapes by plane with the Zephyr, having shot Roy. Simon confesses the Zephyr is problematic – it is fundamentally unstable. A moment later, the Zephyr explodes killing Fitzgerald. Roy is taken to hospital. There, he is congratulated by the head of anti-intelligence for his bravery and told that he will be 'taken to a secure facility, for your own safety', which alerts him that something is not right. When the agents leave June appears, disguised as a nurse. She drugs him and wheels him out of the hospital.

Roy comes to, and realises he is in a car, dressed in a swim suit. (It's the car that June restored for her sister.) June returns and they set off for Cape Horn. The Knights receive two tickets in the post for Cape Horn. Although they do not remember ordering them, Mrs Knight insists they make the trip.

*Legend* (1986)

Director: Ridley Scott

Set in a fantasy world, Jack (Tom Cruise) is a Peter Pan of the forest. He takes Princess Lily (Mia Sara) to a meadow where the unicorns roam. In her curiosity, she reaches out and touches one of the creatures, in spite of the prohibition against doing so. From a distance, goblins watch, waiting for their chance to destroy the unicorns. Taking advantage of the unicorn standing still to be petted by Lily, the goblins shoot a poison dart into its side. As minions of the Lord of Darkness (Tim Curry), by killing the creatures they aid his ambition to rule over eternal night, having declared 'there will never be another dawn'.

Unaware of what has just happened, Jack and Lily run through the forest to a lagoon. Lily tells him that she will marry whoever can retrieve her ring from the water, and throws it in there. Jack jumps off the cliff into the lagoon. Meanwhile, the unicorn dies and the goblins take its horn. Immediately, a snowstorm starts, freezing the landscape and forming ice over the water. Lily flees to the local village. As the temperature drops, Jack must break the ice of the pond to emerge from the water. He discovers the land covered in snow and ice. Overcome by cold, he passes out. Returning to the village to the cottage of friends, Lily finds that its inhabitants have frozen to death. Lily vows that she will make matters right.

Jack wakes up in front of a fire – a gump (a type of elfin creature) has rescued him and brought him to a place of safety. Together, with other fairy supporters they go in search of Lily. Finding the unicorn with its horn removed, they realise the Lord of Darkness has achieved his plans for world domination. They must recover the horn to undo the curse, and find an appropriate individual to carry out the quest: Jack. The elves equip him with a sword and shield and set out together on their journey.

Lily, meanwhile, finds the remaining unicorn mare, along with a little creature, a 'roundtop', protecting the creature. Goblins attack and fire an arrow at him (which does not injure him), but they take the mare and Lily to the Lord of Darkness's castle. He grows enchanted by her and wishes to make her his wife. His father (the Devil, whom we never see but only hear) advises him to woo her to become his bride.

She is dazzled by the displays of wealth, the silver and crystal and the huge diamond necklace she discovers, and for a moment she is swayed. But confronted with the Lord of Darkness and his cloven hooves, she accuses him of being an animal. He tells her that they are the same – for it was her sin of touching the unicorn that allowed him to kill it and aid his plans. Once the sun sets, he will rule the world forever.

Jack and the goblins continue to the castle, collecting all of the metallic objects they can: using these as mirrors to shine the last light of sunset into the Lord of Darkness's quarters, they will have a chance to overcome him (as he cannot tolerate light). Lily

tells the Lord of Darkness that she has one request as his bride – that it is she that who gets to kill the last remaining unicorn. He laughs and concedes to her request. From outside the castle Jack and his supporters see Lily with the unicorn – Jack trusts that she will do the right thing. Approaching the unicorn, she reaches for the chain that binds it and sets it free. Jack and the Lord of Darkness proceed to fight, with Jack’s acrobatic skills keeping him out of harm. (Meanwhile, the pixie responsible for opening the light shaft to shine the light onto the mirrors has fallen asleep.) The unicorn’s horn is thrown into a pool of boiling water but Jack retrieves it just in time and stabs the Lord of Darkness through the torso. Just at that moment, the room is lit up with the reflected light from the mirrors. Asking for help from his father, a void opens up, which the Lord of Darkness falls towards, holding on only by the unicorn horn (which he has pulled from his stomach). Jack cuts his hand off, and he falls into the void.

Jack and Lily are reunited. Once again Jack retrieves her ring from the lagoon, and puts it on her finger, declaring his love. She chases after him through the meadow.

*Lions for Lambs* (2007)      Director: Robert Redford

The film follows three interweaving narrative strands: Dr Stephen Malley's (Robert Redford) attempts to negotiate with a bright but disaffected young student Todd Hayes (Andrew Garfield); the teacher's former students, Ernest (Michael Peña) and Arian (Derek Luke), and who sign up for military service in Afghanistan; journalist Janine Roth (Meryl Streep) who visits Senator Jasper Irving (Tom Cruise) to be briefed on his latest strategy in Afghanistan.

The story opens with Arian and Ernest visiting Dr Malley to announce their decision to sign up for the army upon graduating from college. Dr Malley has been the inspiration for their decision to fight in Afghanistan. Dr Malley meets with Todd to discuss his mediocre grade, a reflection of his apathy towards his studies and greater interest in extracurricular activities. Malley tells him he will award him a B grade, unless Todd agrees to motivate himself in class and engage with the ideas he is teaching.

Roth meets with Republican Senator Irving in his offices in Washington D.C. Irving is keen to discuss his new strategy in Afghanistan – small units of men deployed in the mountains to grab key positions ahead of the Taliban. Irving wants the liberal Roth's positive coverage of the policy to win public support. Roth feels this is unethical and asks her boss if she can run a more sceptical report on Irving's ideas, but this idea is rejected. Irving's version of the story is run on TV.

Ernest and Arian are flown into the mountains by helicopter, which is hit by Taliban forces. Ernest is injured by his fall from the chopper and cannot move. Arian stays with him; U.S. soldiers finally run out of ammunition and are surrounded by enemy forces. Arian and Ernest point their guns – now out of bullets – at the enemy soldiers and are shot down.

Haynes watches TV. The screen shows a banner announcing Irving's military intervention, while a reporter announces details of a singer's personal life. Haynes looks thoughtful, perhaps considering the choice that Malley has presented him with.

*Losin' It* (1983)      Director: Curtis Hanson

California, 1965: four teenagers set out for Tijuana, Mexico with the aim of losing their virginity. The sensitive Woody (Tom Cruise) is unsure if he wants to make the trip, dragged along by his friends Spider [John Stockwell] (the jock) and Dave [Jackie Earle Haley] (the big-talker). David's little brother Wendell [John P. Navin Jr.] also accompanies them, tagging along to buy fireworks.

En route they stop at a convenience store, which two of them shoplift from while the owner and his wife have an argument. They ultimately pick up the store owner's wife, Kathy (Shelley Long), who is heading to Mexico to obtain a fast divorce from her husband. They are involved in a series of misadventures: Spider soon ditches his friends but ends up the target of the local crooked sheriff (Henry Darrow), who tries to extort money from him. Dave gets himself into trouble with the locals as he assumes every Mexican woman is 'easy' and Wendell has to spend his time rescuing him. They are also pursued by some angry marines. Woody, on the other hand, spends time with Kathy. Learning the reason for the boys' trip, Kathy has sex with Woody. Pursued by the sheriff, Spider and Dave manage to make their escape and the five succeed in getting out of Tijuana, crossing the border safely back into America.

*Magnolia* (1999)      Director: P.T. Anderson

The film opens with a narrator describing three urban myths, each based on coincidence.

Police officer Jim Kurring (John C. Reilly) investigates a disturbance at a woman's home and discovers a body. A young boy Dixon (Emmanuel L. Johnson) tells him he knows who did it (telling him a riddle through rap). Other police officers arriving on the scene disregard his report.

Earl Partridge (Jason Robards), once a popular TV host and head of a TV empire, is on his deathbed, dying of cancer. Earl asks his male nurse Phil (Philip Seymour Hoffman) to find his son Frank TJ Mackey (Tom Cruise). Frank is now the successful sex guru of the 'Seduce and Destroy' seminars, which he runs for sad singleton men trying to pick up women. In the audience, interviewer Gwenovier (April Grace) watches his show. Claudia Wilson (Melora Walters) is visited by her father Jimmy Gator (Phillip Baker Hall) but tells him to leave. Gator is the host of a children's TV quiz and is also dying of cancer. One of the children featuring in Gator's quiz show, Stanley (Jeremy Blackman), arrives at the TV studio with his overbearing father Ricky (Michael Bowen). Donnie Smith (William H. Macy), once a champion of the same show, is fired by his boss. He begs with him to reconsider, needing the money for corrective oral surgery.

