UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

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Title: FAMILY VALUES: POPULAR BRITISH CINEMA AND THE FAMILY, 1940-1949

Degree: Ph.D. Date: 1998

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FAMILY VALUES: POPULAR BRITISH CINEMA
AND THE FAMILY, 1940-1949

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Leicester

by

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July 1998
ABSTRACT

Claire Fogg ‘Family Values: Popular British Cinema and the Family, 1940-1949’

Belonging to the field of British cinema history, this revisionist thesis examines the portrayal of the family in feature film, 1940-1949. Using a sample of popular films as extended case studies, the method of analysis is qualitative, identifying recurring narrative themes and patterns across a range of film genres. It investigates what familial forms were depicted in popular British feature films; how family representations operated within (patriotic) film narratives; whether the family was presented as an ideal; whether contradictions existed in the representation of the family; and to what extent film portrayals of the family articulated or related to wider public concerns about the family in general, and about the role of the mother in particular. In addition, this thesis also scrutinises how the idea of the family was an important construct for rendering non-familial structures comprehensible according to commonly held cultural understandings. Overall, it arrives at four main findings: that popular British cinema, 1940-1949, was characterised by diversity; families in some shape or form were a pervasive element of British cinema during the 1940s; familial representations were characterised by a multi-dimensional morality; and that women (especially in their roles as mothers and wives) were frequently figured as a ‘problem’ or ‘threat’ to the family and family life, fathers were presented as less central to family life, and children were usually portrayed as innocents.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following for their patience, encouragement and advice:

Nahfiza Ahmed; Huw Bowen; Cressida Downing; Nadia Durrani; Lucy Faire; Jason Fitzpatrick; Janet Gough; Farida Mukaddam; Binal Nathwani; Chris Newbold; Richard Rodger; Anthony Sutcliffe; David Williams; and my own family.

Many thanks also to the staff at the British Film Institute; the Kimberlin Library at De Montfort University, Leicester; Leicester University Library; the Mass-Observation Archive, Sussex; the National Film Theatre, London; and the Public Record Office at Kew.
ABBREVIATIONS

ATS – Auxiliary Territorial Service
BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation
BBFC – British Board of Film Censors
BFI – British Film Institute
IMPA – International Motion Picture Almanac
MGM – Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures
MOH – Medical Officer of Health
MOI – Ministry of Information
MPH – Motion Picture Herald
RAF – Royal Air Force
WAAF – Women’s Auxiliary Air Force
USAAF – United States of America Air Force
INTRODUCTION

In Oxford, a large cinema, the Majestic, was commandeered for about 800 East-Enders fleeing the blitz. [...] Each family took a part of the Majestic as its own province, often causing ‘territorial’ quarrels over the orchestra pit, galleries, corridors, and gangways. Children ran loose, with little or no supervision, and babies – according to one witness – cried around the clock. (Carlton Jackson, 1985)

In popular thought the family is often regarded as a haven from a harsh outside world, yet in practice this is not necessarily the case. As the quotation above aptly illustrates, families do not always co-operate or exist in blissful harmony: they might quarrel between or among themselves, or young children might be left unsupervised. However, in spite of the contradiction between popular perception and actual family practices, the concept of the family retains a powerful hold over how we live our lives. Above all it remains a fundamental aspect of our mentality: the idea of the family helps determine how we perceive ourselves, how we relate to others, and how we imagine our place in the world. Given this centrality in structuring popular consciousness, when changing social conditions bring the more ‘negative’ aspects of families sharply into focus, a widespread sense of anxiety or ‘moral panic’ about the family can sometimes arise.

Historically, certain periods of acute social change have been accompanied by a diagnosis of family crisis or disintegration: for Britain in the 20th century this occurred during the decades of 1940s and the 1980s. In the 1940s, wartime and post-war dislocations had far-reaching effects on British families: evacuation, mobilisation, female employment, rationing, death and the devastation of the blitz all seemed to strike at the heart of family life, and rising divorce and illegitimacy rates were cited as indices of social and moral decline. Moreover in the immediate post-war period, austerity restrictions and the fraught experience of demobilisation seemed to threaten family life, and poor mothering and juvenile delinquency became the main indices of

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2 The family is, according to Kenneth Thompson, one of the typical areas of concern for moral panic. See Kenneth Thompson (1998) Moral Panics, London and New York: Routledge, viii.
Introduction

disintegrating values. Likewise Britain in the 1980s, with a loss of international power and major structural economic problems, was associated with social and political turbulence, and the family was pushed to the forefront of public attention.  

Cultural representations of the family in popular film have already been scrutinised for this latter decade. Sarah Harwood explores how the family in the popular Hollywood narratives of the 1980s serves as a moral touchstone, with representations of individuals highlighting contemporary British and American trends including: the child as innocent victim; the mother as a neglected possession; and the father as the most problematic figure. This thesis pursues a similar project in relation to the earlier period characterised by a diagnosis of family failure. The family in the 1940s, just as Sarah Harwood argues in relation to the 1980s, was a major way of organising and understanding material reality across all cultural forms, especially feature film. These observations form the basis for an exploration of how the family was represented in 1940s British cinema. This thesis identifies what familial forms were depicted in popular British feature films; how family representations operated within (patriotic) film narratives; whether the family was presented as an ideal; whether contradictions existed in the representation of the family; and to what extent film portrayals of the family articulated or related to wider public concerns about the family in general, and about the role of the mother in particular. It also scrutinises how the idea of the family was an important construct for rendering non-familial structures comprehensible according to commonly held cultural understandings.

The approach is thematic, focusing on the family, and, in terms of previous publications in the field of British cinema history, this is unusual. The literature on British film has tended either to focus upon the productions of individuals or individual studios, or to examine questions of nationality or femininity. The seminal study for the British cinema of the 1940s looked at Ealing Studios, and others have focused on celebrated film-makers such as David Lean or Michael Powell and Emeric

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Introduction

Pressburger. Since the 1980s the productions of the less renowned Gainsborough Studios have become increasingly prominent in the literature (especially in publications with a feminist perspective) and the ideas of ‘nationality’ and national cinema have been similarly high profile. However, no study has, as yet, focused upon the family and British cinema. Nor has any study taken as its subject matter popular British cinema, 1940-1949. The recent establishment of the Society for the Study of Popular British Cinema heralds an increased recognition of this field, but popular British films of the 1940s have not yet received a systematic treatment in the literature.

One key advantage of looking at popular cinema is that films are not discriminated against on the basis of aesthetic judgements. Conventionally, cinema historians have studied ‘realist’ films, but have neglected many others. Here however, popular films, regardless of their cinematographic style, will be accorded the same degree of analytical primacy. This thesis includes a diverse range of British films for analysis, thereby affirming that variety is a characteristic feature of popular British cinema (1940-1949). Among the films discussed at length are those that have received detailed attention elsewhere, such as Brief Encounter (1945) or The Way to the Stars (1945), and those that have been marginalised or excluded from academic debate. In spite of recent attempts to ‘reclaim’ Gainsborough melodramas, some of the films that are discussed, such as Fanny by Gaslight (1944) and A Place of One’s Own (1945), have been barely studied. Other films that are analysed, such as Caesar and Cleopatra (1946), Miranda (1948), The Winslow Boy (1948), Maytime in Mayfair (1949), or Madness of the Heart (1949), have also suffered a similar degree of academic neglect. Through the process of detailed film analysis, these ‘peripheral’ films are returned to their place in the cultural mainstream.

10 In 1997, the Society for the Study of Popular British Cinema was established to further academic study and popular appreciation of previously overlooked areas of commercial British cinema.
Introduction

In the interests of academic rigour, all the popular films are subject to the same treatment. The analysis of familial representations in both the extensively studied and less frequently studied films proceeds on identical terms. All the films are located within chapters on the basis of what family type is foregrounded within the narrative. 'Foregrounded' families are defined as those that are central within films: they are the subjects of the film and they structure its narrative.\footnote{Harwood (1997) Family Fictions, 60.} If, for example, a nuclear family is central within the narrative, the film is discussed as a detailed case-study in Chapter 5, 'Nuclear Families'. The sub-sections within chapters represent the recurring themes and patterns found within case-study films. On occasion parallels are made with films that depict similar themes among 'present' (less dominant in the narrative structuring) or 'absent' (never fully achieved or missing) family forms.\footnote{Harwood (1997) Family Fictions, 60.}

Throughout the thesis a major principle is that of 'revisionism'. A tendency towards re-evaluating 'conservative' British films and re-assessing what is meant by British cinema underpins some of the most recent academic thinking in relation to British film history.\footnote{Tony Williams (1994) 'The Repressed Fantastic in Passport to Pimlico', in Wheeler Winston Dixon (ed.) Re-Viewing British Cinema, 1900-1992: Essays and Interviews, New York: State University of New York Press, 95-105; Janies Chapman (1997) 'Revisionist Interpretations of Ealing War Films', paper presented at The Institute of Historical Research, London.} This thesis is revisionist in two senses: first, in terms of its broad definition of British cinema; and, second, in terms of its approach to film analysis. As we shall see in later chapters, the parameters for the study of British cinema are revised in order to avoid the conventional means for selecting films for study on the basis of their intrinsic 'quality'. Moreover, films that have previously received critical and academic attention are re-examined (on the same terms as other popular films) in order to see whether 'exhausted' texts might reveal 'counter-currents' or 'seeds of rupture'.\footnote{Wheeler Winston Dixon (1994) 'Introduction: Re-Viewing British Cinema', in Dixon (ed.) Re-Viewing British Cinema, 2.}

The thesis is structured in two parts, called 'Family Contexts' and 'Family Texts' respectively. As the name suggests, the first part is primarily about the wider context for understanding popular British cinema and the family, 1940-1949. Part 1
Introduction

examines the historiography of British cinema history; presents the rationale and means by which popular films are selected; and details how the family was at the forefront of popular debate in the 1940s. The subsequent part focuses more closely on the films themselves. Part 2 examines the recurring narrative themes and patterns in the representation of the family in popular British cinema, 1940-1949. Adopting the perspective labelled 'theoretically-informed film history' both parts are closely inter-related: thus film analyses proceed according to historiographical and methodological insights, and film interpretations relate to contemporary (1940s) social and cultural trends.15

Throughout the thesis all popular films, regardless of subject-matter or setting, are located as historically specific products possessing social relevance: this is equally true for period costume films and for 'realist' films with a contemporary setting. Films are regarded as 'at a tangent' to, but not directly reflecting, the social and cultural trends found elsewhere in society.16 As Annette Kuhn has explained, films 'do not merely reflect a world outside the bounds of the text, but mediate external discourses, as it were rewriting and constructing them'.17 Thus films actively produce meaning, rather than neutrally transcribe socio-political ideologies.18 The ways in which film constructs meaning and, more specifically, the way in which popular British feature films (1940-1949) construct meanings of the family is the focus of this thesis.

In addressing the context for understanding, Part 1 consists of three chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the academic field, identifying and evaluating the key publications that have influenced the study of 1940s British cinema history. The chapter has a tripartite structure, reflecting three fundamental approaches to 1940s British film. The three sections focus upon the (broadly chronological) traditions of orthodoxy, reclamation and revisionism. Each section details the major tenets and assumptions

of the main publications that have established and consolidated these approaches. As a whole, Chapter 1 provides an overview of British cinema history and (in the process) identifies and highlights a gap in the field for a full-length revisionist study of popular British film, 1940-1949.

The following chapter, 'Methodology', explains how a revisionist study of popular British film may be undertaken in practice. Chapter 2 advocates a broad definition of British cinema, thereafter refining it (for the purposes of this study) in terms of popular British cinema. The mechanics for establishing a sample of popular British feature films, 1940-1949, are described in Chapter 2. The second chapter functions to explain why popular films are analysed in Part 2, and how popular films are selected for that analysis.

Chapter 3 is the last contextual chapter of Part 1, but in some ways it is also the most important. The chapter provides a bridge between several disciplines as well as establishing the historical context of socio-cultural debate in 1940s Britain. Chapter 3, 'Family Values and Moral Panic', draws upon the insights of sociology, recognising that it is a discipline which has long been concerned with investigations of family life. Furthermore, Chapter 3 details the main conceptions of the family and the main areas of social anxiety about the family that were at the forefront of popular debate during the 1940s. It acknowledges that the family was a source of social concern throughout the 1940s, but emphasises that slightly different areas of concern were prominent in wartime and post-war social commentary.

Part 2 consists of five chapters containing detailed film analyses. The first of these chapters, Chapter 4, addresses films where courting and marriage are central within the narrative. Thereafter the subsequent chapters examine films that foreground nuclear families, extended families, children, and alternative families. Chapters 4-8 focus more directly upon the films themselves, yet they do so without losing sight of how these texts relate to the changing social conditions and debates of the 1940s. Each chapter aims to identify the themes that films shared in relation to their representations of the family. In particular, Chapters 4-8 assess to what extent popular feature films were characterised by conservative morality or positive visions
of family life. Of special interest is whether popular British films of the 1940s sustain a one-dimensional morality, or whether they are characterised by internal contradictions and ruptures in the idea of the family. The latter might indicate that in a period of social turmoil, films present the family as a 'battle between social transformation and social conservation' and did not or could not resolve change through constructing the family as a domain of absolute values.\textsuperscript{19} Finally, the thesis concludes with a summary of significant findings and suggestions for future research.

Briefly, before beginning, some short explanatory notes on style are necessary. Throughout the text, unless otherwise specified, observations are always founded upon the films from my sample that were available for viewing. In each chapter, the first time a film character is cited (s)he is accompanied by the name of the relevant actor in brackets. Likewise, in each chapter only the first mention of a film title is accompanied by its release date. Further information about the films, including names of directors, producers and production companies, together with plot synopses for those films employed as case-studies, can be found in the 'Filmography' at the end of the thesis. In the majority of cases, footnotes provide detailed bibliographic references for each citation in the text. However, with regard to materials in the British Film Institute's microjackets all the available data is given, but sometimes authors and precise dates of publication were unattainable.\textsuperscript{20}

In examining the British cinema of the 1940s, this thesis scrutinises the decade's most popular leisure pursuit, recognising that feature films are both produced primarily for entertainment, yet deserve to be taken seriously. Those who lived during the 1940s can be defined as 'the cinema generation', and cinema-going was as integral a part of life as television has since become.\textsuperscript{21} Indeed, when academically assessing films there is no such thing as 'only' entertainment, and films from the 1940s make many complex statements about family, society and gender

\textsuperscript{19} Harwood (1997) \textit{Family Fictions}, 3.
\textsuperscript{20} 'Microjacket' is the name given by The British Film Institute library to its collated material (on microfiche) about individual named films.
roles.\textsuperscript{22} Thus, as we shall see in the ensuing chapters, investigating issues relating to the family and film (1940-1949) offers fundamental insights into the unique social and cultural world of 1940s Britain.

\textsuperscript{22} Following Richard Dyer 'entertainment' is an attitude towards things more than a category of things. See Richard Dyer (1992) \textit{Only Entertainment}, London: Routledge, 12.
PART 1: FAMILY CONTEXTS
CHAPTER 1: THE LITERATURE

Film scholarship, in the academic sense, barely yet exists. (Roger Manvell, 1946)¹

…the British cinema now exists as an object for study. Its contours, at least, are visible. (Alan Lovell, 1997)²

1.1 Introduction

In 1996, centenary celebrations publicised 'one hundred years of cinema'; the academic study of British cinema, however, has a far shorter legacy. A century ago, on the 20th February 1896, the Lumière Cinematograph was first shown to the British public at Regent Street, London.³ This event, both communal and fee-paying, constituted the birth of commercial cinema in Britain. At a similar time, 1895-1896, early British cinematographers were taking out moving picture patents, undertaking demonstrations, and establishing bases across the country.⁴ In spite of this longevity, the research field associated with British cinema has (until recently) been limited in scope. It began to develop fifty years ago, but only started to proliferate during the 1970s.

During the 1940s and 1950s, early erudite studies and governmental reports about film in Britain tended to be concerned with the psychological effects or sociological experience of cinema going, rather than with issues of content, form and meaning.⁵ In 1946 Roger Manvell recognised an acute shortage of film scholarship in the latter sense, but despite his own subsequent excursions into the field, British cinema (both as a subject discipline and as an area of interest relative to other national

cinemas, especially the American) remained underdeveloped for the next twenty years. It was this neglect that provoked Alan Lovell, in 1969, to declare the British cinema an 'unknown cinema' in what has since become a seminal paper on the state of the film industry's recognition - or lack thereof. The idea of the unknown proved to be a remarkable stimulus. It has since provided a benchmark from which analysts have sought to re-discover British film-making. From the decade of the seventies onwards, a wide variety of books on British cinema have appeared. Today, British cinema is a readily identifiable field of study. In recognition of the increased critical interest in British cinema, Alan Lovell has revised his earlier position. The British cinema, once unknown, is now the 'known cinema', no longer neglected by British film scholars.

The purpose of Chapter 1 is to focus upon a portion of the (now prolific) published material. It evaluates those volumes and papers that have been most influential in the development of the analytical field for 1940s British film history. In charting developments in the 're-discovery' of 1940s British feature films, this chapter acknowledges that British cinema as a whole has been under-studied, but that the cinema of the 1940s occupies a distinct place within the wider field. As a time of high audience attendance and success at the home box-office, the 1940s have attracted a disproportionate (although still slight) amount of critical attention. The irony is that despite the appeal of 1940s cinema as a successful phenomenon, no study has explicitly focused on popular British cinema during the 1940s.

This literature review is organised primarily by theme. In recognition that academic studies do not exist in a void, but build on previous insights (and omissions),

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6 Manvell (1946) Film.
certain chronological trends in the themes are also identified. For example, in spite of some overlap, the orthodox approach to British film history dominated publications produced between the 1940s and 1980s; was then superseded by studies reclaiming neglected films; and is currently being supplemented by revisionist approaches that re-evaluate films already commonly regarded as established classics. The three key strands in the scholarship (classified as orthodoxy, reclamation and revisionism, respectively) are detailed together with their respective merits and limitations. Drawing on these observations, my own contribution to the academic debate is situated within the wider historiographical field.

The review follows a tripartite structure: the three main sections focus on orthodox approaches (section 1.2); the activities of reclamation (section 1.3); and the trend towards revisionism (section 1.4). The first section, 'Orthodox Approaches', deals with conventional film histories and is further subdivided into three parts. Subsections deal with the forerunners of orthodox historical approaches as encountered in critical writing from the 1940s (sub-section 1.2.1); the orthodox approach to British film history which dominated in the late 1970s and early 1980s (sub-section 1.2.2); and the modified orthodox approach which encompassed some new theoretical insights about the nature of British national cinema (sub-section 1.2.3). Thereafter, section 1.3 examines how increasing numbers of academics have acted to reclaim the films and genres which the conventional histories have omitted, neglected or maligned. The final section, 1.4, is devoted to revisionism, a new trend towards re-evaluating films already established as 'classics' of British film-making.

All the sections are delimited according to the content and changing parameters of the film material under discussion. In terms of approach, the authors share a historical perspective which aims to contextualise their film analyses. They all seek out a 'paper trail'. In spite of this similarity, certain methodological differences are apparent. Most notably the orthodox approach (section 1.2.2) is the closest to

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11 John E. O'Connor defines the 'paper trail' as consisting of written sources such as production records, preview response cards, advertising press books, and film reviews. He notes that the process of tracing the trail is complicated by the nature of film as a collaborative project. See John E. O'Connor (1990) 'The Moving Image as Evidence for Social and Cultural History', in John E. O'Connor (ed.) Image as Artifact: the Historical Analysis of Film and Television, Florida: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 109.
The Literature

conventional history, placing relatively less emphasis upon the films themselves and more upon written sources and documents; while the process of reclamation (section 1.3) has been more inspired by feminist theory in general and by feminist film theory in particular.

Briefly, one additional qualification needs to be made. This chapter primarily focuses upon the feature films produced by Ealing studios and Gainsborough. In so doing it reflects the biases inherent in the literature. Cinema in the 1940s continued to produce pre-war genres and consisted of films from a range of production companies, yet the diverse output of British film production has often passed unacknowledged. Building upon this insight, my aim is to borrow from the reclamation perspective (section 1.3) in order to endorse a broad view of British cinema, and to pursue a revisionist mode of analysis (section 1.4) to re-evaluate the range of films encompassed by such a view.

1.2 Orthodox Approaches

To date much of the literature on British film and British film history has relied upon an orthodox approach which perpetuates, rather than investigates, the value-judgements once used by the high-brow critics of the 1940s. This observation employs both Andrew Higson’s conception of orthodox film history and John Ellis’ findings based upon an analysis of critical pronouncements in sixty ‘prestige’ newspapers (1942-1948).12

As Andrew Higson argues, the orthodox approach to British cinema is articulated by the ‘intellectual film culture’.13 This is a culture found in the utterances of specialised film journals, critics and academics. It is characterised by an elitist morality that has four main aspects. In brief, these are a fear of trivial mass culture; a desire to promote a national cinema of art, culture and quality; a longing for a national cinema reflecting realities from a social democratic perspective; and a wish to represent

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The Literature

the national heritage.14 These four concerns have been ongoing. They can be traced back to the conceptions about British cinema held by the critics of the 1940s. As John Ellis has demonstrated, the period 1942-1948, was characterised by a coherent view of the ‘quality film’.15 Critical discourse consistently associated ‘quality’ with a restrained tone of understatement and sincerity; and with a sense of realism - either duplicating the real, being true to life, or appealing at an expressive level of emotional truth.16

The positive evaluation of restraint and realism is the recurring theme of orthodox approaches. The orthodoxy in British film history is, as we shall see below, structured by an opposition between the desirability of realism and the undesirability of ‘Hollywood-style tinsel’ or melodrama. It is significant that the opposition was used by a key figure in the 1940s film industry. The producer, Michael Balcon, explicitly employed the ‘realism and tinsel’ frame of reference in order to justify and explain his wartime policy at Ealing studios.17 Balcon advocated that Britain should make realistic films, those ‘truthfully reflecting the British way of life’, to act as ambassadors for Britain in the world market.18 In articulating an opposition with this pedigree, it is unsurprising that orthodox interpretations of British national cinema have typified Ealing films as quintessential components of British film culture.

The importance of the received orthodoxy in shaping the study of British cinema and British cinema history cannot be underestimated. The orthodox view was the pre-eminent academic model in understanding British cinema for forty years and still holds a currency in today’s ‘quality’ press. In applying the orthodox model to British cinema, the intellectual film culture has channelled academic study in a fundamentally misleading way. It has laid claim to describing British cinema, but has been engaged in the process of constructing one particular and partial view of national cinema.19 Ironically, given its cinematic subject matter, this critical tradition has been committed to an almost Leavisite desire for elitist ‘high culture’ over and above

Orthodox approaches have adopted a narrow definition of British national cinema: namely, in terms of a critically sanctioned realist aesthetic standing in opposition to the alleged frivolity and escapism of the mainstream Hollywood product.

Consequently, orthodox studies have focused upon 'consensus' films: those that are set in contemporary British locations, addressing national issues and using an aesthetic of restrained realism. On occasion, the orthodoxy has also included 'heritage' films: those depicting what is considered to be the national past. The Ealing comedies, with their use of a realist basis, have become integral elements within this construction of national cinema. Moreover, the orthodox view underpins the enduring popular image of 1940s British cinema as 'cosy' and/or 'worthy', and associated with specific films such as *In Which We Serve* (1942), *Brief Encounter* (1945) and *Passport to Pimlico* (1949). Meanwhile, the orthodox tendencies have also acted to exclude or marginalise other types of film from the historical record. Conflating national cinema with realism in general and with Ealing films in particular has entailed neglecting more 'trivial' productions. This is why the Gainsborough costume melodramas, films not associated with documentary or canonical literary influences, have received scant attention in traditional histories of British cinema.

Key proponents of the orthodox approach are outlined below. The spectrum of contributors is broad. They range from contemporary authors who initiated British cinema as an area of study in the 1940s (section 1.2.1), to academics retrospectively addressing issues of national identity in British films from their vantage point in the 1980s and early 1990s (sections 1.2.2 and 1.2.3).

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20 Ironic because an enduring theme of Leavis' criticism was a dislike for film *per se* as an aspect of mass civilisation and a key culprit in lowering public taste. See F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson (1933) *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness*, Chatto and Windus: London, 1.


22 The use of a realist basis for comic fantasy in Ealing films has been noted by Ian Green (1983) 'Ealing: In the Comedy Frame', in James Curran and Vincent Porter (eds.) *British Cinema History*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 297.
1.2.1 Orthodoxy – Forerunners

As outlined above, the orthodox view can be traced to the ‘quality’ press of the 1940s (section 1.2). It can also be attributed to early full-length publications on film, which were often written by journalists. The careers of Roger Manvell and Peter Noble exemplify the crossover that existed between film journalism and book authorship in the 1940s.\(^\text{23}\) Roger Manvell, a research officer at the British Film Institute and member of the London Critics’ Circle, later becoming an editor of the *Penguin Film Review*, wrote extensively on film and the British cinema. His contemporary Peter Noble, also a journalist, was responsible for the first publication dealing exclusively with the British film industry, *The British Film Yearbook 1946*.\(^\text{24}\)

Both authors, Roger Manvell and Peter Noble, helped establish and consolidate the orthodox approach to British cinema. In particular, Roger Manvell’s extensive body of work constitutes one of the fullest realisations of an orthodox view.\(^\text{25}\) His publications span a thirty-year period from the mid-1940s onwards, but this summary focuses upon Roger Manvell’s initial book, *Film*.\(^\text{26}\) This volume deals with the cinema as an international art, yet it also represents a seminal contribution to orthodox British cinema study.\(^\text{27}\)

In *Film*, Roger Manvell’s exposition embodies the main tenets of intellectual film culture. Each of the four moral attitudes of the orthodoxy is articulated in turn. First, there is Manvell’s distaste of escapist mass culture, which he associates with ‘easy satisfaction’ and ‘crass emotionalism’; the ‘debased’ American cinema is a major culprit:

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\(^\text{23}\) Today the crossover exists in tandem with a body of academic scholarship that has few press affiliations.

\(^\text{24}\) Peter Noble (1946) *The British Film Yearbook 1946*, London: British Yearbooks.


\(^\text{26}\) Manvell (1946) *Film*.

\(^\text{27}\) Manvell’s volume, *Film*, was first published in 1942. In the following discussion all references are made to the second revised and enlarged 1946 edition which included the addition of several new chapters, notably a chapter on the British feature film.
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...aimed at the lower levels of quick emotional satisfaction by a succession of thousands of films dealing with violence, feud, murder, veiled adultery and virtue rewarded with a girl for prize.28

Second, Manvell describes a national British cinema in terms of art, culture and quality. He associates film with artistry, reaching a pinnacle with the high artistic standards of World War Two British cinema. For Manvell, the film medium is analogous to an art form in its ability to achieve beauty and distinction, while the director is the ‘twentieth-century artist of the film’.29 Moreover, Manvell describes the wartime film situation in Britain as a ‘renaissance’, a term that is itself significant for wider cultural and artistic connotations.30 Third, there is a desire for a realist national cinema. Manvell conflates his own taste for realism with audience preferences, claiming that the latter expected films to either resemble their own lives or their conceptions of how other people lived.31 Finally, the fourth attitude, the desire to represent the national past, is less explicitly documented. Nevertheless, Manvell both recognises and praises the new wartime vitality in film which he links to a vision of British national life: encompassing ‘our people’ and ‘our cities’; and incorporating the conventional Arcadian imagery of national heritage, ‘our rich and varied countryside’.32

With the summation of these four attitudes, Roger Manvell identified British cinema with films drawing on the documentary tradition and related to British life, in direct contrast with the allegedly trivial imports and streamlined showmanship of Hollywood.33 He constructs a notion of British cinema based upon his personal perceptions of quality and integrity. This is why Manvell could claim that during the 1920s, when British production had continued but fallen short of the realist ideal, Britain did not have a national cinema.34 Similar orthodox values are apparent in Peter Noble’s overview of the British film industry, The British Film Yearbook 1946.35 For example, Peter Noble detects a wartime ‘reorientation’ in Britain’s film industry which

28 Manvell (1946) Film, 25.
30 Manvell (1946) Film, 20, 133.
31 Manvell (1946) Film, 81.
32 Manvell (1946) Film, 136.
33 See Manvell’s discussion of the British feature film and his list of inspiring wartime film production in Manvell (1946) Film, 133-139.
34 Here, one consequence of the dominant orthodoxy is that the 1920s remain one of the areas in British cinema yet to be historically scrutinised.
35 Noble (1946) British Film.
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is comparable with Manvell's notion of 'renaissance'.\textsuperscript{36} For Noble, as for Manvell, cinema in Britain assumed a national quality only after a 'new spirit of realism' had been adopted.\textsuperscript{37}

1.2.2 Orthodox Cinema History

Since these two 1940s publications, key books on film history have perpetuated the emphasis upon a relatively homogeneous British cinema constituted by 'consensus' films addressing national identity and the British way of life.\textsuperscript{38} Among these is the profoundly influential \textit{Ealing Studios} by Charles Barr, first published in 1977 and remaining an established classic of British film history.\textsuperscript{39} As the name suggests the remit for this book is the study of one studio: Ealing between 1938, when Michael Balcon took over production from Basil Dean, and 1958 when production ended. The focal point of the book is the decade of the 1940s: starting from late 1939 with the outbreak of War and ending with 1951, the last flourishing year for Ealing studios. Charles Barr's main thesis is that the film-making team under Balcon remained substantially the same, possessed of a coherent broad policy and creating films which maintained a tight continuity embodied in their consistent, although not inflexible, viewpoint.\textsuperscript{40}

 Unlike the patriotic studies of the mid-1940s, Barr does not explicitly aim to analyse the British cinema or the British film industry \textit{per se}. However, his account of Ealing has helped construct a single studio as the pre-eminent emblem of British national cinema during the 1940s. The volume, \textit{Ealing Studios}, established a 'core

\textsuperscript{36} Noble (1946) \textit{British Film}, 17.
\textsuperscript{37} Noble (1946) \textit{British Film}, 73.
\textsuperscript{38} This emphasis has also been apparent in academic work encompassing, but not devoted to, the study of British cinema in the 1940s. Notably, the historian Arthur Marwick venerates a wartime renaissance in British film-making that only began to peter out in 1951 and which can be characterised as a realistic British style with roots in British experience. See Arthur Marwick (1968) \textit{Britain in the Century of Total War: War, Peace and Social Change 1900-1967}, London: The Bodley Head, 299; Marwick (1982) 'Print, Pictures and Sound: The Second World War and the British Experience', \textit{Daedalus} 3, 4: 135-155; Marwick (1991) 'Society and Culture: Britain 1951', \textit{History Today} 41: 7.
\textsuperscript{40} Barr (1977) \textit{Ealing}, 7.
identity' for British cinema based upon the films produced by Ealing studios alone.\textsuperscript{41} This occurred in part because the rarity of detailed studies on British film made this particular publication high profile, and in part because of Barr’s mode of address. He links national concerns with Ealing’s concerns and conflates Ealing productions with British cinema.\textsuperscript{42} Charles Barr argues that change at Ealing was bound up with national developments, and identifies a similarity between the Ealing community and the ‘national community’.\textsuperscript{43} He also suggests that Ealing in the 1940s was a voice of consensus, representing broader themes in cinema and society.\textsuperscript{44} Taken overall, Barr’s perspective implies a ‘people’s war’ vision of society with Ealing studios at the helm of British cinema, consistently making films about community and co-operation.\textsuperscript{45}

During the 1980s and early 1990s concerns with consensus and the 1940s British film industry were taken up by the historical work of both Tony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards. Like Charles Barr before them, both authors emphasise the theme of consensus as central to 1940s British cinema. They also go beyond Barr’s position and argue that the social function of cinema was to actively engender consensus. The implicit suggestion is that the British cinema functions as a type of ideological state apparatus.\textsuperscript{46} For example, Tony Aldgate, in his 1981 paper ‘Ideological Consensus in British Feature Films, 1935-1947’, considers the ideological role of British cinema to be the production of cohesion and consent within an inherently stable Great Britain.\textsuperscript{47}

In the more recent volume, Britain Can Take It (1994, first published 1986), Richards and Aldgate articulate a similar notion with their three-fold model of British wartime cinema.\textsuperscript{48} The model views cinema as a witness to social change born of

\textsuperscript{41}Cook (1996) Fashioning the Nation, 16
\textsuperscript{42}See also Barr (1974) ‘Projecting Britain, Part I’, 93, 89.
\textsuperscript{43}Barr (1977) Ealing, 13.
\textsuperscript{44}A similar argument underpins George Perry’s more populist survey of Ealing Studios. In it he attributes the success and decline of Ealing to the studio’s degree of correlation with ‘the spirit of the day’. See George Perry (1981) Forever Ealing: A Celebration of the Great British Film Studio, London: Pavilion Books, 162.
\textsuperscript{45}Barr (1977) Ealing, 10.
wartime experience; as evidence of the commitment to build a better post-war world; and as a means of generating adherence to the consensus of the war years.\textsuperscript{49} To support their argument, Aldgate and Richards have selected 13 films for detailed discussion.\textsuperscript{50} They have chosen films according to three reasons that conform to the central tenets of the intellectual film culture.\textsuperscript{51} First, films were selected because of the light they shed on war issues. Thus they are not considered trivial (presumably like the films that were not chosen for discussion). Second, films were chosen because they were popular. Yet since there are notable absences (such as the enormously successful costume drama, \textit{The Man in Grey}, 1943) popularity is subsumed to the elitism of the first and third criteria.\textsuperscript{52} Third, the films are considered good films emanating from directors of note in a particularly successful era for the British cinema. Thus, Aldgate and Richards are engaged in promoting a national cinema described in terms of quality.

Whereas the partial view of British cinema in \textit{Britain Can Take It} omits popular Gainsborough costume dramas, a subsequent article by Jeffrey Richards starts to address the implications of such films.\textsuperscript{53} In ‘National Identity in Wartime Films’ (1988), Jeffrey Richards argues that films portray a dominant national identity derived from England and constituted by three qualities: humour, tolerance, and stoicism or emotional restraint.\textsuperscript{54} As an aside, Richards argues for a consensus view of the Gainsborough dramas. He suggests that although Gainsborough melodramas take account of the desire for instant gratification that threatens to erode ‘the national character’, the representatives of national qualities always ultimately triumph.\textsuperscript{55} Overall, Jeffrey Richards constructs British cinema according to an orthodox view. British cinema, for Richards, is a fundamentally conservative cinema in which Gainsborough costume dramas are largely peripheral, or relevant only in so far as the conservatism of their resolutions.