Jim is called to Claudia's house, where her disagreement with Gator has been reported as a disturbance. He realises she is a cocaine addict, but nevertheless is attracted to her and asks her on a date. Linda visits Earl's lawyer, asking him to change the will. She married him for his money but has come to love him, so no longer wants the money she will inherit upon his death.

Stanley goes on the quiz show and starts winning. At the commercial break he is banned from going to the toilet by the producers and subsequently wets himself on air. Terrified, he can no longer answer any questions and eventually collapses. Ricky is furious, but Stanley refuses to return to the show and be treated like a 'doll'.

Phil finally gets through to Frank's assistant on the phone. Interviewing Frank for television, Gwenovier asks him about the details of his personal history and his family background. Earl's wife Linda (Julianne Moore) goes to the drugs store to pick up his prescription and breaks down.

Gwenovier tells Frank that she knows about his mother's battle with cancer when he was a teenager, and the fact that he was her only caretaker up until her death – all of which has been omitted from his PR. Incensed, he ends the interview. He then gets the message that his father is dying and starts weeping. Overhearing the phone conversation, Linda hangs up Phil's line, telling him not to get involved. Donnie goes



to a bar to watch the object of his infatuation, Brad (Craig Kvinsland), from a distance. Jealous at the attention he gets from another customer, Donnie confesses his love to Brad then leaves.

Jim investigates someone loitering. An unknown figure shoots Jim, which causes him to drop his gun, which is stolen by Dixon. Linda apologises to Phil for her behaviour, then goes to her car to commit suicide by swallowing morphine.

Jim and Claudia go on a date. Claudia tells him she won't love him when he knows what she is like, asking him not to see her again. They kiss and then she runs away. Jimmy returns home to his wife Rose (Melinda Dillon), where he confesses that he cheated on her. She asks him why their daughter doesn't speak to him and she he tells her that Claudia thinks he molested her but he cannot remember if he did nor not. Rose leaves and Jimmy decides to kill himself.

Donnie returns to his former employer to steal money from the safe to fund his dental work. He breaks his key in the lock of the offices while doing so. He later thinks better of his actions and goes to return the money, but cannot get in because he has broken his key, so tries to break in by climbing up a pole and get in through the roof.

Dixon finds Linda, who has overdosed, in her car. He steals the money from her purse, but dials 911 to call an ambulance. Frank watches his father die, ranting against Earl how much he hated him but begging him not to die. Jim sees Donnie trying to break in and goes to stop him.

Suddenly, it begins to rain frogs. Rose crashes her car, right outside her daughter's apartment, and this facilitates a reunion of the pair. Jimmy is about to kill himself, but frogs pour in through his skylight, causing him to shoot the TV which starts a fire. Jimmy slips on the pole and falls, smashing his teeth (now he will need the corrective surgery he wished for). Jim's gun drops in front of him. He helps Donnie return the money.

Phil gives Earl a dose of morphine and Frank watches his father die. He goes to visit Linda in hospital where she is recovering from her overdose. Stanley tells his father that he must be nicer to him; Ricky tells him to go to bed. Jim goes to visit Claudia and asks if they can make it work; she agrees.

The narrator asks us to consider the nature of coincidence following the events we have just witnessed.

The year is 2054. A system called pre-crime is in operation in Washington D.C. Using the visions of three 'pre-cognitives' who see future murders, police detectives are able to prevent these crimes before they occur. The head detective of pre-crime is Jon Anderton (Tom Cruise), who remains traumatised by the abduction of his son Sean some years earlier. Divorced, Anderton has a drug addiction but nevertheless is largely responsible for the success of the pre-crime system. He maintains a close relationship with the founder of pre-crime, Lamar Burgess (Max Von Sydow), who has plans to make pre-crime national.

The film opens with Anderton preventing the double murder of a woman and her lover by her husband. The husband is 'haloed' – a device is placed round his head which sends him into a dream-like trance indefinitely – and taken away. Later that night, he watches holographic films of his late son and ex-wife and takes the illicit drugs he has obtained earlier that day. Committed to his work, he has no personal life.

The next day at work he is introduced to Danny Witwer (Colin Farrell) who works for the Attorney General and is investigating the pre-crime scheme, to make sure no miscarriages of justice have taken place. He is forced to show Witwer around the facilities, including the chamber where the pre-crime 'detectives' are housed in a pool. Alone for a moment, Anderton is grabbed by the pre-cog Agatha (Samantha Morton), who demands 'do you see?' while the visual playback of her visions shows a woman being drowned.

Anderton visits the storage facility of the pre-crime criminals and discovers that the dead woman is an Ann Lively. However, there is vital data missing about her case – namely, the identity of her murderer – which troubles him. He shares his findings with Burgess, who tells him not to worry.

At the pre-crime facilities, the pre-cogs predict that Anderton will kill a man called Leo Crow, whom Anderton has never heard of. He escapes before his colleagues can halo him and goes on the run. Witwer and the pre-crime team chase him through the city until they reach a car plant, where following a punch-up with Witwer, Anderton escapes.

Fleeing to the countryside, he visits the co-founder of pre-crime Iris Hineman (Lois Smith). She tells him about the existence of a 'minority report', an alternative future which is sometimes generated by one of the pre-cogs, casting the absolute justice of the pre-crime scheme into doubt. Hineman suggests that he find out if Agatha (Samantha Morton), the 'most talented' of the pre-cogs, has generated a minority report for him. Witwer visits Anderton's apartment where he finds evidence of his drug habit. He then visits Lara (Kathryn Morris), Anderton's ex-wife, discovering more about Sean's kidnapping and Anderton's grief.

Anderton plans to break into pre-crime and kidnap Agatha, but first he must undergo an eyeball transplant to avoid being identified by the 'i-dent' scheme that is in place around D.C. He visits a back-street surgeon, Dr Solomon Eddie (Peter Stormare), who turns out to be a criminal that Anderton previously put away. While under sedation, Anderton dreams of the moments just before Sean (Tyler Patrick Jones) was snatched from a swimming pool while in his care. He finally wakes up to discover that the apartment block he is in is being searched by pre-crime robots (which identify everyone using i-dent scans) – fortunately his new eyes are read and he escapes detection.

Finding his way to pre-crime premises, he breaks in and takes Agatha. Unfortunately, he discovers that he has no minority report and that he is predicted by Agatha to kill Leo Crow. Desperate to solve the mystery, he analyses Agatha's visions to work out where Leo Crow is due to be at the time he will kill him and goes to his hotel room. There he discovers photographs scattered across the bed of many children, including Sean. Leo Crow (Mike Binder) returns and Anderton attacks him. At gun point, ready to shoot, Crow lets slip that he is being paid to pose as a child abuser and his family will be paid only if he dies. Before Anderton can discover who paid him, Crow pulls the trigger on himself.

Witwer calls Burgess to Anderton's apartment to explain that he thinks Anderton is being set up. Burgess shoots him dead.

Anderton takes Agatha to Lara's home out of town by the shore. Anderton realises the connection between Ann Lively and Agatha – Lively was Agatha's mother - just as the pre-crime team turn up, arresting and 'haloing' him. Anderton is placed in storage along with all of the would-be murderers he previously arrested.

Lara meets with Burgess who tells her it is all his fault – Anderton was under too much stress and he didn't support him enough. Burgess promises to look into cases of drowning. From this statement, Lara realises Burgess is guilty – having never given him details of the case Anderton was investigating. Lara breaks into pre-crime storage facilities and gets Anderton out of containment.

At a convention dinner, at which Burgess is due to announce the national launch of pre-crime, Anderton hijacks the event. He streams Agatha's visions of Ann Lively's murder by Burgess onto screens visible to the whole hall, while broadcasting how Burgess got away with his crime. Burgess follows Anderton outside, gun in his pocket. At the last moment, asking Anderton's forgiveness, he turns the gun on himself and pulls the trigger.

Anderton explains in a voice-over that the pre-crime experiment was disbanded. He is shown with Lara, now pregnant, in their apartment. The pre-cogs read and pass the time in a remote log cabin far from civilisation.

*Mission: Impossible* (1996) Director: Brian De Palma

A black and white screen shows a drunken Russian waking up to discover that the woman he took back to his hotel room is dead. He is interrogated by a middle aged moustached man. Confessing the name of his contact, he is drugged and falls unconscious. The walls slide back to reveal a warehouse location – the whole thing was a set-up. The interrogator pulls off his mask to reveal Ethan Hunt (Tom Cruise). He goes to the body of the woman, shaking her gently she wakes up, his colleague Claire (Emmanuelle Beart).

On a plane, Jim Phelps (Jon Voight) looks at a picture of his wife Claire. He then watches a briefing from the IMF (Impossible Mission Force), a branch of the CIA, on his latest mission.

In Prague, Jim's IMF team are taken through his plans for their task: to obtain one half of a 'NOC' list, sensitive data which reveals the identities of a number of IMF agents working throughout the world. Ethan and his colleague Sarah (Kirsten Scott Thomas) will steal the disc, with others taking support positions. Jim will stay at the 'crow's nest' to supervise the operation. The evening soon goes wrong, with team-mate Jack (Emilio Estevez) being killed after the lift he sits above hurtles towards the lift-shaft and he is impaled by metal. Sarah is stabbed and Jim gives orders to abort. Leaving the crow's nest to rescue his team Jim is shot by an unknown attacker. Finally, the last team-mate is blown up in her car.

Calling the IMF to report the failure of the mission, Ethan learns that senior IMF operative Eugene Kittridge (Henry Czerny) is in Prague. He meets him later that night, where the older man tells him the whole operation was a 'mole hunt' to flush out a crooked operative, known only as 'Job', and that he suspects Ethan of being the mole. Enraged, Ethan manages to escape and returns to the crow's nest. Claire returns and together they vow to find the mole.

Following a biblical clue (Joe 3:17), Ethan manages to locate arms dealer Max and arranges a meeting to discuss the sale of the NOC list. Ethan discovers to his surprise that Max is a woman (Vanessa Redgrave). He warns Max that the NOC list she has been sold is a fake and strikes a deal that he will deliver the real NOC list in return for \$10M and a meeting with 'Job'. They will rendezvous on the Eurostar between London and Paris.

Ethan must then set about stealing the NOC list from IMF headquarters. In addition to Claire, he assembles Luther Stickell (Ving Rhames) and Franz Krieger (Jean Reno) to carry out the task. Ethan and his team succeed in breaking into IMF HQ in Langley and stealing the NOC list, employing a variety of performance set-pieces and acrobatics to slip into the premises unnoticed.

Returning to Europe, to a secure base in London, Ethan discovers that his mother and uncle have been arrested on drugs charges – an attempt on the part of the IMF to put pressure on Ethan to give up the NOC list. He calls Kittridge on a payphone in London, staying on the line long enough to allow the phone tracer to ascertain he is in the city. He turns around to see Phelps, whom he thought was dead.

Phelps tells him what happened that night, how the mole hypothetically pulled off the stunt. However, as they discuss events, Ethan pictures Phelps committing the murders and realises that Phelps is ‘Job’. But he remains unsure of Claire’s guilt. Having formed a romantic attachment to her (the nature of which remains unclear) he is torn.

A meeting is set up with Max. However, having deliberately alerted the IMF to the fact he is in London, they are able to trace the meeting and Kittridge also appears on the train. Kittridge’s IMF team keep a close eye on Max and her men as Ethan negotiates the deal. He is told that his money and Job can be found in the baggage car. As Ethan departs, Kittridge moves in and arrests Max. Phelps appears in the baggage car to meet Claire, who tells him Ethan suspects him. Phelps pulls off his mask to reveal Ethan: he now has proof of Claire’s guilt. Phelps appears behind him and tells Claire that Ethan was just waiting for confirmation of her guilt. He then shoots Claire and escapes through the roof. Claire dies in Ethan’s arms. He follows Phelps along the top of the train and following a fight, a helicopter chasing through a tunnel, and an explosion, Phelps is killed and Ethan survives.

Onboard a plane, Ethan is asked if he is interested in ‘the cinema of the Caribbean, Aruba?’ – thus offered a new mission.

Ethan Hunt (Tom Cruise) escorts scientist Dr. Vladimir Nekhorvich (Rade Serbedzija) on a plane from Australia to the United States. Nekhorvich carries with him the Chimera virus that he has developed for Biocyte Pharmaceuticals and its antidote Bellerophon. (Unknown to Hunt, he has injected himself with Chimera as the only means of entering the U.S. with the virus) During the flight, terrorists take over the plane, including Hunt himself. Moments later, he pulls off his mask to reveal Sean Ambrose (Dougray Scott). Ambrose and his men jump from the plane leaving it to crash in the mountains.

Hunt is shown climbing in the Nevada mountains on vacation. His superior Mission Commander Swanbeck (Anthony Hopkins) interrupts him to assign a new task. He goes to Seville where he lays a trap for a cat burglar, Nyah Hall (Thandi Newton), whose services the IMF wish to engage. Attempting to steal the jewels that Hunt has laid as bait, Nyah is caught by him but he releases her, having successfully observed her skills. Following a high-speed car chase in which Hunt pursues Nyah, the two meet again and soon end up in bed together.

Hunt is then told the nature of the mission Nyah must undertake: a former girlfriend of Ambrose, she must pretend to get arrested and wait for him to bail her out. She is to resume their former relationship in order to obtain information about the Bellerophon antidote that he has stolen. Hunt voices his objections to Swanbeck but is overruled. Nyah is duly arrested and rescued by Ambrose, who takes her to Sydney where his HQ is based (along with Biocyte Pharmaceuticals). Hunt and his assembled team Luther (Vince Rhames) and Billy (John Polson) remotely observe from a hidden location in the Australian bush.

At a horse-racing event, Ambrose meets with the CEO of Biocyte, John C. McCloy (Brendan Gleeson), showing him disturbing photos of a Chimera victim and his rapid decline before death, 20 hours after exposure to the virus. Ambrose has all of the Bellerophon and he wishes to obtain the Chimera virus from McCloy. Also at the event are Nyah and Hunt, who manage to meet so she can give him the video footage Ambrose has shared with McCloy.

Hunt and his team kidnap McCloy. Posing as the deceased Nekhorvich, he convinces McCloy that he has been hospitalised, is dying of the Chimera virus and that he is a hallucination. In doing so he manages to obtain a confession from McCloy: Ambrose has forced him to agree to a sale of Chimera for £37 million, promising to return the Bellerophon. Ambrose plans to use the Chimera to extort money from nations that he will threaten with the virus and Biocyte will grow rich providing the cure.

Hunt plans to break into Biocyte and destroy the remaining Chimera samples. Unfortunately, Ambrose finds out about his plan, posing as Hunt to test Nyah's loyalty,

and decides he will do the same thing. Hunt gets into Biocyte and has destroyed all but one of the Chimera vials when Ambrose's team arrives. Nyah manages to get a hold of the sample and injects herself with it, preventing Ambrose from stealing it (and killing her). Hunt escapes from Biocyte, the clock ticking.

Ambrose releases Nyah into Sydney, where she wanders the streets in a daze. She heads for the cliffs to commit suicide so as to avoid creating a pandemic. Hunt breaks into the secret location where the deal between McCloy and Ambrose is taking place. Posing as Ambrose's right hand man, Hugh Stamp (Richard Roxborough), Hunt disguises Stamp as himself and brings him to the meeting. Ambrose gleefully shoots Stamp (thinking he is Hunt), providing a distraction as Hunt steals the Bellerophon and escapes. Ambrose finally realises he has been tricked into killing Stamp and goes after Hunt.

Chasing Hunt on motorbike, Ambrose finally catches him and a fight ensues. Finally, Hunt shoots Ambrose. His teammates have found Nyah and bring her to Hunt, who injects her with the Bellerophon.

Disaster averted, Nyah and Hunt are able to holiday in Sydney in peace.