\textsuperscript{49} Aldgate and Richards (1994) \textit{Britain Can Take It}, 13.
\textsuperscript{50} 11 films in the 1986 edition.
\textsuperscript{51} Aldgate and Richards (1994) \textit{Britain Can Take It}, 16-17.
\textsuperscript{52} Here I am assessing popularity on the same basis as Jeffrey Richards and Tony Aldgate, namely according to Josh Billings’ summaries of box-office success in \textit{Kinematograph Weekly}.
\textsuperscript{53} Only one Gainsborough film, \textit{The Young Mr Pitt} (1942), is included in \textit{Britain Can Take It}, 138-167. Following Sue Harper’s classification, this is a historical film, dealing with actual events and personages, rather than a costume drama, a type of film more closely allied with popular taste. See Sue Harper (1994) \textit{Picturing the Past: The Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film}, London: BFI, 2.
1.2.3 Modified Orthodoxy

The limitations of orthodox approaches to British cinema are implicitly identified, but still perpetuated in two further volumes on wartime cinema. In these instances theoretical insights are not matched by a similar degree of innovation in practical approach. In contrast with orthodox cinema history (1.2.2), contributors to National Fictions, edited by Geoff Hurd in 1984, acknowledge cinema as a site of struggle and emphasise the variety of British wartime cinema. Similarly Antonia Lant, the author of Blackout, has rallied against received wisdom. She suggests that all (not just 'realist') British films can be understood in the light of wartime social conditions. However, as we shall see below, these 'unorthodox' ideas have not been systematically transferred into the practice of examining a broad range of films.

The volume National Fictions is composed of the papers presented at a British Film Institute Summer School in 1983. The contributors share a notion of hegemony and the case studies about films made during or immediately post-war focus upon how the narratives of wartime cinema were constructed to mobilise popular consent. Like Jeffrey Richards, the contributors employ concepts derived from the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Unlike Jeffrey Richards, whose focus is upon the dominant image of national identity, the National Fictions contributors (at least in theory) emphasise the active components of hegemony. In his overview, the editor, Geoff Hurd, explains how the mechanism of hegemony arrives at a type of equilibrium formed through processes of struggle and conflict. This is a contested vision of culture. Moreover, Robert Murphy's paper, 'British Film Production, 1939-1945', is significant because he identifies disparate schools of film-making in the 1940s. Only a minority of British cinema production was, according to Murphy, constituted by consensus films. Here then, there is an overall view of British cinema as a potential site for tension and contradiction, and as a source of diversity. Yet this view is not matched by the choice of case studies. Although Robert Murphy draws our attention to a British film

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industry geared to melodramas, mysteries, comedies and musicals, the case studies reinforce the enduring image of a British film history accustomed to 'realism' and Ealing 'classics'. Thus there are analyses of The Bells Go Down (1943) and Frieda (1947) among others, but nothing about the Gainsborough melodramas condemned by critics.

In a similar vein, Antonia Lant identifies the variety in British film production, but focuses upon critically sanctioned films. In Blackout, Lant is interested in the construction of femininity and national identity in wartime British films. In particular, she argues that the war caused every film, even those apparently remote from the crisis, to be understood in its terms. \footnote{Lant (1991) Blackout, 35.} In spite of this observation, the remit of her own enquiry guides her primarily towards 'realist' fictions. Her focus is largely restricted to the 'genre of the national subject'. A genre she defines as 'realist' cinema. According to Lant, the 'national subject' genre is constituted by those films representing contemporary events, possessing recognisable images and themes (including tea-drinking, listening to the radio and blackouts), and embodying the idea of a variegated nation pulling together. \footnote{Lant (1991) Blackout, 15.} In this instance, a feminist perspective dictates the selection of films. Antonia Lant argues that the representation of women is an intrinsic part of the realist films because it is the area on which they consistently stake their identity as British. \footnote{Lant (1991) Blackout, 13-14.} Consequently, Lant argues that the genre of the national subject has more to say for feminism than do costume melodramas. \footnote{Lant (1991) Blackout, 13.}

In both the volumes, National Fictions and Blackout, the authors demonstrate an awareness of a British national cinema beyond its traditionally defined parameters. In their conceptual frameworks, the authors move beyond the 'narrow' definition of British cinema employed by the conventional orthodox approaches. The following section deals with those who not only share the broad understanding of national cinema, but who also utilise this understanding to determine their film selection and analysis. These are the cinema historians who have 'reclaimed' areas of cinema history hitherto neglected by orthodox approaches.

\footnote{Lant (1991) Blackout, 35.}
\footnote{Lant (1991) Blackout, 15.}
\footnote{Lant (1991) Blackout, 13-14.}
\footnote{Lant (1991) Blackout, 13.}
1.3 Reclamation

Reclaiming areas of 1940s British cinema was a trend instigated during the early 1980s. It is associated with four key figures: Sue Aspinall, Robert Murphy, Sue Harper and Pam Cook. All four contributed to the first publication that addressed Gainsborough melodramas as a valid source of historical investigation. This was the BFI dossier, *Gainsborough Melodrama*, published in 1983. Since then, Sue Harper and Pam Cook have published extensively on Gainsborough film production. The publications of these authors are discussed in the section below.

The idea of reclamation received its initial and most explicit recognition in the BFI dossier, *Gainsborough Melodrama*, which heralded a change in the prevailing academic climate. No longer dismissed as superficial entertainment, the dossier recognised Gainsborough melodramas both on their own terms and in terms of their wider social relevance. The dossier subdivides the area of enquiry into Gainsborough’s contemporary women’s pictures, and Gainsborough’s costume melodramas. Both these groups of films are analysed in terms of their social significance. According to Pam Cook, the former group of ‘women’s pictures’ (those pitched at a female audience), deal with the images of women in circulation in society in order to achieve recognition from this audience. The latter group of costume films (a sub-genre of the woman’s picture set in the past) is also considered more than escapist fantasy. Sue Aspinall suggests that the costume films address the contradictions in female experience inherent in 1940s society.

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65 Here I am focusing on the activity of reclaiming neglected 1940s films, most usually the costume dramas produced by Gainsborough. It is important to note that the films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger have also been 'reclaimed', albeit over a greater timescale. See Ian Christie (1994) *Arrows of Desire: The Films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger*, London: Faber and Faber. In addition a recent book has extended the activity of 'reclamation' to include individual British film-makers who have been overlooked. Charles Drazin writes about the characters and aspirations of British film-makers who he believes deserve to be well known, rather than fade into even greater obscurity. See Charles Drazin (1998) *The Finest Years: British Cinema of the Forties*, London: Andre Deutsch, xi-xii.


68 Aspinall and Murphy (eds.) (1983) *Gainsborough Melodrama*.


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Overall, the dossier's contributors aimed to redress the critical imbalance within British film history. This was clearly a reaction to the dominance of orthodox approaches. In particular, the dossier's editors noted how the most popular films of the 1940s (namely Gainsborough productions) were consistently omitted from the academic canon.\textsuperscript{71} Aspinall and Murphy proffer two reasons for this omission. Firstly, that the Gainsborough melodramas, characterised by energy and a florid nature, could not be assimilated into a critical discourse which valued realism and restraint. Secondly, Gainsborough films were neglected because they were a disparate group, without an easily discernible view-point. This dual observation opposes Gainsborough films with the coherent value-system associated with Ealing productions. This particular appraisal of Ealing studios possesses an idea of coherence that harks back to Charles Barr's original emphasis upon teamwork, continuity and cohesion. Consequently, although the dossier successfully opened up new areas for historical enquiry, it was characterised by a continued reliance upon conventional terms of reference.

Subsequent studies have also 'reclaimed' Gainsborough films while perpetuating the opposition with Ealing productions. This characteristic is shared by both Sue Harper's work on British costume films, and by Pam Cook's examinations of costume and identity in British cinema.\textsuperscript{72} In keeping with the perspective established by the earlier dossier, both authors interpret Gainsborough films within their social and historical context. Sue Harper emphasises that the Gainsborough costume melodramas, produced 1943-1947, articulated audience fears about issues of class and gender.\textsuperscript{73} Pam Cook goes one step further and suggests not only that the costume cycle articulated these concerns, but that in so doing it presented an image of the nation in crisis.\textsuperscript{74} The suggestion is that Gainsborough films relate to the social issues current at their time of production.

\textsuperscript{73} Harper (1987) 'Historical Pleasures', 190.
\textsuperscript{74} Cook (1996) Fashioning the Nation, 89.
Furthermore, according to Sue Harper and Pam Cook, Gainsborough films do not relate to social concerns in the same way as Ealing films. This is because, for both Harper and Cook, the activity of interpreting films is dependent upon more than an understanding of their broad social context. It is also dependent upon the role of producers and of the production company. In this instance the role of the producer is privileged with regard to the final film product. The producer’s role (not the director’s) is closest to being that of film ‘authorship’. The result is an opposition between Ealing and Gainsborough production style. So that, Sue Harper contrasts the production control of Ealing, characterised by a commitment to realism, with the control of Gainsborough, committed to visual flamboyance. As a result she argues that Gainsborough and Ealing produced two cycles of historical films which differed in every way.75 Gainsborough’s historical films foreground visual and sexual pleasure, while Ealing’s historical films are preoccupied with authenticity, respectability and sexual repression.76 Similarly, Cook re-iterates and expands upon the contrasting themes developed by Sue Harper. Pam Cook describes how the Gainsborough studio style produced costume films that were notoriously inauthentic and influenced by a number of national styles. In so doing, they re-present history as a type of ‘masquerade’, a place of fantasy where the conventional boundaries of class, gender and nation are transgressed. In contrast she describes the Ealing style as parochial and lacking pastiche. It is precisely because of these contrasts that Pam Cook suggests that Gainsborough costume films, with their transgressive features, were closer to wartime society than consensus-bound Ealing productions.77

Thus, an oppositional theme links Pam Cook’s and Sue Harper’s ‘reclaiming’ perspectives. The films of Gainsborough and Ealing studios are characterised in terms of their contrasting production styles: the former associated with flamboyance and the latter with realism. It is this oppositional view of British cinema that has been challenged by another dimension emerging in the literature. This new revisionist approach aims to ‘re-evaluate’ conventional film interpretations, producing wider implications for the pursuit of film history. In particular, it suggests that Gainsborough

77 Cook (1996) *Fashioning the Nation*, 89.
and Ealing films share certain characteristics and cannot be stylistically discussed as if they were mutually exclusive.

1.4 Revisionism

The vogue for revisionism is a recent development. It has started to emerge following Charles Barr’s ‘Retrospect 1993’, appearing in the updated edition of Ealing Studios.78 Like the trend for reclamation, revisionism also challenges orthodox approaches to film history. However, these challenges are established on different grounds. Reclamation has sought to include Gainsborough melodramas within the remit of traditional film history. However, in so doing, it has assimilated Gainsborough films within an oppositional model of British national cinema. In contrast, revisionism questions the terms upon which this model was initially founded. It has sought to reinterpret the conventional premise that the 1940s output of Ealing studios was essentially conservative, occupying a semi-official status, and relying overwhelmingly on realist conventions. The revisionist approach has significant implications. In particular, it suggests that an oppositional model should be replaced with a more fluid view of British national cinema. To date, the idea that genres and studio production styles are not necessarily distinct has received relatively little attention. As an idea it was first intimated by Robert Murphy in Realism and Tinsel (1992, first published 1989), since then it has only recently reappeared in a 1996 paper by Christine Gledhill, “‘An Abundance of Understatement”: Documentary, Melodrama and Romance’.79

Given that Charles Barr’s 1977 Ealing Studios stood as the backbone of orthodox film approaches, its revised edition (with ‘Retrospect’) in 1993 has fundamental ramifications. The brevity of the additional ‘Retrospect’ belies its significance.80 It represents both the seal on the coffin of orthodox approaches, and the harbinger of changing academic perceptions. The importance of the ‘Retrospect’ derives from its questioning of the conservative image of Ealing. This is the image that has underpinned orthodox approaches to film history. It is worth outlining the revised

argument, together with its changed perception of Ealing, as detailed by Charles Barr in 1993. In the new edition, Barr points out two substantial inadequacies that characterise the main text of *Ealing Studios*. In both instances Barr suggests that the original book has relied on retrospective public images, rather than attempted to assess the wartime period accurately. Consequently, the 'Retrospect' seeks to re-evaluate the war period. It does so with particular reference to the figures of Michael Balcon and Basil Dearden.

The first inadequacy relates to the construction of a particular image of Michael Balcon. Charles Barr notes that the 1977 edition relied upon the image of Balcon created by Michael Balcon himself and by others. In so doing, Balcon was portrayed as a benevolent embodiment of consensus values. Moreover, his production strategy at Ealing was depicted as operating harmoniously with the Ministry of Information and enjoying the possession of a semi-official status. The 'Retrospect' brings to light additional information that suggests a very different image of Balcon's Ealing. Notably, during World War Two, Michael Balcon consistently and openly attacked five targets: British film-makers in Hollywood; the services and Government, for their reluctance to co-operate with British producers; the Ministry of Information, because of its film policy; the monopoly tendencies of J. Arthur Rank's empire; and Hollywood for its continued dominance of the British film industry. Given Balcon's tendency to make public and critical pronouncements the re-assessment suggests that he was associated with controversy rather than with consensus, and that he was an abrasive rather than avuncular character.

The second inadequacy Charles Barr detects in his original work relates to the image and work of Basil Dearden, a director at Ealing. Barr notes how the original book uncritically uses the retrospective image of Basil Dearden as a 'hack British director', that of the man who received opprobrium for epitomising what was worst about mainstream British cinema. In terms of the films, Barr suggests that his original negative attitude towards Dearden's 'theatrical' *Halfway House* (1944) and *They Came to a City* (1944) was largely unfounded. It was informed by the misnomer

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81 For the re-evaluation of Michael Balcon see Barr (1993) *Ealing Studios*, 183-185.
82 For the re-evaluation of Basil Dearden see Barr (1993) *Ealing Studios*, 185-188.
that both Ealing’s form of cinema and Ealing’s mentality were realistic, and profoundly uncomfortable with anything too abstract or stylised. In the light of recent work on melodrama in cinema, Barr explains that this judgement can no longer be convincingly sustained. Where previously he castigated *Halfway House* and *They Came to a City* as the two worst films made by Dearden, Charles Barr positively re-evaluates their ‘theatrical’ stylisation as ‘bold, eloquent and powerful’. The result is a broader vision of wartime production at Ealing: one that encompasses disparate films, rather than ostracising theatricality as an exception to the realist norm. Taken together, the two new perspectives on Balcon and Dearden are fundamental because they highlight an Ealing that was ‘less limited, less comfortable, [and] less conformist’ than hitherto assumed.

Since 1993, two academics have followed Charles Barr’s lead and employed revisionist approaches to Ealing films. These perspectives demonstrate a departure from the characteristic traditions of British film history, orthodoxy and reclamation. In the 1994 article ‘The Repressed Fantastic in *Passport to Pimlico*’ Tony Williams reassesses the now famous 1949 Ealing comedy. Williams notes how the film, *Passport to Pimlico*, has been represented as part of the post-war Ealing mainstream. This was, for example, how it was portrayed in the 1977 edition of Charles Barr’s *Ealing Studios*. Tony Williams suggests in this volume that the ‘mainstream’ *Passport to Pimlico* was contrasted with films operating outside the Ealing mainstream, such as those of Alexander Mackendrick and Robert Hamer. The former Barr associated with ‘daydream’ and the latter with ‘nightmare’. Taking issue with the received wisdom, Tony Williams argues that *Passport to Pimlico* possesses nightmarish overtones despite its surface joviality. In particular he suggests that the film contains indications of ‘dark repressed forces’: so that, the early shots of female sunbathers indicate a sexual voyeurism; and the pit with the unexploded bomb is a source of information and forces that ordinary citizens would choose to deny. In presenting his argument, Tony Williams somewhat overstates his case. He imposes his interpretative

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framework unremittingly onto the film content, so that most acts become symptoms of
darkness and repression. For example, even one momentary, unidentified screen
couple’s kiss outside the public house takes on the darkest symbolism. It becomes the
‘dark underside’, a representation of unwholesome desire. Nevertheless, Williams’
main premise remains important: namely, that Passport to Pimlico is not representative
of an Ealing mainstream any more than films such as Kind Hearts and Coronets (1949)
can be said to operate outside the mainstream. Instead, the qualities of films are
‘diffuse and interrelated’. This is an important observation. It recognises that film
texts share certain features. This is something which oppositional models of films and
of cinema have failed to accommodate.

The second academic engaged in re-evaluating Ealing films is James Chapman.
Using two films as case studies, Chapman challenged the received notion of a
conservative Ealing in his 1997 paper, ‘Revisionist Interpretations of Ealing War
Films’, presented at the Institute of Historical Research, London. After explicitly
rejecting the orthodox version of Ealing’s wartime history, Chapman detailed how
Ealing narratives dramatised conflict and nightmarish scenarios. Two films were
discussed to support his case, The Foreman Went to France (1942) and Went the Day
Well? (1942). The former film, according to Chapman, rejects the popular notion that
in June 1940 people put aside their differences. Instead, it illustrates the continued
existence of class conflict in British society. This is achieved through the
characterisation of the complacent factory owners as representatives of wealthy or
influential classes, and the portrayal of the foreman being impeded by their
bureaucracy. The latter film, Went the Day Well?, was interpreted as a particularly
violent dramatisation of a German invasion. Consequently, according to Chapman’s
analysis, it possesses an undeniably disturbing quality. In keeping with Tony Williams’
suggestion that Passport to Pimlico is imbued with nightmarish overtones, Chapman
argued that Went the Day Well? dramatises nightmares which were close to home,
making it a fantasy film. Here then, the new revisionism suggests that Ealing
dramatised conflict as well as consensus in its wartime narratives. This challenges the

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90 Williams (1994) 'The Repressed Fantastic', 97.
91 James Chapman (1997) 'Revisionist Interpretations of Ealing Films', paper presented at The
Institute of Historical Research, London.
orthodox view that Ealing operated at the heart of the War effort, working in harmony with the Ministry of information. Moreover, the revisionism of Chapman, like that of Tony Williams, implies that oppositional models are problematic. In particular, Chapman has drawn attention to the Ealing press releases for *Went the Day Well?* which sought to emphasise the film's realism and sincerity. Rejecting this notion that *Went the Day Well?* is unequivocally realist, Chapman argued that it has more in common with the horror fantasies of *Dead of Night* (1945) than with *San Demetrio, London*, (1943) a film based upon a real incident. Once again this points to the importance of a diffuse and interrelated understanding of film qualities.

The idea that film qualities are interrelated was first intimated by Robert Murphy in *Realism and Tinsel*. In particular, Murphy suggests that although a conflict between escapism and realism agitated Britain in the 1940s, it remains possible for certain 'escapist' and 'realist' films to have a great deal in common. Thus, the opposition between escapism and realism has been, in this instance, more apparent than real. Murphy illustrates his observation with a discussion of two films that traditionally have been treated differently. *The Seventh Veil* (1945) and *Brief Encounter* were both produced in the mid-1940s, yet the latter was assimilated into the canon of revered British films whereas the former was not. In spite of this differential treatment, Murphy argues that the two films share certain stylistic and thematic features. Notably, both films are told through the device of flashback; both have a female heroine; and in each case the heroine is troubled by guilt and forced to choose between different types of love. The key point is that *The Seventh Veil* does not occupy an 'opposite pole' to *Brief Encounter*. In this instance, the observation has been made with regard to two specific cases, however, the idea that there is not an opposing pole between realism and escapism holds true in more general terms. Recently, this theme has received further attention in an incisive paper by Christine Gledhill.

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94 Similarly, Alan Lovell detects melodramatic 'excess' as well as restraint in *Brief Encounter*. He also points out that the elements of extravagant plotting and characterisation in British melodramas, 1946-1947, are downplayed by the writing, camerawork, acting and direction. Lovell (1997) 'British Cinema', 239.
Having previously written on melodrama and feminist film theory, Christine Gledhill’s 1996 paper, “‘An Abundance of Understatement’: Documentary, Melodrama and Romance”, applies theoretical insights to introduce a new approach to British film history. Like Tony Williams and James Chapman, Gledhill questions received notions of British cinema. However, unlike Williams and Chapman, Christine Gledhill analyses a wide variety of films. Her re-evaluation of British cinema casts a wider net than any other revisionist approach to date. Ranging from a historical overview of concepts to analyses of film genres and one specific case study, it represents the practical application of a theoretical re-evaluation of British cinema across a relatively broad spectrum. Initially Christine Gledhill outlines how, although traditionally viewed as opposites, realism and melodrama have meanings which shift over time. In terms of film culture, she suggests that the terms realism and melodrama have meant different things to the film industry, intellectuals, audiences, and theorists. In particular, Gledhill notes how for many during the war realism was central to British national identity, but that film theory has since criticised the realist mode as complicit with a masculinised bourgeois ideology. Alternatively, she notes that costume melodrama was not generally considered central to national identity, but has since been reclaimed by feminists as a potential source of ideological subversion. These trends in film history are summarised as a ‘critical reverse canon’, associating melodrama with transgression and realism with repression. However, in contrast with this position, Gledhill wants to avoid such distinctions. Instead, she argues that costume melodramas and home front films are related. So that, for Gledhill, documentaries are invested with melodramatic meaning, just as costume melodramas make social references. These themes are explored in relation to the home front film (defined here as those sponsored by the Ministry of Information) and in relation to Gainsborough melodramas. According to Gledhill’s analysis the home front films released acculturated images invested with communal and patriotic meaning. The repeated images of Saint Paul’s Cathedral, barrage balloons, singsongs and so forth

96 The historical transitions in the meanings of ‘melodrama’ and ‘realism’ are outlined both in relation to British film culture and in British culture more generally. See Gledhill (1996) "‘An Abundance of Understatement’", 212-217.
98 For discussions of home front and Gainsborough films see Gledhill (1996) "‘An Abundance of Understatement’", 218-224.
functioned as documents of shared experience. In this way, the home front films are assimilated within Christine Gledhill's understanding of melodrama as a combination of document and vision. The Gainsborough melodramas are perceived as another way of addressing the needs of the present. Christine Gledhill explains how the relationships between the main characters of films such as *The Man in Grey* and *The Wicked Lady* (1945) are as much about the 'geographic remapping of social relations' as they are in any home front film.\(^9\) Having discussed these two groups of films, Gledhill ends her paper with a discussion of *The Lamp Still Burns* (1943).\(^{10}\) The significance of this case study is that the film, *The Lamp Still Burns*, combines the rhetoric of documentary, melodrama and romance. In keeping with a revisionist perspective, what emerges from Gledhill's paper is that an oppositional mode of British cinema is inadequate. This finding is the logical culmination of a series of revisionist approaches that stress the importance of relations between films (and between film genres) as much as the distinctions between them.

### 1.5 Summary

Each section of this review has focused on a different tendency in the literature, highlighting key proponents and tenets. The major observations from sections 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 can be summarised as follows. In each instance I offer a brief synopsis of the approach (orthodoxy, reclamation, and revisionism), and identify the fundamental contribution each approach has made to film history, followed by its primary limitation.

- 'Orthodox approaches' oppose 'realism' and 'tinsel', and focus primarily upon realist films. They possess three varying nuances. The 'forerunners' were the 1940s critics who wrote about realist British cinema as a contemporary phenomenon. In so doing, the 'forerunners' established the initial terms of debate. 'Orthodox cinema history' consists of academic works that later imported the 'forerunners' value-judgements for use in historical analyses of 1940s British cinema. The 'modified orthodoxy' started to identify a diverse national cinema in theory, but remained focused on realist films in practice. Overall, the orthodoxy's

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100 For the case study of *The Lamp Still Burns* see Gledhill (1996) "'An Abundance of Understatement'", 224-226.
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major contribution has been to help establish 1940s British cinema as an area of academic interest. The main limitation is that orthodox approaches focus upon realist 'classics' and neglect other types of British film.

- 'Reclamation' criticises the orthodox view of national cinema as narrowly conceived. The focus has been on costume melodramas as a neglected, but important element of British national cinema. The key contribution of 'reclamation' has been to identify a broader and less elitist view of British national cinema. The primary limitation of 'reclamation' is a tendency to focus solely on costume melodramas and to oppose these with realist films. This perpetuates the orthodoxy's distinction between 'realism' and 'tinsel'.

- Revisionist approaches have re-interpreted various (often realist) films, suggesting that realist films and costume dramas might have more in common than has been previously assumed. Endorsing the broad view of national cinema, these approaches make a fundamental contribution. They demonstrate that films can be analysed in terms of both their similarities and differences, not just as polar opposites with nothing in common. The main limitation is that these approaches are relatively new and have yet to be systematically applied in a full-length study of British feature film.

1.6 The Way Forward

Building on the insights above, this thesis addresses the principal gap in the literature. It provides a full-length study of British feature film from a revisionist perspective. In so doing, I advocate two things, first, a 'broad' definition of British national cinema and, second, an 'intertextual' or 'relational' approach. British national cinema during the 1940s incorporated a variety of films. Furthermore, these films do not readily fall into mutually exclusive categories. Often they share structural, thematic and stylistic characteristics. This 'intertextuality' acknowledges that films relate to each other. No text is formed in a void: films employ certain conventions and themes found in other film texts and films also draw upon the meanings found in non-filmic texts, such as books, newspapers and magazines. These two factors, the broad definition of British national cinema and the inter-related nature of film, underpin my
research methodology and analysis. In Chapter 2 I explain how my film sample has been selected to encompass a range of British films, not just those critically sanctioned or 'reclaimed'. Thereafter my analysis focuses on the theme of the family as a fundamental strand of 1940s thought. Chapter 3 sets out to examine what is meant by the family in general and how it was conceived during the 1940s in particular. Thereafter, the thesis analyses the family in popular film, 1940-1949, and how its portrayals relate to the wider concerns expressed about the family in other contemporary (1940s) texts and discourses.
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

Throughout my literature review I explained that 1940s British film history has, to date, been dominated by two approaches: orthodoxy and reclamation. Only more recently, has a third revisionist approach started to emerge. All three approaches have sampled films according to their intrinsic interest. They are evaluative from the outset. The orthodox view conceives of British national cinema as a predominantly realist cinema, examining a critically acclaimed canon of realist films. The process of reclamation has challenged the elitism of orthodox approaches, focusing instead on films that were once critically derided. The revisionist approach has re-evaluated the films studied by other scholars, but has not yet produced a systematic study of British cinema. All three approaches have drawn very different parameters for their fields of study, yet possess one thing in common. None has gained an overall sense of British cinema, in terms of the British films most audiences saw and those they enjoyed, during this period. My contribution to the academic field is an analysis of popular British cinema. As such, this study is underpinned by an understanding of 1940s cinema as a mass leisure pursuit, whereby films were primarily produced for profit and attended for entertainment and pleasure. This chapter defines the field of study as ‘British cinema’, as distinct from ‘British cinema culture’. Thereafter it details the rationale and methodology for selecting a sample of British films that were relatively popular at the British box-office. The benefits and limitations of the methodological approach are also outlined.

2.2 What is British Cinema?

The focus of this study is on British cinema. Such a statement, although seemingly innocuous, gives rise to further questions that are addressed below. Most importantly, and most obviously, in what sense can films be defined as British? Section 2.2 outlines why British cinema can be an ambiguous concept; defines what is meant by British cinema; and explains the ongoing relationship between British cinema and British cinema culture. Drawing on a notion of British cinema that uses production as its baseline, attention is paid to the circumstances of British film production: both in
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general terms, the dominance of the American film industry, and in more specific terms, the key figures informing two distinctive film-making policies during the 1940s.¹

British cinema is a widely used phrase. This can belie its complexity. There are several ways in which British cinema can and has been defined. Such definitions are not necessarily co-extensive, thereby creating a degree of ambiguity. British cinema may refer to films produced on British soil, set in British locations or funded with British financial backing. If a film conforms to all these criteria it is usually and unequivocally defined as British. However, a grey area appears when films only fulfil some of these criteria.²

Here then, I am deploying a specific notion of a British national cinema. British cinema is defined in production, rather than cultural, terms. The importance of distinguishing between a production and cultural conception of British cinema has been noted elsewhere.³ According to Sarah Street, the former deals with a British film industry with relatively clearly defined economic boundaries and methods of classification, whereas the latter deals with the extent to which films participate in establishing a sense of belonging.⁴ Instead of adopting a cultural focus on films as an expression of collective consciousness, I focus on production, sharing Street’s definition of British cinema as congruent with those, ‘films registered as British’.⁵ One strength of this definition is that it is not ‘nationalistic’.⁶ By including films produced or directed by ‘outsiders’ such as Emeric Pressburger or Gabriel Pascal, it encompasses the cosmopolitan nature of 1940s British cinema.⁷

² In recent years the boundaries have blurred further. Cinematic achievements in the 1990s involving the participation of television mean that not only is it difficult to say what a British film is, but it is also difficult to define a British film. See John Caughie with Kevin Rockett (eds.) (1996) The Companion to British and Irish Cinema, London: BFI, ix.

36
British cinema, in the above sense, is distinguished from 'British cinema culture', the totality of films screened in Britain. According to this distinction, British cinema is part of a wider British cinema culture, usually dominated by Hollywood. During the 1940s, as in other decades, the question of international competition loomed large: American films accounted for approximately 80% of the films exhibited in Britain, making the American market four times the size of the British. This factor is captured by Sarah Street's explanation of British cinema. She describes how registered British films do not always deal overtly with British subject matter, and that they are:

...often seeking to differentiate themselves from films made in Hollywood, while at other times attempting to beat Hollywood at its own game.

Thus British films are partly defined by their relation to a wider, Hollywood dominated, cinema culture. As such, British films may seek to distance themselves from or emulate the American product.

During the 1940s, this dual observation is of significance. On the one hand, there was an attempt at 'product differentiation', that is, making films with a modest budget, intending to generate profit primarily from the home market. This was the policy of Michael Balcon, Ealing's head of production, and advocated by the orthodox critical tradition described in Chapter 1. Their preference was for making specifically British films in opposition to the showmanship of Hollywood. These films self-consciously attempted to distance themselves from the American cinema. On the other hand, there was also 'competition' with the American film industry. The highly publicised and expensive epics made in the mid and later 1940s were produced according to this second strategy. Films such as *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1946) were intended to mimic Hollywood's appeal to international audiences.

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The 'competitive' approach was favoured by J. Arthur Rank a figure who, by 1943, dominated much of the British film industry. Initially acquiring an interest in General Film Distributors and Pinewood in 1935, over the following eight years Rank expanded and consolidated his position. By 1943, Rank owned two (out of the three) major cinema circuits; the largest British distributor, General Film Distributors; six studios; two production companies, Gaumont-British and Gainsborough; financed the Two Cities production company; and was the chairman of Independent Producers' Limited. This was the 'Rank Empire', the subject of public debate about domestic monopoly and the British film industry. In spite of his own personal views and potentially influential position, there is evidence that Rank maintained a hands-off approach to film production. However, in terms of film policy, Rank persistently tried to challenge Hollywood. During the 1930s he had failed to penetrate the American market, but this did not stop him from making further attempts during the subsequent decade. Early in 1947, Rank made an agreement with five American majors to ensure that they secured his films a wide distribution on their circuits. However, this policy was rapidly altered following the film industry's crisis in August 1947. As a result of the balance of payments, Hugh Dalton levied 75 per cent ad valorem tax on the import of foreign films, unintentionally resulting in a Hollywood boycott of the British market. J. Arthur Rank's new policy was to dominate the home market with British films, rather than to try and make an impact in America. During the boycott, Rank stepped up film production. After the import duty was removed in 1948, Rank continued in this policy direction. He severed links with American companies and prevented his circuits showing American films. These tactics proved to be unsuccessful. By 1949, Rank was closing down studios; unemployment was rising in the film industry; and the trade press feared falls in profits might cause production to cease. Ultimately then, Rank found that British cinema could not compete with the American cinema, either in the United States or at the British box-office.

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14 Dickinson and Street (1985) *Cinema and State*, 139-140.
15 Under the chairmanship of Albert Palache, a committee was appointed by Hugh Dalton to examine this situation. It reported in 1944. Board of Trade (1944) *Tendencies to Monopoly in the Cinematograph Films Industry*, London: HMSO.
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By 1949, the precarious status of British cinema in relation to British cinema culture was consolidated as a permanent feature of the film industry. The establishment of the National Film Finance Corporation in 1949, designed to help British producers, was a concrete sign that the British film industry was in financial jeopardy. This precarious state of affairs, which has endured since, was not a foregone conclusion. In spite of the perils of production, during much of the 1940s there was a degree of optimism about British films. It was a decade when audience attendance was high and many British productions figured prominently at the home box-office. These are the popular films of my study. They are socially significant because they were seen by a large number of people, yet academia has not fully acknowledged this importance. No academic study focusing explicitly on the popular British films of the 1940s has been produced.

2.3 Rationale

A gap in the scholarship exists for a full-length revisionist study of British cinema. This is my contribution to the academic field. In offering a revisionist perspective I am challenging the models of British cinema upon which prior studies have been founded. Notably, the approaches of both orthodoxy and reclamation have encouraged a partial view of British cinema. The former focuses upon realist 'classics' and the latter upon Gainsborough melodramas. In so doing, both perspectives have claimed to analyse popular British films, but neither has achieved this goal. Orthodox approaches consistently emphasise that realism enjoyed a wide appreciation at the 1940s box-office. Alternatively, the process of reclamation has argued that Gainsborough films were successful at the box-office, but that these films have been ignored by the elitism of traditionalists.

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18 Intended as a short-term plan, the Corporation ended up being an essential part of government policy. Moreover, the introduction of the Eady Levy (1950) was another scheme, initially intended as a temporary measure to help producers, but remaining in place until 1985. See Street (1997) British National Cinema, 16.

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Thus, there are two conflicting views regarding what constituted popular British cinema during the 1940s. The apparent paradox can be accounted for in three ways. First, the studies of 1940s British cinema have been dictated by implicit academic agendas that prioritise either realist or melodramatic styles of films. This is then justified by an explicit reference to the films’ popularity. Second, both films classified as realist and those classed as melodrama were successful at the 1940s British box-office. Third, there are no absolute boundaries between realism and melodrama, allowing for shifting categorisations of specific films.

This study establishes and examines those British films that were popular both at the British box-office and in audience polls. In one sense this too constitutes a partial model of British cinema. It is a model that demarcates popular films as an area of study, as distinct from those that were less successful. It does not, however, construct a partial model of cinema based on aesthetic judgements or the intrinsic academic interest of specific film genres. Instead, popular British films are identified as a fundamental aspect of British social and cultural experience. Consequently, they are analysed (Chapters 4-8) in terms of how they relate to some of the key domestic concerns of the period, 1940-1949 (Chapter 3).

Throughout the 1940s, the recurring motif at the heart of domestic social concerns was ‘the family’. It has already been established that a traditional familial ideology was sustained by both the State and by other agencies in wider culture during World War Two. Notably, Patricia Allatt has argued that throughout the Second World War, a period characterised by the articulation of egalitarianism and the disruption of familial patterns, a traditional ideology persisted.22 The ideology in question posited a single role family structure with the husband-father as sole breadwinner and the wife-mother as based within the home. According to Allatt, the traditional familial ideology was active, but not conscious. In addition, it was pervasive and contradictory. It was not confined to conservative agendas. The ideology’s messages were tailored to individual audiences, while still operating under ‘the broad chapel of familism’ and sustaining the prevailing patterns of economic

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(capitalism) and gender (patriarchy) power. Patricia Allatt’s study is based on a qualitative content analysis of three texts: the Beveridge Report (state regulation); the forces' education programme, using material from the Directorate of the Army and The Army Bureau of Current Affairs; and two women’s periodicals, True Romance and Good Housekeeping. Given that these diverse mediums all supported a traditional familial ideology, it is pertinent to expand the remit for study by analysing cinema as another socio-cultural agency.