Ethan Hunt (Tom Cruise) is bound to a chair in an unknown location. Coming to, he sees arms dealer Owen Davian (Philip Seymour Hoffman) pointing a gun at his fiancée Julia's (Michelle Monaghan) head. Davian tells him an explosive device has been planted in his head and demands to know where the 'rabbit's foot' is. Hunt tells him he doesn't know, as Davian counts down from ten, claiming he will shoot Julia. A distraught Hunt struggles from the chair, wheedles, reasons, persuades, all to no avail. At zero Davian shoots Julia. (Cut to credits.)

Ethan Hunt, former IMF agent, has retired from active service and is happily engaged to Julia, spending his professional life in the training of new agents. Julia knows nothing of his real occupation, thinking he works for the traffic police. At their engagement party, Ethan receives a call from the IMF telling him that one of his agents, Lindsey Farris (Keri Russell), has been kidnapped and is being held in Berlin. They ask for his help to bring her back safely. Reunited with his old team-mate Luther (Ving Rhames) and new operatives Declan Gormley (Jonathan Rhys Meyers) and Zhen Lei (Maggie Q), they infiltrate the safe house outside Berlin where Lindsey is being held. They manage to retrieve her but as they escape in their helicopter, realise that she has had a device planted in her head. Before they can neutralize the charge with a defibrillator, it goes off, killing her. Ethan is devastated.

After Lindsey's funeral, Ethan retrieves a package, posted by Lindsey prior to her death. It contains a blank postcard with a magnetic microdot on it. Luther and Ethan agree not to share this information with their superiors. Retrieving vital information from Farris's laptop, the team realises that Owen is due to broker a deal with the mysterious rabbit's foot in the Vatican City. Although neither IMF superior Brassel (Lawrence Fishburne) nor Musgrave (Billy Crudup) have authorized the mission, the team make their plans for Rome. Ethan reaffirms his commitment to Julia by marrying her in the hospital where she works as a nurse before leaving. His elaborate and highly staged plan works, and the team succeeds in kidnapping Davian. The villain threatens to kill Ethan's loved ones when he gets free. While threatening Davian onboard a plane, Luther makes the fatal mistake of saying Ethan's name – an error which will have repercussions for Ethan.

Luther and Ethan oversee the transport of Davian to a secure facility. Luther shows him the information obtained from the decoded microdot, a video message from Lindsey expressing her concerns that there is a mole within the IMF – and she suspects Brassel. The pair is interrupted by an explosion: mercenaries are attacking the transport in an attempt to rescue Davian. After a gun battle, Davian escapes. Ethan rushes to the hospital where Julia works, remembering Davian's threats to kill his wife. But he is too late: Julia has already been kidnapped.



Davian calls Ethan to strike a bargain: he wants Ethan to retrieve the rabbit's foot within 48 hours, otherwise he will execute Julia. Ethan hastily assembles his team with the help of Musgrave and flies to Shanghai, where the rabbit's foot is located. They succeed in breaking into the premises which houses the rabbit's foot and meets with Davian's people, giving up the package. Ethan is knocked unconscious and awakens to find himself in the scenario shown in the prologue: strapped to a chair being threatened by Davian.

Davian shoots Julia and leaves. Moments later, Musgrave turns up. He explains that the IMF is using Davian in a complex sting operation: allowing Davian to sell the rabbit's foot to a Middle Eastern country hostile to the U.S., it affords American an excuse to invade the region. The woman that was shot dead was not Julia, but Davian's translator, wearing a mask – Julia is still alive. Having heard Musgrave's explanation, Ethan manages to attack him (by biting him) and breaking free of his bonds sets off to rescue Julia.

Having stolen Musgrave's phone, he is able to find the location that Julia has been taken to. He succeeds in freeing Julia, but is then rendered incapable of action by the explosive that has been planted in his head and that Davian has just activated to send out a deafening sound. Davian attacks the incapacitated Ethan. In the resulting fistfight, they roll into the street where Davian is hit by an oncoming car. Returning inside, Julia charges a make-shift defibrillator to neutralize the device implanted in his head. It involves a brief spell of unconsciousness, so he instructs her in how to use his handgun, should she need it. Just as he is knocked out, Davian's men – including Musgrave – coming looking for them and Julia singlehandedly shoots them dead. When Ethan awakes moments later following CPR by Julia, he finds the enemy has been entirely taken out, much to his surprise. Ethan finally reveals his secret double life to his wife. At the IMF, his superior Brassel offers Ethan his congratulations for his bravery. Ethan reiterates his wish to retire – but is keen to know exactly what the rabbit's foot is. Brassel promises to tell him only if he doesn't come back. Ethan and Julia depart on their honeymoon.

*Rain Man* (1988)      Director: Barry Levinson

Charlie Babbitt (Tom Cruise) is a slick, successful importer of luxury cars. He and his team make deals from their 'boiler room' outfit in California, juggling demanding clients and stringent imports personnel. On his way to Palm Springs for a weekend with his girlfriend Susanna (Valeria Golino), he receives a call telling him his father, Sanford Babbitt, has passed away. He shows little emotion at the news, merely apologising to Susanna and turning the car around to return to L.A.

Returning to his childhood Ohio home with Susanna, he attends the funeral at a distance. He tells her the reason for his fallout with his father: celebrating high school exam success, he took his friends out in his father's vintage Buick, an action expressly prohibited. Babbitt Sr. reported the car as stolen and Charlie and his friends were thrown in the local police cell. The others were soon picked up by their family; Charlie waited two days before his father returned for him. Charlie left home and cut off all contact with his father.

Attending the reading of his father's will, Charlie learns that all he has been left by Babbitt is his Buick and prize rose bushes, in consequence of their severed relationship. His fortune, in excess of \$3M, has been left to an unnamed beneficiary living at Walbrook, a local institution. Furious, Charlie goes to Walbrook to find out the identity of this individual. The director of the institution, Dr Bruner (Jerry Molen), will not disclose this information. However, a chance encounter with Raymond (Dustin Hoffman) around Babbitt Sr.'s Buick reveals that this man is Charlie's brother – and the beneficiary of their father's fortune.

Charlie then kidnaps Raymond in order to extort half of the \$3M from Walbrook. However, Raymond's severe autism makes caring for him extremely difficult. Susanna eventually gives up in exasperation at Charlie's plan and leaves. Charlie tries to get Raymond to fly back to California with him, as he must return to attend to his business, which is his absence is facing trouble. But Raymond is afraid of flying and refuses to get on a plane. Charlie must make the journey with Raymond from Ohio to California in their father's Buick. As they make the journey together, Charlie is amazed by Raymond's extraordinary capacity for memory and statistics, and grows increasingly attached to his brother. He decides that he wishes to care for Raymond and get to know his brother better. Raymond's phobia of hot water also leads Charlie to realise that their father sent him to the institution because of a scolding accident Raymond had with Charlie as a child, when Babbitt had not been long widowed. Raymond was the 'rain man' Charlie remembers from childhood, who used to sing him to sleep.

By this time, Charlie's business is in serious financial trouble. He hits upon a scheme: take Raymond to Las Vegas to play blackjack and win enough to cover his business losses. He and Raymond get suited up and hit the casinos. Raymond succeeds in

winning a sizable amount of money before the casino owners quietly ask the pair to leave and never return – but they are allowed to keep their winnings.

Returning to California, Charlie meets with Dr Bruner to determine what is best for Raymond's welfare. Bruner offers him a cheque for \$250K, but Charlie declines it, saying that it is no longer about the money – he wants the brother he never had growing up. Following this, Raymond has an accident while Charlie sleeps – he accidentally sets off the smoke alarm and the noise causes him to have a fit. Charlie realises that Raymond belongs in Walbrook, which can better provide for his needs. Attending a meeting with Dr Bruner and a psychiatrist, Charlie concedes this and arranges for Raymond's return to Walbrook.

The film ends with Charlie saying an emotional farewell to Raymond at the train station.

*Risky Business* (1983)

Director: Paul Brickman

Joel Goodson (Tom Cruise) is a Chicago high school student who is desperate to get into an Ivy League school - and lose his virginity. When his parents go away on holiday, his friends convince him to take advantage of his empty suburban house. Eating a (still frozen) ready meal washed down by bourbon and cola, he ends the evening cranking up the (prohibited) stereo and dancing in his underpants and socks to 'Old Time Rock 'n' Roll'. The next day, transvestite prostitute Jackie (Bruce A. Young) turns up on his doorstep, sent by one of his friends as a joke. Before she leaves, she gives him the number of 'Lana'.