The following questions are located at the centre of my analysis. To what extent does popular British cinema articulate traditional family values in a period of social change? What family types occur in popular British cinema and can recurring themes be identified? Is the family in popular film an ideal; a source of anxiety; or a means of narrative resolution? To this end, 1940s British feature films are sampled according to their popularity at the domestic box-office. The methodological process for selecting popular British films is outlined in section 2.4 below. Thereafter, Chapter 3 continues with a description of the key ideas about the family and family life found in an array of non-cinematic sources from the 1940s. The rest of the thesis offers an analysis of the family in popular British film rooted firmly in the findings from the first three ‘contextual’ chapters. Part 2 analyses popular films in terms of their familial representations, and the extent to which they present the concerns about the family found elsewhere within the cultural parameters of 1940s Britain.

2.4 The Film Sample

Defining the popularity of British films is not a straightforward process. This section outlines how a lack of data means most definitions of British film success or popularity for the 1940s have relied upon one source. Thereafter, I explain why, in addition to using box-office success, it is preferable to use a more explicit indicator of audience preferences. The result is the use of a correlative method, indebted to Janet Thumim, which is also described. Finally, the strengths and limitations of such an approach are detailed.

The main difficulty with sampling films according to their popularity relates to the limited availability of statistical evidence. This is because box-office figures were only made freely available to the cinema press in the late sixties. Beginning in July 1969, the trade paper *Today's Cinema* was the first publication to guarantee box-office statistics. Prior to this date the figures remained a closely guarded trade secret. The only surviving British record of box-office successes in the 1940s is the annual assessment produced by Josh Billings and published in the trade paper, *Kinematograph Weekly*. Billings compiled annual lists based on any information which exhibitors and independent cinema owners provided, and his own personal knowledge of the film industry. The information from exhibitors and distributors was not automatically forthcoming. In 1946, Billings himself noted:

This is the ninth year in which we have compiled box-office returns, but, although we have been frequently quoted and just as frequently condemned, we are still offered no voluntary aid and information from renters through their publicity departments.

In spite of the apparent lack of voluntary assistance from publicity departments, Billings found the ‘executive co-operation’ of ‘renters’ sales departments and the circuit chief’ helpful, and his analyses still remain the most detailed source of 1940s British box-office information available. Consequently, although no systematic study of popular British film (1940-1949) has been produced, authors citing specific films in terms of their popularity seek recourse to this solitary source. For instance, the historians Tony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards consistently draw upon *Kinematograph Weekly* assessments as does Andrew Higson and, most recently, Charles Drazin.

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26 For films produced after 1949, the Eady Levy (by which a proportion of Entertainments Tax was returned to the producers of British films in direct relation to their box-office performance) could also be used to indicate success. See Robert Murphy (1998) ‘Popular British Cinema’, *Journal of Popular British Cinema* 1: 6.


29 Billings (1946) ‘These Were the Box-Office Hits’, 47.

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The assessments in *Kinematograph Weekly* provide an indication of a film’s popularity predominantly in terms of box-office attendance, an economic factor of most importance to the film industry. However, they do not gauge popularity according to whether (after viewing) audiences liked or disliked a particular film. Accepting that films are primarily produced for profit, but attended for entertainment and pleasure, popularity in the sense of audience preferences is more significant than a sole reliance on *Kinematograph Weekly* assessments would suggest. Yet it is also important to recognise that the two, box-office attendance and audience tastes, are closely related. A discussion of narrative image highlights the way in which box-office attendance might indicate audience tastes. Thereafter these observations are supplemented by the incorporation of a source that explicitly (rather than implicitly) addresses audience preferences.

Data derived from box-office returns, such as Josh Billings’ lists, details the films which were watched by the most number of people. At this level, the films can be understood as having achieved a wide circulation among the civilian population. Given that 70% of adults sometimes attended the cinema and that 32% of adults went once a week or more, such films were socially significant because of their high degree of exposure. However, in addition to identifying high audience attendance, box-office returns also indicate certain audience preferences. This is because popularity in the field of mass culture is the result of ‘temporary synonymities of taste’ between social groupings, which largely determine the economic success of a film. John Ellis’ notion of the ‘narrative image’ offers a conceptual framework for understanding how audience tastes and box-office success are interlinked. A film’s narrative image is circulated and promoted outside its performance in the cinema and:

...consists of the direct publicity created by the film’s distributors and producers; the general public knowledge of ingredients involved in the film (stars, brand identifications, generic qualities); and the more diffuse but equally vital ways in

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which the film enters into ordinary conversation and becomes the subject of news and of chat.\textsuperscript{34}

Here then, there is the sense that film is an economic product that is both consciously marketed by distributors and producers, and unconsciously publicised through everyday conversations. People usually attend the cinema with an expectation about a film’s merits predicated on these factors. Thus a narrative image helps determine box-office attendance on the basis of taste. Audiences endorse or are seduced by a film’s narrative image. In this way, box-office success provides a useful starting point from which to gauge audience preferences. However, it is only a baseline: affirming a narrative image (by attending the cinema) is not the same as the popular endorsement of a film itself.

It is also important to consider (more directly) what audiences thought of the stars and films they elected to see. Therefore this thesis treats popularity as commensurate with success at the British box-office (\textit{Kinematograph Weekly}’s lists) correlated with viewers’ stated preferences for particular star performances. The source used for identifying audience preferences is the annual poll from the film magazine, \textit{Picturegoer}. The following section outlines various annual assessments that detail successful British films and stars between 1940-1949. Thereafter the choice of sources and sampling method is described in detail.

Annual assessments, despite lacking the quantitative statistical data available after 1969, remain the most consistent and viable source for determining which were the popular British films of the 1940s. Lists of successful British films, based on information from exhibitors, distributors, and film-goers, appear regularly throughout the period. Qualitative sources, such as J. P. Mayer’s sociological reports, are not used to select the film sample because they are infrequent, providing information for a restricted number of years, rather than for the whole period under investigation.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{34} Ellis (1992) \textit{Visible Fictions}, 31.
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During the 1940s, several annual trade and audience assessments appeared in the press.\textsuperscript{36} The main ones are as follows:

- Josh Billings' tables, \textit{Kinematograph Weekly}
- The gold medal awards, \textit{Picturegoer}
- Money-making stars in British made pictures, \textit{Motion Picture Herald}
- Biggest British grossers, \textit{Motion Picture Herald}\textsuperscript{37}

The first source, \textit{Kinematograph Weekly}, is (as mentioned above) a British trade paper containing an annual review of the British film industry. The second source is the popular British film magazine, \textit{Picturegoer}. Each year the magazine called upon its readers to nominate their favourite actors and actors. Nominations were in a specific format: readers had to choose one 'best actor' and one 'best actress' on the strength of their performance in a specific film released during the year in question. The third and final source, \textit{Motion Picture Herald}, is an American publication, a trade journal primarily focusing on the American film industry.

The three sources differ in kind. Both the trade papers, \textit{Kinematograph Weekly} and \textit{Motion Picture Herald}, use information derived from the British film industry to arrive at their assessments, whereas the magazine \textit{Picturegoer} employs audience evaluations. Due to their differing readership, the trade magazines were concerned with the profitability of films, whereas \textit{Picturegoer} was interested in the particular star performances which viewers enjoyed. These differences reflect the nature of feature film as a commercial product made for both profit and for entertainment.

The correlative method used below is a modified version of that employed by Janet Thumim in her studies of popular cinema, 1945-1965.\textsuperscript{38} She outlines her method

\textsuperscript{36} Critics' assessments of popular films have been discounted from my analysis. This is because they belong to the critical orthodoxy outlined in my literature review. Furthermore, as Janet Thumim notes, the assessments of critics and professional peer groups as evidenced by the British Academy awards, have a low correlation with box-office success. See Thumim (1992) 'Methodological and Critical Problems', 26.

\textsuperscript{37} For the full details of these assessments see Appendix 1.

most explicitly in the appendices accompanying her PhD, a thesis which was later published (with less methodological detail) as the book, *Celluloid Sisters: Women and Popular Film, 1945-1965*. In her thesis, Janet Thumim correlates categories from the three sources described above. To arrive at a sample of popular films she uses three consistent categories from *Kinematograph Weekly*, the annual gold medal awards from *Picturegoer*, and two British categories from the *Motion Picture Herald*. Each film is given a 'score' figure that refers to the number of mentions it receives in these annual award categories. The most popular films are those with the highest scores.

Whilst sharing Janet Thumim's overall approach to selecting a film sample, some alterations to her method have been necessary in practice. These are the result of differing temporal boundaries. Here the focus is on the period 1940-1949, whereas Thumim analyses the postwar period from 1945 until 1965. Methodological adjustments have arisen because of the more limited availability of sources for the earlier historical period. For the 1940s, especially the first half of the decade, certain assessments are unavailable.

In particular, whereas Janet Thumim includes the *Motion Picture Herald* assessments, these could not be used effectively in my analysis. During the 1940s, the *Motion Picture Herald*’s lists of money-making films only appear twice, and using the *Herald* lists of stars without the additional information about films would skew my film sample too far towards star preferences and film industry assessments. A similar situation occurs with another category, that of ‘best individual performance’ as listed by Josh Billings. Once again Thumim uses this category, but for my own study this is impractical. The ‘best individual performance’ is only detailed from 1945 onwards. Thus it does not appear for the first five years of my study.

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The result is a simplified application of Thumim's methodology, using two separate sources to arrive at a sample of popular British films. A step-by-step description of this method is outlined below.

From the three available papers, *Kinematograph Weekly*, *Picturegoer* and *Motion Picture Herald*, I have selected two and excluded one. The two sources I have correlated are annual assessments from *Kinematograph Weekly* and *Picturegoer*. Taken together they constitute a useful balance, the former based upon film industry information and the latter on audience opinion. As noted above, my methodology excludes the information appearing in the American trade press. I have not used the categories of 'money-making stars' and 'biggest British grossers' as listed in the *Motion Picture Herald*. These *Herald* categories cite the most successful British stars and films, as determined by British exhibitors. The lists of stars appear every year from 1940 to 1949, whereas lists of money-making films only appear for 1948 and 1949. The *Herald*'s information about British stars is not used, because the *Picturegoer* awards provide more detail and are attained from an audience, rather than industry, perspective. The *Motion Picture Herald* lists of money-making films are not used to determine my film sample because they only appear for two of the ten years of my study. They have, however, provided a useful check on the *Kinematograph Weekly* lists in 1948 and 1949.40

Having selected the sources *Kinematograph Weekly* and *Picturegoer*, the next step is to consider which specific categories are to be correlated. For *Picturegoer* this is an easy decision. The uniformity of the star lists means that the categories, most popular male and most popular female star can be used. Each year between 1940 and 1949 there are lists of the top ten male and female stars at the British box-office, together with the film for which they were chosen. The listings are virtually consistent over the ten-year period. There is only one exception. The lists of star names for 1943 are not accompanied by specific film titles.

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40 For 1948 and 1949, there is a high degree of correlation between the *Motion Picture Herald*'s lists of 'biggest British grossers' and Josh Billings' 'biggest box-office attractions' in *Kinematograph Weekly*. 

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The case for *Kinematograph Weekly* is not quite so straightforward. Instead of relatively uniform lists, Josh Billings uses 40 different categories over the ten year period, 1940-1949. On close inspection these can be simplified to 24 distinct areas. Of the twenty-four in total, five category areas consistently appear over the ten-year period. They are 'best British film'; 'best documentary'; 'biggest box-office attraction'; 'most popular and consistent stars'; and 'most spectacular new stars'. Of the five, the categories of 'best documentary' and 'most spectacular new stars' are irrelevant for a study of popular British feature film. The category of 'best British film' is also excluded. This is because it frequently lists only one film, not enough to establish a sizeable sample; and because a category devoted solely to British productions does not provide an adequate basis for correlation with the *Picturegoer* gold medal awards that include both British and American stars. Through this process of elimination the 'biggest box-office attraction' and 'most popular and consistent stars' have been selected as the most appropriate categories for correlation with the *Picturegoer* awards in order to arrive at a sample of popular British films.

The correlation then proceeds according to Thumim’s method of scoring. For the years 1940-1949 every film listed receives a point for each time either it (or its stars) are mentioned in any of the four categories: Top Ten Stars (female) *Picturegoer*, Top Ten Stars (male) *Picturegoer*, Biggest Box-Office Attraction *Kinematograph Weekly*, and, Most Popular and Consistent Stars *Kinematograph Weekly*. The addition of these points results in a ‘film score’ anywhere between one and six. The score indicates a film’s popularity in terms of box-office success and audience preferences. The higher the film’s score, the more popular the film. In this way a sample of popular British feature films from the 1940s is determined. British films scoring ‘2’ and above constitute the popular films which are analysed in Part 2.

Chapters 4-8 proceed according to what Nina C. Leibman has recently called “nearly” close textual analysis. This is a mode of analysis that examines the systems

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41 See Appendix 2.1 'Kinematograph Weekly Categories'.
42 See Appendix 2.2 'Calculation of Film Scores'.
43 See Appendix 2.3 'British and American Final Film Scores'.
44 See Appendix 3 'Film Sample'.
of meaning production in film: such as narrative structure, visuals, dialogue and *mise-en-scène*; paying particular attention towards repetitions, gaps and contradictions. At essence this is a form of qualitative analysis, using a structured approach that is dependent upon description and classification, and involves an act of interpretation on behalf of the film historian. The key benefit of this analytical approach is that it examines 'signifying components', but does not break up the 'object of study as a meaningful whole'. Thus the qualitative approach succeeds where a quantitative approach does not. As Kracauer argued in 1953, quantification lessens the accuracy of analysis because the act of isolating quantifiable units introduces arbitrary simplifications and risks treating the text (in its entirety) inadequately. In Chapters 4-8 the popular films from my sample are ordered by theme and understood as 'meaningful wholes' according to the historiographical, theoretical and contextual insights of Chapters 1-3. The films are qualitatively assessed with a primary focus upon the texts as historically contingent sources: their meanings neither directly reflect history, nor transcend it. Indeed, as we shall in subsequent chapters, popular films appear closely related to contemporary (1940s) socio-cultural debates and ideas, and critical reviews are a useful point of contact with such attitudes.

My method of selecting a film sample has several benefits and limitations. I have already explained the general rationale behind a study of popular British cinema. How, in particular, popular cinema locates those films that were socially significant at the time of their initial consumption, rather than of intrinsic and retrospective academic interest. In this section I outline the specific merits of my sampling method. These can be summarised under three areas: correlation, tautology, and cinema culture.

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46 It is a qualitative approach that identifies patterns, rather than subtleties, and omits statistical content analysis. See Leibman (1995) *Living Room Lectures*, 12.


Methodology

Primarily, the method is preferable to the traditional tendency to rely on Josh Billings' assessment alone. By taking into account audience assessments of stars at the British box-office, the method acknowledges that audience perceptions of film popularity are both important and linked with named stars. The correlation of two distinct sources, from differing perspectives (trade and audience), is a useful corrective. For example, unlike conclusions drawn solely from Billings' assessment, my film sample demonstrates that in 1946 *The Wicked Lady* (1945) was a more popular film than *Brief Encounter* (1945), and although Josh Billings suggests *A Canterbury Tale* (1944) was a box-office success, it does not (according to my findings) rank among the most popular British films of 1944. In addition, the information derived from trade and from audiences is indicative of two fundamental aspects of popular cinema: film as a profit making venture, and film as an entertaining leisure pursuit.

Secondly, the use of a film sample based on annual assessments avoids the perils of tautology. For example, in analysing family portrayals it would have been easy to select films because they were 'about the family'. This method, however, is not acceptable. It uses circular reasoning and precludes any overall understanding of the family in popular film.

Finally, the method of sampling applies to British cinema culture as a whole. Consequently the results are useful because the final film scores confirm that British films did relatively well at the home box-office during this period. For example, British films scored more highly than American productions for each year between 1945 and 1949, inclusive. This wider perspective reinforces the relevance of studying meaning in popular British film, a widespread cultural agency, during the 1940s.

51 Janet Thumim has made the association between 'perception of popularity' and 'named stars'. See Thumim (1992) 'Methodological and Critical Problems', 27.
52 Robert Murphy notes the success of *The Wicked Lady* and explains that although Josh Billings records *A Canterbury Tale* as a success, Michael Powell's autobiography explains that it was one of The Archers few box-office failures. See Murphy (1998) 'Popular British Cinema', 6, 11.
54 British films did relatively 'well', but not necessarily for the right reasons. The popularity of British films during 1948, for example, must be read within the context of the devastating American boycott precipitated by the *ad valorem* tax.
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As with all methodologies, there are also some limitations. Two main disadvantages relating to the sampling procedure can be identified. On the one hand, Josh Billings’ annual assessments are not supported by figures or statistics, on the other, audience opinion is derived from one source. Both these restrictions are largely unavoidable. No statistical information on 1940s box-office returns exists, Josh Billings’ interpretation of the industry is the closest available source. Similarly, the audience awards in Picturegoer are the only consistent source of audience preferences for the 1940s.55

In relation to the final sample of successful British films, three additional observations must be made. First, no British films rank highly at the home box-office for 1940. This is not so much a limitation as a reflection of the American domination of the British box-office for that year. Second, In Which We Serve (1942), a film regarded by common consensus a popular success is not included in the sample. This occurs because In Which We Serve is somewhat of an anomaly: it represents a film that did exceptionally well even without established star names. It has, however, been analysed at length elsewhere and is also included as illustrative of a thematic tendency in Chapter 8.56 Third, not all the popular films of the final sample have proved accessible for repeated viewing. Consequently, detailed analyses of films are restricted to those popular British films distributed on video or broadcast on television between 1995 and 1998. Out of a possible 40 popular British feature films, almost 80% (representing a cross-section of British film production) are analysed in detail.57 Moreover, of those films that are omitted, the majority (56%) only has the lowest ranking.58 Furthermore, perhaps there is a hidden benefit: popular features of the 1940s that are readily accessible today possess an enduring significance beyond the parameters of this study. Not only are they centrally located within the British cinema culture of the 1940s, but, as non-specialist access to the past is increasingly provided

55 Less consistent sources of audience opinion are also derived from this single source. Notably, the individuals included in J. P. Mayer’s surveys were contacted via Picturegoer, and unpublished readers’ letters from Picturegoer are housed within the Mass-Observation archive. Mayer (1946) Sociology of Film; Mayer (1948) British Cinemas. This confirms that Picturegoer was the main source for eliciting audience responses to films during the 1940s.
57 See Appendix 3 ‘Film Sample’.
58 See Appendix 3 ‘Film Sample’.
by the media record, such films increasingly contribute to the formation of today’s historical consciousness.

2.5 Summary

In summary, Chapter 2 has been devoted to the methodological aspects of my thesis. Initially, I defined what is meant by British cinema. In particular, a production-based notion of British cinema was adopted. In keeping with this definition I have outlined the basic conditions relating to British film production during the 1940s. A key observation was that, in spite of competition with America, throughout much of the 1940s British films did remarkably well at the home box-office. It is these box-office successes which were identified using a sampling methodology adapted from Janet Thumim’s extensive work on popular postwar British cinema. Each stage of the sampling process has been described. Thereafter, the merits and limitations of the approach were identified. In spite of the restricted availability of data, my correlative method represents an improvement upon the traditional recourse to one source in isolation, namely Josh Billings’ lists in *Kinematograph Weekly*. The resulting film sample can be analysed in terms of how the films expressed concerns about the family as articulated elsewhere across society.

The articulation of anxieties about a pervasive family ideal in 1940s Britain is addressed in the next chapter, ‘Family Values and Moral Panic’. Chapter 3 begins by defining ‘the family’ as a social construct; then dismantles approaches which try to identify a universal family form; and subsequently supports those approaches which stress a gap between actual behaviour (families) and an ideal (the family). Finally, Chapter 3 identifies 1940s social concerns about family life that used the notion of the nuclear family as a moral barometer.
CHAPTER 3: FAMILY VALUES AND MORAL PANIC

Mankind is a collection of families and upon the primitive unit of the family the number, and to a large extent the quality, of the children “brought into the world” mainly depends. (Lord Horder, c. 1946)\(^1\)

The West has always been characterized by a diversity of family forms, by diversity of family functions and by diversity in attitudes to family relationships not only over time but at any one point in time. There is, except at the most trivial level, no Western Family type. (Michael Anderson, 1980)\(^2\)

3.1 Introduction

Whereas Chapters 1 and 2 provide the historiographical and methodological basis for a revisionist thesis on popular 1940s British cinema, this chapter offers a contextual framework for a specific analysis of the family in film. At a general level, this chapter explores key issues in the literature of the historical sociology of the family. At a more specific level, it details the social debates that focused on the family as ‘a problem’ during the 1940s. The overall perspective emphasises that ‘the family’ is a social construct not matched by the changing and varied circumstances of actual families. The argument is that during the 1940s, a period of extensive social change, social and cultural commentary and policy was characterised by a sense of moral panic about traditional ‘family values’.

Chapter 3 is divided into three main sections all broadly related to the value-judgements implicit in various definitions and descriptions of families and family life. The chapter begins with a brief consideration of what is meant by the family, a concept that remains notoriously difficult to pin down. Section 3.2 addresses the need to abandon universalising tendencies in social and historical theories of family development. Section 3.3 elaborates upon the gap between discourses about the family and actual behaviour. Finally, section 3.4 explains how the ‘ideal’ of the nuclear family underpinned the major social debates of the 1940s. The two sub-sections (3.4.1 and 3.4.2) relate to 1940s social anxieties about the quantity and quality of the national


population. As we shall see below, both areas of concern were articulated in terms of a moral panic about the conventional model of the family and family life.

From the outset it is important to recognise that the family, in spite of appearances to the contrary, cannot be understood as a biological category. Although the notion of the family has been widely used because it seems to refer to a natural and universal phenomenon, the institution of the family socially and culturally elaborates upon biological referents such as genetic relatedness. The family is a construct that has no straightforward one-to-one correlation with social structure. In 'real life' there exists a variety of different familial formations: there are cross-cultural and historical differences in household size, composition or behaviour. In the face of this diversity, rather than attempting to define the family per se it is more rewarding to investigate how the family has been constructed. This is because the family is a concept that carries more weight for its moral value than for its descriptive accuracy. Thus, following Kenneth Thompson, my thesis adopts a ‘contextual constructionist’ approach, analysing why and how the family during the 1940s came to be viewed as a problem, and relating the meanings of families in film to non-filmic sources, factors and attitudes. The premise is that films are never a straightforward reflection of society, but that they do relate to society in more diffuse ways. Films articulate and mediate certain social concerns and debates which, in turn, are grounded in actual experiences to varying degrees.

3.2 There is No Universal Family

Whereas Chapter 1 focused on the literature relating to British cinema history, sections 3.2 and 3.3 evaluate sociological and historical approaches to the study of the family. The purpose of section 3.2 is to explain that where once the idea of a universal family dominated sociological studies of the family, in recent years a consensus of

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opinion has rejected any unitary understanding of the family. Situated within this consensus, my thesis is underpinned by a broad, pluralistic view of family life and practices.

The idea of a universal family form characterising modern society and replacing a (similarly universal) extended family form of past times has hitherto enjoyed a wide currency in conventional and popular interpretations of society and social formations. The image of the family underlying sociological writing into the 1960s, and still informing popular thinking, contrasts a past in which the population lived in large and complex households within stable communities, with relatively isolated families in the present. This image usually contains intrinsic value judgements about the past as a "golden age". Namely, the past is constructed as a time when families felt a strong responsibility to provide emotional and physical support to their individual members. Such a model has been aptly labelled 'the classical family of Western nostalgia' in which life was difficult but harmonious, and the family was a source of economic stability and religious, educational, and vocational training.

One consequence of this imagery has been to contrast the past and present, conceiving the opposition in terms of a sense of loss. Remorse accompanies the alleged demise of the extended family as repository of traditional values and multiple functions. It is thought to be superseded by more rootless and anonymous social conditions. Moreover, the generalised 'evils' of capitalist society may be projected onto the restricted family type closely associated with capitalism. An associated myth has been that industrialisation was the key negative force behind these changes, responsible for destroying familial harmony and community life. As such, the 'classical family' stereotype has been allied with conservative and evolutionary perspectives. One observation is that stereotypes are always characterised by their partiality. A stereotype, by definition an ordering process making sense of society

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through simplification, is in some sense incomplete or removed from reality. Thus stereotyping past and present families in terms of their positive and negative attributes is both unconvincing and misleading. It relies upon the implicit acceptance of the universality of the family: a notion both characteristic of a specific strand in academic thought and also a fundamentally flawed conception.

A link between specific definitions of the family and academic perspective has been noted by the sociologist D. H. J. Morgan in his book, *The Family, Politics and Social Theory* (1985). For Morgan, the theoretical and intrinsically political 'project of the investigator' is a factor determining the perception of a unity or diversity among family forms. According to Morgan, pluralist formulations of the family reflect a liberal orientation and unified understandings reflect conservative or (some) Marxist philosophies (albeit from radically different outlooks). The connection between theoretical perspective and the perception of family forms appears to have a widespread applicability. For example, the structural-functionalist Talcott Parsons with his perception of a unified nuclear family form emerging with the onset of industrialisation can be allied with a conservative tradition, while Martine Segalen's focus upon the family as a polyseme belongs to a more liberal theoretical tradition. Such observations provide a useful taxonomic framework, but some discrimination between the validity of different definitions of the family must also be established.

In terms of definition my approach stresses the differences between families, a liberal political perspective (according to Morgan's framework). Families are characterised by their diversity, not their uniformity. Thus there can be no single demarcated model of the family that is not a simplification or a generalisation. My reasons for stressing pluralism above unity are based on the findings of sociologists and historians that have largely discredited the received or 'classical' idea of a single family type.

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Traditionally, historical interpretations of the family have stressed the evolution of a single family type, the nuclear family unit, emerging as a concomitant of industrialisation, Protestantism or capitalism. These are the 'classical' treatments of changing family forms which, while identifying different sources for the changes, all share a consensus that the causes are deep-rooted shifts in structural and/or cultural aspects of society, originating in the 19th century and before.\(^{16}\) Included among these are the diverse analyses of anthropologist Talcott Parsons, who saw a functional fit between the nuclear family and the needs of modern industrial society; Max Weber, who perceived a causal connection between the Protestant ethic and English defamilialisation in the 15th century; and Alan MacFarlane, who has controversially regarded 13th century England as a capitalist system with a nuclear family-system.\(^{17}\) Alternatively, Peter Laslett and the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, have emphasised the longevity of the nuclear family as a form that predates industrialisation in England.\(^{18}\)

The 'classical' theorists share an emphasis upon sameness, rather than difference. In dealing with the English or American case Talcott Parsons, Weber and MacFarlane all suggest that the nuclear family has superseded extended networks of kin. This framework establishes a dichotomy between extended families, a more 'primitive' from, and nuclear families, their 'modern' counterpart. However, in common with most theoretical oppositions this extended/nuclear or primitive/modern binarism is of limited worth. It does not do justice to the multiplicity of family structures that exist either in the present or in the past.

The 'classical' idea that the nuclear family replaces extended family forms in an industrialised, Protestant, or capitalist country has been effectively challenged on three counts. First, there is the suggestion that in the past high mortality rates mitigated against stable family forms. Second, it has been argued that extended networks remain

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an important resource in contemporary society. Finally, there is the view that according to life-cycle or life-course theory, there exists a diversity of families at any one historical moment. These three perspectives are elaborated below.

Earlier centuries were not characterised solely by extended families. Instead, high mortality rates resulted in the instability of family life and a variety of family forms. As Diana Gittins argues, until the 19th century typical life expectancy remained low, with the result that families were altered because of death. Widowhood, orphanhood and remarriage were all common experiences, not least among the poorest sections of society, resulting in the ‘hybrid family’ where orphans resided with relatives outside the nuclear group, or with their stepparents, half-siblings and stepsiblings. The correlation between this situation and the common contemporary ‘hybrid family’ resulting from divorce (rather than death) and remarriage is noted.

Secondly, the seminal investigation of Bethnal Green conducted by Peter Wilmott and Michael Young during the 1950s has illustrated the continued relevance of kin networks in providing both emotional and material support. Emphasising the importance of the ‘wider family’, their concluding observations stress the married daughter’s continued contact with her mother, involving the exchange of services and advice, and community loyalty derived from the mutual ties of kinship and friendship between households.

Finally, the idea of life-cycle or life-course is fundamental in suggesting the dynamic aspects of family structure. Life-course theory provides a link between the two theories outlined above, the former suggesting historical familial instability, the other emphasising the extended family in 20th century London. At its simplest the life-cycle describes the development of a person through childhood, adolescence, mid-life, old age and death; while the concept of family life-cycle refers to the development of...

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19 Gittins (1993) The Family, 8-10. A similar argument regarding the high incidence of marital break-up in past times is found in Anderson (1994) 'What is New', 71-73. In the light of demographic evidence, he argues that pre-20th century marriage durations and marital break-up rates closely paralleled modern ones.


22 Young and Wilmott (1957) Family and Kinship, 186-199.
individual families over time, a process including courtship, marriage, childrearing, children leaving home and dissolution of the family unit. The latter, family life-cycle, is clearly dependent on the former, individual life-cycles. We have already seen that it is effectively the changes in individual life-courses that constituted Gittins' 'hybrid family' of past times. Moreover, the life-cycle is also an important element of Young and Wilmott's study. Their analysis of the kinship network in Bethnal Green recognises that the present circumstances of people vary according to life stage:

Who is in a person's kinship network, and the character of the relationships within it, depend primarily upon the stage of life reached by himself and by his relatives.

This recognition of diachronic family changes (through time), creating variety at any one synchronic moment (in time) is intended to render the kinship system a 'dynamic process' rather than a simplified static object. As such, discussions of life-cycle and life-course have become commonplace in sociological and historical family studies. However, there is some indication that 'life course', which does not imply that family processes are cyclical, has become the preferred term. Also, even within life-course analysis, a shift can be traced from the emphasis upon stages (as demarcated periods of time through which individuals pass) towards transitions (social turning points imbued with significance within the family context). Nevertheless, the important insight of life-course theory remains the recognition that the existence of life stages, cycles or courses renders the identification of a single family type at best an inaccurate simplification. As summarised by Tamara Hareven, there is 'an increasing appreciation of the changing and diverse nature of "the family", rendered fluid by shifts in internal age and gender configurations across regions and over time'.

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24 Young and Wilmott (1957) *Family and Kinship*, 86.
25 Young and Wilmott (1957) *Family and Kinship*, 76.
27 Morgan (1996) *Family Connections*, 142
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unaffected by the controversies surrounding the relative merits of attempts at defining stages or transitions in life-cycles or courses.

3.3 The Gap between Discourses and Behaviour

Without the existence of a single family type it becomes misleading to consider the family, in terms of a stable social institution, at all. Thus section 3.3 explains how pluralistic approaches reject a universal definition of the family in favour of examining families or family practices. Thereafter, this section evaluates approaches that stress the gap between the imagery, symbolism and connotations of the family, and material families. Pluralistic studies (like my own) are frequently concerned with analysing how the family is a constructed concept, often at odds with people’s actual experiences of family life.

In common with other theorists with pluralistic perspectives, I have sought to avoid overt references to the family as an undifferentiated unit.\(^{30}\) It is because of the absence of a single social phenomenon called the family and because of the inequalities between and within families (in terms of class, gender, ethnicity and age) that Diana Gittins considers it essential to think of families, in the plural, rather than ‘the family’, singular.\(^{31}\) Similarly, David H. J. Morgan’s most recent work shares a pluralist perspective.\(^{32}\) He uses the term ‘family’ as an adjective (rather than as a noun) referring to practices dealing with ideas of parenthood, kinship and marriage, and the expectations and obligations associated with those practices.\(^{33}\) Morgan’s argument has been influenced by the political and theoretical debates about the family outlined above (section 3.2) and he astutely summarises their implications:

...the question is one of whether it is misleading, or possibly even dangerous, to talk of “the family” in the face of an observable diversity of modern family practices and domestic living arrangements and in the context of a vigorous ideological debate about the importance of family life in the context of society as a whole.\(^{34}\)

\(^{30}\) Unless directly specified, references in the text to ‘the family’ refer to constructed representations of families. Hereafter, this understanding of the family will be assumed and the phrase will not necessarily appear in quotation marks.


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Here then, Morgan highlights a distinction between 'the family' and social diversity. The notion that the gap between a unified perception of the family and social realities has been developed elsewhere: William Goode was among the first sociologists to identify a gap between ideal and real family patterns; since then Arlene Skolnick and Diana Gittins have focused upon similar distinctions, undertaking theoretical projects that share greater similarities with my own.35

In 1963 William Goode introduced his ambitious study of world changes in family patterns by outlining the major theoretical issues informing his work. Significantly, he recognised the necessity for sociologists to question preconceived notions about the family and to 'distinguish ideal family patterns from real family behavior [sic] and values'.36 Although Goode attempted to discover universal trends in human experience (such as a world-wide alteration towards a conjugal family pattern, resulting from industrialisation and urbanisation), his theoretical observation has had considerable academic import in other studies stressing greater familial diversity. Whilst William Goode focused upon the material evolution of family systems, his distinction between the ideal and the real has since underpinned investigations of the images and ideologies that surround the family in American and British thought.

In 1979 Arlene Skolnick echoed William Goode with her observation that the family was subject to a confusion between 'image' and 'reality' and that gaps between prescriptive ideological norms and familial behaviour may be the rule.37 For the American context she documents the prevailing 20th century ideology of a 'sentimental model' which assumes that the family must compensate for the harsh realities of life outside the home.38 In contrast with this model, Skolnick argues that contemporary Western family life with its 'backstage' status provides a shield of privacy creating the (realised) potential for unobserved deviancy.39 Skolnick's distinction between

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37 Skolnick (1979) 'Public Images', 301.  
38 Skolnick (1979) 'Public Images', 304-308.  
39 Skolnick (1979) 'Public Images', 301-303.
ideology and lived experience is important. However, this insight must be qualified by her tendency to emphasise a universal experience of family life situated unequivocally within a private sphere. A direct association between the ‘private’ and the family is problematic. Arlene Skolnick argues that the private family is a distinctly modern form, the result of industrial capitalism separating work and family. Yet recent feminist thinking has effectively challenged the idea that the family constitutes a private area in implicit opposition to a public world of work. An opposition between the public and the private does not adequately account for women’s paid work or for its status as an extension of traditional housework; nor does it recognise the existence of either intermediate zones, such as communal domestic facilities, or intermediate enterprise, such as taking in paid lodgers. Moreover, the separation of public and private spheres can in itself be considered a consequence of bourgeois Victorian ideology. Skolnick herself documents how the evolution of the ‘sentimental model’ was characterised by a separation between work and family in the later 19th century. Thus, by asserting the existence of a modern family life associated with privacy, Arlene Skolnick tends not to separate ideological from material forms of families. The simplification, no doubt, arises from the limited length of Skolnick’s study. An article’s scope cannot effectively address a multiplicity of family forms. It is only in Diana Gittins’ more recent book, The Family in Question (1993, 1st published 1985), that some of the issues are resolved.