After some procrastination Joel calls the phone number. Lana (Rebecca De Mornay), a tall attractive blonde, arrives at his house and they have sex. The next morning at breakfast she demands \$300 for her services. Joel goes to the bank to withdraw the money and returns to find Lana has stolen an expensive Steuben glass egg belonging to his mother. Joel goes downtown in his father's Porsche (also prohibited) to find Lana to demand his property back; before he gets any further Lana's pimp Guido (Joe Pantoliano) returns and pulls a gun on him. He manages to escape.

Lana calls him the next day, telling him that the egg and all of her property are at Guido's place. Joel allows Lana to stay in his house while he goes to school. When he returns he finds all of his friends there, along with Lana and her friend Vicki (Shera Danese), whom she has invited to stay. She suggests that a meeting of her friends and his would be to their mutual financial advantage, but he dismisses the idea.

That evening, Lana, Vicki, Joel and his friend Barry (Bronson Pichot) take a trip down to Lake Michigan and get stoned. Lana and Joel argue and she storms off. Taking her purse out of the Porsche, she knocks the gear shift out of gear and the car rolls onto the pier. Moments later the pier collapses and the Porsche lands in the lake. Joel goes to the mechanic to investigate how much it will cost to fix the car and is devastated by the estimate. He finally concedes to Lana's business plan: they will turn his parents' home into a brothel for one night and split the profits.

They do so, with great success: Joel indicates that he earned \$8000 from the one night. However, in the middle of the 'party' Princeton interviewer, Rutherford (Richard Masur), turns up and Joel tries to conduct the meeting while Lana interrupts with requests to move a pull down mattress. Later, Rutherford is seen leaving with one of Lana's co-workers. Lana and Joel end the evening by departing for a late night sex session on the Chicago-L.

Upon their return, Joel discovers that his home has been burgled; the culprit turns out to be Guido, who is angry that Lana and Vicki have gone to work for themselves. He offers to let Joel buy back the furniture, thus wiping out Joel's profits for the evening. Joel manages to replace all of the items (including the glass egg, which he has to dive to

catch when it is thrown to him) before his parents return by taxi from the airport. They remain none the wiser, though his mother chastises him for causing a chip to her glass egg. Sulking in the garden, Joel's father approaches him: Rutherford has called him, suitably impressed by his son, and wishes to offer Joel a place at Princeton. Joel ends the evening walking through the park with Lana. Lana indicates she wishes to keep seeing him when he goes to college; he tells her she'll have to pay for it.

*TAPS* (1983)

Director: Harold Becker

At the Bunker Hill cadet school, Brian Moreland (Timothy Hutton) meets with academy commander, Brigadier General Harlan Bache (George C. Scott), who promotes him to Cadet General, the highest rank of the school. The following day, at the school rally, Bache announces to his students that the school will be closed and sold to property developers; this will be final year of Bunker Academy.

At a school dance, the local teenagers harass the cadets' dates as they arrive. Moreland tries to calm the situation, which leads to a brawl. Bache arrives and tries to break up the fight, but his pistol is grabbed by one of the teenagers and discharges, killing one of the locals. Bache is to be charged with manslaughter, but has a heart attack and is admitted to hospital. Following this incident, it is announced that Bunker Hill will close immediately. Moreland decides to stage a siege, although he first allows school staff to leave. To make matters worse, while visiting the town to get supplies, when one of the cadets' trucks breaks down it is attacked by local teenagers. Another cadet, the impulsive Captain David Shawn (Tom Cruise), fires a round in the air to scare them off and helps to pull the cadets into the other truck and drive off.

The siege is run by Moreland with military strictness, supported by his friend Captain Alex Dwyer (Sean Penn). Various attempts are made to persuade the cadets to give up the school. Moreland meets with one delegation led by his father, a Master Sergeant (Wayne Tippitt). When Moreland refuses to concede to his father's demands, he slaps his son. Moreland Jr. demands that the delegation be removed from campus.

Later, the National Guard is sent in; its commander Colonel Kerby (Ronny Cox) tries to bargain with Moreland. As cadet morale dwindles, students return home to their parents – initially covertly, then openly when Moreland gives them the option to leave. They begin to run out of supplies, then the water, followed by the electricity, is turned off. Moreland offers to end the siege if Bache supports it. Kerby tells him Bache died the previous night in hospital.

A tank approaches the gate at night; panicking, one of the cadets on patrol surrenders, but drops his gun on the ground, where it discharges. National Guard officers start shooting, killing the other cadet.

His death badly affects Moreland, who after discussing the matter with Dwyer, agrees to surrender. As he walks up to the gate to inform the National Guard, calling the other cadets to surrender, Shawn begins firing and a gun battle ensues. Moreland and Dwyer rush up to the look-out where Shawn is positioned, as the National Guard and police storm the campus. They arrive just as a grenade is thrown at Shawn. Moreland dives for Shawn to pull him out of the way; both are killed in the explosion. A tearful Dwyer carries Moreland out of the building, followed by cadets and members of the National Guard. A flashback to the earlier cadet parade ends the film.

*The Color of Money* (1986) Director: Martin Scorsese

Eddie Felson (Paul Newman), previously a successful pool shark, now a liquor salesman, misses the action of the pool halls. At a bar, he sees a young pool player Vince (Tom Cruise) who has talent but lacks maturity, enjoying the bar's video games as much as playing pool. He offers to school him as a hustler. Vince is uncertain, happy with his job at children's store 'Childworld', but his girlfriend Carmen (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio) is quicker to see the possibilities. Vince finally agrees to Eddie's offer and the three of them go on the road to work the local pool halls. Vince finds the world of hustling difficult. Feeling sorry for an old man that he is playing against, he bails on the game. A fight ensues and Eddie manages to pull him out, claiming to be Vince's father, and they make a run for the car in which Carmen is waiting.

Vince continues to be a tough student: he enjoys showing off too much, which undermines his hustle. Meanwhile, the manipulative Carmen makes sexual advances to the much older Eddie, which he ignores. Looking after the pair is like 'childcare', Eddie mutters.

Vince becomes increasingly insecure about Carmen's loyalty. Eddie suggests they play the 'two brothers and a stranger' routine, which involves Carmen and Eddie faking it as a couple (the 'brothers' in this set-up). Vince earns \$1000 from this hustle, but meeting Eddie in the car park confronts him over his inappropriate behaviour towards Carmen (although part of the agreed ruse).

Vince finally learns to play badly for the sake of the hustle – if only because of Carmen's threats to leave him if he continues to play well against Eddie's advice – gearing up for a big tournament in Atlantic City. Eddie finds himself badly hustled by a real pro – he is despondent that he has not spotted the signals, and gets drunk to console himself. He tells Vince that he no longer needs Eddie.

Eddie returns to the pool hall as a player, finally getting an eye test and wearing the glasses he needs to be able to play. He comes across Vince at the championship in Atlantic City, now smarter dressed and more confident of his own abilities. They wish each other luck. They find themselves up against each other in one of the tournament rounds. Eddie beats Vince in the game and is triumphant in his win. But he later discovers that Vince lost intentionally as part of a bet – Vince turns up at Eddie's room to offer him a cut of his \$8K winnings. Now in the semi-finals, Eddie is angry. He forfeits the game and storms out of the hall. As he passes Vince and Carmen he hands back the envelope of money. He tells Vince that he wants his 'best game' and that he'll be in the green room waiting for him.

An angry Vince meets him and throws down the money on the pool table. He tells Eddie that he 'used us', but now he is playing with the 'big boys'. He concedes to a rematch with Eddie. Eddie tells him not to put the money in the bank, because if he doesn't beat him there he'll beat him next month in Dallas. Vince asks him what makes him so sure, to which Eddie replies 'I'm back', as he breaks the pool set.

*The Firm* (1993)      Director: Sydney Pollack

Promising young law graduate (Tom Cruise) attends a number of interviews, all of which result in competitive offers: he has his pick of jobs. He finally settles on the small Memphis law firm of Bendini, Lambert and Locke, which makes him an offer more enticing than the rest.

He and his wife Abby (Jeanne Tripplehorn) move to Memphis where he is bowled over by their new wealth: a beautiful house, expensive car and other perks of his new job. A working class boy who made good (his mother lives in a trailer and his brother is in prison) he is dazzled by his new life style. Abby, who comes from money, is less sure of the firm, unsettled by its subtle control of its employees.

Initially overwhelmed by work, Mitch sees nothing amiss. He is mentored by senior lawyer Avery (Gene Hackman) who subtly defies the more petty rules of the firm. Mitch's suspicions are first aroused when he hears two of the firm's employees have been killed in a boating accident. When Abby speaks to one of the men's widows, she thinks that she sounds scared – as if she realises that foul play has been involved. Mitch begins to investigate and discovers a number of similar fatal 'accidents' of the firm's former lawyers.

Meanwhile, the demanding schedule is putting a strain on his marital relationship, with Abby resenting the number of hours he is spending at the office. While on a business trip to the Caribbean, walking alone on the beach, Mitch rescues a young woman whose partner has an altercation with her. She makes a pass at him, which leads to a sexual encounter. At the time he thinks no-one has witnessed it.

Shortly after, the FBI approaches Mitch to request his assistance in a case it is putting together against the firm, which is involved in money-laundering and other illegal activities for the Mafia. Mitch initially refuses, insisting that he will be debarred if he reveals confidential lawyer-client information, even if it is at the bequest of the FBI. In the meantime, he visits his brother Ray (David Strathairn) in jail and asks for his help. Ray puts in him touch with a private investigator, Eddie Lomax (Gary Busey). When Eddie is killed by the firm's henchmen, Mitch is approached by his assistant and girlfriend Tammy (Holly Hunter) who offers to help him in defeating the firm.

When one of the firm's henchmen shows Mitch photographs of his extra-marital encounter, Mitch realises he is trapped and confesses all to Abby. Angry at his betrayal, she moves out. Avery approaches Abby, apparently concerned about the couple's marriage, then invites her to accompany him to the Caribbean, to which she agrees. There she liaises with Tammy to obtain files which will indict the firm – not for money-laundering, but for over-billing clients. As a federal offence, it will convict the senior members of the firm while saving Mitch from being debarred. The FBI is unhappy at this arrangement, but nevertheless agrees to it, and also arranges the release of Ray from prison as part of the deal.



When the firm discovers that Ray has been released, and the private investigator was a former cell mate of his, they realise that Ray is Mitch's brother. They try to corner Mitch in the law offices, but he escapes. Meanwhile, Tammy and Abby obtain the files they need to convict the firm of illegal activities.

The film ends with Ray and Tammy (now a couple) sailing the ocean with the files (giving Mitch continued leverage over the FBI) and Abby and Mitch leaving Memphis, in the same beat-up car they arrived in.

*The Last Samurai* (2003)      Director: Edward Zwick

Summer of 1876: Nathan Algren (Tom Cruise), a former United States Army captain, makes a drunken sales pitch at a centenary exposition, showing off the capability of a firearm while recounting his war experiences. Traumatized by his memories of Native American slaughter at the hands of his army, he deviates from his scripted speech to describe the horrors of war to a shocked audience, ending his performance by firing into the crowd. His employer terminates his contract for this outburst and he is forced to take a job offer made by his former commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Bagley (Tony Goldwyn), a man whom he holds responsible for the Indian massacre. He will be employed by Omura (Masato Harada), on behalf of the Japanese government, to train the Imperial Army in Western warfare. This is an attempt to control the samurai warrior class that is resisting the government's attempts at modernisation. Algren travels to Japan with his old army friend Sergeant Zebulon Gant (Billy Connolly) and Simon Graham (Timothy Spall), an expert on the samurai.

When he reaches Japan, Algren finds that the army recruits are all badly trained peasants, lacking any experience of combat. Hearing that the samurai leader Katsumoto (Ken Watanabe) has led an attack on a railroad outside his area, Bagley instructs Algren to take the new regiment into battle, to which Algren objects. Algren leads the soldiers into battle, but the samurai attack the unprepared soldiers and they run away. Gant is killed and Algren is left to defend himself alone. Felled from his horse and surrounded by samurai on all sides he continues to fight, defending himself with a samurai spear. Katsumoto, witnessing this scene, is reminded of a vision he had of a brave white tiger and takes this as an omen: he captures the injured Algren alive.

Algren is taken to Katsumoto's village and nursed back to health by Katsumoto's sister Taka (Koyuki), whose husband, Hiroto, Algren killed on the battlefield. During this time he overcomes his alcoholism and comes to terms with his traumatic nightmares while adapting to Japanese village life. Katsumoto takes an interest in him, and they begin to engage in conversation. At the same time, Algren learns swordplay from Ujio (Hiroyuki Sanada), following an initial humiliating encounter, as well as the Japanese language. Taka grows fond of Algren. One night, while villagers watch a stage play, ninja assassins attack the village. Algren takes up his sword and fights on the side of the village; it is clearly an attack that has been ordered by Omura.

Allowed to return to Tokyo in spring, Algren meets Bagley and sees that the Japanese are now well-trained with sound military provisions. Omura offers Algren command of the army if he crushes the samurai revolt - while privately instructing his men to kill Algren if he warns Katsumoto of their plans. Katsumoto meets with the young emperor, whom he once taught, and offers his counsel; shortly after this he is arrested for refuting new laws that will ban samurai from wearing their swords in public. Algren fears that Katsumoto will be assassinated; returning to his quarters he is ambushed by Omura's men but escapes. With Ujio and other samurai, he manages to free Katsumoto, but Katsumoto's son is killed in the rescue mission.

Shortly after this, Katsumoto learns that Bagley and Omura are planning an attack on samurai forces; Imperial army forces vastly outnumber the 500 samurai who will fight against them. Just before the battle, Katsumoto gives Algren the gift of a sword. Taka presents him with the armour of her deceased husband that Algren will fight in. Algren and the samurai ride out into battle against the Imperial army. Bagley shoots Katsumoto in the shoulder; Algren kills Bagley by spearing him through the chest with his sword. Dying, Katsumoto implores Algren to help him commit seppuku (ritual suicide), which he does.

The American Ambassador meets with the emperor to secure a contract that would give the U.S. sole right to sell firearms to the Japanese government; at the same time the injured Algren presents the emperor with Katsumoto's sword. The emperor realises the symbolism of the gesture – that he must uphold the country's traditions and culture - and refuses to sign the treaty, stating it is not in Japan's best interests. When Omura objects, he confiscates his property.

Algren returns to the village, where Taka is waiting for him.

Set in 1965, Tulsa, Oklahoma, the film documents the rivalry between the Greasers, a gang from the wrong side of town, and the 'Socs', or Socials, a group of wealthy youths. The Greasers are made up of Darrell (Patrick Swayze), the head of the gang, and his two younger brothers, Sodapop (Rob Lowe) and Ponyboy (C. Thomas Howell), who he raises alone after their parents' death in a car crash. The other members are Johnny (Ralph Macchio), Ponyboy's best friend, who lives with his abusive, alcoholic parents, and Dallas (Matt Dillon), Two-Bit (Emilio Estevez) and Steve (Tom Cruise).

As the film opens, a group of Socs attack Ponyboy, cutting his neck with a switchblade knife, although he is not fatally injured. It is implied that Johnny has been attacked in this way previously, since which time he has always carried a knife.

At a drive-in movie, Johnny, Pony-boy and Two-bit start talking to Soc girls Cherry (Diane Lane) and Marcia (Michelle Meyrink). The girls prove to be more friendly than their male counterparts. Seeing that these Greasers have befriended their girlfriends, Bob (Leif Garrett) and Randy (Darren Dalton) start a fight; the situation is only prevented from escalating by the girls' efforts, who take them home. Later that night, Ponyboy and Johnny are attacked in a park by the Socs. An enraged Bob attempts to drown Ponyboy in a fountain; coming to his rescue, Johnny stabs Bob and kills him. The other Socs flee.

Now on the run, Ponyboy and Johnny leave town. Given supplies by Dallas, they hide out in an abandoned church. They read *Gone With the Wind* and the poems of Robert Frost to keep their spirits up. Dally finds them and recounts that Cherry will give evidence in court to support their claim of self-defence against Bob. In the meantime, the church which the boys have been staying in catches fire, with a number of children inside. They manage to rescue the children, though Johnny is badly burned. Forced to go to hospital, Johnny now faces manslaughter charges against Bob, though the boys are declared heroes.