Like Arlene Skolnick, Gittins has sought to articulate a gap between image and reality, but (unlike Skolnick) Gittins maintains a sense of familial diversity. Diana Gittins observes that there is a discrepancy between discourses about ‘the family’ (ideologies of how people should live) and how individuals actually live their lives. Building on this main premise, Gittins considers how sometimes contradictory discourses about ‘the family’ are exercised in and through the media, religious institutions, the educational system and social policy to create an ‘ideology of the family’. Consequently, although Gittins perceives an overall ideology of the family,
she explicitly acknowledges the existence of several discourses that may contribute to
that ideology. This perspective benefits from attributing discourses to specific sources,
such as the media or social policy, rather than constructing them as abstract entities. It
also accounts for the diffuse nature of discourses, not necessarily in accord, thereby
militating against a monolithic conception of family ideology. As with her views on
discourses, Gittins also emphasises the diversity of actual family experiences. Her
argument against a stable historical family form has already been outlined.\textsuperscript{46} Similarly,
Gittins argues that contemporary forms are also characterised by diversity rather than
by an adherence to any universal form. This is true whether families are defined by
common residence, economic co-operation, reproduction or sexuality. For example, in
terms of co-residence, Gittins points out that families where children are at boarding
school or a father is in the armed services may only form households for limited
periods of time.\textsuperscript{47} Consequently, a ‘universal’ definition of the family founded upon
the criteria of co-residence would exclude individuals living apart while still
considering themselves to be family. This also works in reverse. People may co-reside
without considering themselves to be a family.

It is the idea of a gap between image and reality or between discourses and
behaviour that informs my thesis. Other historians, especially those focusing on State
legislation, have implicitly demonstrated the saliency of this idea. The most pertinent
example (in terms of subject matter, and the quantity and quality of her publications) is
provided by the work of Jane Lewis. She has written widely about women in Britain
during the 19th and 20th centuries.\textsuperscript{48} For Lewis, State legislation between 1870 and
1945 was based on the typical ‘dependent’ experience of women (as married and not
employed outside the home) thereby masking important variations in actual
experiences.\textsuperscript{49} In particular, Lewis emphasises that women’s experiences vary
according to their class: working class patterns of marriage and motherhood are less
likely to entail a separation between public and private spheres than their middle class

\textsuperscript{46} See above, 58.
\textsuperscript{47} Gittins (1993) \textit{The Family}, 61.
Jane Lewis (ed.) \textit{Women’s Welfare: Women’s Rights}, London: Croom Helm, 17-37; Jane Lewis
Wheatsheaf Press; Jane Lewis (1992) \textit{Women in Britain Since 1945: Women, Family and State in the
Post-War Years}, Oxford: Blackwell.
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counterparts. Yet within the context of specific historical experiences of women and their relationship with social discourses and policy, Jane Lewis shares Diana Gittins' broader desire to:

...re-examine elements of the concept of the family in more depth, trying to disentangle the ideological elements from the material and structural elements of people's living arrangements.

Yet while recognising the disjunction between discourses and material arrangements, two additional qualifications are necessary. First, it is important to acknowledge (as indeed Gittins does) that the concept of the family must relate, or be perceived as relating, to materialities in order to appear relevant. Second, given the material and ideological privilege accorded to the family during the 1940s, people 'invested' in the family as a rational choice. It seemed to offer emotional security; the best environment for child rearing; and appeared both naturally given and as socially and morally desirable. These factors militate against a top-down model, thereby explaining the continued popularity of the notion of the family and 'family values'.

Section 3.4 details how family life was addressed in family policy, state legislation, psychology and journalism between 1940 and 1949. These four areas all highlighted 'family values' as an area for concern and there was a high degree of correlation in their construction of familial ideals. As we shall see below, there was a widespread sense of moral panic, often defining women as a major threat to the family (itself held sacred by or considered fundamental to society). As Stanley Cohen notes in his seminal study of the phenomenon: moral panics define something or someone as a threat to societal values; its nature is presented in a stereotypical way by the mass media; 'right-thinking' people occupy the moral barricades; experts pronounce diagnoses and solutions; and the panic ultimately disappears or leads to social

55 Kenneth Thompson notes that 'implicit in the use of the two words 'moral panic' is the suggestion that the threat is to something held sacred by or fundamental to society'. See Thompson (1998) Moral Panics, 8.
The subject of moral panic, according to Cohen, might be novel or might be something which has long been in existence, but suddenly appears in the limelight. During the 1940s the wartime and post-war intensification of social changes precipitated moral panic about family life and the roles of women as wives and mothers. Long-standing concerns about the declining birth-rate and worries about the ‘quality’ of the British people became located at the forefront of 1940s public debate and social policy.

3.4 Public Debates and Social Policy in the 1940s

Throughout the decade of the forties the family was a fundamental preoccupation in contemporary debates, particularly those concerning domestic policy and legislation. In keeping with Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson’s recent hypothesis that “reading” the significance of wartime representations of women requires a wide familiarity with their surrounding cultural context, this thesis situates cinematic representations of families (Chapters 4-8) within their broader context (section 3.4). Consequently the cinema is to be located ‘at the intersection of social policy and representation’. In the 1940s there was a moral panic about the family because of a broader anxiety about the state of the national population, primarily in terms of its quantity and quality. In terms of quantity, commentators traced the longevity of the declining birth-rate, but it was only following the onset of war and the subsequent anticipation of its deleterious effects on family life that the perceived population problem became a focal point in contemporary debate. Similarly, although the quality of the nation’s populace had been previously articulated in terms of problem families and poor parenting, the war and the allied prospect of social dislocation brought these concerns sharply into focus.

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Section 3.4 addresses why and how a wider social anxiety about the national population became expressed in terms of a perceived crisis in one particular model of the family. Thereafter, sub-sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 outline the main public debates about the causes of population decline and deterioration. Between 1940 and 1949, social debates constructed the category of 'woman', as wife and mother, as primarily responsible for the well-being of the family and hence the nation. As such, women were both heroised, for increasing morale by maintaining the Home Front, and vilified, for allegedly poor parenting skills and the decline of family life. A paradoxical implication was that the family unit was simultaneously held to be both the bedrock of society and an increasingly fragile institution requiring the benefit of protective state intervention. These opposing impulses were contained within a biological model of the family, presupposing the naturalness of the bond between mother and child, and entailing any deviations from the norm to be interpreted as immoral aberrations. In this way a variety of sometimes contradictory elements were implicitly woven into the key social discourses of the 1940s.

Anxiety about the population is not a new phenomenon. Instead it has taken a variety of forms: it was, for example, a concern of Plato and, in terms of British history, took on a new significance with the quantification engendered by the new census in 1801. Moreover, the politicisation of the population question is readily apparent in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is at this moment that the themes of degeneracy and multiplication of the unfit begin to recur. These themes are the harbingers of the debates of the forties. Both the turn of the century and the forties countenanced the politicisation and proliferation of population concerns as part of a

61 Here, my focus is on Britain: British society, conceptions of the family, and maternalism. For a comparative overview of how the themes of 'motherhood' and 'family values' have evolved historically, and how they relate to the rise of women's movements and the emergence of welfare states in Australia, France, Germany, Great Britain, Sweden and the United States, see Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (eds.) (1993) Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States, New York & London: Routledge.

62 This dual nature of the family as a bedrock of society and yet fragile, or as a powerful refuge and yet in crisis has been identified by Lewis (1992) Women in Britain, 12; Segalen (1986) Historical Anthropology, 2-3.


fear of national decay. They did, however, differ in their external referents. For the earlier period, population themes were linked more directly to urban change. There was a fear among the urban middle classes that Britain was undergoing negative developments, thereby creating a residual class as it became industrialised. During the forties the population panic was once again linked to large-scale social change. In this instance the culprit was not just urbanisation or industrialisation, but the upheaval caused by World War Two and its immediate aftermath. Those who continued to link low fertility with the conditions of urban society emphasised the war’s role in making the situation more serious.

In the 1940s population concerns were located at the forefront of socio-political debate and theory, yet a centralised policy on population was never introduced. In part this was a reaction against the interventionist approaches adopted under fascism. Notably we can see how key members of the British eugenics movement, a powerful lobby, shied away from some of their earlier extremes and consciously tried to distance themselves from the legacy of Nazism. Moreover, by the time the Royal Commission on Population reported with its recommendations in 1949, many measures had already been anticipated by Beveridge and fears of population decline were also subsiding. Thus, the significance of the population debate lies not in the application of any centralised policy, but in its massive scale and pervasive assumptions about procreation and sexuality. The discussion below outlines sources of the debate and identifies key shared assumptions about the family.

Population anxiety in the 1940s reached epidemic proportions, preoccupying those who monopolised public debate: including the politicians, psychologists, health education specialists, and social workers who saw it as their duty to educate others and ensure social responsibility. The focus on the family was apparent throughout the war and was not just limited to the post 1945 agenda of reform and reconstruction.

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66 Titmuss (1942) Parents Revolt, 75, 36.
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Circulating debates frequently represented commonly held ideas, albeit with varying nuances, but were not indicative of 'conspiracies'. Didactic intentions ensured that the views of professionals were widely disseminated. This, in turn, was aided by the high degree of correlation between different specialists' views regarding the ideal model of the family, together with explanations and solutions for its apparent state of jeopardy. Debates over family life infiltrated a variety of popular media. In World War Two, for example, popular psychologists D. Winnicott and Edward Glover broadcast on family issues on BBC radio; women's magazines collaborated closely with the Ministry of Information; and the Board of Trade and Ministry of Information's jurisdiction over cinema personnel and scarce resources ensured the production of socially responsible films. Even without the background of wartime Britain to elicit a largely self-imposed pre-production mode of media censorship, contemporary debates about the family remained pervasive in the popular arena. The proliferation of family-centred debate indicates that the various views and attitudes espoused possessed, at the very least, a certain cultural currency, whether or not they were widely accepted among the majority.

The commonality among contemporary debates was constituted by the displacement of social concerns (about the health of the population) onto a domestic and personal level. The domestic level was intrinsically associated with the welfare of the family which, in turn, hinged upon the centrality of the mother. This mechanism of articulating social concerns in terms of the family is not unusual. Indeed, since the 18th century, a recurring fear that coincides with economic and political crisis is that the family is similarly in a state of crisis or decline. Following Diana Gittins, there are several interrelated reasons for why this coincidence between social crisis and a

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71 See Riley (1983) *War in the Nursery*, 85: influential British psychologists (1930s-50s) were the authors of their own 'popularisations' by broadcasting on radio and publishing articles in newspapers and women's magazines.


‘crisis in the family’ should exist.\textsuperscript{74} These reasons relate to the symbolic status of the family as an ideal and the gap between that ideal and lived reality. Firstly, the theme of a loss of family is about a general sense of change and loss as symbolised by the family; secondly, because the family as an ideology permeates social institutions, the theme of a crisis in the family is in effect the fear that society itself is in crisis; thirdly, family ideology insists on one type of family which can never be matched in reality, consequently people believe there is a crisis in the family.\textsuperscript{75} At this level, the explanation proffered by Gittins remains general, relating to crises in ‘modern’ industrial society, rather than to any specific historical period.

For the 1940s, the symbolic status of the family can be refined in terms of the functionalist arguments that were either explicit or implicit in the major strands of popular and academic thinking about the construction of a healthy social fabric. Functionalism is a doctrine that, as the name suggests, explains the existence of social institutions in terms of their function in and for society as a whole. For functionalists, the nuclear family fulfils what William Goode has described as a ‘mediating’ function which ‘links the individual to the larger social structure’ by ensuring that (s)he accepts social values, thereby mediating between his/her instinct and the wider culture.\textsuperscript{76} According to this model, behaviour not deemed ‘functional’ is consistently defined as abnormal and abhorrent. While this is certainly the case for 1940s Britain, it is testimony to the depth of these ideas that similar theories and models have exerted a continued hold in other areas and decades.\textsuperscript{77}

According to the functionalist view, nuclear family units are vital social institutions, necessary for both reproducing the nation and socialising its members. During the 1940s the family’s ‘function’ was usually articulated in terms of a

\textsuperscript{74} Gittins (1993) \textit{The Family}, 153-167.

\textsuperscript{75} Gittins (1993) \textit{The Family}, 153-167.

\textsuperscript{76} William J. Goode (1964) \textit{The Family}, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 2.

\textsuperscript{77} Functional theory has, for example, not only influenced 1940s perceptions of British domestic living arrangements, but has also prejudiced several academic contributions from those working among many societies (including Britain) in the 1970s and 1980s. See La Fontaine (1996) ‘An Anthropological Perspective’, 24-25. However, since the 1960s, there has also been a growth in conflict perspectives (including Marxism, radical psychiatry and feminism) which challenge conservative and biologically deterministic functionalist approaches in the sociology of the family. See Ian Marsh (ed.) (1996) \textit{Making Sense of Society: An Introduction to Sociology}, London and New York: Longman, 415.
quantity/quality axis. Concerns about the size of the population were related to the perceived biological function of the family to reproduce, while concerns about responsible citizenship were linked to the perceived socialisation function of the family.

In the 1940s, the biological significance of the family in producing future generations was emphasised.\(^7\)\(^8\) One consequence of the emphasis on the reproductive function of the family was to stress the relationships and roles between, rather than within, generations. This explains the relative neglect of sibling relations among the commentators of this period.\(^7\)\(^9\) Instead it is easy to see how links were made between families, generational reproduction, heredity and eugenics which, in turn, prioritised relationships between parents and children. One eugenic assumption was that the future well-being of society rested with the reconstitution of families of ‘good-stock’ after the war.\(^8\)\(^0\) Furthermore, the biological significance of the family became elaborated in terms of an analogy achieving its apotheosis with Innes H. Pearse and Lucy H. Crocker’s study of attendance at the Peckham Health Centre: each member family was regarded as a biological ‘organism’ or ‘functional unity’ essential to the health and reproduction of society.\(^8\)\(^1\)

Psychologists were most prominent among those repeatedly invoking the socialisation function of the family. The stability of a functioning nuclear family was thought to provide the best environment for childcare.\(^8\)\(^2\) A logical concomitant was that a dysfunctional family, one not conforming to the nuclear ideal, could not adequately socialise its members as assets to the community. Thus, delinquents were considered the casualties of insecure family life and detrimental to society as a whole. Underpinned by these functionalist assumptions, the idea that the family was in decline became important as a symbolic means of articulating the apparent crisis in society, the declining quantity and quality of the nation’s populace.

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The ‘functional’ model of the family became the definitive motif for articulating population anxiety in the 1940s. It presupposed a ‘normal’ family: a married couple who loved each other, where the man was the breadwinner and his dependants were both wife and children. Whereas the husband was considered necessary to provide for his family in financial terms, necessitating a negotiation with the ‘public’ world, the wife was considered necessary to manage the domestic realm: including, the upbringing of children and undertaking housework.

The differentiated model of the ‘normal’ or ‘ideal’ family, with the mother at its centre, was widespread. For example, it was apparent in both the Beveridge Report and the educational literature of the 1940s. The Beveridge Report presented marriage in terms of ‘the ideologies of domesticity of motherhood’, articulating a view (assuming married women would not work and performed complementary roles to their husbands) which already had extensive political support. Likewise, the mother’s domestic role, central to the family, was evident in educational literature and policy. Both John Newsom’s book *The Education of Girls* (1948) and the Board of Education’s *Norwood Report* (1943) insisted on the value of domestic science for young girls as potential homemakers. Wartime addresses to women also addressed domestic issues. Ideally women were to be efficient and responsible homemakers. Thus women in the 1940s were associated with their ‘natural’ roles as wives and mothers. Motherhood, in particular, was posited in biological terms, with the relationship between mother and child regarded as a ‘bond’ that should not be broken or threatened. Consequently, female psychiatric disorders, such as hysteria, could be understood as a response to the frustrated instinct of motherhood. Alternatively, resistance to the socially sanctioned female norm was expressed by a lack of interest in the home, and an interest in sexuality and dress.

86 Gillian Swanson (1996) ‘“So Much Money and So Little to Spend It On”: Morality, Consumption and Sexuality’, in Gledhill and Swanson (eds.) *Nationalising Femininity*, 77.
87 David Morgan and Mary Evans (1993) *The Battle for Britain: Citizenship and Ideology in the*
Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 describe how the population debate implicitly accepted the functional model of a 'normal' family (a nuclear family within which women were perceived as 'natural' homemakers), and how exceptions to the 'norm' were foregrounded as areas of concern and indicators of decline. The discussion divides concerns into those relating to the size and those relating to the 'quality' of the population, chronologically the former tend to precede the latter. It also traces some precursors of the debates; notes the indices cited as evidence for social change; and describes how fears crystallised around women's changing roles as the cause for concern.

3.4.1 The Family and Population Size

Fear about the declining rate of population growth constituted a major strand in the debates of the 1940s, especially during the five-year period between 1942 and 1947. This fear possessed a precedent among the overriding population questions that characterised the previous decade. During the 1930s, the fall of the birth rate to 30 per cent of the level needed for replacement launched the future of the family to the forefront of debate.\textsuperscript{88} However, it was the nationalistic concerns accompanying World War Two that increased the issue's salience. People were needed, in large numbers, for the British war effort. Almost paradoxically, population anxieties intensified in spite of an increasing birth-rate in the early forties.\textsuperscript{89} For example, birth-rate preoccupations found material expression with the establishment of the Royal Commission on Population in 1944 and the introduction of family allowances. The former was directly motivated by the threat of population decline, whereas the latter's motives were more complex. Introduced in 1945, family allowances entitled mothers to receive a weekly payment of 5s for each child after the first. The allowances might have been intended to alleviate poverty; to act as an alternative to a general wage increase; or to stimulate the birth rate.\textsuperscript{90} Yet they were most widely and cynically interpreted as an incentive to increase the birth rate.\textsuperscript{91} The concern about population decrease...
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decline peaked during 1945-47. It was not until after the baby boom of 1947, together with the post-war recovery of the marriage rate, that the immediate panic about falling population figures diminished and that concerns about the ‘qualitative’ aspects of the population became more prominent.

In the 1940s the declining rate of population growth, discussed in terms of a generalised fear about the family, was widely cited as an index of social change. Rising divorce and illegitimacy rates seemed to locate the roots of population decline at the level of the familial and personal. Divorce petitions numbered 9,970 in 1938; rising to 19,155 in 1944 and reaching 34,443 in 1949. The increase in petitions together with illegitimacies figured as something of a moral panic. It appeared to indicate that sexual mores were changing, families were breaking down and extra-marital affairs were becoming more commonplace. Moreover, population decline was attributed to various social changes taking place at the ‘heart’ of the family, often as a result of wartime exigencies and notably in women’s roles. Consequently it became women’s behaviour which seemed to offer the most potential to threaten the endurance of family life. Several key factors were thought to be militating against the ideal of large and stable families. Women’s employment, selfishness, hasty marriages and demobilisation were all considered problematic in terms of widely espoused family ideals. An overview of the main themes relating to each of these threats to ‘family values’ is provided below.

In terms of female employment, women’s entry into the labour force was repeatedly discussed according to the anticipated effects it might have on family life. Towards the end of the decade, the 1949 report of the Royal Commission recapitulated some of the key population discourses of the period. In particular, it linked paid female employment with the threatened birth rate. The main point underpinning this debate was that full-time work was deemed incompatible with

93 In retrospect, the increase in illegitimacy is a crude index of sexual morality, indicating only those relationships that could not be legitimated due to the war. See Morgan and Evans (1993) The Battle for Britain, 65.
women’s traditional roles as wives and mothers complementing the male breadwinner. Women working outside the home were thought to effect the stability of the family because they were not economically dependent on husbands and fathers. However, with considerable numbers of women required to do war work this image of woman located within the home became strained. Attempts to reconcile war work with traditional roles led to the construction of women’s paid work as a necessary, but temporary, aberration from the norm.

Wherever possible, traditional female roles were still emphasised. For example, the Ministry of Information started recruiting under the auspices that women were not suited to conventional male employment outside the home. This is why the Ministry initially promoted women’s services and nursing rather than industrial and munitions work. Moreover, women’s paid work was ideally to be undertaken by those who were single, and it was ascribed a part-time and temporary status. Indications of these three assumptions were clearly embodied in official policies. Part-time work was officially instituted for the first time in 1943, indicating government commitment to mobilising women without upsetting conventional home life. In addition, the differential treatment of women according to their familial status was apparent in the conscription regulations. Men were called up immediately the war began, however the government hesitated in the compulsory mobilisation of women: their registration at labour exchanges and call-up began in March and December 1941 respectively. Men’s availability for work was solely determined by medical requirements, but women’s was qualified by their role within the home. Single women were employed in preference to those who were married because the latter were presumed to have children and familial responsibilities to prioritise. Most notably, women with children under 14 years were volunteers who were never subject to conscription, whereas fatherhood did not exempt men. Furthermore, in 1945, married women were a

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96 Urwin (1944) *Can the Family*, 18.
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priority category for release.\textsuperscript{102} Later still, in 1947, the production drives aimed at women targeted those with older children, focused upon jobs not done by men, and emphasised that the work was only a temporary requirement.\textsuperscript{103}

The idea of women’s employment as an anomaly departing from ‘natural’ roles was not only inscribed in the type (part-time) and duration (temporary) of work, but also in its fiscal evaluation. Women in employment were consistently paid far less than their male counterparts. The gap between men and women’s earnings narrowed only a small amount: in 1938 women earned forty-seven per cent, in 1945 fifty-two per cent and in 1955 fifty-three per cent of men’s average weekly earnings.\textsuperscript{104} The rationale was that wage earning was not and should not be a woman’s primary occupation. One finding of the 1946 Royal Commission was that equal pay would be an unwelcome development because women were meant to find motherhood (not employment) a desirable vocation.\textsuperscript{105} Overall, the tendencies relating to women and employment can be summarised succinctly: ‘wives and mothers were granted entry into paid work only so long as this did not harm the family’.\textsuperscript{106}

A related dimension was that female employment not only prevented women from being full-time mothers, but it also introduced women to new ideas and activities that were not family oriented. The mobile woman, with her location in a wider social world, was among the causes for concern. In addition, the vagaries of wartime apparently accentuated any tendencies to look for immediate gratification through alternatives to conventional behaviour. The result was thought to be a pernicious ‘selfishness’ centring on individual pleasure, rather than the ideal of self-sacrificing motherhood. It was a trait considered inimical to the creation of the large and stable families required to increase the growth of population rates. Once again, this was consistently attributed to the changing desires and roles of women. Mass Observation’s survey \textit{Britain and Her Birth Rate} (1945) was not alone in the suggestion that women, by refusing multiple maternity, were pursuing an implicitly

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[103] Wilson (1980) \textit{Only Halfway}, 44.
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irresponsible wish for independence and a good time.\textsuperscript{107} Even when modern conditions as a whole were thought to have exerted a cumulative effect on the birthrate, it was the mother in particular who was described as developing interests not centred on the family.\textsuperscript{108} Single women who did not want to have children and families became commonly known as ‘good time girls’, unconcerned with the future or common good. This conflicted with an image of female sexuality that could only find its legitimate expression within the socially sanctioned institution of marriage. In the absence of such legitimisation, ‘good time girls’ were often described in negative, if not anti-social, terms: at the most conservative extreme they were regarded as tantamount to ‘amateur prostitutes’\textsuperscript{109}

In the case of married women’s selfishness, anxiety focused upon extra-marital affairs and preferences for financial rather than familial stability. Whereas service men were widely expected to have affairs, the standards for women were somewhat different. In particular, the fidelity of soldier’s wives was in the public eye, constituting a problem of morale for commanding officers overseas.\textsuperscript{110} An association between security and lowered fertility was only a superficially less gender specific variable in the debate. Richard and Kathleen Titmuss in their famous Parents Revolt (1942) identified a desire for security (in the face of the uncertainties created by war and unemployment) as a primary factor in choosing to have fewer children.\textsuperscript{111} Ostensibly the authors suggested that selfishness was not the root cause and that both men and women were opting to have smaller families.\textsuperscript{112} However, in spite of these comments, their discourse was qualified according to class and gender. Selfishness together with selflessness operated among certain class categories. Workers who were semi-skilled, skilled or clerical were considered influenced by the ‘economic handicap’ of children effecting their standard of living and curtailing leisure time, and by the desire to provide children with the best start in life.\textsuperscript{113} An additional claim was that the

\textsuperscript{110} Slater and Woodside (1951) Patterns of Marriage, 219-223.
\textsuperscript{111} Titmuss (1942) Parents Revolt, 96.
\textsuperscript{112} Titmuss (1942) Parents Revolt, 88, 95-96.
\textsuperscript{113} Titmuss (1942) Parents Revolt, 98.
emancipation of women, presumably of all classes, meant that wives desired a share in a fuller life, rather than the drudgery of the home.\footnote{Titmuss (1942) *Parents Revolt*, 99.}

It was not only women's pre-marital and post-marital behaviour that constituted an apparent threat to the family, but also specific types of marriage arrangement. Although marriage was classed as a necessity for familial and national well-being, not all types of relationship conformed equally to the 'norm' of commitment and longevity. Instead, some newly identified variations of the marital tie were among the causes for concern. Hasty and loveless marriages were considered nearly as damaging to the social fabric as relationships outside wedlock. Rushed marriages were widely associated with higher rates of familial break-up, rather than with the goals of stability and child rearing. Hasty marriages were characterised as those entered into by near strangers, sometimes after only a few hours acquaintance, and with little or no planning for the future.\footnote{MacNalty (n.d.) 'Influence of War', 134.} Documentary evidence from bastardy cases indicates a version of matrimony in conflict with the long-lived ideal permeating public policy discussions: one in which couples might spend only a few months together, followed by years of separation; and where women were sometimes pregnant by other men before marriage.\footnote{Carol Smart (1996) 'Good Wives and Moral Lives: Marriage and Divorce 1937-51', in Gledhill and Swanson (eds.) *Nationalising Femininity*, 96.} Both practical and psychological explanations were provided for the hasty marriage phenomenon. A man entering the services was one reason explaining a rush to get married.\footnote{MacNalty (n.d.) 'Influence of War', 134.} Another reason was held to be the tendency for people to fall in love more readily and urgently under exceptional wartime conditions.\footnote{Glover (1940) *The Psychology of Fear*, 88.} Such marriages were thought to be entered into in the excitement of a moment, creating the potential for long-term complications.\footnote{Slater and Woodside (1951) *Patterns of Marriage*, 223.} Loveless marriages were another departure from the 'normal' model. Sexuality and desire expressed within a marriage without love was not regarded as an appropriate basis for familial stability, whilst marriages founded on financial gain, status or sexual desire were considered troublesome affairs with greater potential for dissolution.\footnote{Urwin (1944) *Can the Family*, 37-38.}
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Debates about marriage, having crystallised around the interrelated issues of familial size and stability, underwent another permutation. They intersected with anxieties surrounding demobilisation towards the end of the war. Demobilisation began on the 18th June 1945 and with it the potentially disruptive nature of reunification after months or years apart began. With regard to family life, demobilisation was discussed in hopeful although ambivalent terms. The restoration of traditional family life and its associations of normality was the widely stated social goal, a pre-requisite for post-war reconstruction, towards which demobilisation was the initial and precarious step. However, with it came the fear that separations might not be adequately repaired and civilian re-adjustment would be a fraught and lengthy process. Certainly the problems of civilian adjustment were considered important enough for David Mace, a key figure in the marriage guidance movement, to broadcast a series of five BBC radio programmes on the topic. Moreover, anxieties took on a material form with the establishment of both residential centres, offering vocational guidance and psychiatric advice for ex-prisoners-of-war settling into family life, and Resettlement Advice Offices, which did not offer counselling but did provide practical advice for servicemen. The potential for instability in family life (through demobilisation, female employment, selfishness or hasty marriage) was considered a threat to the birth rate and future generations, but in addition, it was considered a threat to the present generation: this ‘current threat’ was articulated in the discourses of parenting, delinquency and problem families.

3.4.2 The Family and Socialisation

During the later forties population anxiety underwent a shift away from fears about the declining rate of population growth and towards an emphasis about the ‘quality’ of the national populace. In particular there was concern about the standards of care and socialisation which children received within their families. With the immediate fear of population decline over in 1947, existing debates about heredity and eugenics in specific relation to the notion of the ‘problem family’ came to the fore. Like the earlier fears about the birth-rate, concerns about problem families were not an

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entirely new phenomenon. What was new was the intensification of interest throughout the forties and especially during the post-war period.

The longevity of the debate is readily apparent. Continuities can be traced from at least the 19th century. A Victorian precursor was the eugenicist association between heredity and crime. Moreover the Poor Law legislation of 1899 allowed guardians to remove children from unsuitable parents which, in effect, meant those working-class women who were deemed ignorant of careful childrearing. Thereafter, in the 1930s, the ‘social problem group’ emerged as a distinct concept. The *Our Towns Survey* (1943) by the Women’s Group on Public Welfare witnessed the terminological transition from the problem group to the ‘problem family’: claiming that the latter, while relatively few, were a serious threat to society. The survey’s emotive definition provides the benchmark for post-war investigations and, as such, it is worth outlining. Of note is the recognition that evacuation highlighted an ongoing phenomenon of great national concern:

The effect of evacuation was to flood the dark places with light and to bring home to the national consciousness that the “submerged tenth” described by Charles Booth still exists in our towns [...] Within this group are the “problem families”, always on the edge of pauperism and crime, riddled with physical and mental defects, in and out of the courts for child neglect, a menace to the community, of which the gravity is out of all proportion to their numbers.

At the time of publication, the *Our Towns Survey*, identified the absence of and the need for a study of problem families. Post-war this need was met by Medical Officers of Health who focused upon the administrative difficulties of problem families and the predicaments of children. Psychologists also investigated the latter. Thus by 1947 the problem family was a widespread idea, achieving dissemination through a range of medical text books. The problem family continued to inform social debate and

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128 For a discussion of the rise and decline of the concept of the ‘problem family’ see Welshman
policy throughout much of the ensuing decade. It was not until the mid 1950s that the concept began to fall out of favour in some circles, notably among social workers, although it retained a popular currency.

Widespread social change was the deciding factor in propelling 'problem families' to the centre stage. An apparent crisis in society was displaced onto a familial level and, aided by a vogue for psychological theories, was relayed through the 'problem family' motif. One index was repeatedly invoked to confirm the state of social disarray and its attribution to dysfunctional families. This was the rise in rates of juvenile delinquency. Delinquency was attributed to insecure family life, an insecurity considered heightened by wartime and post-war stresses and dislocations. The pessimistic assessment by Cyril Burt, Professor of psychology at University College London, revealed a 60 per cent rise in delinquency among boys and 20 per cent rise among girls over the four year period, 1938-1942. Moreover, unnerving experiences of evacuation were used as psychological proof that children needed a happy and functional home life in order to develop into responsible adults. At best evacuation was considered damaging, with commentators noting the disruptive behaviour of child evacuees, at worst it was a pursuit in contravention of human nature. The overriding view was not that social conditions alone could create delinquents, but that they strengthened predispositions to this tendency. Debates about delinquency thereby retained a strong hereditary dimension. An emphasis upon 'internal' inherited factors in conjunction with 'external' factors (the immediate family unit and its environment) placed the onus for juvenile delinquency predominantly upon parents. As a response health educationalists aimed to encourage the promotion of responsible parenting and, using the rationale that the mother-child bond was most important, focused on adequate mothering as a crucial preventative issue. These strands of thinking explain the popularisation of 'maternal deprivation' as a theory, emerging in the 1940s and informing debate into the 1950s.
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Concern about the 'quality' of the population focused on the causes of delinquency and neuroses, and their prevention. Debates attributed a powerful role to the mother, the potential to make or break the functional family unit, dictated by the view that she was centrally located within any family group. In contrast, the father's relation to the family, was as a figure of only secondary or peripheral importance. Consequently, accounts of fatherly roles are relatively scarce. The 'paternal role' did not figure in the same terms, either quantitative or prescriptive, as that of the mother. Where the father was discussed, it was to classify his role within the family as one of detachment. At most, the father was the remote bearer of the authority of the outside world. The father's main allegiance, in accordance with his conventional association with the 'public', was to the world outside the home: the country or nation, rather than family. Indeed, men and women's differential reactions to (and relations with) family life had already been among the causes of wartime concern. Previously, the morale of women had been considered more problematic than that of men because the former 'might defend the family and let the country go hang'. The link made between the mother and her family meant that it was the separations of evacuees from their mothers, rather than paternal absences, which were most frequently cited as potentially damaging for children. Moreover, post evacuation and post-war, the mother retained her status as the parent with the greatest potential to harm childhood development through poor parenting and neglect. Popular psychology underlined the link between mothers and children while educational literature encouraged women to fulfil their traditional roles and responsibilities within the family.

Psychologists emphasised the necessity of the mother-child bond, particularly during the earliest years of childhood development. One correlative was that the 'problem mother' emerged as an entity within the 'problem family', but no categorisation of 'problem fathers' was introduced. According to Anna Freud, who based her findings on studies of war nurseries and evacuees, maternal bonds were a pre-requisite for the development of stable personalities. Her findings were re-

133 Urwin (1944) Can the Family, 120.
135 Glover (1940) The Psychology of Fear, 73
136 Anna Freud (1974) Infants Without Families and Reports on the Hampstead Nurseries 1939-1945,
iterated throughout the late 1940s: with the family and the mother's continued affection within it described as the best environment for children. For example, Agatha H. Bowley argued that the mother's presence was all important to the child and her employment was a factor in delinquency (pilfering, truancy or difficult behaviour).\textsuperscript{137} Her summary of 'parents' with problems listed six categories: the tired mother, busy mother, worried mother, exacting mother, ailing mother and the unstable mother.\textsuperscript{138} No such attempt was made to define problem fathers. Similar notions prevailed among Medical Officers of Health. In 1946 the County MOH. for Hertfordshire identified the 'problem mother' as:

...a woman who does not give her children at least the minimum of care, and refuses to co-operate with the health visitors and make effective use of the technical advice available for her.\textsuperscript{139}

These definitions were buttressed by John Bowlby's theories of deprivation and child development. Forming his preliminary hypothesis in the forties, he coined the phrase 'maternal deprivation' to describe the situation where there was no warm, continuous relationship between child and mother.\textsuperscript{140} In so doing, Bowlby connected 'prolonged deprivation in the early years' with the 'development of an affectionless psychopathic character given to persistent delinquent conduct'.\textsuperscript{141} The separation of the child from the mother during the first five years of life constituted 'prolonged deprivation' and was considered the foremost cause of delinquent character development.