The Socs declare a 'rumble' to avenge Bob's death. The two gangs meet for the stand-off and the Greasers win. Dallas takes Ponyboy to hospital to visit Johnny, who is unimpressed at their victory, having now rejected violence. He dies in the presence of Ponyboy and Dallas. Distraught at his death, Dallas holds up a magazine store and is shot by police.

Ponyboy is finally cleared of wrongdoing in the death of Bob. Re-reading his copy of *Gone With the Wind* he comes across a letter from Johnny, in which he says the sacrifice of his own life was worth it to save the children in the church. The film ends with Ponyboy writing an account of his experiences for a high-school essay.

*Top Gun* (1986)      Director: Tony Scott

Naval Aviator Pete 'Maverick' Mitchell (Tom Cruise) and his Radar Intercept Officer Nick 'Goose' Bradshaw (Anthony Edwards) engage in a flying operation with 'Cougar' (John Stockwell) and 'Merlin' (Tim Robbins) over the Indian Ocean. Intercepting enemy 'Migs' they are able to scare them off. However, Cougar is badly shaken and needs to be talked down into landing by Maverick; later that day he hands in his 'Wings of Gold' badge to his superior 'Stinger' (James Tolkan). In spite of Maverick's reckless flying Stinger is forced to offer him and Goose places at the elite 'Top Gun' training academy in place of Cougar and Merlin.

Maverick's arrogant attitude soon wins him enemies at the academy – amongst them rival pilot 'Iceman' (Val Kilmer). On the first night, Maverick and Goose attend a bar with the rest of the trainees, where they serenade a woman with 'You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling' and Maverick tries to make a pass at her. The next day he discovers her true identity: Charlie (Kelly McGillis) is a civilian Top Gun instructor, with a PhD. Nevertheless, he continues his pursuit of her and they begin a relationship. At the same time, his instructors and Iceman continue to criticise him for his reckless flying and he is threatened with being thrown out of the school. He confesses to Goose that he is acting up out of his sense of inadequacy, haunted by the reputation of his father, Duke Mitchell, who died dishonourably in Vietnam.

Towards the end of their time at the academy, a plane accident occurs: Maverick and Iceman pursue instructor 'Jester' (Michael Ironside) through the air. Iceman is forced to break off and Maverick flies through the turbulence caused by Iceman's jets: Maverick and Goose's aircraft engines burn out and they are forced to evacuate their plane. Goose is ejected into the aircraft canopy and breaks his neck.

Although he is cleared of responsibility for Goose's death by the board of enquiry, Maverick blames himself and is now afraid of flying. He considers leaving the navy and goes to instructor 'Viper' (Tom Skerritt) for advice. Viper discloses that he served with Maverick's father in Vietnam and that he knows he died a hero - classified information that Maverick has never been given. This gives Maverick the strength to return to the academy to graduate, where Iceman picks up the prize for best pilot. At their graduation party, Iceman and Maverick are called in to deal with a crisis situation that has occurred, to protect a ship that has drifted into enemy waters. Despite Iceman's reservations over Maverick's state of mind, the two succeed in shooting down several enemy Migs and forcing the other planes to flee. They return to base triumphant.

Offered any assignment of his choice, Maverick chooses to return to the Top Gun academy as an instructor. At a local bar, over a jukebox playing 'You've Lost that Lovin' Feeling', he is reunited with Charlie.

*Tropic Thunder* (2008)

Director: Ben Stiller

Hollywood is filming the adaptation of Vietnam veteran John 'Four Leaf' Tayback's (Nick Nolte) memoir. Has-been action hero Tugg Speedman (Ben Stiller), multi Oscar-winning Kirk Lazarus (Robert Downey Jr.), rap star Alpa Chino (Brandon T. Jackson), comedian Jeff Portnoy (Jack Black) and unknown Kevin Sandusky (Jay Baruchel) are starring in the film, shooting in the Laotian jungle. First-time director, Damian Cockburn (Steve Coogan) cannot control his cast, and only five days into the shoot they are already over-schedule and over-budget. Studio chief Les Grossman (Tom Cruise) demands that something radical is done to put the shoot back on track.

Tayback advises Cockburn to drop his stars into the jungle, where secret cameras have been installed so they can shoot footage of their journey back to camp. Unfortunately, they are dropped in the middle of territory belonging to Flaming Dragon, a heroin gang. Cockburn soon steps on a landmine which blows him up. Speedman, however, thinks it is all part of the guerrilla film shoot and persuades the rest of the cast to continue with the project. Lazarus is sceptical but agrees to go along with the rest of the actors. In the meantime Tayback and his pyrotechnic operator Cody Underwood (Danny McBride) are kidnapped by Flaming Dragon, at which point he confesses that he invented his memoirs.

After wandering through the jungle for some time, Lazarus and Sandusky realise that Speedman is leading them the wrong way. The pair, along with Chino and Portnoy, leaves Speedman in the jungle alone – he is soon kidnapped by the Flaming Dragon gang. Taken to their village, he is convinced that this is still part of the film set and there are hidden cameras. The gang threatens to kill him until they discover that he is the star of their favourite film, *Simple Jack*.

Back in Los Angeles, Speedman's agent Rick Peck (Matthew McConaughey) attempts to negotiate with Grossman over the terms of one of Speedman's contracts. Flaming Dragon calls the pair and demands a ransom for the star; Grossman declares he does not deal with terrorists and hangs up the phone. He then puts it to Peck that the star is worth more dead than alive on the insurance the studio will collect upon his death. He bribes Peck with a Gulfstream V jet and money in return for his cooperation.

The four actors locate the Red Dragon factory and witness Speedman being tortured. They form a plan to distract the gang and manage to free Speedman, Tayback and Underwood, making their escape, with the help of Peck who appears out of nowhere. Returning to Hollywood, footage from the hidden cameras is edited into a feature film *Tropic Blunder*, which wins Speedman his long sought-after Oscar.

*Valkyrie* (2008)      Director: Bryan Singer

Colonel von Stauffenberg (Tom Cruise) is a senior Nazi defending the North African front who, as the film opens, expresses serious concerns about the conduct of the German army. Moments later, he is blown up in a car trying to flee an Allied aerial attack. Meanwhile, in Germany, an attempt is made by Major-General Henning von Tresckow (Kenneth Branagh) to blow up Hitler's plane. Upon Stauffenberg's return to Berlin, a colleague of Von Tresckow asks if he will come on board in a plot to assassinate Hitler; Stauffenberg agrees. Attending a meeting with various senior political figures who debate about whether to confront Hitler openly or not, Stauffenberg argues that they must kill him, a message rejected by some members of the meeting.

Later, while shielding his family in a bunker during an air raid, he realises that the strategy 'Valkyrie' is a way of overthrowing Hitler's Reich. 'Valkyrie' is the operation that would be put into effect if Hitler was personally in danger; the Reserve Army would be gathered and mobilised to protect him. Stauffenberg realises that if the procedure could be re-written to exclude the SS, it could be exploited for the plotters' own ends. Kill Hitler, frame the SS and the Reserve Army could be used to control and suppress the SS while a new government was put in position. Having decided on this plan of action, Stauffenberg sends his family to the countryside to be out of harm's way, should the plot go wrong.

General Friedrich Olbricht (Bill Nighy), a fellow conspirator, promotes him to afford Stauffenberg entry to military planning meetings, which will give him access to Hitler. Stauffenberg approaches other military figures that would be able to help with this scheme. Amongst them are General Friedrich Fromm (Tom Wilkinson), who is in charge of dispatching the Reserve Army, and Fellgiebel (Eddie Izzard), who controls communications at the Wolf's Lair, where Stauffenberg intends to carry out the assassination. Fromm declines; Fellgiebel accepts. Stauffenberg also hires Lieutenant Werner von Haeften (Jamie Parker) as a loyal aide.

Stauffenberg must then persuade Hitler (David Bamber) to sign the forms consenting to the change in the 'Valkyrie' policy, which he successfully does. Following this, Stauffenberg goes to the Wolf's Lair, a secluded centre of operations, to a meeting with other high-level military officials; it is here that he will plant the bomb to kill Hitler. However, he is told by the other senior members of the plot, amongst them Ludwig Beck (Terence Stamp) that he must not act on this occasion unless he can also kill Himmler. Himmler is not present at the meeting and in the time he is on the phone with Olbricht's aide, Colonel Mertz von Quirnheim (Christian Berkel), the meeting has ended and he has missed his opportunity. He vows that next time around there will be no indecision.