Thus, psychological interpretations of problem families rested on the interrelation between poor parenting, maternal absence and delinquency. Furthermore, the circulation of psychological explanations hinging on the mother, helped channel renewed interest into philanthropy and good mothering as preventative measures. In the post-war period, for example, the women's services introduced refresher courses on how to be civilians. The courses consistently emphasised domesticity over and

\textsuperscript{137} Bowley (1948) \textit{The Problems}, 31.
\textsuperscript{138} Bowley (1948) \textit{The Problems}, 46-52.
\textsuperscript{139} Blacker (1952) \textit{Problem Families}, 14-15.
\textsuperscript{140} Bowlby (1951) \textit{Maternal Care}, 34-35.
\textsuperscript{141} Bowlby (1951) \textit{Maternal Care}, 34-35.
above vocational training.\textsuperscript{142} There was also a proliferation and promotion of books on mothercraft: an appendix in Bowley's \textit{The Problems of Family Life} (1948) lists twelve books on the subject.\textsuperscript{143} In retrospect, it is hardly surprising that in an era when the maternal bond was constructed as the key to functioning family life 'problem' mothers were thought to be a root cause of dysfunctional families and the target for rehabilitative education. In all the debates about population and family life the mother's role was consistently constructed as of central importance: both necessary and potentially damaging to the family.

### 3.5 Summary

To summarise, Chapter 3 has concluded the establishment of a contextual framework (Part 1) for an analysis of popular British cinema and the family, 1940-1949. At the outset, I defined the family as a social construct rather than a biologically defined entity. Thereafter, section 3.2 outlined the key theoretical point that there is no such thing as a universal family type, either now or at any point in history. Instead, there are and have always been a multiplicity of family forms. Section 3.3 established that there is a gap between the diversity of material families and the family as a relatively uniform ideal that possesses more moral value than descriptive accuracy. Section 3.4 applied this observation by examining the moral attitudes and assumptions underlying social debates about the family in the 1940s.

Section 3.4 described how 'official' discourses entailed a dominant tendency towards an acceptance of a single model of the 'normal' nuclear family. That is, a model of the family with a male breadwinner and his dependents, the wife-mother located within the home and the children. Sub-sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 demonstrated that social concerns about the 'quantity' and 'quality' of the national population were articulated in terms of moral panic about the nuclear family. Population anxiety was attributed to social issues such as illegitimacy, divorce, evacuation, and delinquency that were discussed on a familial level. Exceptions from the 'normal' nuclear family became focal points of debate. Most notably, women's behaviour was considered problematic. Key areas of concern that seemed to deviate from normal family life

\textsuperscript{142} Turner and Rennell (1995) \textit{When Daddy}, 111.
\textsuperscript{143} Bowley (1948) \textit{The Problems}, 121.
included women’s employment; female selfishness; hasty or loveless marriages; demobilisation; and problem mothers.

Given these findings, Part 2 of the thesis analyses the family in popular British feature film, identifying dominant patterns and themes and examining how they relate to contemporary (1940s) debate. The key issue is how and to what extent mainstream British films recruited the ethical and philosophical values of their time?

144 The case that film articulates the preoccupations of society has been made in relation to the American cinema of this period. Writing about American films of the 1940s and 1950s, theorists Alain Silver and James Ursini have argued that *Film Noir* relates to society by recruiting the ethical and moral values of American culture. Alain Silver and James Ursini (eds.) (1996) *Film Noir: A Reader*, New York: Limelight Editions, 7.
PART 2: FAMILY TEXTS
CHAPTER 4: COURTSHIP AND MARRIED COUPLES

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 has demonstrated that, in the 1940s, the nuclear family was widely esteemed as the best environment for achieving emotional well being and fulfilment. According to this ethos, courting and marriage represented the first stages in the family life cycle, and (perhaps unsurprisingly) many 1940s feature films contained these two narrative threads. This chapter recognises that courtship and marriage were widely diffused themes, but that not all films focus upon these elements to the same degree or deal with the issues that they raise in the same way.

Section 4.2 begins with a discussion of some general themes concerning films, cinema-going and courting; thereafter sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 analyse the popular 1940s films from my sample that foreground courting; and section 4.3 examines those films dealing with married couples. In this chapter, the ‘case-study’ films all possess a narrative focus on either courtship or a married couple without children. For each film analysed in detail below, the themes of courting and marriage relate to the main (rather than secondary or peripheral) characters and as a direct consequence are of primary importance in structuring and driving the narrative of the film forwards.

One further note about films, courting and marriage needs to be made. Again, this relates to the relative positioning of themes within the narrative. Courting and marriage are the key ingredients of the traditional narrative closure that was pioneered by Hollywood and widely adopted by other national cinemas, including Britain’s. As noted above, the selection of films in this (and in all the other chapters) is dictated by what familial themes occur in each narrative and the degree to which they are central to it. In this chapter, the emphasis is upon those films which foreground courting and married couples throughout the story. It does not include films which centre for the most part upon other familial themes, but end with a passionate embrace or the chime of wedding bells. Nevertheless, the notion of the traditional narrative closure or ‘happy ending’ remains significant in two ways. First, following Sarah Harwood, I refer to such endings as the ‘Final Romance’ and consider them symbolic of incipient
families (a ‘potential generative unit’). Second, because these endings are so firmly entrenched within film culture, any departures from the norm are extremely interesting. Where features do not end with a Final Romance, this can be an indication of controversial issues which are not easily resolved. Film endings, romantic and otherwise, are discussed in view of specific cases, rather than used in the act of categorising the films themselves.

4.2 Courtship

This section focuses on the portrayal of courting in 1940s British films. The word ‘courtship’ is appropriate terminology for an analysis of the 1940s because it conveys ‘courting’ in the sense of seeking someone’s favour, usually with a view to marry, rather than suggesting a more casual relationship. Unlike many other areas of familial affairs, courtship was covered by social convention, but not by official legislation. Social policies targeted married couples and families, because these were legally recognised ‘norms of family life’, but courting was outside their remit. It is precisely for this reason that an examination of courtship in film is an area of interest. Although courtship was not directly targeted by social policies, it was among the main topics of feature films, both those with a didactic purpose and others with more frivolous intent.

In this instance, films provided an outlet for addressing a widespread social experience. Moreover, with 1940s cinema audiences consisting disproportionately of young adults and women, films were often made and marketed for these groups. Courting and romance (films invariably associated the two) were subjects considered to have a special appeal for younger adults and especially for female viewers. Press stunts indicate the particular audiences which distributors aimed to capture. For example, in the case of the romantic film, Love Story (1944), Eagle-Lion were keen to involve ‘young women’ in a novel publicity scheme sponsored by Margaret

2 For example, Gillian Swanson notes how the Beveridge Report imposed strategies supporting married women and mothers, whereas female sexuality as a whole was regularised by the ‘psychiatric management of morale’. See Gillian Swanson (1996) ‘So Much Money and So little to Spend it On: Morale, Consumption and Sexuality’, in Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson (eds.) Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 70-90.
Lockwood, the film’s ‘charming star’. They were asked for photos and personal messages to be included in ‘A Salute to Lovers’, a composite page appearing in local newspapers and circulated to their sweethearts and husbands in the forces.

Not only did courtship and romance underpin marketing ploys (such as the one for *Love Story*), but they were also widely associated with emulating film stars and going to the cinema. During the 1940s, film content helped to define actual courting behaviour, and cinemas were a frequent location for romantic dates. As the responses to J. P. Mayer’s survey question ‘Have films ever influenced you with regard to personal decisions or behaviour?’ demonstrate, young women often sought to imitate the make-up and fashions of their favourite film stars. Moreover, at least one RAF serviceman connected ‘pin-ups’ with his actual romances as he recalled how a girl dancing in his arms may have been a ‘WAAF cook, or an ATS orderly, but as the orchestra wove its spell, she was Alice Faye, Betty Grable, [or] Rita Hayworth’. Furthermore, as Leonora Pitt from the West Midlands has described, wartime courtship often involved frequent cinema-going:

My boyfriend Tom and I used to go dancing, cycling, and to the theatre or cinema, to see Abbott and Costello, Judy Garland, *The Way to the Stars*, *The Glass Mountain*, etc. Films like that kept us going.

Such social experiences provided a creative outlet for film-makers to introduce a degree of playfulness and irony into many of their productions. Thus, several British pictures, among them *The Seventh Veil* (1945), *Frieda* (1947) and *Brief Encounter* (1945), made references to romance and the movies, or showed courting couples going to the cinema. In so doing they demonstrate early examples of cinematic self-reflexivity.

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7 Also, Margaret and John Watson arrange a first date at the cinema in *They Were Sisters* (1945).
In *The Seventh Veil* for example, there are witty exchanges about the subject of films between Francesca (Ann Todd), an English ward, and her date, Peter (Hugh McDermott), an American working his way through college. Francesca does not like films, but Peter lectures her on the unspoken rules of romance according to the wisdom of the movies. In a film, according to Peter, he would kiss Francesca and she would walk out. *The Seventh Veil*’s dialogue proceeds to provide an interesting comment on the relationship between society and representation, and the role of fantasy and wish-fulfilment in films. Peter explains how films are the reverse of real life, providing Francesca with the opportunity to propose to him – thereby coding this act as something which no self-respecting young woman of the 1940s would dare do. Taken within this context the nationality of the interlocutors is significant. In particular, Peter, who knows all about movies, is an American, whereas Francesca, who is sheltered from the outside world and not used to having friends, let alone boyfriends, is not. The association between films and courting or romance is thereby extended to embrace contemporary awareness of the Americanisation of British cinema, and concerns about or stereotypes of ‘uncultured’ Americans liaising with British women.

Other films explored the association between courting and the cinema with less heed to fun, frivolity and Americanisation and greater attention to ironic juxtaposition. In these instances the social norm of carefree courting at the cinema was at odds with the film world’s narrative ‘reality’. This is the case where the couples shown to be courting are not the conventional young, single adults. Instead, their status is rendered morally problematic, because it explicitly involves either cross-cultural or extra-marital romance and entanglement. In *Frieda*, Robert Dawson (David Farrar) takes the German nurse, Frieda (Mai Zetterling), to the cinema during the months they are effectively courting (before a second marriage ceremony, required for religious reasons). However, their evening out is disrupted by the ‘Horror in Our Time’ newsreel of Belsen and the realisation that Frieda and others in wartime Germany were aware of the events depicted. On a less serious note, there is the cinema sequence in *Brief Encounter*. Here the adulterous yet restrained love-affair between Alec (Trevor Howard) and Laura (Celia Johnson) is contrasted with the

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8 Americans are also associated with cinema-going in *The Way to the Stars* (1945).
film they watch on their furtive and guilt-ridden date at the Palladium Cinema. The bold lettering of the film's sensational title, *Flames of Passion*, signifies cheap thrills and is, for Laura at least, 'a terribly bad picture'.

Moving on from general currents of ideas relating to 1940s films, cinema-going and courting, the rest of this chapter is devoted to analyses of how specific films projected narratives about courtship and marriage. The films analysed in relation to courting are *Love Story*, *The Way to the Stars* (1945), and *Maytime in Mayfair* (1949). There is a key distinction to be made between the three. Whereas both *Love Story* and *Maytime in Mayfair* focus almost entirely upon courting couples, *The Way to the Stars* has a more complicated narrative structure. *The Way to the Stars* is equally weighted towards two stories: one concerning a romance, the other following a woman's marriage, motherhood, and the loss of her husband.9 Because of this dual trajectory, the on-off courting relationship is discussed below (4.2.1), and the theme of changing familial status is analysed in the chapter on nuclear families (5.2).

### 4.2.1 True Love Never Runs Smooth

Two popular British films from my sample, both with middle-class wartime settings, represented courtship in the early and middle 1940s. The films *Love Story* and *The Way to the Stars* present a positive view of courting and marriage, tainted only by the anxiety of uncertainty about the future. The traditional activities and institutions of courting, marriage and the family are not questioned in and of themselves, rather it is unfavourable outside circumstances which are shown potentially to militate against these ideals.

In *Love Story* and *The Way to the Stars* both men and women are shown to be cautious about romantic liaisons, due to concerns about their ability to fulfil the morally sanctioned goal of long-term commitment to marriage and the family. In spite of this apparent similarity, the notion of distinctions between male and female roles and goals is deep-rooted and important gender divisions are still portrayed. Notably, women are associated with a greater desire or biological urge for marriage.

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9 There is also the theme of Anglo-American friendship and co-operation which is not discussed here.
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and commitment than men. In particular, men are shown as being persuaded (by women) that courting and marriage are ideals worth pursuing at all costs.

Both films ultimately espouse optimism in the form of a sense of seizing every opportunity for happiness, regardless of what the future may entail. This is a message drawing upon wartime discourses, namely the widespread idea that during the war people were ‘living for the moment’, a lifestyle that was commonly held to entail improper conduct such as pre-marital sex or hasty marriage. Yet both the films articulate an unusual sense of ‘living for the moment’, one which has didactic overtones. As might be expected in the latter years of war, the films indicate a fundamentally moralistic message: that there should always be a serious commitment to love and marriage in the short term, disregarding any possible uncertainties.

*Love Story* (Leslie Arliss, October 1944)

Set within a British wartime context, courting together with the achievement of personal and emotional fulfilment are the main themes of *Love Story*. The key message of embracing love and marriage is communicated by the narrative transition from reckless to responsible courtship. In addition, the contrast between Lissa (Margaret Lockwood) and Judy (Patricia Roc) establishes a blueprint for respectable modern femininity, and the figure of Tom (Tom Walls) provides the presence of a watchful moral guardian. Taken in combination these elements can be viewed as a forceful and fundamentally patriotic prescription for romantic relationships in Britain during the war.

*Love Story* is primarily about the acceptance of wartime uncertainty. This is articulated through the protagonists’ changing outlook on courting, love and romance. The narrative hinges on a notion of living for the moment which undergoes a fundamental transition in meaning. Initially the notion is allied with Lissa and Kit’s (Stewart Granger) lack of responsibility, but by the end of the film it has become associated with their reawakened sense of national duty and commitment to each other. In the film, Lissa and Kit’s dedication to the war effort is thrown into question. Both attempt to find happiness through seeking individual desires and pleasure before
realising that in so doing they are actually suppressing their natural vocations: namely those of marriage and national service.

Lissa is the film’s heroine. Initially framed as respectable, she undergoes a brief period of fun seeking, before developing an awareness that such behaviour is fundamentally against her nature. Lissa’s essential decency is relayed from the outset. Although employed as a successful concert pianist, Lissa wants to do something crucial for the war effort and attempts to enlist with the WAAF. Yet, having established Lissa as a person committed to the national effort, a chance event leads her down an alternative, albeit short-lived, avenue. A routine army medical reveals that Lissa, according to the specialist, is going to die in a matter of months. The diagnosis that Lissa is ill and unfit for war-work precipitates a period of selfishness which sees her determined to ‘enjoy every moment while it lasts’. It also marks the film’s change of setting from the concert halls of London to the Cornish coast. The geographical switch from city to country accompanies Lissa’s attempt to flee from her usual life and routine. Cornwall is a place of attempted but thwarted escape.

Bernard Knowles’ photography of the Cornish seaside provides a nostalgic sense of romantic English heritage. Literary, artistic and cinematic convention all traditionally use rural settings to convey a seamless sense of continuity, a type of timelessness isolated from the urban and industrial developments of the modern world. It is precisely because Cornwall is a place potentially removed from wartime considerations, that the intrusion of wartime into this environment is so significant. In Love Story, Cornwall is a site associated both with the ‘eternals’ of romance and nature, and with wartime responsibilities and probity. When Lissa attempts to escape, she finds no respite, for even Cornwall is not detached from the concerns and uncertainties of World War Two. Instead of contemporary isolation, the Cornish environment and people act to fuse tradition, heritage, romance and nature within an unmistakably wartime context. In so doing, uncertainty is presented as a constant facet of the human condition, but one which is often only acknowledged, intensified or thrown into sharp relief by wartime considerations.
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The Cornish location’s association with romance and nature is encapsulated by the integration of the piano piece, Cornish Rhapsody, into the film. The Cornish Rhapsody, composed by Hubert Bath especially for *Love Story*, is portrayed as Lissa’s personal and emotionally imbued composition. The music, itself a ‘rhapsody’ with all the connotations of love and rapture that this entails, is the prime example of *Love Story*’s connections between romance and the natural, and more specifically the Cornish, environment. From the music’s conception to its final performance it is unequivocally associated with romance. Lissa’s idea for the tune originates from her first cliff-top encounter with Kit, her love interest. As one disparaging reviewer astutely pointed out, the piano rhapsody ‘was born on the lovers’ first meeting as they were poised in a Kodak composition on the Cornish headlands’. Key links are also made between the piece’s structural arrangement and the seacoast setting. Here the intention is to create a melody suffused with emotion, romance, nature, and danger. The highest pitches are used to denote the shrill cries of the sea-gulls, the lower tones convey the waves breaking on the cliffs, and the rest of the tune (according to Lissa) expresses emotions that cannot be adequately described with words.

An innovative (though not unique) concept, the Cornish Rhapsody was both pivotal to *Love Story*’s portrayal of the naturalness of courtship and romance, and pitched as a marketable commodity. During the 1940s, recordings of ‘feature music’ enjoyed larger sales than background music and where music was an integral part of the story, film-makers recognised that they could capitalise on the way it was forced on filmgoers’ attention. This had happened at least once before, and reviewers noted more than a passing similarity between *Love Story*’s Rhapsody and the best-selling Warsaw Concerto from the 1941 film, *Dangerous Moonlight*. Cornish Rhapsody’s promotion as part of the film’s overall exploitation, hints at how specifically wartime discourses were also at play within both the film itself, and the commercially manipulated and socially-shaped context of its reception. *Love Story*, as a direct result of its historical context of production, was characterised by a double emphasis. This duality is highlighted by the incongruities contained in the film’s promotional campaign. On the one hand, the film was billed as a tale of people ‘in a

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romantic setting’ which would ‘enable the public while seeing the picture to forget about the war’. On the other hand, there was a detailed proposition for organ presentations of the Cornish Rhapsody with slides, again addressing the public, and implying that Lissa’s story was a familiar one for many women during the war:

...a woman’s heart will always find consolation in beauty and draw forth courage and comfort from adversity (haven’t we seen it so often in these days - do we not know someone who is doing so at this very moment?)

The film itself highlights the intrusion of wartime into the apparently remote Cornish countryside. On arrival in Cornwall, Lissa intends to live dangerously, yet she cannot forget her duty and future. In the Cornish hotel, Lissa is (at first) associated with vain ‘good-time girls’ seeking quick flings. Dazzlingly overdressed for dinner, Lissa describes herself as a British subject with ‘no family, no husband, no plans’. One made-up young woman regards her enviously as competition, while a disapproving elderly resident later remarks that she knew ‘exactly what kind she [Lissa] was when she walked into the dining room last night’. However, there are ever-impinging signs of war to remind Lissa that she has a national vocation.

Although Lissa meets Kit and tries to court without ‘strings’ or ‘come-backs’, there are intrusive signs and symbols of World War Two Britain. There are for example, the injured (presumably war-wounded) men encountered on the cliff-top pathway and the open-air theatre’s audience consists largely of men and women in service uniforms. Ostensibly, Cornwall is a place for Lissa’s attempted escape back to nature, but in effect it is a realm which reaffirms Lissa’s once wavering wartime commitment. From arriving in Cornwall with no husband and no plans, Lissa is finally pictured standing on a cliff, first clasping her wedding ring, and then waving at the bombers overhead. The shot shows that she has come full circle. For while a sense of uncertainty remains at the film’s closure (Lissa still has her weak heart; and is visually shown alone, waving goodbye and standing on the precipitous ‘edge’) Lissa embraces living for the moment in a new and responsible manner: namely, with marriage and a renewed sense of optimism and hope.

12 Eagle-Lion Publicity, microjacket for Love Story.
13 Eagle-Lion Exploitation, microjacket for Love Story.
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A similar narrative fate befalls Kit, the film’s male lead. Like Lissa his sense of commitment is shaken by illness, and like Lissa he returns to his patriotic duty. Whereas Lissa is threatened with a failing heart, Kit is losing his sight following an injury incurred during a RAF battle. Here, gender distinctions are pertinent. Her heart and feelings govern Lissa, a woman. She is, for example, less able then Kit to suppress her desire for marriage. Alternatively, Kit’s masculinity is determined, at least in part, by his ability to see. As long as he dreads losing his sight Kit womanises, but shies away from marriage; fears his future dependence on a manipulative woman friend, Judy; and is unwilling to act in the line of duty. When his sight is restored through a chance in a million operation, Kit returns to the services and marries Lissa. Here again there is a transition from a state of hopelessness to a renewed sense of optimism. For the character of Kit, this is framed through metaphors of darkness and light. Kit’s fear of blindness is as incapacitating as the blackout, and his sight-saving operation allows him to ‘see’ his duty clearly. As in the case of Lissa, this transformation entails the considered acceptance of uncertainty. This is demonstrated through Kit’s re-appearance in RAF uniform and his final message to Lissa, ‘We are all living dangerously. There isn’t any certainty any more. […] Let’s take all the happiness we can, while we can. Don’t be afraid’. Kit’s newfound sense of responsibility involves both marriage to Lissa and active participation in the forces. Taken in conjunction, Lissa and Kit’s narrative transformation from casual fling to married couple underlines Love Story’s conservative morality. It is, as C. A. Lejeune succinctly put it, a film that is ‘all for patriotism and all against promiscuity’.14

Two other characters act as adjuncts to Love Story’s overwhelmingly moral message. The secondary characters of both Judy and Tom underscore the message that living selfishly during wartime is ethically objectionable. Judy presents an unacceptable face of femininity, while Tom is a beacon of 1940s relationships. Both Lissa and Judy are in love with Kit, but it is telling that Lissa rather than Judy is the more marriageable of the two. The opposition between Lissa’s fundamental respectability and Judy’s lack of moral worth is inscribed throughout the film via their

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narrative actions and their visual appearance. Lissa is an idealised model of self-sacrificing 1940s womanhood. A deal struck with Judy (that if Kit’s sight is saved, Lissa will leave him) demonstrates she is prepared to forfeit her own chances of happiness for the sake of a man’s welfare. By way of contrast, Judy is a desiring woman who wants Kit to be her husband, even though she knows he does not love her, and she is prepared to be manipulative in order to achieve her goal. As director Leslie Arliss put it, Judy was intended to be ‘the bad girl, the girl who loved a man so intensely that she would stoop to deceit and lies to keep him for herself’.16

These distinctions are inscribed in the costumes devised by Elizabeth Haffenden. For the most part (excepting her formal concert performances) Lissa wears fashionable 1940s styles which are tailored, but not severe. She is projected as ‘well-groomed’, a requisite for women who wanted to sustain (male) morale during the war.17 In contrast, Judy has an extreme veneer of modernity which belies her regressive and manipulatively coded femininity. Judy usually appears wearing trousers and a headscarf, and with a cigarette in her mouth. When Love Story was released women were engaged in jobs previously reserved for men, fashions such as Judy’s were a symbol of changing social conditions and, as a result, a cause for conservative consternation. Concerns circulated about whether women should wear such masculine clothes except when necessary for work (women’s uniforms didn’t include trousers except for certain jobs and ATS women were not allowed to wear trousers off duty).18 Similarly cigarette smoking, in films at least, was the conventional mark of a licentious woman. Through the use of dress codes Judy is projected as both a hardened and scheming woman, thereby paving the way for Lissa’s substantially more patriotic version of womanhood to receive narrative validation at the film’s closure.

15 Marcia Landy has noted that as both women have careers the opposition is framed in psychological (rather than social) terms, so that Lissa is emotionally liberated whereas Judy is possessive. See Marcia Landy (1991) British Genres Cinema and Society, 1930-1960, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 221.
17 Pat Kirkham has explained how during World War Two women were exhorted to beautify themselves to keep up morale, both of the home front and of the men fighting abroad. See Pat Kirkham (1995) ‘Beauty and Duty: Keeping Up the (Home) Front’, in Pat Kirkham and David Thoms (eds.) War Culture: Social Change and Changing Experience in World War Two, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 13-28.
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Whilst Judy’s characterisation emphasises the need for wartime responsibilities by default, Tom’s embodies moral fortitude. As a surrogate father-figure to Judy and Lissa, he watches over proceedings from a distance, offering his guidance and advice without direct intervention. His own background, he was married for forty years, provides a social comment on ideal relationships. We learn that he loved his wife, although he is now a widower. Tom’s status provides a backdrop amplifying the theme that happiness is achieved with long-term marital commitment, even though that partnership may be broken unexpectedly.

Overall, Love Story endorses the ideals of love, marriage and the family as part of a commitment to the war effort. It confirms that ‘melodramas’, are not devoid of social comment. Cautionary and prescriptive, the narrative is as didactic as those of the ‘realist’ war films critically sanctioned by the intellectual film culture. Another film, dealing with similar themes, received greater critical approval. By avoiding some of the despised and overwrought ‘confection’ of Love Story’s piano rhapsodies, cliff-top cart rides, and terminal illnesses, The Way to the Stars was a more acclaimed film on its release the following year.19

The Way to the Stars (Anthony Asquith, June 1945)

Whereas Love Story dealt with the war-torn romance of two young lovers, The Way to the Stars focuses on the wartime influences on the lives of Peter Penrose (John Mills), an RAF flier, and Toddy (Rosamund John), the manageress of a hotel near to a British air-field. Made at the end of the war, the film’s flashback structure was a direct result of a production schedule which straddled the 1944-45 boundary between war and peace. Completed after the war had ended, a modern frame (of a derelict air force station) was added to locate the events of 1940-44 in the past, but not firmly so. Even with the film’s narrative closure, uncertainty is portrayed as a lingering effect of the war.

Courting, in the sense of lifelong commitment, is again represented as a key area of anxiety. However, whereas in Love Story uncertainties focused upon the

19 William Whitebait accused Love Story of being confection. See New Statesman, 21/10/1944, microjacket for Love Story.
individual (heart murmur and loss of sight), in *The Way to the Stars* they disrupt the family and are portrayed as a more direct and immediate effect of war. These have a knock-on effect on courtship and romance. In *The Way to the Stars*, Peter and Iris (Renee Asherson) are happily dating until a tragic incident causes Peter to question the things he had previously taken for granted. The incident in question is the sudden death of his RAF friend and mentor, David (Michael Redgrave), who is killed during action. Here, it is significant that David is framed as a devoted and loving family man. He was married to Toddy and together they had a son. David’s death is alarming because of what he has left behind, a loyal and supportive wife and a baby boy, the emblem of the future. The effect on Peter is profound. It jeopardises his own relationship with Iris. Death causes a reassessment of life as Peter questions whether people have a right to carry on regardless, ‘he’d got no right to get married and have a kid. None of us have’.

Here, Peter is aware that marriage brings with it responsibility and commitment, things that cannot necessarily be successfully achieved when the war brings with it such unpredictability. Interestingly, it is Peter who pulls away from his relationship with Iris. Like Lissa and Kit in *Love Story*, it is the male partner who distances himself from emotional commitment. It has recently been suggested that Peter represents a certain type of man, one articulating the frailty and sensitivity of masculinity.\(^{20}\) However, if this is sensitivity, it is a peculiar and repressed manifestation of it. Although deeply effected by the death of his friend, Peter is reluctant to break the news to his widow, refuses to be drawn on the matter, and reacts by retreating from Iris, thereby hurting the woman who he cares most about. In addition, Peter is not projected as fearing for himself, rather his actions are, ostensibly at least, intended to save women and children from future heart-break. This is not about the frailty of masculinity, but about a man’s misgivings about women’s abilities to cope in the event of his untimely demise. In as far as Peter’s sensitivity to himself and to others stretches, it is misplaced. Only under the guidance of Toddy can Peter be convinced that he should be professing his love for Iris. In this way the story adopts a similar moral trajectory to that of *Love Story*.\(^{21}\) In *The Way to the Stars* Peter

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\(^{21}\) Toddy in *The First of the Few*, for example, is a guardian figure with a moral role that echoes Tom’s in *Love Story*. 
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has undergone a transition from a refusal to commit to an acceptance of uncertainty and a desire for marriage, regardless of what the future may entail.\textsuperscript{22} The continual presence of uncertainty is underlined by the subsequent death of Johnny (Douglass Montgomery), an American flier who, like David, is also presented as a man devoted to his wife and children. Moreover, the film closes on Toddy alone, indicating a sense of pessimism that a more conventional romantic ending would have alleviated.\textsuperscript{23}

Taken within the mid-1940s moral, social, and cultural context both \textit{Love Story} and \textit{The Way to the Stars} outline the deleterious effects of war on courting and marriage and the potential for stable family life. In spite of these apparent dangers, they promote marriage (as long as it is not hasty or loveless marriage) as an ideal, even if it can only be realised temporarily. In each film, although the primary obstacle to marital and familial commitment is the uncertainty of wartime conditions, it is portrayed in different ways: both indirectly, as in \textit{Love Story} (through illness); and more directly, as in \textit{The Way to the Stars} (via the death of key father figures). By the late 1940s, however, there was leeway for the presentation of courting as a more frivolous affair. With the immediate concerns of wartime patriotism having subsided, a new avenue was opened up for courting to be associated with greater glamour and less outright moralising. This was the case with the popular romantic comedies which enjoyed immense success among audiences in post-war Britain. The social context may have been one of austerity, but references to the routine and day-to-day experiences of men and women were conspicuously absent from films hoping to offer humourous escape and an appeal to human aspirations, both material and emotional, if not spiritual.

4.2.2 The Comedy of Courting

By the latter half of the decade, courting in films was an altogether less serious affair. Where previously popular films had associated courting not only with happiness (to a point), but also with portentous questions and much heart-felt soul-searching, films such as \textit{Maytime in Mayfair} offered a thoroughly different


\textsuperscript{23} The original play ended with a happy ending. See Aldgate and Richards (1994) \textit{Britain Can Take It}, 278.
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Perspective. Aimed firmly at women and filmed through the lens of seemingly innocent comedy, these 'women's films' targeted social conventions and the type of prescriptive roles shown in films such as *Love Story* and *The Way to the Stars* for comic effect. In spite of this greater degree of frivolity, certain assumptions were so deeply entrenched that they, somewhat unsurprisingly, remain in evidence. Together with the gloss and appeal of fashions, expensive life-styles, and courting as a period characterised by a relative lack of responsibility, marriage was still presented as the ultimate aim for all right-minded and self-respecting men and women.

*Maytime in Mayfair* (Herbert Wilcox, June 1949)

Post-war, the romantic comedy *Maytime in Mayfair* offered a comic antidote to the impassioned or repressed angst of *Love Story* and *The Way to the Stars*. The film uses reflexivity and parody as the touchstones of its humour. Moreover, although it employs a contemporary setting, it is one associated with a heightened decadence and consumerism, the sense of vivid display enhanced through the use of Technicolor. A product of its time, *Maytime in Mayfair* presented aspects of the sort of luxurious, unencumbered, technologically enhanced life-style which were promoted in the consumer-led magazines of the late 1940s and 1950s. The archetypal fairy-tale romance is shown in a fanciful setting, depicting a type of emotional and material wish-fulfilment pitched primarily at a female audience.

*Maytime in Mayfair* uses reflexivity in relation to its star leads and parody in relation to some of the more absurd social obligations and etiquette associated with courting. It is the last in a cycle of films, dubbed 'rainbow romances' in the press, which star Michael Wilding and Anna Neagle, and were directed by Herbert Wilcox. Each used a formula of romance, interspersed with dance numbers, and linking film title and setting with city glamour. In *Maytime* the use of comedy assumes audience familiarity with and implies the popularity of the film's two main stars. There are two important instances. First, when the character Michael Gore-Brown (Michael Wilding) meets Eileen Grahame (Anna Neagle), the dress-shop manageress, his flirtation leads him to remark on her resemblance to Anna Neagle. Eileen, of course, is the character played by Neagle. This is a fact which 1940s

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24 Connery Chappell (1949) "The Last of the line?", *Picturegoer* 21/5/1949: 5.
In terms of courtship, *Maytime* focuses on the rivalry between Michael Gore-Brown and D’Arcy Davenport (Peter Graves) over one woman’s affections, Eileen Grahame. The two competitors are portrayed very differently. Whereas Michael, the recent inheritor of Eileen’s dress shop, is meant to be a likeable charmer, D’Arcy, the owner of a rival establishment, is presented as an incessant womaniser and seducer. Both characters suggest a turn around from the gravity associated with courting and earlier 1940s male film roles. In this late forties instance, for example, an eligible man could be both impoverished (in spite of his inheritance Michael is still borrowing ‘the lot’ from the petty cash) and charming, without any additional narrative justification. There is no need for Michael’s behaviour to be associated with either negative overtones or hidden depths. This contrasts with the disdain heaped upon Kit in *Love Story* when it was initially thought that he was idly avoiding war work. Not only is Michael bad with money, but he is also appallingly inept with all the business matters and responsibilities which come with his inherited dress-shop. Michael professes that he does not just want to be a ‘sleeping partner’ (although, in one sense, he clearly does), but is clueless about what his business role entails. Dress shops and the fashion industry are shown to be the prerogative of capable women, such as Eileen and the newspaper fashion ‘editresses’ she contacts, or dandy men, like D’Arcy. As male dilettantism in *Maytime* is no great cause for concern, it is interesting to see how inappropriate male behaviour is framed. *Maytime* presents D’Arcy as a superficial man of deceit who will go to the extremes of seduction to get what he wants. The film in effect shows two patterns of courting, both of which are discussed below. First, there is the acceptable heterosexual courtship between Michael and Eileen.
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Second, there is an exaggerated mockery of courting and the arch seducer's techniques as illustrated by D'Arcy's demeanour and calculating behaviour.

The courtship between Michael and Eileen is set in a 'film pattern' of romance and morals. It is firmly grounded in 1940s social values, and the continual advances made by Michael (employer) towards Eileen (employee) in the work-place are markedly less palatable today. In this courtship, Michael pursues Eileen, while she behaves in a largely responsible and guarded manner. They go out for dinner, he walks her home, and she says good-bye at the door. There are the expected narrative twists, but the two are reconciled and marry at the end of the film. As a whole, their relationship is heavily romanticised and their way of life is aspirational.

The fairy-tale nature of their courtship and life-style is emphasised through the use of dream and dream-like sequences. Michael, for example, dreams of Eileen literally on a pedestal, being waited on and having a luxurious satin gown tailor-made. In addition, Eileen has a daydream forming an extended interlude in which she and Michael dance together, their slow motion twirls and lifts taking place on a candlelit evening amidst an abundance of pastel 'Maytime' blossom. But perhaps the greatest departure from post-war austerity is the fantasy scene where elegant models in up-to-date dresses of the British version of the New Look form a fashion parade, stepping out from the covers of the exclusive magazines, *Vogue* and *Harpers and Queen*. The New Look used yards of fabrics, unlike the short skirts and boxy jackets of Utility clothing, and the magazine/model sequence was unequivocally about expensive 'feminine' glamour. The gowns were the named creations of actual designers, including Norman Hartnell, the man famed for the fashion event of 1947, the Royal Wedding. The film-makers also gratefully acknowledged the cooperation of other Members of the Incorporated Society of London Fashion Designers, an institution founded in 1942 and devoted to providing society ladies with lavish designer dresses. Inscribed as part of the post-war fashion trend, emulating

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25 In Britain designers encountered fabric shortages not shared by the French couturier Christian Dior, pioneer of the New Look. Therefore, British designers used ingenuity to create fashionable designs. For example, an illusion of fullness in skirts was achieved by using over-size bustle-like bows. See Amy de la Haye and Valerie Mendes (1997) 'New Look Flounces into Fashion', *The Guardian* 17/11/1997: 5.