At the next meeting at the Wolf's Lair, Stauffenberg invents an excuse (having deliberately cut himself shaving and stained his shirt) to change his clothes – and put

together the bomb. Unfortunately due to the clement weather the meeting has been moved to a normal building, not the bomb-proof hold that was anticipated (and which would have exaggerated the impact of the bomb substantially). However, Stauffenberg goes ahead with the plan, leaving his briefcase at the meeting, being called away to the telephone, then walking straight out of the building. Moments later the bomb explodes.

Fellgiebel sends the message to Berlin that Hitler has been assassinated, then cuts all communications at the Wolf's Lair. Stauffenberg and his aide von Haeften escape on a plane to Berlin. Olbricht, receiving news that Hitler has been killed, panics and does nothing. Olbricht's aide Quirnheim challenges him on this, accusing him of abandoning Stauffenberg, now that he has played his part. In Olbricht's absence, Quirnheim sends out a letter on his behalf, executing the order to put the Reserve Army on standby.

When Stauffenberg reaches Berlin there is no car to meet him and he is told that the execution of Valkyrie has been delayed by three hours. Stauffenberg returns to Berlin HQ and the plan is fully put into action, with Fromm being arrested and held. The Reserve Army is dispatched to arrest the SS, who are accused by Stauffenberg's people of killing Hitler. Finally word comes from the Wolf's Lair that Hitler is still alive. Goebbels (Harvey Friedman), about to be arrested by Head of the Reserve Army, Major Otto Ernst Remer (Thomas Krestchman), puts him on the phone to Hitler - Remer realises that he has been involved on the wrong side of the coup. Ultimately, Stauffenberg, Fellgiebel, Beck and other members of the conspiracy are arrested. Beck shoots himself, the others are shot by firing squad. Haeften, loyal to the end, puts himself between the squad and Stauffenberg. The two men look eye to eye as Haeften takes the bullets meant for Stauffenberg, who is shot dead moments later.



*Vanilla Sky* (2001) Director: Cameron Crowe

David Aimes (Tom Cruise) is the heir of a publishing empire. He takes little interest in running the corporation his father left him, preferring to bed women, such as Julie (Cameron Diaz) and hang out with his writer friend Brian (Jason Lee). At his birthday party, Brian brings along date Sophia (Penelope Cruz) who David instantly falls for, much to Julie and Brian's mutual pain. Sophia and David escape to her apartment and sit up the whole night talking. Leaving the next morning, Julie drives by and asks him if he wants a ride. Once in the car, Julie declares her feelings for him and her sense of betrayal at his actions. Distraught, she plunges the car over a gulley where it smashes upon impact.

David wakes up to discover Julie is dead and he is horribly disfigured. He tries to approach Sophia but she is only interested in being friends. After a drunken night out, he argues with Brian, who goes home with Sophia leaving him alone in the street where he passes out. He is woken the next day by Sophia, who apologises for not rescuing him earlier. They resume their previous connection and fall in love. With access to the finest plastic surgeons, his face is reconstructed perfectly. However, things are not as they seem. He has strange flashbacks, sometimes seeing his damaged face in the mirror. One day he goes to Sophia's apartment and Julie is there instead, claiming to be Sophia. All of her photographs feature Julie in poses previously taken by Sophia. Enraged, David smothers Julie with a pillow.

He finds himself being interviewed by a court psychiatrist Dr McCabe (Kurt Russell), initially confused as to why he is there. Slowly he learns that he was responsible for the death of 'Sophia' (who looks like the Julie of his memory). David is convinced that the 'seven dwarves' - the board responsible for the overseeing of his company (in which he has 51% shares) - have set him up.

Watching TV during one of his interviews with McCabe, he sees an advert for 'Life Extensions' which he find uncannily familiar. McCabe agrees to accompany him to the L.E. offices to investigate. An L.E. agent tells them that they sell 'lucid dreams' which allows a client who is terminally ill to be frozen until a cure can be found and the body reanimated. In the mean time, they may choose to experience any reality they wish. An L.E. client, David's programme was facing glitches, digging up troubling aspects of his unconscious, which is why L.E. sent in a representative to reach him.

David breaks free of McCabe and rushes to the top of the building. The L.E. representative travels up with him in the elevator, telling him he has been in a deep slumber for 150 years. David opted for the L.E. experience after he was rejected by Sophia. He chose to start his 'living dream' at the point where he woke up in the gutter (left there alone, he never saw Sophia again). All subsequent scenes are marked by a 'vanilla sky'. At the top of the skyscraper, David sees his friend Brian and Sophia, which the rep tell him are the creations of his brain. McCabe, also a fiction, rushes up to try to reason with David. He has a choice: return to the living dream or choose suicide by jumping over the edge of the building. Saying goodbye to Brian and Sophia, he leaps over the edge and falls. He hears 'open your eyes' – and his eyes open.

*War of the Worlds* (2005) Director: Steven Spielberg

The narrator opens the film explaining that humankind was so busy with its own affairs that it hadn't noticed it was being spied upon by extra-terrestrial beings with malign intentions.

Ray Ferrier (Tom Cruise) is a crane operator employed at the New Jersey docks. Estranged from his ex-wife Mary Ann (Miranda Otto), he arrives late to take their children Robbie (Justine Chatwin) and Rachel (Dakota Fanning) for the weekend. While he sleeps, his son Robbie steals his car. Waking up, Ray goes looking for his son. He observes a strange wall cloud which is emitting electro-magnetic pulses – and rendering all electronic devices (including cars) inoperable. A crowd gathers as lightning is emitted by the wall cloud. The lightning causes holes to open up in the ground. From the holes appear giant metal tripods, which open fire on the crowd, vaporising bystanders. Ray runs for cover. Returning home, he grabs Robbie and Rachel and heads for his ex-wife's place out of town, although she is not there.

The next morning, Ray switches on the news to discover that a Boeing plane crashed due to the tripods' intervention. He meets a news crew who show him footage of further tripods arriving in all major cities, causing mayhem across the country. Ray decides to head for Boston, to meet up with Mary Ann and her husband who are at her parents' place. En route, they see bodies piling up and devastated towns, casualties of the tripods. Their car is hijacked and they are forced to continue the journey on foot. They narrowly avoid being killed by a tripod attack while they cross the Hudson River by ferry.

They meet the U.S. Military who are forming a strategy to combat the tripods. Robbie is desperate to join the fight but Ray objects. While Ray is busy rescuing Rachel, who is nearly kidnapped by a couple, Robbie leaves with the militia. The tripods launch an attack on the military, which is unable to defend itself or the refugees it seeks to protect. Ray and Rachel are aided in their escape by Harlan Ogilvy (Tim Robbins), who offers them shelter.

Ogilvy is cleared disturbed by the loss of his family and vows revenge upon the tripods. Hiding in his basement, they witness the tripods spreading a strange red weed upon the ground. They manage to evade the probes sent out by the tripods as well as four aliens scouring the basement. The next day, they see the tripods feeding the weed with human blood. This proves too much for Ogilvy who suffers a breakdown. Making so much noise that he threatens to attract the tripods to their hiding place, Ray eventually kills him.

While Ray and Rachel sleep, another probe returns to the house and discovers them. Ray is able to destroy it with an axe, but Rachel runs away in fright and is caught by the tripods. Ray pursues the tripod that captured Rachel, discovering hand grenades that he decides to detonate inside the tripod (as the tripod consumes each of its human victims).

‘Collected’ with the other prisoners, Ray is sucked inside the tripod, but the other captives manage to pull him out in time – after he has succeeded in planting the grenades. They explode and the tripod collapses, releasing all of its prisoners.

Ray and Rachel finally make it to Boston. Ray notices that the red weeds spread by the tripods are slowly receding. The tripods themselves are no longer sending out force fields and Ray notices one tripod staggering about, unaware of the human targets around it. The military opens fire and it crashes to the ground, releasing an alien who has been piloting the contraption.

Ray and his daughter finally make it to Mary Ann’s parents’ home to be reunited with Robbie, who has managed to make his own way there. Ray and Robbie have a tearful reunion.

(The narrator explains that the aliens started to die because they had no immunity to the microbial diseases native to the earth and this is how they were finally overcome.)