26 On this occasion Princess Elizabeth wore a Hartnell creation costing 100 clothing coupons (roughly twice an adult's annual allowance).
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Paris couture and renowned for flowing and romantic lines, the sequence offered an alluring display targeting (and creating) female viewers' aspirations.27

The locations outside these 'dream' sequences are also extravagant and far removed from the realities of post-war Britain: there is virtually no evidence of rationing, bombed-out houses, or European travel difficulties. Instead, the introductory titles pronouncing the historical background of Mayfair omit references to the effects of the war; clothing coupons are mentioned only once in passing; Michael and Eileen both live in luxury west-end flats with servants; and they travel to Paris without hesitation or difficulty. In setting, the film is both forward looking, to fifties consumerism, and a backwards-looking homage to an almost 1920s style decadence. There are signs of modern materialism, such as electricity and a refrigerator in Eileen's flat.28 There is also much conspicuous consumption. Michael and Eileen frequent clubs and restaurants where evening dress is de rigeur. The night-spots ooze opulence rather than widespread leisure activity, and avoid any sense that strict guidelines for eating out were still enforced under the Meals in Establishment Order.29

Michael and Eileen are both acceptable and desirable models of male and female behaviour and lifestyle, and, as such, are quite unlike the irrepressible character of D'Arcy and his dubious courting techniques.

D'Arcy's characterisation is a ridiculous exaggeration of those things 1940s films commonly associate with femininity, courtship and romance. In appearance he is the archetypal dandy. Whereas Michael's clothes are smartly understated, D'Arcy's costumes are characterised by excessive fuss and detail. The carefully

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27 One cynical commentator, Kate Quinlan, suggested a second function of the dress display to be titillating male audience members. See Kate Quinlan (1949) 'One Woman's View: I Know What I Like', Picturegoer 16/7/1949: 17. This point-of-view is also indicated by the film's later 'amusing' title-caption for Paris in Spring, 'where the New Look on any woman brings out the old look in any man'.

28 In the late 1940s, refrigerators were restricted to a minority of the population. In 1948, for example, 1.9% of all classes used an electric refrigerator and a further 1.6% used a gas refrigerator. Edward Hulton (ed.) Patterns of British Life, London: Hulton Press, 106.

29 Introduced in 1942 by Lord Woolton, the Meals in Establishments Order limited public meals to three courses (bread counted as a course) and restricted their contents - main dishes had more than 25% of their weight in meat, poultry or game, subsidiary dishes had less than 25% of those foods. However, in Maytime in Mayfair, characters dine out twice in one evening.
coiffured D'Arcy, complete with groomed moustache and monocle, is perpetually overdressed. His undue attention to fashion is underlined by his profession as the owner of a Mayfair dress-shop, an arena in which (as explained above) eligible men are presented as having little knowledge. Moreover, D'Arcy plays the piano and forties films usually associated this with the expression of female emotions and creativity. In addition, D'Arcy consistently sings a serenade drawing on the romance of the Italian language, 'oh amor amor...'. This all forms part of the mockery of courting and seduction. D'Arcy serenades Eileen, but he also serenades and flatters the elderly women who shop at his store, and even the staid bachelor Henry when he is determined to find out some secret information. In each case the parody is completed by the repetitive and exaggerated nature of the performance: D'Arcy sings the same song horrendously badly; and he usually plays the piano peering out from behind a huge bouquet of orchids, a flower symbolising a feminised exoticism, luxury and passion.

*Maytime in Mayfair* with its emphasis on comedy, spectacle and romance in a luxury setting is far removed from the didactic war-torn courtships of *Love Story* and *The Way to the Stars*. Yet, in spite of these differences, all three films have a common meeting ground. In presenting courting as a necessary and desirable stage in an individual's life-cycle, each shares a structural similarity. They all work towards marriage, or the prospect of marriage, as fundamental to the narratives' (unstable) closure. What they do not do is look beyond marriage to what lies ahead. The next section deals with films centring on married, rather than courting, couples.

4.3 Wedlocked

Married couples were a feature of popular British films in the middle and late 1940s. Four films focusing upon married couples without children are discussed below: *The Wicked Lady* (1945), *Miranda* (1948), *A Place of One's Own* (1945), and *An Ideal Husband* (1948). One additional film is included in the discussion, *The Red Shoes* (1948). This is because important similarities can be seen between the

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30 Examples include *Love Story*, *A Place of One's Own*, and *The Seventh Veil*.
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portrayal of marriage in The Wicked Lady and its narrative, but largely off-screen, articulation in The Red Shoes.\(^{31}\)

Unlike the films focusing on courting which suggest the desirability of marriage as a goal, popular post-war films (perhaps more surprisingly) portray marriage as a restrictive, lonely, or unwisely idealised arrangement.\(^{32}\) The question of whether feature films presented ‘glamour or reality’ was an area of growing concern during the 1940s. From the perspective that films potentially exerted a powerful influence over people’s manners and fashions, commentators were keen to assess whether films glamourised certain areas of life, especially those aspects relating to citizenship and morality, such as crime or marriage and the family.\(^{33}\) Against the backdrop of rising divorce rates, a leading article by John Y. Stapleton in Picturegoer directly asked, ‘Do Films Glamourize Marriage?’\(^{34}\) Taking as its starting point the Archbishop of York’s presidential address in which one of the reasons for divorce was cited as, ‘the sentimental and glamorous picture of marriage presented by the cinema, often followed by disillusionment in real life’, the Picturegoer article disagreed with this idea that British films presented marriage irresponsibly.\(^{35}\) Stapleton argued that British films suggested the reality of marriage, but did (like all traditions of fiction) glamourise the idea of getting married or love in the abstract sense. Overall, Stapleton presented a largely positive assessment of British films, particularly in relation to their American counterparts which, he added, did glamourise marriage. It is important to recognise that this article appeared in a British fan magazine and was predictable in its defence of popular British films. While it is wrong to suppose, as Stapleton did, that films like The Wicked Lady presented marital reality, his article remains important in two respects: it highlights the circulation of moral concerns crystallising around the impact of films on marriage and society, and

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\(^{31}\) A detailed analysis of The Red Shoes is found in Chapter 8 because the film’s primary narrative driver is a metaphorical family as constituted by the ballet company itself.

\(^{32}\) In popular late war and post-war British films from my film sample, a negative view of marriage is matched by a negative view of (nuclear) family life. See ‘5.3 Secrets and Lies’, Chapter 5.

\(^{33}\) These areas were so controversial that even scripts based on a BBC radio series, ‘Crime Does not Pay’, with a foreword from a Scotland Yard official, were rejected under the BBFC’s ruling of ‘crime capable of imitation’. See BBFC scenario 24, The Blue Lamp, 12/4/1949, special collections, BFI library.


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it is correct in suggesting that British features tended to idealise courtship and romantic love, but projected marriage as a much more unhappy territory.

4.3.1 Marriage as a Restrictive Institution

Popular films of the forties taking married couples as their subject, often show the marital relationship in an unfavourable light. In a decade when marriage was the expected norm, it is striking that during the post-war period extra-marital activities and liaisons were presented as exciting alternatives to the stifling confines of everyday domesticity. In film, marriage was often projected as an unwelcome restriction on personal conduct. This restriction applied to the representations of both women, *The Wicked Lady*, and men, the film *Miranda*.

*The Wicked Lady* (Leslie Arliss, December 1945)

The Gainsborough costume drama *The Wicked Lady* focuses on Lady Barbara Skelton (Margaret Lockwood), her escapades and her unhappy marriage. Although set in the Britain of Charles II, *The Wicked Lady*’s themes regarding gender roles and marriage had considerable mid-forties appeal. In the event of its release late in 1945 *The Wicked Lady* broke box-office records, becoming the most profitable British film for 1946. In order to escape from her wifely chores and routine, Lady Skelton takes on the guise of a highwayman and secretly leads two lives. As Landy states, ‘the double life as a mistress of the house and as male highwayman captures the sense of all women leading dull lives’.36 Lady Skelton is a convention-breaking woman with whom audience sympathies largely rested. After her portrayal of the wicked lady, for example, Lockwood’s fan-mail went up by thousands, proof that audience members either enjoyed or identified with her performance.37 Indeed Lockwood built up much of her popularity from playing sinister roles and even the film’s publicity acknowledged that ‘bad girls are more glamourous than good’.38 Nevertheless, the film’s narrative closure adheres to the moral conservatism that 1940s censorship demanded.39 Lady Skelton is, of course, the profoundly wicked woman of the title and for her sins (against marriage and the family) she is punished.

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39 In the 1940s, production companies submitted scenarios pre-shooting for individual assessment by the BBFC. There was no codified system of film censorship, yet there is evidence that censors erred on
In *The Wicked Lady* the constraints of marriage are manifold. For Barbara, a desiring and wilful woman, life as the tame Lady Skelton is an endless routine of perpetual boredom. She abhors the traditional and passive wifely role which she is expected to adopt: this is signified by her dislike for the peacefulness of country life and her desire to spend time in London; by her lack of children and her evident discomfort when required to be a godmother; and also by her persistent refusal to do the housekeeping. *The Wicked Lady* associates the management of household affairs with women’s moral certitude and atonement. On feigning her repentance, Barbara promises to lead a ‘pure and blameless life’, and her apparent redemption is marked by an immediate willingness to learn about housekeeping and cookery. Barbara’s dislike for the restrictions of conventional femininity and married life is further defined through two oppositions. There is the contrast between Barbara and the other main female character, the self-effacing Caroline (Patricia Roc). There is also an opposition between Barbara’s boredom in her marital home and the excitement and adventure she finds outside it.

Like other Gainsborough costume melodramas, *The Wicked Lady* creates a relatively straightforward opposition between the female leads, one good and the other bad. 40 Barbara’s desire and jealousy, the root causes of her dissatisfaction with marriage and domesticity, are highlighted through difference. From her initial introduction onwards, Barbara is the converse of her meek cousin, Caroline. The former is possessed of passion, callousness and ambition, whereas the latter is quiescent, loyal and trusting. Whilst Caroline considers the two to be ‘more like sisters’, Barbara holds her in contempt for being the same self-sacrificing Caroline she has always known. Barbara always wants: either to be envied; to gain material rewards; to be admired; or to own the possessions of others. As the film’s publicity

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40 Oppositions between good and bad female leads also occurred in *The Man in Grey* (1943), *Love Story* (1944), *Madonna of the Seven Moons* (1945) – through the motif of split personality, and *Madness of the Heart* (1949).
posters boasted, ‘She couldn’t resist anything that belonged to someone else’. Alternatively, Caroline is prepared to repress her own needs and wishes for the sake of others. This is clearly illustrated with regard to the two’s relationships with Ralph Skelton (Griffith Jones). Barbara desires Ralph because he is engaged to Caroline and she thought it would be ‘amusing to steal him’. Caroline, on the other hand, is prepared to suffer heart-break and call-off her wedding when she thinks that Ralph loves Barbara more than herself. Later in the story, when it is clear that Ralph and Barbara are not in love, Caroline cries for Ralph’s unhappiness, not her own. Even when Caroline and Ralph eventually profess their love and kiss, she behaves with honour-bound convention and insists that ‘we must part’.

The distinctions between Barbara and Caroline are further articulated through costume. Barbara wears extravagant gowns in luxurious fabrics and striking designs, but Caroline dons less attention grabbing dresses which denote a greater modesty. A predilection for fashion and vanity is at odds with a more circumspect and acceptable model of femininity. However in spite of the film’s ostensible moral judgements, the differentiation between Barbara and Caroline’s attire might indicate an amoral costume narrative inviting audiences to covet and identify with Barbara’s sumptuous wickedness.

The second opposition contrasts the stifling life Barbara leads as lady Skelton with her audacious night-time excursions disguised as a highwayman. This also introduces class and gender cross-overs. Barbara is unhappy as an aristocratic wife trapped in a loveless marriage (albeit of her own creation) to an especially mild-mannered man. She escapes from boring domesticity by creeping out under the cover of darkness. During the night she dons male attire and holds up coaches, stealing valuables. Not only is she a thief, but she meets and falls in love with the notorious highway robber, Jerry Jackson (James Mason), making her a thief and an adulteress. She starts to frequent the insalubrious bar where Jackson resides, identifying Barbara in a masculinised role as part of a criminal fraternity. When Barbara commits murder

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42 For The Wicked Lady, Sue Harper identifies a ‘costume narrative’ encouraging female fantasies of sexual desire, and at odds with the film’s ‘verbal narrative’ in which the lines of sexual morality are clearly drawn. See Sue Harper (1994) Picturing the Past: The Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film, London: BFI, 130-131.
she crosses one last taboo, something that even Jackson finds deplorable. The extreme activities contrast with the passivity expected of Barbara within marriage. Barbara only experiences the thrill of 'freedom' (from marriage) as a highwayman. By fulfiling wanton desires, Barbara the highwayman is the perfect respite from the demands placed upon Barbara as wife of Lord Skelton. It provides an exciting escape, and Barbara adores the danger of her secret life.

Using the device of Barbara's double life, The Wicked Lady, for the most part, dramatises marriage as a zone of confinement and repression. However, although Barbara is the wicked woman (robber/adulteress/murderer), the film's closing sequences see her genuine repentance and subsequent death. The end of the film both re-incorporates Barbara into the realm of domesticity and morally acceptable femininity, as well as personally punishing her for earlier transgressions. Upon knowing Kit (Michael Rennie), Barbara finally discovers that she loves someone. When she is in love, she refuses to see Jackson, a confirmation that their relationship was all about thrill-seeking, abandonment and freedom, rather than deeper emotional commitment. Indeed, this was the aspect that many of the film posters and newspaper advertisements traded on: 'Thrown together in mad adventure their reckless guns and ruthless lips met for danger'. However, when in 'true love', Barbara undergoes a complete personality transformation as she realises what things are important in life. 'I want a home, children, all the things I thought would never matter', she says. Yet despite her remorse and newfound aims, Barbara is rejected for her sins. Barbara, in her highwayman disguise, is shot by Kit (who does not realise her identity) and stumbles home. Finding a new honesty, Barbara confesses the truth about her life, and pleads for Kit to stay with her during her dying moments. 'Don't leave me' she begs, but is left to die in agony and alone. The 'bad' Barbara suffers for her sins, whereas 'good' Caroline is rewarded for her sacrifices. The film's last scene is the archetypal Final Romance, showing Caroline and Ralph Skelton happily together.

In its opposition between restrictive marriage and ambitious freedom, The Wicked Lady shares thematic similarities with a later film of the forties, Powell and

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43 As Margaret Lockwood pointed out, the Lady Skelton of the film commits three murders, making her more ruthless than in the original book, where she commits two. Picturegoer 14/4/1945: 7.
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Pressburger's *The Red Shoes*. Set in contemporary urban locations, *The Red Shoes* also opposes domesticity and marriage with female desire: marriage signifies the death of female career, drive, and passion. In *The Red Shoes*, Vicki Page (Moira Shearer) joins a ballet company run under the domineering tyrant, Boris Lermontov (Anton Walbrook). But when she marries, she puts her career at risk. The two are represented as fundamentally incompatible. Whilst the idea of marriage symbolises the end of creativity and artistry, ballet signifies ambition. Vicki’s choice is between ballet and domesticity: choosing the former indicates a suppression of human (woman’s) nature as articulated by the authoritative voice of Lermontov. Yet when Lermontov challenges Vicki to go with her husband Craster (Marius Goring) and become ‘a faithful housewife’ he spits the words with contempt, despising the conventional female role. The issue is not easily resolved. Vicki cannot bring herself to sacrifice her dancing for Craster and for married life.

Narratively, the result is that Page, like the wicked Lady Barbara Skelton, must be punished for her denial of proper femininity. Rather than being reassimilated into her role as wife, Vicki represses her ‘nature’. Immediately after Vicki finalises the rejection of her husband, she meets her tragic fate. The red shoes take on a supernatural life of their own, dancing Page off a bridge and to her death. The ending is bestowed with more finality than the original Hans Christian Andersen tale on which the film is loosely based.⁴⁵ Whereas in the fairy-tale the dancer’s feet were cut off, in *The Red Shoes* Vicki is killed. Page chooses ballet over her marriage, her death represents the seriousness of her choice and the mode in which she dies indicates the unnaturalness of her ambitious passion for dancing.

Films such as *The Wicked Lady* or *The Red Shoes* projected marriage as a zone of confinement for women. However, rather than unequivocally validating women’s experiences outside the home, they end in a cautionary manner. Both films are brutal and uncompromising in their punishments of women who seek excitement and fulfilment away from their marital roles. In other popular films the boundaries of

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⁴⁵ Andersen’s fairy-tale is a cautionary story about vanity, rather than ambition. In it, a young girl wears red shoes to Confirmation and is cursed by the angel of God to dance until her skin is shriveled ‘like a skeleton’s’, visiting houses where the children are ‘vain and proud’. The girl repents for her sins, her feet are cut off with the shoes, and she is touched by God’s mercy. See Hans Christian Andersen (1950) *Fairy Tales*, Leicester: Edmund Ward, 367-379.
marriage were a negative restriction on men and male desire. This was the case with the light-hearted comedy, *Miranda*. In it, one married man, and two engaged men, all find excitement outside their stable relationships. They do not, however, pay the penalty for their marital violations.

**Miranda (Ken Annakin, April 1948)**

The film *Miranda* adopts a more amoral tone towards its subject matter than either *The Wicked Lady* or *The Red Shoes*. In *Miranda*, a husband seeks respite from his middle-class marriage, resulting in transitory repercussions, but not the trauma or regret characteristic of the wicked Barbara or the ambitious Vicki. As in the case of *Maytime in Mayfair*’s treatment of courtship, the use of romantic comedy (rather than costume melodrama or contemporary ‘realistic’ setting) lends itself to a less morally prescriptive story. The entire plot of *Miranda* relies upon an outlandish and fanciful pretext, that of a mermaid in Chelsea. This allowed the representation of infidelity and even illegitimacy in a relatively unjudgemental way.

If *The Wicked Lady* presents a female struggle between suffocating marriage and desire, then *Miranda* suggests a similar opposition (although not conflict) for men. From the outset Dr Paul Marten (Griffith Jones), a married man, is in search of adventure and keen to spend time away from his wife, Clare (Googie Withers). Whereas his wife is content to stay at home, Paul wants to go to Cornwall for a ‘bachelor holiday’ where he thinks he might ‘enjoy fishing alone’. The holiday away from his marital responsibilities results in improbable repercussions. It is during his Cornish fishing trip that Paul encounters Miranda Truella (Glynis Johns), a lonely mermaid seeking a husband and desperate to get ashore. Although Paul claims to be ‘a respectable married man’, he is captivated by Miranda’s charm and brings her back to London disguised as an invalid. Paul, like the lesser characters Charles (David Tomlinson), his chauffeur, and Nigel (John McCallum), an artist friend, is ‘seduced’ by the mermaid. In *Miranda*, the predictability of male infidelity and deceit is underlined. All three men stray, for example. Also, Paul is a ‘normal’ man as signified by his status as a doctor, he does not need to appear unduly wicked or ambitious in order to explain his desires. There is an overall sense that male lust outside marriage is natural or at the very least expected, especially by men’s partners.
and wives. As soon as Miranda arrives in London, for example, Clare’s suspicions are aroused. She is immediately unsettled by Miranda’s beauty and her single status. Significantly, these are the things which demarcate Miranda from married life, and indicate that she might be a threat to it.

In his relationship with Miranda, Paul experiences a refreshing change from his conventional wife. This is because Miranda is the opposite of a well mannered middle-class woman such as Clare. In Miranda, the mermaid’s allure (and comic effect) rests upon her defiance of social norms and acceptable female behaviour. Miranda is a mermaid in Chelsea, a place where middle-class etiquette rules. She is beautiful, but she is also impudent, bold and outrageous. In this respect Miranda reverses the usual narrative precondition whereby a mermaid has to lose her voice in order to enter the human world. As a mermaid (rather than a ‘normal’ woman or wife) the film emphasises that Miranda Truella is exotic, sexual and unusual. On the one hand she subverts social customs, she sleeps in the bath and eats raw fish, on the other she crosses the boundaries of acceptable femininity by flaunting her sexuality. Miranda’s vanity knows no bounds: she combs her long tresses; sits by the mirror; and adores jewelry. In addition, Miranda flirts openly with three men: endlessly insisting, for example, that they pick her up and carry her; and giving them each ‘love-tokens’, lockets containing a strand of her hair.

Miranda addresses a serious social issue, infidelity, through a comic lens. Yet unlike the films where women relinquish their marital responsibilities (such as The Wicked Lady or The Red Shoes) Miranda finishes on a surreptitious sly note, rather than a punitive ending. Paul is reunited with his wife (Charles and Nigel are also back with their respective fiancés) and is reincorporated into his role as a husband: he decides not to go on any more ‘bachelor holidays’. However, a brief epilogue brings into question any notion of a conservative morality tale. In a final shot, Miranda is shown on the beach at Majorca, happily nursing a ‘merminnow’. The juxtaposition of the last shot we see of Paul and Clare with that of Miranda and ‘child’, confirms that Paul is the father. However, despite the evidence, neither Paul nor Miranda are reproved nor suffer for their affair. Instead, Paul and Clare remain unaware of the

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46 As noted in ‘Fairy-Tale and Film’, NFT Programme, microjacket for Miranda, BFI library.
illegitimate offspring, and Miranda has achieved exactly what she set out to do: help prevent mermaids from becoming extinct. Such an ending was controversial in spite of the film’s nature as a comedy far removed from actual experience. Criticisms that the last scene was an ‘unpleasant tinge to what had seemed innocent fun’ indicated that broaching marriage as a subject of humour involved treading a fine line between people’s perceptions of jovial reverence and deeper disrespect. Whilst the British censor naively commented, ‘The mermaid is unexplained. We have seen no mer­man. Are we to conclude it had a landsman father or is this being fastidious?’, Hollywood censors required that the epilogue be cut.\(^{47}\) Within the context of a puritanical American market the issue of illegitimacy was particularly contentious. As reported in the *Daily Mail*, ‘Mermaids must be married before merminnows are permissible in the American cinema’.\(^{48}\)

Using comedy *Miranda* addressed the theme of male infidelity in a less morally judgmental way than those films dealing with female infidelity (*The Wicked Lady*) or female dissatisfaction with marital life (*The Red Shoes*). In *Miranda* there is a sense that male desire outside marriage was natural or expected. Paul consummated an affair, but remained an ordinary ‘respectable’ man. In this he differed from those female film characters who sought escape from marriage. Women with extra-marital desires were depicted as ‘abnormal’ in some way, either unnaturally wicked or excessively ambitious. Nevertheless all three films share a common theme. In *Miranda*, *The Wicked Lady* and *The Red Shoes*, marriage curtails desires and behaviour. In these instances marriage is a repressive force on young men and women. However, as we shall see below, one film also portrayed the marriage of older partners.

**4.3.2 Frustrated Parenthood**

1940s films focusing on marriage usually showed young couples and among the popular British films from my sample, only *A Place of One’s Own* portrays a retired couple without children. The anomaly was tempered via the addition of a conventional courtship between Annette Allanby and Dr Selbie, something which did


\(^{48}\) *Daily Mail* 10/2/1949, microjacket for *Miranda*.
not occur in the original Osbert Sitwell story on which the film was based. Furthermore, *A Place of One's Own* was an incongruous film on two other levels: casting and genre. Its inappropriate casting accounted for the film only enjoying moderate success. In particular, James Mason (whose star appeal resided with his ability to play sadistic, yet attractive, young cads) was cast as the elderly husband, Mr Smedhurst. Moreover, unusually for this period, the film dealt with an occult theme, that of a haunted house and the ghostly possession of a young woman. Whereas films with younger married couples (such as *The Wicked Lady* or *Miranda*), emphasise marital infidelities, *A Place of One's Own* is about the loneliness of old age, retirement and marriage, in the absence of a 'traditional' nuclear family unit.

*A Place of One's Own* (Bernard Knowles, March 1945)

In *A Place of One's Own*, marriage does not place unwelcome restrictions on the elderly Mr and Mrs Smedhurst (Barbara Mullen). Instead, their marriage is presented as a lonely, rather than repressive, condition. The Smedhursts are a couple who, even though they have achieved all their material ambitions in life, remain unfulfilled. The absence of children causes their loneliness and leads Mrs Smedhurst to employ a young 'daughter-like' companion, Annette Allanby (Margaret Lockwood). Later, Annette becomes possessed and the Smedhursts attempt to restore her health and sanity. Thus the film can be read as an attempt at reconstituting the family.

The opening scenes of the film signify both the Smedhurs' material achievement and their lack of emotional happiness. In 1900 Mr and Mrs Smedhurst buy Bellingham house. The purchase represents the summation of their lifetime accomplishments. The Smedhursts have worked hard all their lives (forty years in the drapery business) in order to retire to 'a place of their own'. They have Northern

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49 *Daily Mail* 4/5/1945, microjacket for *A Place of One's Own*, BFI library.
50 In 1945, other Gainsborough films with more stereotypical casting of their stars, such as *Madonna of the Seven Moons* and *The Seventh Veil*, were more successful than *A Place of One's Own*.
51 According to Sue Harper, James Mason's casting was a mistake. See Harper (1994) *Picturing the Past*, 134.
52 Although World War Two had made death commonplace, the accompanying interest in the supernatural found only a limited expression in British film. See Robert Murphy (1992) *Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain*, Routledge: London and New York, 171.
lower middle-class roots as denoted by their Yorkshire accents and dialect; and, later in the film, by their unease around their new upper-class neighbours, Major and Mrs Manning-Tuthorn (Michael Shepley and Helen Haye). However, in spite of financial success, the Smedhurs are lonely. The young companion, Annette Allanby, is a counter to the solitude of marriage: she arrives at the house like an orphan, and becomes a substitute daughter, rather than her ostensible role as a hired employee.\(^5\)

The association between loneliness in marriage and the absence of children is most clearly illustrated by the exchanges and speeches at the Smedhurs’ garden party. Here Mrs Smedhurst articulates the discrepancy between material attainment and true happiness. ‘We’ve always been intent on a place of our own. If only our own children had been spared’, she says. Moreover, in publicly announcing Annette’s engagement to Dr Robert Selbie (Dennis Price), Mr Smedhurst emulates the archetypal paternal role of giving away his daughter. Furthermore, throughout the film, Mr Smedhurst’s frequent references to his wife as ‘mother’ are a consistent rejoinder highlighting the couple’s lack of children.

Mr and Mrs Smedhurst’s ready yet unconscious assumption of ‘natural’ parental roles indicates their desire for children. When Annette becomes increasingly ill (hearing voices, fainting, and confined to bed), Mr and Mrs Smedhurst worry like devoted parents. Moreover, the very nature of Annette’s illness imbricates her in a daughterly role. She is possessed by the spirit of the ‘invalid daughter’ who was murdered in the house forty years previously. The closeness between Mrs Smedhurst and Annette models that of a stereotypical mother-daughter bond. Mrs Smedhurst occupies a maternal role towards Annette, using a capacity for caring and sensitivity (for things spiritual) to its full potential. Mrs Smedhurst first senses when something is wrong and also attends to Annette when she is ill.

*Place of One’s Own* presents loneliness in marriage as a stage of later life. One overriding theme is that of frustrated parenthood: the Smedhurs have lost their

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\(^5\) Landy notes how Annette is like an orphan who acquires parents who guide her into a proper relationship with her doctor-fiancé. Landy (1991) *British Genres*, 303.
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own children; find a substitute in Annette; and then risk losing her through illness. In so doing the Smedhursts symbolically attempt to (re)construct a nuclear family unit, yet are thwarted in their attempt. After Annette is ‘saved’ from possession she is reunited with her fiancé, Dr Selbie, indicating that Annette will leave the Smedhursts’ household and establish a family of her own. Thus *A Place of One’s Own* is characterised by a degree of ambivalence towards marriage and the family. There is a respectable (hard-working and devoted) elderly couple for whom married life is lonely, yet the narrative closure upholds the idea of marriage as an ideal. Meanwhile, the narrative as a whole represents an attempt to establish a ‘family’ (the Smedhursts and Annette), but that attempt is fraught with difficulty. Whereas films such as *The Wicked Lady*, *The Red Shoes*, and *Miranda* dealt with youthful marriage as a problematic arrangement, *A Place of One’s Own* represents a more ambivalent approach. But what of the marital ‘ideal’? Another film from my sample, *An Ideal Husband*, demonstrates not just how marriage itself was portrayed negatively or ambivalently, but how even the ideal of marriage was called into question.

4.3.3 Marriage Founded on Unreal Expectations

In the films of the 1940s marriage was often portrayed in a pessimistic light, yet certain films focusing on the problems of marriage still used conventional happy endings. In these pictures, marriage is almost paradoxically presented as both a problem and a solution. This was, for example, the case with *The Wicked Lady*, which dramatises the confines of married life, yet ends with the promise of marriage between Caroline and Ralph. Also, *A Place of One’s Own*, focuses on a lonely married couple, yet optimistically ends just after the re-uniting of Annette and Dr Selbie. These narrative closures indicate that the idea of marriage, to some extent, remains an ideal. However, as previously noted, the departures from such an ideal are equally fascinating. Both *The Red Shoes* and *Miranda* are films that ended unconventionally and as a result became the subjects of critical controversy. Vicki’s death in *The Red Shoes* was regarded as graphic and brutal, whereas the birth of an illegitimate ‘baby’ in *Miranda* was deemed too excessive for an American market. Rather than reaffirm the sanctity and legitimacy of marriage, such films possessed

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55 Frustrated parenthood is also a theme of another film of 1945, *They Were Sisters*. In it, Lucy and William symbolise an ideal companionate marriage in every respect except that they are unable to have children of their own.
‘unstable’ narrative closures that left an open-ended question over it. One additional popular film from my sample viewed marriage from a similar vantagepoint. This is the screen adaptation of Oscar Wilde’s *An Ideal Husband* which questions the sanctity and ideal of marriage throughout.

**An Ideal Husband (Alexander Korda, January 1948)**

*An Ideal Husband* is an irreverent look at high society, its manners and customs, especially marriage. Set in London, 1895, it focuses on the marriage between Sir Robert Chiltern (Hugh Williams), the ‘ideal husband’ of the ironic title, and his wife Lady Chiltern (Diana Wynward), an apparent paragon of virtue. The entire plot rests upon Lady Chiltern’s misplaced trust in her husband, and reveals how an apparently ‘model’ marriage proves to be founded on deceit and corruption. In setting and costume, the film foregrounds excess, fun and frivolity over and above moral worth. In dialogue it questions the existence of any form of marital ideal. In particular, there are the Wildean epigrams which employ wit and irony to comment on men, women and the hypocrisy lurking behind any marriage arrangement.

The film, *An Ideal Husband*, suggests that a marriage founded upon honesty and perfection is inherently unrealistic. The high moral tone of a married couple is presented as a ridiculous and hypocritical stance. The Chilterns are meant to be socially upstanding and responsible members of society. As a senior politician, Sir Robert Chiltern occupies a position of authority, while Lady Chiltern, is a respectable society lady. In this they are quite clearly set apart from the three other main characters in the film. Lord Goring (Michael Wilding), for example, is frivolous, does not work and is only interested in living entirely for pleasure. Mabel Chiltern (Glynis Johns), Robert’s younger sister, is in love with the ‘beautiful idiots’ and ‘brilliant lunatics’ of London society, and is alarmed by the prospect of marrying a ‘man with a future’. Finally, Mrs Cheveley (Paulette Goddard), a blackmailing divorcee, is as mischievous as her name suggests. Goring and Mabel lack a sense of responsibility and Cheveley is cold and calculating. However, it is only the married couple, Sir Robert and Lady Chiltern, who are shown to have misjudged life and society. Their high ideals force them into hypocrisy, something which none of the less moral, unmarried characters share. Although Lady Chiltern has absolute trust in
her husband, she discovers that Robert is not the virtuous man she thought she loved. Instead, at an early stage in his career, he sold secret information about the Suez Canal to a German official. Robert Chiltem is exposed as a hypocrite, and Lady Chiltem realises that her ‘ideal’ is, in Robert’s words, a ‘false idol’. Indeed the ‘model’ husband’s hypocrisy was a prominent feature of the film’s teaser campaign. ‘An Ideal Husband...Never flirts...openly! Is ever faithful...in his fashion! Is always truthful...when caught!’, stated one advert. Rather than spurning her husband, Lady Chiltem takes Robert back and ultimately refuses to let him sacrifice his cabinet seat over his dishonest behaviour. Here then, marriage is characterised by lies, deception, hypocrisy and compromise. Both husbands and wives are hypocritical, but in particular women are mistaken in their attempts to put men on pedestals, rather than to accept them, ‘faults and all’.

The film’s mise-en-scène, in keeping with a plot that underlines the unfeasibility of high morality, offers an ostentatious show, emphasising lavish frivolity and implying superficiality. The visual display endorses the spectacle of high society, rather than suggesting a modest or morally prescriptive depiction of London life. From the film’s opening sequence, the viewer is plunged into a particular vision of late 19th century London. This is what Vincent Korda, the art director, described as his creation of ‘authentic opulence’. There is a bustling Hyde Park Corner, filmed in Technicolour and packed with the glamorous men and women of polite society. The narrator’s voice confirms that this is the ‘naughty nineties’, a time when ‘leisure is around’ and ‘fashion is the queen’. Other settings also show leisure and luxury, for example, there is a Mayfair reception replete with guests dressed in exquisite finery, and there is Lord Goring’s vast bachelor residence, described by one reviewer as, ‘chambers which look like mansions fit for the National Coal Board’.

Moreover, expensive fashion (as designed by Cecil Beaton) is a main feature of An Ideal Husband, providing a keynote in the film’s publicity aimed mainly at

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56 Press book for An Ideal Husband, BFI library.
57 Sue Harper has convincingly argued that An Ideal Husband was visually sumptuous. See Harper (1994) Picturing the Past, 170.
58 Press book for An Ideal Husband.
59 Evening Standard, 14/11/1947, microjacket for An Ideal Husband, BFI library.
women. The costumes emphasise character, but are also indicative of wealth and excess. In terms of character, Mrs Cheveley, a predatory blackmailer, wears exotic fashions, with exaggerated lines and striking colours such as emerald green and flamingo pink; whereas the more respectable Lady Chiltem is seen in pastel shades and more delicate materials, such as lace and satin. The height of excess is reached with Mrs Cheveley’s dress in the final scene. Unrepentant and unreformed, Mrs Cheveley flirts with a wealthy Duke. She wears the attire of a venomous black widow: a wasp yellow and black striped suit of velvet and silk, topped with a black hat trimmed with coal-black raven’s wings. All the gowns are intended to have a glamorous look: the dresses worn by Mrs Cheveley were made in Paris by Maison Karinska, while the dresses of Lady and Mabel Chiltem were created by Simmonds of London. Indeed, London’s largest fashion shops, Marshall and Snelgrove, had window displays drawing on the desirable look of the film’s costumes. The displays compared the styles of ‘England’s most colourful era and the fashions of today’, conjuring up ‘what every woman yearns for – BEAUTY [sic]’.60

In dialogue, as in setting and costume, An Ideal Husband is about amoral frivolity rather than more serious didacticism. In spite of many cuts to the original play, the ludicrous nature of morality is still highlighted.61 The Earl of Caversham (Aubrey C. Smith), for example, tells his son that Robert Chiltem’s life (based on ‘probity, hard work, and a sensible marriage with a good woman’) should be a model for his own. The mockery of marital morality is also encountered through Mrs Cheveley: she says it is fashionable to marry as often as you can, and is last seen picking-up a duke in her carriage.62 Furthermore, even after Goring finally proposes to Mabel Chiltem, she upholds her original desire to avoid men with futures and is convinced that she does not want an ideal husband because, ‘it sounds like something in the next world’. Mabel’s epigram and others were used in publicity campaigns. Exploitation material used the following Wildean sayings: ‘There is only one real tragedy in a woman’s life. The fact that her past is always her lover and her future is

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61 The film adaptation of An Ideal Husband involved cutting dialogue which was extraneous to the plot, often these were the witticisms for which Wilde was renowned.
62 The final scene of Cheveley’s ‘pick-up’ occurs in the film, but not in the original play. It is important in detracting from any sense of romantic or moralistic ending: something which might have been indicated with Sir and Lady Chiltem’s resumed marriage, or Mabel and Goring’s engagement.
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invariably her husband,' and 'I get a proposal every day'. In this way the publicity played on the absurdity rather than sanctity of the marriage ideal.

Where other 1940s films presented marriage as a site of restriction or loneliness, An Ideal Husband took as its theme the absurdity of idealising husbands and marriage. Instead of ending with any positive affirmation of marriage, the film closed on the image of blackmailer and potential marriage-breaker, Mrs Cheveley. Interestingly, the evident amorality of An Ideal Husband, its jests and mockery of marriage, was inconceivable for the prominent reviewer who bemoaned that the, 'passages of formal morality were so stilted they sound tongue-in-cheek'. But in this instance, marriage and immorality were not beyond a joke.

4.4 Summary

This chapter has demonstrated that during the mid and late 1940s, popular British films from my sample focused upon courtship as a necessary or desirable activity which invariably led to marriage and commitment. Films made during World War Two, such as Love Story or The Way to the Stars, tackled issues relating to the wartime engendered uncertainties of romantic relationships. They suggested that instead of living for the good times, there needed to be a deeper commitment to living with uncertainty in a responsible way. Post-war, the patriotism and didacticism inherent in such messages subsided, and was replaced with a greater sense of care-free frivolity. The musical-comedy, Maytime in Mayfair, for example, used dream sequences and luxury lifestyles to highlight the fanciful pleasures of fairy-tale style romance.

Alternatively, when post-war films centred upon married rather than courting couples, some negativity or at least a greater sense of ambivalence started to surface. In films such as The Wicked Lady, Miranda, The Red Shoes, A Place of One's Own and An Ideal Husband, marriage was depicted as a restrictive institution, a place of loneliness, or a site of moral hypocrisy. In summary, although popular British films romanticised courtship (together with the idea of marriage), they did not glamourise

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63 Press book for An Ideal Husband.
64 Dilys Powell (1948) 'Britain Today', microjacket for An Ideal Husband.
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marriage itself in the way that several socially concerned contemporary commentators had feared.
CHAPTER 5: NUCLEAR FAMILIES

5.1 Introduction

Whereas Chapter 4 was about courtship and married couples, this chapter analyses films where the main familial theme centres on the nuclear family unit. If courtship and marriage were widely held to be the first stages in family life cycles, then the nuclear family was the apotheosis of that cycle. In this era, sex was associated with procreation, courting conventionally led to marriage and the logical culmination was generally considered to be the nuclear family group. Indeed, the idea of the nuclear family was so deeply entrenched in 1940s culture that, like courting and marriage, its inclusion in feature films comes as no great surprise. The nuclear family unit can be defined as that sacrosanct social ideal of mid-20th century Britain: a white married couple, consisting of male breadwinner and housewife, together with their children. The pervasiveness of this notion was (and is) such that it has given rise to the sociological term ‘familism’, meaning the ideology of the family.¹

Here then, Chapter 5 examines one particular cultural manifestation of familism, the construction of the nuclear family in popular 1940s British feature films. However, as we shall see below, just because the notion of the nuclear family was commonplace this did not mean that films always presented it in the best possible light. The ideas in popular British films from my sample were often at odds with more official views (as discussed in Chapter 3).

Like courting and marriage, the portrayal of family life in film was an area of social concern.² Worried establishment observers held that films had a negative effect on family life. A case in point is provided by the report filed by Len England, a prolific member of Mass-Observation. Tapping into the wave of official concerns, England produced ‘The Film and Family Life’ in mid-1944.³ He noted how recurring types of film, both light-hearted and serious treatments of family life, encouraged

² For a discussion of the alleged glamourisation of romance and marriage in film see Chapter 4.

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wishful thinking and as a direct result had ‘entirely deleterious [social] effects’. The view attributed mass audiences with very little initiative or sophistication. Len England assumed that typical film-goers would be suggestible and prone to imitation, and argued that the fictional course of action taken by film characters could have serious repercussions in actual practice. He concluded that ‘family films’, with their ‘Cinderella stories’ were among the most successful, influential and damaging of all film types.

Interestingly, British pictures with the kinds of on-screen film families identified by Len England in 1944, were not an enduring success throughout the 1940s. By the late 1940s, there was a new lightweight British ‘family film’ cycle centred on the Huggett family’s exploits, yet it did not consistently rank among the biggest box-office successes. The Huggett cycle was the British equivalent of the American-made Hardy films, the latter having been one of the most popular series of all time. The Huggett family initially appeared in the film Holiday Camp (1947) and then returned in three more films released during 1948 and 1949. However, the Huggetts never soared to the heights of cinema success, achieving their popular longevity from radio instead.

In selecting British films according to a gauge of popularity, many films most evidently ‘about’ the family fell outside the sample. Notable absentees are not only the Huggetts, but also The Briggs Family (1940), regarded in Picturegoer as a British equivalent to the widely known American film families (the Hardys, Higginses and the Joneses); and Salute John Citizen (1942), a British film that documented a typical English middle-class family. For popular British cinema in the 1940s, the

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4 M-O A: FR 2120.
5 M-O A: FR 2120.
6 Only the first film of the series, Holiday Camp (1947), appeared in any of Kinematograph Weekly or Picturegoer’s annual appraisals.
7 The Hardy family appeared in 14 films between 1938 and 1946; with one last cast reunion in 1958.
8 Between 1953 and 1962 they were re-created in the form of the popular BBC radio show, Meet the Huggetts.
lightweight ‘family film’ was relatively low profile, yet the number of popular films from my sample dealing with nuclear families in some shape or form was high. Against a backdrop of social debate about ‘normal’ family life, popular British feature films across a range of genres often portrayed nuclear family types. But whereas more official views sustained the notion that the nuclear family was a beneficial (if threatened) institution, the picture that emerges from the films themselves is somewhat different.

The portrayal of the nuclear family in popular 1940s films is predominantly negative. On the rare occasions where an idealised model of the nuclear family is represented it is an avowedly short-lived phenomenon. In the majority of instances, the nuclear family is not even portrayed as an ideal structure. Instead, as was often the case with marriage, films relayed a sense of pessimism about the archetypal family unit. If marriage in film was usually restrictive, then the nuclear family in film added children to an already burdensome institution. The nuclear family was frequently portrayed as more like a prison than a haven.

The presentation of the nuclear family as a state of short-lived perfection or place of incarceration indicates that there were stresses and strains in any wider contemporary notion of the ideal family. As a consequence of wartime and post-war processes of social change and re-adjustment, official validations of nuclear families were coming apart at the seams. In the face of peoples’ diverse and novel experiences, some good and others bad, feature films did not condescend to portray the nuclear family as an unproblematic social norm.

5. 2 The Nuclear Family Ideal

In the early and mid 40s, popular films at best presented the structure of the nuclear family as a short-lived ideal. Films such as The First of the Few (1942) or The Way to the Stars (1945) were inculcated in discourses of wartime patriotism and suggested that nuclear families were a positive environment, both for individual well-being and for the future national good. On the one hand the nuclear family was regarded as the best location for emotional support, on the other it was also the only legitimate place for social reproduction. Underlying the patriotic emphasis upon the
nuclear family was a need for the new sons of Britain. However, although wartime engendered patriotic sentiment, it also ushered in a period of uncertainty and accelerated social change. In terms of film, the twin elements of patriotism and uncertainty created a deep-rooted and insurmountable contradiction. Namely, the nuclear family was simultaneously presented as the strong bedrock or foundation of the nation, and as something that was weak and fragile.11

In popular 1940s films, the ideal model of the nuclear family is shown to be under considerable threat. The films *The First of the Few* and *The Way to the Stars* both portray fathers (not mothers) disrupting family harmony. Fathers leave their family in order to join the services or pursue other types of war-related endeavour. Moreover, the balance of family life is not successfully reconstituted thereafter. The father figures in these films die in the course of duty. Accordingly, fathers are not personally accountable for their role in family breakdowns. Instead, the ultimate cause of familial upheaval is an external force beyond their control, World War Two. Men do not undermine familial stability for their own gain, but do so in order to facilitate the long-term good of the nation or ‘national family’.

During the films there is a recurring message articulating gendered assumptions. Films projecting an ideal of the nuclear family, suggest very different roles for husbands and wives. According to their conventions, men make sacrifices for the country; whereas women tend to compromise their own wishes for their husbands (a type of sacrifice for the country by default). This narrative theme obeys the rationale that women and men are motivated differently according to their complementary places within the family. So that women’s first allegiance is to their families; but men’s main allegiance is to the nation, or greater good.

The differences between ‘ideal’ fathers and mothers are highlighted throughout *The First of the Few* and *The Way to the Stars*. The paternal role is characterised by distance, or prolonged absence, from the family unit. Alternatively,

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mothers are defined by their close relationship with domesticity, home and childcare. Whereas fathers are actively involved in the national effort, wives sit and wait patiently, hoping for their return. These modes of behaviour are fundamentally prescriptive. Reminiscent of the early and mid 1940s film treatments of courtship, they are imbued with a form of didacticism intended to distil an overriding sense of national duty.

In such films ‘home’ remains a haven, but a fragile and uncertain one. Home is associated with women and children, and is part of the notion of ‘what we [men] are fighting for’. Nuclear families are rendered unstable by the deaths of adult men, but in spite of the feeling of uncertainty, the films are not unremittingly bleak. In particular, young children, especially sons, are used as symbols (rather than developed characters) to indicate tentative hopes the future.

The First o f the Few (Leslie Howard, August 1942)

The First of the Few is a good example of how the nuclear family was constructed as a desirable ideal, but also as something which was endangered by the war and national concerns. It is not a ‘family film’, but a biopic (told in flashback) of R. J. Mitchell (Leslie Howard), inventor of the spitfire, during the 1920s and 1930s. Mitchell is the central figure in the narrative and his family provides a background of traditional familial assumptions. The desirability of family life is primarily presented through the quintessentially English, middle-class union of Mitchell and his wife Diana (Rosamund John), and the birth of their son. In addition, it is also underlined by the character of Crisp who is seeking a marriageable partner and an escape from the embarrassments of casual liaisons. However, there is an unresolved contradiction. Mitchell must pursue his work in order to fight for his country and for his family, but to do so he must be prepared to sacrifice his place in both.

Although The First of the Few is ostensibly the tale of one man’s life story, it is significant that he is not a solitary figure. Rather than conforming to the usual stereotype of the lone scientific genius, Mitchell is unequivocally presented as a

12 This is a departure from Jeffrey Richards’ view that Leslie Howard played Mitchell as a ‘solitary visionary’. See Richards (1997) Films and British National Identity, 91.
The film was billed as a ‘human story’ rather than as a war film, and it contained ample material for cinema managers to ‘play R. J. Mitchell as the devoted husband and father – a man of simple tastes’. Indeed, Mitchell’s closeness to his wife is apparent from the start. We are initially introduced to Mitchell, picnicking with his wife, Diana, on a sunny cliff-top. The shot frames happiness in a similar way to *Love Story* (1944) with its Cornish cliff-top romance. The natural setting connotes the naturalness of Mitchell and Diana’s relationship. It symbolises a tentative inter-war harmony which is later shattered. Moreover, there are prolonged scenes that take place in their family home. Their family set-up is idyllic. They live in a spacious house in a rural setting. It is a type of countryside retreat, evoking a sense of timelessness and distance far removed from the noise and troubles associated with Mitchell’s involvement in flying, aircraft design and production.

The character of Crisp (David Niven), a test-pilot, further emphasises the desirability of family life. This is achieved both through dialogue and through his presence within the family home. Crisp compliments Mitchell on his home-life, the very thing Crisp himself lacks. ‘It’s a nice place you’ve got here’, he says. Moreover, his casual flings are a source of comedy for viewers and embarrassment for Crisp when contrasted with the respectability of the Mitchell family. When invited to dinner at the Mitchell’s house, for example, Crisp’s date for the evening is loud and obnoxious, and he is keen to disassociate himself from her as much as possible. The date’s exaggerated and inappropriate behaviour is thrown into sharp relief by Diana who, as the perfect wife and hostess, is tactful and mild-mannered.

Through the motif of the family (at) home, *The First of the Few* projects a nuclear family unit as an ideal. However, the film also stresses the family’s uncertainty and potential demise at times of hardship. The nuclear family is a fragile ideal.

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The First of the Few was a government-backed film emphasising personal and familial sacrifice for the national good. A patriotic message is signified by the title that borrows from a famous Churchill speech. It was quoted on both advertising hoards and in the film’s closing sequences. “‘Never... was so much owed by so many to so few’ Churchill, Autumn 1940’, proclaimed the film posters. Consequently, Mitchell’s main allegiance is presented as to the nation, over and above all else. His duty to Britain overrides his obligation to his family. The prevailing sense of national duty is articulated by way of Mitchell’s diagnosis as a seriously ill man. Mitchell learns that he will die unless he takes complete rest from his work for one year. However, his choice is not as straightforward as opting for retirement and claiming life over death. It is a decision that has far-reaching implications. The choice for Mitchell is presented as between nation and family, rather than between sickness and health. Continuing his aircraft design work in the short-term is essential for the national good, whereas his long-term physical state is only of consequence for his immediate family.

When Mitchell first tells his wife of his illness and decision to keep on working, their exchange clearly reveals the film’s gendered perspective on the choice between nation and family. Mitchell, adhering to the line of duty, explains to Diana that his work is ‘more important than us’. So that even though Mitchell is framed as a loving family man, his country comes first. On the other hand, the ‘instinctive’ reaction of a kind wife and mother is to think of her immediate family, rather than the greater good. Diana implores Mitchell to rest from work and reads a letter to remind her husband of his almost ‘forgotten’ son. The belief that women held an attitude devoted to family above all else was one cause of wartime concern. As a high profile psychologist put it, women ‘might defend the family and let the country go hang’. Constructed in these terms women were potentially harmful to the war effort.

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16 The actual inventor, R. J. Mitchell, died from cancer. Thus the film has massaged facts in order to present a patriotic message. The choice between nation (and death) or family (and life) would not have had the same resonance for a man with a terminal rather than a serious illness.
First of the Few addresses the potential national danger of the perceived female attitude to families, and then alleviates the threat.

In The First of the Few the needs of the nation do triumph over those of the individual. Mitchell convinces Diana that his work is unavoidable and she bows to his superior wisdom and judgement. In so doing, Diana's own wishes are subordinated to her husband's patriotism. The theme is a familiar one. In In Which We Serve (1942) Captain Kinross' wife knows she is second best to her husband's 'first wife' the HMS Torrin, a destroyer symbolic of the nation. Similarly, in Scott of the Antarctic (1948) Kathleen recognises Scott's commitment to national pride. According to Kathleen, Scott 'knew the Antarctic long before me', likewise making her his second love.

The opposition between male and female attitudes to nation and family is matched by a distinction between the world of valuable work and ground-breaking research, and that of family life. Predictably, work is associated with men, whereas domesticity is associated with women. What is interesting is how the dinner party scene actively highlights this association. When Mitchell and Crisp talk about their aircraft work, they quite literally step over the domestic threshold to move outside and away from their wife and girlfriend.

The First of the Few further contrasts men's work with family matters. They are, for example, mutually exclusive aspects of Mitchell's life. One invariably suffers at the expense of the other. As Mitchell becomes more engrossed in his spitfire design, for example, he is increasingly distanced from his wife and son. He stays late at the office and makes fewer appearances at home. There is a contradiction in that Mitchell's role as a successful man is defined by his ability to work, but that very ability also places him away from his family. Consequently, the 'good' father is removed from the family. The inverse is that when Mitchell is resting, he is located in a wheelchair at home. Mitchell, through his inability to work, is shown to be incapacitated and effectively emasculated. He is unhappy and edges away from domesticity as much as possible. Rather than being inside where Diana cooks, Mitchell is outside, attempting to hold on to the defining attributes of his masculinity:
activity and authority. Although expected to act on the bequests of others, he does the gardening rather than take complete rest, and he smokes a pipe, used to connote an authoritative gentlemanly status.

Throughout *The First of the Few* there are two different relationships to family life. First, there is the father, Mitchell, who is outward looking. Second, there is the mother, Diana, who is more centrally located at the heart of the family. Mitchell considers the national interest to be paramount, but Diana initially attempts to delay her husband's vital work for the sake of the family. Mitchell does however persuade Diana that his work and Britain must come first. Men and women are shown to be committed (although not equally) to the war effort, with the family presented as the casualty of their national undertaking. Mitchell's self-sacrifice for the nation means that he dies, leaving behind a wife and child, together with hope (the invention of the spitfire; a son to indicate future generations) and uncertainty (the outcome of war) for the future. The final frame returns to the war and a sense of hope in the light of possible victory. The film ends with the fighter pilots launching into the Battle of Britain.

*The Way to the Stars* (Anthony Asquith, June 1945)

As in *The First of the Few*, the film *The Way to the Stars* suggests that the nuclear family is desirable, but fragile. Both films narrate their stories in flashback, but from slightly different historical perspectives. Whereas *The First of the Few* was made during the height of war and primarily recalls the 1920s and 1930s, *The Way to the Stars* was produced during the closing days of war, but focuses on 1940-1944. Nevertheless, both films show the death of respectable father figures and both use familial disruption to suggest a patriotic message. Namely, that the acceptance of personal sacrifice, loss and emotional suffering is required for the greater good. In *The First of the Few* male bravery and achievement are stressed, mainly through the use of a single (although not solitary) figure. In *The Way to the Stars*, together with the male heroism of several pilots, greater emphasis is accorded to female courage, especially the endurance and management of emotional pain.
In *The Way to the Stars* the nuclear family is presented as a desirable institution, but one which is impermanent. The nuclear family is constituted by 'ideal' individuals. As in *The First of the Few*, the family consists of responsible members of the English middle-classes. The father is David Archdale (Michael Redgrave), a RAF officer and, by implication, an upstanding Englishman. David is suited to his career, but not to domesticity. As a 'normal' father, David is unfamiliar and inept with his baby son, whom he calls 'it' (rather than by name) and barely knows how to hold. Childcare is clearly the duty of his wife, Toddy (Rosamund John). She also runs a boarding house: its restaurant, bar and dances. Toddy's job, which helps ensure the morale of the flyers from the nearby airbase, has overtones of wartime and domestic responsibility. Thus, although Toddy works, it is in a motherly 'housekeeping' role: she is responsible and level-headed, and cares for others. The Archdales' child is pictured from a baby until the age of 3 or 4. He too is a type of ideal. Being so young, he represents the innocence of childhood and the hope for a future with a clear conscience, untainted by the corruption of war and the woes of the present generation.

The family, in its nuclear form, is short-lived. Shortly after the birth of Toddy and David's son, David is killed in action. This is an act of self-sacrifice for the good of the country. Here, the death of a father figure is a direct consequence of war and his role in the national effort. The pattern is repeated once again during the course of the narrative. This time it is part of the Anglo-American co-operation theme of the film. *The Way to the Stars* was made with the co-operation of both the RAF and the USAAF. In it, one American pilot, Johnny Hollis (Douglass Montgomery) is established as a sympathetic character, especially in his capacity as a family man. Johnny cements his friendship with Toddy by chatting to her son; empathising over the loss of her husband; and showing her pictures of his wife and children. Like David, Johnny is a responsible and honourable man, and like David he is a paternal role model who is shot down. Johnny's death establishes a commonality between the personal sacrifices demanded of Britain and of America.

The death of David relatively early in the film, leaves Toddy to fend for herself. In so doing, *The Way to the Stars* dramatises the need for women to quietly
accept death, family break-up, and emotional pain. This patriotic sentiment is stressed through minimalist poetry. John Pudney’s two poems ‘Missing’ and ‘For Johnny’, are included in the film as the legacy of David.\(^{18}\) For Marcia Landy, the poems’ message of assimilating mourning and seizing happiness is a characteristic quality of all elegies.\(^{19}\) However, what is important about ‘Missing’ and ‘For Johnny’ is that they indicate the irrelevance of traditional elegy during World War Two. As Paul Fussell argues, Pudney’s attenuated style is a departure from the verbally confident poetry of the Great War.\(^{20}\) Pudney’s message of ‘less said the better’ (the first line from ‘Missing’) captures the understatement, not only characteristic of World War Two poetry, but also at the heart of *The Way to the Stars* and much of the critically acclaimed wartime tradition of British ‘realist’ filmmaking. In addition to the silence of ‘Missing’, there is the survival theme of ‘For Johnny’. In the film, ‘For Johnny’s’ emphasis upon relinquishing despair becomes a female article of faith. The last verse is especially pertinent:

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Better by far
For Johnny-the-bright-star
To keep your head,
And see his children fed.\(^{21}\)
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Toddy not only cherishes the poem written in her husband’s hand, but also obeys its sentiment to the letter. She continues to care for their son and ‘keeps her head’. In this her response to David’s death differs from that of Peter Penrose (John Mills), a junior RAF pilot. Whereas Penrose reacts adversely to David’s death, breaking off his engagement, Toddy convinces him of the need to go on. Toddy is more skilled than Penrose at successfully managing her feelings of loss and pain. It is Toddy, again in her capacity as a motherly figure, who advises Penrose to make amends with his true love, Iris (Renee Asherson). Like in the film *The First of the Few*, a mother places the highest value on family life and marital commitment, even when these are

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\(^{18}\) The emotional restraint expressed in the poems has been identified as a constituent of the construction of Englishness. See Richards (1997) *Films and British National Identity*, 88.


\(^{21}\) John Pudney, ‘For Johnny’, as quoted in *The Way to the Stars*.

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things that might be shaken by national duties and the war. The revival of a romance between Penrose and Iris suggests hope for the future and confirms the desirability of marriage and the family. However a sense of uncertainty remains. Johnny’s death towards the end of the film casts a shadow of pessimism and injustice over the final events. The film’s closure is bitter-sweet: Iris and Peter are reunited, but Toddy is (in the final scene) left standing alone under the cover of night.

By developing how Toddy copes with life after her husband’s death, *The Way to the Stars* elaborates a theme of the female management of self and of emotions. This is something not dealt with in the earlier film, *The First of the Few*, which culminates with the death of Mitchell. In spite of the different emphasis, both films possess a fundamentally similar message. They suggest that human sacrifice is needed for the good of the nation. Jeffrey Richards states that a principal moral of *The Way to the Stars* is, ‘do not make a fuss when people die but carry on working for a better world so that the sacrifice shall not have been in vain’. A moral for *The First of the Few* could be thus: sacrifice is not in vain. However, in articulating a shared notion of patriotism, the films also projected a deep-rooted ambivalence towards the family. Nuclear families were ideal, but broken families were commonplace; nuclear families were the bed-rock of society, yet impermanent; and children were meant to represent (national) hope, although family disruption hinted at their (and Britain’s) uncertain future. However, the mixed view of the nuclear family was itself short-lived. By the later 1940s, popular films had replaced uncertainty with certainty. The endorsement of and tentative optimism about the nuclear family unit, characteristic of *The First of the Few* and *The Way to the Stars*, was surpassed by a more assuredly negative perspective on family life.

5. 3 Secrets and Lies

Popular films of the late war and post-war period usually indicate that the nuclear family is not an unqualified blissful haven. Film production was taking place during an important phase of social re-adjustment, a time accompanied by many

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family troubles. Intersecting with the social backdrop of separations, new experiences, changed lives, and increasing divorce rates, popular films such as *The Man in Grey* (1943), *Madonna of the Seven Moons* (1944), *They Were Sisters* (1945), *Brief Encounter* (1945) and *It Always Rains on Sunday* (1947), outlined negative aspects of the nuclear family unit. These films omit issues of large-scale social and political protest, or else translate a generalised sense of disillusionment onto a personal and familial level: nuclear families are depicted under pressure and family welfare is presented as a moral and individual matter, rather than as a state responsibility.

The negative view of the nuclear family is accompanied by a recurring theme of adultery (not rationing, housing, education, or unemployment) as the major nuclear family problem. Among popular film representations of the nuclear family, the predominant focus is upon emotions and the boundaries of social acceptability; encompassing facets of changing values (temptation, morality, judgement and redemption) rather than the details of social ‘reality’. Adultery, in the popular films from my sample, is variously associated with deception; hysteria; alcoholism; sadism; or escape from boredom and routine. This is a view of the nuclear family embedded in a mesh of secrets and lies.

Interestingly, although films do not extensively draw on the detail of 1940s everyday life, they do interact with the cultural currency of ideas and more general themes, especially the notion that conventional femininity was questioned or threatened by women’s changing experiences and allegedly newfound freedoms. This is why popular films depict mothers as a source of anxiety. The mother is simultaneously portrayed as a figure at the centre of family life and as a role at issue. In keeping with the assumption that they were centrally located within the family, mothers are portrayed as the people whose behaviour may have the most extreme repercussions on family life.

Recent work by Sarah Harwood demonstrates how popular Hollywood films of the 1980s, a decade when masculinity was represented as being in a state of crisis,
attribute family breakdown to the father. By way of an alternative, popular British films of the forties, a decade when femininity was thought to be in a state of crisis, show the mother as a threat to the family.

Most of the popular films from my sample that focus on the nuclear family incorporate the theme of a mother’s (potential) adultery. The narrative device apportions mothers with the power to destruct both themselves and their families. If films such as *The Wicked Lady* (1945) and *The Red Shoes* (1948) showed marriage as a restrictive institution for women, then *The Man in Grey*, *Madonna of the Seven Moons*, *They Were Sisters*, *Brief Encounter* and *It Always Rains On Sunday* show at least equally negative portrayals of nuclear families. In these films the nuclear family is portrayed as detrimental to female (not male) well-being. The family takes on overtones of imprisonment as mothers such as Lady Clarissa Rohan (*The Man in Grey*) or Laura Jesson (*Brief Encounter*) are held against their will by the force of social convention. On the fewer occasions when fathers are a destructive influence towards the family, then mothers are also guilty of some moral crime, and fathers are not trapped in the same way. Lord Rohan (*The Man in Grey*) for example, is an adulterer, but Clarissa is presented as a woman who has made a poor choice in marriage and succumbs to an affair herself; Rohan also has the freedom to live where and how he chooses.

As these films take adultery as a theme, there are always pronounced moral judgements. Conservatism is enshrined most obviously in the films’ endings. As in the films about marriage, women are either punished for their transgressions or they are re-assimilated into ‘responsible’ motherhood and family-bound domesticity. Fathers, as mentioned above, are represented as a less destructive force. On the occasions when their behaviour does undermine the family, fathers go largely unpunished. This is in keeping with an overall 1940s construction of the father as a distant figure; a person whose behaviour was not a main issue at stake and someone who was considered less crucial (than the mother) to the functioning of the family unit. Popular films, by addressing issues of female adultery and familial

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responsibility, project how anxieties about women and motherhood intensified during the decade of the forties.

**The Man in Grey (Leslie Arliss, July 1943)**

*The Man in Grey* opens with a wartime auction, then flashes back to a Regency-based narrative, before briefly returning to the 1940s auction room setting. The family of the Regency costume drama is aristocratic, consisting of Lord Rohan (James Mason) and Lady Clarissa Rohan (Phyllis Calvert) and their child. Acting on individual whims, the parents are not the 'ideal' middle-class, national-minded family members as in films such as *The First of the Few* or *The Way to the Stars*. The Rohan family is presented as dysfunctional and as a place of entrapment for Clarissa, yet through some of its flaws the Regency family spoke to 1940s audiences. In the historical setting, the film deals with complex and disturbing emotions and experiences such as those relating to loss and separation. As Janet Thumim notes, every 1943 audience would have included those who had experienced bereavement and trauma.25 Significantly, pain and conflict are thus located in the (class-bound) past, with a more positive modern frame distancing such things from the 'socially progressive' 1940s. The two wartime auction room scenes include characters that are more idealised family representatives. In this respect, similarities can be drawn between the modern frame and the wartime address of more avowedly patriotic films.

The Regency nuclear family does not form an ideal. Instead of respectable and responsible parents, torn between national and familial responsibilities, there are reckless individuals ruled by personal desires and emotions, and enslaved by social conventions. Sue Harper has aptly described the representation of the past (with the excessive behaviour of the aristocracy and the appearance of the lustful female) in the *Man in Grey* as, 'a site of dread'.26 The father, Lord Rohan, is an aristocratic bully and adverts dwelt on this aspect of his character. ‘Who was the haughty, powerful

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Man in Grey?”, read one ‘teaser’ catchline. Rather than being a distant ‘family man’ of simple tastes (such as Mitchell in The First of the Few), he is barely a family figure at all. He marries for practical reasons, to gain an heir (not the devotion of a wife and child); shows no affection for his wife from whom he lives a separate life; and refuses to relinquish his bachelor freedoms. Alternatively, although Lady Clarissa Rohan is self-sacrificing, rather than selfish, she is also irresponsible and feeble, rather than an ideal of female emotional management and endurance. For example, Clarissa pursues Rokeby (Stewart Granger) even though it is presented as a romantic, hopeless and illogical venture.

Furthermore, the Rohans’ child is not so much an ‘ideal’ or emblem of hope, but a symbol used to emphasise maternal guilt and remorse. The son is never shown on-screen, a factor which in itself suggests that his status may be more akin to an abstract idea or icon, than a ‘straightforward’ representation of a child or childhood. Indeed, it is the boy’s absence that is most significant. This is highlighted in the portrait-painting scene. It is at Clarissa’s portrait sitting that we first become aware of her anxieties about motherhood and her enforced separation from her child. Echoing social concerns about the psychological perils of wartime evacuation, Clarissa’s conversation with the portrait painter, Mr Lawrence (Stuart Lindsell), suggests that happy and successful parenting requires the prolonged and intimate contact of a mother with her young child:

You paint me as a happy mother. I am not very happy. I’m scarcely a mother. The child hardly knows me [...]. He’s never really been mine and yet I smile because I am supposed to be happy.

The disjunction between ‘what is’ and ‘what is supposed to be’ is visually reinforced by the contrast depicted between the finished portrait, a seemingly happy Clarissa with her son, and the conditions under which it is being painted. At the sitting Clarissa poses with her arm around a baby doll and, unable to judge for herself, she need to ask Mr Lawrence if her son is as pretty as he is portrayed. The son’s narrative significance lies in the depressing overtones of his literal and metaphorical

27 Microjacket for The Man in Grey, BFI library.
'evacuation' from the scene. It suggests a disconsolate mother, a gulf separating mother and child, and a deeply damaged family group.

The figures of the brutal Lord Rohan; Lady Clarissa, the disconsolate mother; and their absent son constitute a dysfunctional nuclear family. Both father and mother pursue affairs and their son remains absent, a momentary reminder of Clarissa's effectively unfulfilled desire for motherhood. The representations of the parents' affairs suggest two things about the family: firstly, that class is a prime mover in dictating familial structures and problems; and, secondly, that a mother's adultery is a more serious moral transgression than that of a father's.

The Man in Grey portrays the Regency period as a time when marriage was dictated by class lines, and implies that this tendency created a disharmonious family grouping. In the film the aristocratic Lord Rohan seeks a wife with a 'suitable' social background to provide him with an heir. They have a loveless marriage, conducted solely to continue his family name. Thus Lord Rohan and Clarissa seek passion and love (respectively) outside wedlock. Significantly, both have extra-marital affairs with people of a lower social class: Lord Rohan with Hesther (Margaret Lockwood), who is penniless and covets a private life of luxury; and Clarissa with Rokeby, also a strolling player, but one who seeks emotional rather than material reward.

Class allegiances constitute the family, but the extra-marital and cross-class encounters (even when heartfelt) damage it irrevocably. Clarissa loves Rokeby, but is trapped in her marriage by conventions which decree that a divorced woman is socially ostracised. Moreover, Clarissa's fatal illness is contracted after she symbolically transgresses the boundaries of respectability by following Rokeby through the stormy night. Her illness is purposefully hastened by Hesther who acts on the strength of her desire for Lord Rohan. An emphasis upon family, class and respect is underlined when Lord Rohan exacts vengeance upon Hesther for Clarissa's death. It does not matter that the Lord did not care for his wife, all that matters is: 'You [Hesther] killed a Rohan. Who dishonours us, dies.'
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With her death, the moral trajectory of the Regency drama punishes Clarissa for her, but not Lord Rohan for his, liaison. Similar to those films dealing with marriage as a restrictive institution, there is a double standard in operation. Women are more culpable than men for their adultery: as in The Wicked Lady the female adulterer meets an untimely death; and, like the case of Miranda, the man’s affair is presented as less of a moral abhorrence.

Through the Regency drama, The Man in Grey addresses several familial themes: including those of mother and child separation; loveless marriage; heredity and class distinctions; adultery and morality. These are issues that, for some, had wartime resonances. The Man in Grey has been remembered not only for the sadomasochistic bravado of James Mason, but also for its virtue in that:

it humanised, domesticated and made containable many aspects of human frailty...[at a time when] the war revealed evil as endless rows of wooden huts at Buchenwald: as unidentifiable bodies frozen in ludicrous art forms upon the icy Russian steppes: [and] as babies dragged from the smouldering rubble of a Coventry or a Dresden. 28

In contrast to the representation of human frailty in the past, the present frame projects a more sanitised vision of World War Two Britain. It is more positive, ‘containing’ the aspects of ‘human frailty’ and echoing the tentative ideals envisaged in the more avowedly patriotic films such as The First of the Few and The Way to the Stars. Thus there is a parallelism between the 1940s and Regency England, but the final wartime-set scene seeks to allay certain fears and concerns invoked by the Regency narrative.

Primarily, the auction room scenes emphasise the need not to dwell on the past. For example, the trinkets, each one associated with personal events, arrivals and departures in the Regency Clarissa’s life (the toy, for instance, indicates Rokeby’s reappearance) are now irrelevant; they are dismissed as trivial time-wasters first by the auctioneer and then by Rokeby.

More precisely, not only is the past’s general relevance played down in the
1940s scenes, but key indicators of class advantage are also downplayed, suggesting
that the troublesome birthrights and class distinctions associated with the past are
anachronisms in wartime Britain.\footnote{This ties in with Sue Harper’s observation that for a wartime audience, the preoccupation with
aristocratic surplus would be translated into immediate concerns about the equitable allocation of
Melodrama’, in Christine Gledhill (ed.) \textit{Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the
Woman’s Film}, London: BFI, 172.} In the auction room setting there are a ‘modern
day’ (1940s) Clarissa and Rokeby, also played by Phyllis Calvert and Stewart
Granger. The wartime Clarissa highlights the apparent demise of aristocracy: she is
the last in the aristocratic Rohan family line (her brother was, we learn, killed at
Dunkirk) and the auction itself signals the ‘democratic’ selling off of the family
heirlooms. Moreover, the probability of Clarissa’s and Rokeby’s (Stewart Granger)
modern-day romantic union suggests the potential for the birth of a new society
founded without inherited advantage. At the film’s time of release, the Final
Romance was recognised as a conspicuous change from the original 1940 story.\footnote{C. A. Lejeune (1943) \textit{The Observer} 4/4/1943, microjacket for \textit{The Man in Grey}.}
The film’s narrative closure can be regarded within the context of patriotic wartime
film production.\footnote{Post-war Gainsborough melodramas from the same costume cycle do not use modern frameworks.
As Lant suggests, the conditions of war seemed to force period film narratives into a closer relationship
with viewers’ lives. See Lant (1991) \textit{Blackout}, 5.} Its final emphasis upon greater equality is articulated in terms of
the war and national duty. In contemporary Britain, Clarissa and Rokeby meet on an
equal footing and are able to depart together, something which their ancestors in
class-bound Regency Britain never achieved. Their wartime uniforms are a leveller,
disguising their social backgrounds and emphasising an allegiance to the country
rather than to class.

For the most part, \textit{The Man in Grey} is set in the Regency period and projects a
problematic nuclear family entrenched within the codes and practices of a class-
ridden society. Through its flashback structure, \textit{The Man in Grey} explores wartime
anxieties about the family at a safe historical distance, but diffuses them within a
‘frame’ of egalitarian wartime Britain. Thus, a fairly conventional romantic ending is
located in the film’s narrative present, while the misery of thwarted relationships (a
marriage of convenience and doomed love affairs) is situated in the Regency past.
The closure refuses to look backwards, yet it also refuses to envisage future certainties. Clarissa and Rokeby leave the auction to catch the bus wherever it may take them, their lack of plans (even for a journey destination) underscores a generalised sense of uncertainty and a present-time orientation. Such was the popular success of The Man in Grey that it became the first in a series of costume dramas made by Gainsborough between 1943 and 1947. The next film under discussion, Madonna of the Seven Moons, is part of the same generic cycle. However, although Gainsborough’s management structure lent itself to a formulaic style, there are important differences between the films.32 Most noticeably, Madonna of the Seven Moons lacks the wartime address and happy ending of its predecessor, The Man in Grey.

Madonna of the Seven Moons (Arthur Crabtree, December 1944)

Whereas The Man in Grey used a past century to explore family problems at a distance, Madonna of the Seven Moons locates difficulties at the ‘safe’ distance of a different foreign setting, 1930s Italy. Released 16 months after The Man in Grey, Madonna of the Seven Moons does not include a pronounced and idealised vision of wartime Britain because some of the pressure for overt statements of national duty had subsided. Madonna of the Seven Moons uses the motif of female split personality to explore family anxieties: the film opposes motherhood, domesticity, sanctity and the nuclear family, with wanton abandonment, desire, and criminality. Whilst motherhood and sanctity are associated with Maddalena (Phyllis Calvert), passion and profanity are associated with her other self, the gypsy Rosanna (Phyllis Calvert). The opposition between female domesticity and desire is similar to elements of The Man in Grey (Clarissa is passive and domesticated in comparison with Hesther’s desiring wilfulness), but most closely resembles the marriage-based themes of the films The Wicked Lady and The Red Shoes. However, the emphasis on the nuclear family, rather than just the married couple, employs a daughter to introduce an additional narrative dynamic. Unlike the boy baby of The Man in Grey, the child is not a symbol of maternal guilt. In Madonna of the Seven Moons, Maddalena’s daughter is a

modern teenager on the verge of adulthood; she embodies changing social values and introduces a question mark above the traditional image of motherhood.

Although *Madonna of the Seven Moons*’ settings are a middle-class household in Rome and the poor quarters of Florence in the late 1930s, class, nationality, and history are not of paramount importance. There is a minimal sense of authenticity in either place or period.33 The actors are playing Italian roles, but speak their dialogue with the clipped intonation of the Queen’s English and there is little beyond a few fleeting early titles (noting dates of marriage and the birth of a daughter) to indicate the year. What is significant is that there is a generalised sense of ‘foreignness’, creating an awareness that the film is not set in World War Two Britain, rather than a more specific vision of 1930s Italy. An absence of wartime conditions underlines that this setting is distant, at a remove from Britain. In this respect, like the Regency period used in *The Man in Grey*, an Italian location is first and foremost a narrative device used for the acceptable expression of controversial issues.

The main issue at stake is the role of the mother within the nuclear family. The family is presented as a site of female repression, whereas the world beyond the family is associated with sexuality and desire. This is explored through the character of Maddalena who possesses a split personality. The use of dual personality, bordering on the schizophrenic, can be read within the 1940s vogue for psychology as an explanatory discipline and, in particular, a rising awareness of the teachings of Freudian psychoanalysis. A *Picturegoer* article, ‘Split Personalities’, bore witness to the high profile of psychoanalysis and sought to explain the complexities of schizophrenia in non-technical terms. Sufferers of the illness were thought to be unusually ‘highly strung’; had, in childhood, suffered a ‘terrific shock’ usually connected with sex; and had repressed its implications until a repetition of similar circumstances blanked out the ‘normal’ personality and released the ‘dark forces of libido’.34 In *Madonna of the Seven Moons*, such schizophrenic behaviour is a female phenomenon. The opening of the film alludes to a childhood attack, thereafter

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Maddalena’s split-personality emerges when emotions long-repressed within the nuclear family environment are triggered and released. There is a fundamental opposition between Maddalena’s ‘normal’ personality in her familial role as wife and mother, and her ‘darker’ libidinous self, Rosanna.

The nature of motherhood in *Madonna of the Seven Moons* is a source of anxiety in a way that is not matched by the role of the father. Maddalena/Rosanna is a figure at war with herself, whereas her husband, Guiseppe Labardi (John Stuart), is presented as someone that has successfully adjusted to social change. He does, for example, accept their daughter’s ‘modernity’ in a way that Maddalena finds difficult to grasp. Moreover, the father is largely a peripheral character in the plot. Labardi’s very lack of narrative significance underlines that masculinity and fatherhood are not represented as issues being called into question.\(^{35}\)

Whereas there is a theme (however understated) of paternal adaptation, there is no middle-ground of maternal adjustment. Instead, Maddalena is cast between two destructive extremes which cannot co-exist in harmony. On the one hand, there is her life as a mother. In this role Maddalena is excessively demure and pious. On the other, there is her second life as an Italian peasant with her criminal lover, Nino Barucci (Stewart Granger), in the slums of Florence. This alternative existence, where Rosanna drinks, smokes and carries a knife, is only accessible through the ‘abnormal’ behaviour of hysteria. It is marked as an exotic life of danger. The exoticism is illustrated through the costume transformation from Maddalena to Rosanna.\(^{36}\) As Pam Cook argues, the gypsy clothing of Rosanna is not narratively motivated (Nino is not a gypsy), but is a meaningful signifier of exoticism, freedom and escape in its own right.\(^{37}\) The danger is emphasised through location (backstreets and bars) and association (with criminals and gigolos). Furthermore, amnesia helps to imply that this is a flight from the exigencies of motherhood; Rosanna forgets about

\(^{35}\) For popular Hollywood films of the 1980s, Sarah Harwood argues that anxieties over the role of the father displace the mother at the centre of the narrative. Here, the reverse is true. Motherhood is the issue at stake and the father is omitted from the main narrative action. See Harwood (1997) *Family Fictions*, 102-123.

\(^{36}\) A similar ‘exotic’ costume transformation occurs in *Black Narcissus* as the nun, Sister Ruth, crosses the threshold of sanity. See Chapter 8.

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Maddalena’s family life, her husband and her daughter, thereby escaping from her maternal duties without guilt or remorse. However, although Rosanna’s existence is guilt-free and therefore at least partly affirmed by the narrative, the problematic nature of motherhood is not resolved. In the film Maddalena (thus also Rosanna) is killed, suggesting an insurmountable contradiction. The irreconcilable opposition between a sacred notion of maternity and a profane extra-marital passion remains visually inscribed, literally over Maddalena’s body, at the end of the film. As publicists stressed, ‘Maddalena dies with the rose and the cross on her bosom, the emblems of her two lives, and her two selves’.38

The division between the sacred and the profane resembles the split between the good and bad characters of films like The Wicked Lady where Caroline represents virtue and Barbara evil. It has been suggested that the opposition is most acute in Madonna of the Seven Moons because it is explored through a single personality, rather than two separate characters.39 However, what marks the good/bad opposition of Madonna of the Seven Moons as particularly interesting is not only its extremity, but also the way in which it is triggered. Namely, through the re-appearance of Maddalena’s modern-thinking daughter, Angela (Patricia Roc). When Angela returns from school in London, she has changed almost beyond her mother’s recognition. Angela indicates the new ‘emancipated’ aspects of femininity: she has traveled from London with a boy called Evelyn (Alan Hames); Angela wears shorts, rather than a skirt or dress; and her preferred drink is alcoholic, a cocktail. Angela’s father sums up his daughter as ‘an unholy influence’. It is this modern and unholy influence which precipitates the resurgence of Maddalena’s repressed self. Thus, in Madonna of the Seven Moons the split personality surfaces from an interaction between old and new values: those of the mother and those of the daughter respectively. As a result, the crisis in the nature of motherhood is presented as a result of the frictions caused by social change.

Like Clarissa in The Man in Grey, Maddalena in Madonna of the Seven Moons is a mother who is trapped and repressed within the nuclear family. However, unlike

38 Microjacket for Madonna of the Seven Moons, BFI library.
Clarissa’s short-lived affair, Maddalena enjoys a greater escape from such confines through her secret life as Rosanna. Nevertheless, the opposition between motherhood and passion cannot be resolved, thus Maddalena/Rosanna dies for her moral transgressions. Throughout *Madonna of the Seven Moons*, the mother (not the father) is presented as a central and problematic feature of the narrative. Moreover, the crisis in motherhood is represented as a result of changing social values and attitudes. In this way, *Madonna of the Seven Moons* addresses certain mid-1940s concerns about changing female roles at a ‘distance’; namely through the depiction of fictional lives and events in an earlier decade and a foreign environment. In popular films where the problems associated with the nuclear family are represented within the ‘closer’ context of 1930s and 1940s Britain, a slightly different pattern emerges. Although the nuclear family is still portrayed as a repressive sight for female behaviour, the resolutions are more positive. Instead of underlining the impossibility of reconciling oppositions, as in the final scene of *Madonna of the Seven Moons*, the films either have more positive closures (such as *They Were Sisters*) or end with the reassimilation of mothers into their conventional domestic roles (*Brief Encounter* and *It Always Rains On a Sunday*).

*They Were Sisters* (Arthur Crabtree, April 1945)

The film *They Were Sisters* takes as its subject matter the family life of three middle-class English sisters, Lucy (Phyllis Calvert), Vera (Anne Crawford) and Charlotte (Dulcie Gray). The sisters all marry in the early 1920s and the film is predominantly about their relative fortunes in the late 1930s. Thus, the narrative of *They Were Sisters* is ‘closer’ to Britain 1945 (its country of production and year of release) than either *The Man In Grey* or *Madonna of the Seven Moons*. *They Were Sisters* explores the problems of family life, but not in a distant historical period or foreign location. It focuses on families, emphasising marriage and children, rather than just dwelling on the sisterly bond.

Departing from the binary good/bad opposition, *They Were Sisters* contrasts three rather than two women’s lives: Lucy is an ideal role model, she even ‘mothers’ her sisters; Vera is vain and self-interested; and Charlotte is feeble. Throughout the film background music emphasises the three sisters’ differences in temperament. The
producer, Harold Huth, requested Hubert Bath to compose an original theme tune for each of the three sisters. The three melodies in the film are all signifiers of character and this is what Bath intended. So that the responsible and conventional Lucy is accompanied by a tune which Bath described as ‘almost motherly’; whereas Vera’s is ‘scintillating’; and Charlotte’s starts as a little tune, plunging into the depths of emotion as she becomes a more tragic figure.40

The sisters’ personalities determine the sisters’ choice of husbands and consequently their familial stability. The sensible Lucy weds wisely to a responsible man. The callous Vera opts for a loveless marriage of convenience to an old friend; they have a spoilt child, Sarah (Helen Stephens). Charlotte, overly romantic, falls for an overbearing and sadistic partner, and is trapped by his ceaseless manipulation; their three children, Judith (Ann Stephens), Stephen (John Gilpin) and Margaret (Pamela Kellino) are a pawn in their father’s scheming. As two of the three sisters are departures from the ideal, the film as a whole devotes a good deal of narrative time to an exploration of problems within the nuclear family. In addition even Lucy, the ideal wife and the only sister with a sound marriage, endures some personal hardship. Although family life does not repress her in the same way as either Vera or Charlotte, Lucy has had a daughter who died.

Each sister is more of a focal character than that of her husband and each sister is presented as central within the home and responsible for her family situation. In appearance, deliberate contrasts between the three women’s homes highlights the link between female personality and domestic arrangements: Lucy’s house is the comfortable domestic ideal somewhere between the extremes of Vera’s modern house and Charlotte’s old-fashioned house. Moreover, only Lucy’s house has places where the family congregates.41 Described in the press release as ‘the cottage type, gay, rather casual and homely’, Lucy’s house exactly recalls the perfect family home of R. J. Mitchell and Diana in The First of the Few.42 However, in They Were Sisters the

41 Marcia Landy (1996) Film, Politics and Gramsci, Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 113-114.
42 'Settings for "They Were Sisters"', press book for They Were Sisters.
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model setting belies a more pessimistic view of the ideal nuclear family arrangement. Lucy and William represent parental ideals, yet have lost their only child.

Through the lives of Vera and Charlotte (and Lucy to a lesser extent) there is a narrative emphasis upon certain negative aspects of the nuclear family, especially for mothers. In They Were Sisters, women's personalities influence the types of partner they choose and women, more than their husbands, are shown to err and/or suffer as a result of the consequences. Vera, for example, is unhappy with her husband, has an extra-marital affair, and goes to live in South Africa with her new partner. The consequences of Vera’s affair are formulated in maternal, not paternal, terms. Vera’s husband vanishes from the film, yet Vera ‘misses her daughter terribly’. Whilst Vera is a straying mother responsible for the break-up of the nuclear family, for Charlotte the family becomes a place of confinement. Driven to secret drinking by her husband’s cruelty, Charlotte becomes a solitary figure, caged in an upstairs room. Although Geoffrey (James Mason) is a brutal husband and Charlotte is an adoring wife, Charlotte’s fate is the worse of the two. She is killed by a car, whereas Geoffrey is merely shunned by his eldest daughter after the inquest. A probable suicide, the manner of Charlotte’s demise suggests both her personal suffering within family life and also the weaknesses of a character that impelled her into a ‘poor’ choice of marriage and a downwards spiral of events.

Whereas Vera and Charlotte are representations of imperfect womanhood, one vain and the other frail, or, as Jeffrey Richards puts it, the ‘Bohemian’ and the ‘Victorian’, Lucy is an ‘almost motherly’ ideal. Alone of the three she is happy with her husband, and Lucy and William’s (Peter Murray Hill) amicable marriage is the epitome of the 1940s notion of ‘complementary partnership’. Moreover, their home is a haven for the other sisters’ children in times of need. However, there is one respect in which Lucy and William’s partnership is not ideal. Although Lucy is motherly in manner, her own child died. Nevertheless, a morally weighted closure attempts to resolve the theme of unfulfilled motherhood. Lucy’s maternal behaviour

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is rewarded with the adoption of her two young nieces and nephew, symbolically creating the conventional nuclear family ideal.

The final shots of Lucy and William in the garden with their newfound family attempt to establish a positive familial imagery. For publicity, cinema managers traded upon Calvert and Murray Hill’s idealised ‘real life’ status as a husband and wife team filmed in their own country estate near London. Not only does the film privilege a model of family perfection, but it also tries to present a typical family. William’s ‘informal’ talk is a wartime address emphasising a patriotic message. He explains how Lucy is ‘muddling through’ and that the ‘same triumphs and disasters are going on next door’. However, the combination of perfection and typicality rested uneasily with several critics, and presumably some viewers. The positive narrative closure is undermined by the overall content (both negative and class-specific) of the film. At its time of release the class-bound nature of They Were Sisters was recognised in the press. One reviewer saw They Were Sisters as a middle-class world where Mrs Miniver (a character signaling the archetypal middle-class English woman) would have been recognised as an ‘interloper’ or ‘dangerous agitator’. Another noted the gap between the model family at the end of They Were Sisters and people’s actual experiences: ‘in view of Uncle William’s little sermon on the similarities between families everywhere many may regret that it is so obviously confined to the life of the unrepresentative upper middle-class’. Here then, the resolution is unstable; it is called into question by the class-specific content of everything that went before.

Taken overall, They Were Sisters presents women at the centre of a bleak family life. The sisters’ personalities and behaviour determine both their own happiness and their family stability. Both Vera and Charlotte destroy their families, whereas Lucy’s ‘motherhood’ is unfulfilled until the final scene. The closure attempts to indicate the desirability of companionate marriage and parenthood, yet does so only in an unstable way. The glow of Lucy and William’s family life sits

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45 Landy (1996) Film, 120.
46 Manchester Guardian 7/8/1945, microjacket for They Were Sisters, BFI library.
47 Ernest Lindgren (1945) microjacket for They Were Sisters.
uncomfortably with the trials and hardships that have been portrayed throughout the film. In particular, Geoffrey’s entrapment of Charlotte is hard to forget. As Robert Murphy puts it, ‘Mason’s seedily sadistic Geoffrey casts a pall over the cosy edifice of family life’. Moreover, although the ending seeks to construct a typical happy family, it was met with incredulity, indicating that Lucy and William’s middle-class perfection jarred with at least some people’s experiences. Whereas They Were Sisters (unsuccessfully) sought to convey an up-beat ending as part of a wartime address, with the next two films there is no similar attempt. Released slightly later, Brief Encounter and It Always Rains on Sunday again show family life as stifling (for women) and present the erring mother as the main threat to family stability; but they do not close on a sublime family scene. Instead, mothers return to their everyday, non-idyllic family routine.

Brief Encounter (David Lean, December 1945)

Set in late 1930s England, Brief Encounter presents the middle-class nuclear family as content, but not happy. Rather than exploring the extreme circumstances of three different families as in They Were Sisters, Brief Encounter portrays just one. In Brief Encounter the family is constituted by the mother and father, Laura (Celia Johnson) and Fred (Cyril Raymond) Jesson, and their children, Bobbie (Richard Thomas) and Margaret (Henrietta Vintcent). The focal character is that of the mother. This is emphasised by the film’s unusual narrative structure. Laura tells the story, in a retrospective first-person voice-over. She recalls how her usual routine was thrown into question through a chance meeting and ensuing, but un consummated, affair with a doctor, Alec Harvey (Trevor Howard). The voice-over device permits an insight into Laura’s character, behaviour and emotions, which is not matched by similar perceptions of either her husband’s or lover’s motivations. By focusing upon Laura, the film privileges the mother as potentially capable of adultery and destroying the family unit. Through Laura’s perspective we see how her short-lived affair contrasts strongly with her habitual lifestyle and how Laura is excessively guilt-ridden by her actions. It is the push of guilt fostered by social judgement, rather than the pull of family life, which leads Laura to forego her affair and return to her husband and

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children. Social standards of morality triumph over Laura's own desire, suggesting at best an ambivalent attitude towards the family.

The family in *Brief Encounter* is settled and middle-class. There is a suburban family house in Ketchworth; two young and quite well-behaved children; and an evening routine, Laura listens to the Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No. 2 on the record player, while Fred does the crossword. The main theme, opposing domesticity with desire, is Laura's subjective story and is presented from her perspective. One evening, Laura returns from a day out, sits in the living room with Fred, and mentally recalls her affair from the past few weeks. The effect of Laura's telling of her story is reinforced by the accompaniment of Rachmaninov; music associated specifically with Laura and conveying the idea of an individual under the spell of uncontrollable emotions.49 Laura's memories indicate secrecy within the family. She calls to mind the things that she cannot tell her husband. Throughout the tale of her affair, Laura reflects upon and evaluates her actions. The stress is upon the boredom of her everyday routine, the excitement of her romance, and her overwhelming sense of guilt. Through Laura's reflections, *Brief Encounter* focuses on representing the problematic nature of motherhood. There is no indication that fatherhood contains similar conflicts. In terms of circumstance, Alec closely matches Laura. Alec, like Laura, is married with two children. However, the film does not represent any emotional turmoil in his role as a father. Alec's point of view is not shown or heard, he is always pictured apart from his family, and Alec is only a secondary character. Similarly Fred, Laura's husband, is a peripheral character, whose gentleness and ignorance of the affair underlines Laura's guilt, but does not identify any crisis in fatherhood itself.50

The subjective structure of *Brief Encounter* focuses on the mother's role above all others. Laura's predicament is the primary danger to the constitution of the nuclear family. Through her version of events, the distinction between personal desire and a mother's duty to her family is underlined. There is a strong contrast

50 Dyer notes how some of the confessional tone of Laura's recollections derives specifically from her telling of the story to Fred, her husband. See Dyer (1993) *Brief Encounter*, 25.
between the predictability of everyday routine associated with respectable middle-class family life and the excitement of an unexpected affair. On the one hand, family life is restricted: train schedules, objects (Laura buys Fred a three-dial barometer/clock) and dialogue (‘There’s no time at all’, says Alec) all point to a temporarily bounded life. Moreover, Laura spends most days at home and one day a week, always a Thursday, she always goes into the small town of Milford and does precisely the same things: she shops, borrow her books from Boots the library, and goes to the cinema. Even Laura’s cultural life consisting of fiction by Kate O’Brien, Keats’ poetry and Rachmaninov is in itself a romantic outlet within an otherwise uneventful life. On the other hand, during the affair Laura breaks out from the monotony. Thursdays are characterised by a new sense of fun and extravagance: with Alec, Laura sits in the expensive seats at the Palladium, goes boating in the Botanic Gardens, or lunches at the Royal Hotel.

The contrast between staid domesticity and the thrill of an extra-marital affair is forcibly brought home with the heavy symbolism at Milford Junction, a place with a dual meaning. The location itself is associated with both Laura’s initial Thursday routine and the break from it: she first bumps into Alec at the station buffet, thereafter they always meet in Milford and leave each other at the station. The different types of trains are key signifiers, suggesting either reliable constancy or sexual fervour. Roger Manvell in an outpouring of critical adulation, even described how the trains forge Milford station as a ‘poetic image’. The local trains are slow. Laura catches these trustworthy and unfailing vehicles home to her family. Then there are the high-speed trains. They never stop at Milford and are signs of fast-lived passion and sexuality. When Laura and Alec embrace they do so in the rush of smoke and under the sound of the whistle that these trains emit.

52 Laura’s subscription to a commercial library marks her middle-class way of life. During the inter-war period there were three forms of library in use: public libraries mainly used for educational needs by middle-class men; commercial fiction libraries, used predominantly by middle-class female customers; and ‘tuppeny libraries’ in working-class districts. See Steve Chibnall (1995) ‘Pulp Versus Penguins: Paperbacks Go to War’, in Pat Kirkham and David Thoms (eds.) *War Culture: Social Change and Changing Experience in World War Two Britain*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 132.
Although home-life is presented as habitual and an affair as more exhilarating, the two are not evaluated in clear-cut terms. A notion of middle-class morality underpins the film. As Laura recollects, her reflection on events is laden with guilt and fear. She experiences guilt about what she has done and the fear that she will be discovered and exposed. Her feelings of wrongdoing are rooted in her knowledge that she should be a responsible mother. Laura’s affair is at odds with the respectable ‘ordinary housewife’ image she has of herself. On one occasion, for instance, Laura returns from a day with Alec to discover that in her absence a car has knocked down her son Bobbie. A hurt child indicates Laura’s neglect of her familial commitments. Where was the child’s mother when this happened, why was she not looking after him? Bobbie is not seriously injured and the episode acts as an omen, forewarning of the damaging consequences of an affair. By using Laura’s own retrospective, the augur of doom is heavily implied. Laura explains how she felt about the matter. Akin to divine intervention, she tells how she regarded it as a ‘sort of punishment’ or ‘sinister warning’. As in *The Man in Grey*, a mother’s separation from her child infers maternal guilt. In *Brief Encounter*, the feelings of guilt are a specifically middle-class curse. Laura’s self-condemnation contrasts with the working class characters working at the station. In comparison, they are noticeably casual in their tea-room flirtations.

Laura’s guilt is interwoven with fear. Although she has some misgivings about her affair’s direct effect on her family, Laura mainly dreads being found out and her secret exposed. When Alec and Laura dine together in Milford, Laura is anxious because her friend spots them out together. Moreover, there is the significant moment when Laura, intending to consummate their affair, returns with Alec to the flat of Stephen Lynn (Valentine Dyall), his physician friend. Stephen returns unexpectedly and Laura flees in abject horror that she will be discovered. She leaves via the tradesman’s entrance (less respectable and less noticeable than the front door), feeling ‘humiliated, and defeated and so dreadfully, dreadfully ashamed’.

The force of social convention and a horror of ostracism prey heavily on Laura, more so than any personal code of morality. This is why Laura constantly
judges herself through the eyes of others. She ceaselessly wonders what people might think of her improper behaviour. Laura questions whether others would empathise or understand, and the answer is a resounding no. She is unable to confide in friends or acquaintances. Laura asks her friend, Mary Norton (Maijorie Mars), to cover for a secret liaison, but does not explain the real reason why, and although Laura desperately wants to talk, she feels unable to tell the gossiping Dolly Messiter (Everley Gregg) of her troubles and her heart-break. Ironically, the only person who Laura thinks possesses the qualities of wisdom and gentleness necessary to understand is her husband, Fred.

Indeed, Laura's sensitivity to the power of social sanction is so strong that it starts to colour nearly every encounter. In a key instance the unofficial, conventional moral judgements of society appear to metamorphose onto another, more formal, plane. After Laura has fled from Stephen's flat (her lowest moral ebb), she walks until she finds the war memorial and sits and smokes until a policeman walks by. Laura rests by the town's war memorial, a symbol of self-sacrifice and duty, and her act of smoking in public to 'calm her nerves' reveals how shaken she is by shame. The policeman simply stops and asks if Laura is all right. Laura interprets his concern as tantamount to a cross-examination. Social sanctions become invested with the power of law and authority as Laura recalls how she 'felt like a criminal' at the time. The scene visually reinforces Laura's audible version of events: the memorial towers imposingly above as Laura sits feeling condemned.55

Above all else, social condemnation is what persuades Laura to relinquish her affair and return to her family. She is convinced that 'decency' matters. Laura is aided in her decision by Alec's departure for a new job in Johannesburg. The decision to be a dutiful mother is not an easy one. Instead, Laura's return to her family is almost tragic. At the station, having said her final goodbye to Alec, Laura contemplates jumping under an oncoming train. She does not commit suicide, but returns to the tearoom, slightly shaken. Laura's inability to act is not marked as a renewed desire for her family life. Rather, Laura recounts how she would like to

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55 Richard Dyer interprets this image as 'the full weight of patriarchal disapproval'. See Dyer (1993) Brief Encounter, 28.
think that Fred and the kids stopped her, but that they were not the reason. Laura is a person divided. There is a conflict between what she knows she ought to think and do (in the eyes of society and for her family’s well being), and what she personally wants. In the end, the dutiful ‘ought’ triumphs, but only just. The family is an unwelcome maternal responsibility.

_Brief Encounter_ opposes boring domesticity and an exciting affair from a mother’s point of view. The theme is similar to that of _Madonna of the Seven Moons_. However, _Madonna of the Seven Moons’_ Italian and ‘gypsy’ exoticism allowed for both the implied consummation of the mother’s affair and a more tragic ending. _Brief Encounter_ with a less distanced setting posits a more sanitised version of adulterous behaviour. As with those other films dealing with the ‘secrets and lies’ in nuclear families in 1930s or 1940s English settings ( _They Were Sisters_; the final frame of _The Man in Grey_; and _It Always Rains On Sunday_, discussed below) there is an attempt to resolve the problems at the heart of the family. In _Brief Encounter_ the mother figure is re-incorporated into the domestic sphere: Laura returns home. Nevertheless, there remains a lingering sense of ambivalence about the benefits of family life, not least from a female point of view.56 Throughout the film Laura is restricted by what she feels she ought to be doing as a proper mother. The narration gives Laura a voice, but one that only exists inside her head and one that silences her in a world of conventional morality.57 Laura suppresses her own desires, and returns to her family because socially she feels she has to and not because of her own ‘free’ will. The conflict between boredom and passionate excitement is presented in one more popular film from the 1940s, _It Always Rains On Sunday_. Again, the mother is the main threat to the nuclear family. However, released late in 1947 and using a ‘realistic’ post-war setting, _It Always Rains On Sunday_ shows the family as a struggling rather than

56 An overlapping ‘sub-cultural’ reading that has gained currency relates to the sexuality of _Brief Encounter_’s producer and scenarist, Noel Coward. Namely, that Coward’s own pessimism, fear and furtiveness about experiencing a fulfilled sexual relationship in an oppressively homophobic culture may have been transposed onto a heterosexual context. For a discussion of this perspective see Andy Medhurst (1991) ‘Brief Encounter: Homosexuality and Authorship’, _Screen_ 32, 2: 198. However, Coward’s own stage-play upon which the film was based undermines the notion of a direct connection between authorship and representation. In _Still Life_, the characters are definitely adulterous, suggesting that _Brief Encounter_’s repression is related as much to the circumstances of 1940s British cinema production and exhibition as to Coward’s own personal input.

57 See Landy (1991) _British Genres_, 228.
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contented unit. Also, rather than focusing on middle-class guilt in the face of social
discrimination (as in Brief Encounter) It Always Rains On Sunday projects a more down­
beat image of society at large.

It Always Rains On Sunday (Robert Hamer, November 1947)

Unlike the films discussed so far, It Always Rains On Sunday does not address
social concerns about the nuclear family at a ‘safe’ distance. It is ‘realistic’ and set in
contemporary post-war Britain, rather than a historical period or a different country. It Always Rains On Sunday presents a nuclear family that is only just surviving, both
economically and emotionally. Again there is the recurring theme of a mother’s
adultery and the secrets she keeps from other family members. In this instance, the
mother’s allegiances are split between her escaped criminal lover, Tommy Swann
(John McCallum), and her family. However, there is no over-riding sense of a guilt­
ridden social conscience. Whereas Laura Jesson (Brief Encounter) judges her actions
through the eyes of middle-class society, in It Always Rains on Sunday, society itself
is found wanting. It is a world ridden with deceit and criminality. Overall there is a
negative view of the family and of society, but the film finishes on a note of
conservative morality. The force of law triumphs and the mother suffers for her
immoral behaviour.

It Always Rains On Sunday was intended to be ‘realistic’. It is a forerunner
of the kitchen-sink school of British film-making which was released to critical
approval during the late 1950s and early 1960s. This tradition of realist aesthetic uses
black and white photography, urban or industrial settings, gritty dialogue and location
shooting. In terms of the nuclear family, It Always Rains On Sunday focuses upon the
household of the Sandigates. Opening with location filming of the rainy streets of
London, the film firmly situates the Sandigate family within the east-end. In
particular, the filmmakers tried to recreate the ‘authentic’ atmosphere of Bethnal
Green, not only in place but also in character. For the dance-hall sequence, care was
taken to ensure a mix of ‘representative’ east-enders appeared. Types were sought

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58 It adhered to Michael Balcon’s production philosophy of presenting an ‘authentic’ way of life and
environment. See John W. Collier (1947) A Film in the Making [It Always Rains On Sunday], London:
World Film Publications, 53.
According to a detailed 'wanted' list that included '19 average shop-girls from the East End' and '20 smart, spiv-type boys in rather flashy lounge suits'. Dialogue was also considered a chief component of the things that made the film British and truthful. For example, there was a desire to maintain 'authentic speech' (Cockney rhyming slang and swearing) throughout the script changes necessary for the American censor.

For *It Always Rains on Sunday*, 'realism' defines a style associated with post-war devastation and disillusionment. The name of the film itself smacks of dreary, defeatist predictability. Even the truncated church signifies an 'iconography of urban destruction'. There are three important observations about the negative portrayal of 'reality' in a post-war setting. First, there is the question of *It Always Rains On a Sunday*'s moment of production and release. The film released at the end of 1947, and a similarly pronounced 'non-ideal' perspective on the nuclear family is not characteristic of the films earlier in the decade which share a recognisably 20th-century British setting (*The First of the Few* and *The Way to the Stars*, for example). Prior to 1947, the popular films rehearsing family anxieties distanced themselves from present day England. Second, the picture of socially and economically struggling family life is a working-class 'reality'. Although the film deals with negativity in a contemporary setting, it does not directly address the experiences of all social classes. Third, the ideas of family and social pessimism relate to more general concerns about rising crime rates during the post-war period.

In *It Always Rains on Sunday* the nuclear family is presented as barely surviving within a crime-ridden world. The film's focal family comprises Rose (Googie Withers) and George (Edward Chapman), and three children, Vi (Susan Shaw) and Doris (Patricia Plunkett), who are Rose's step-daughters, and Alfie (David Lines). They are working-class and portrayed as subject to post-war austerity. The

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59 'Ealing Studios Information', microjacket for *It Always Rains On Sunday*, BFI library.
60 Collier (1947) *A Film in the Making*, 14-16.
62 Vi and Doris form the conventional contrast between the domestic 'good' girl and the desiring 'bad' girl similar to the female characters of *Love Story*, *The Wicked Lady*, *The Man in Grey*, *Madonna of the Seven Moons* and *This Happy Breed* (1944).
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Sandigates, unlike the characters of the films discussed above, do not exist in an economic vacuum. *It Always Rains On Sunday* is unusual in portraying some of the 'realistic' details of family hardship. There is evidence of rationing (Doris is sent to get the cheese ration); the step-daughters share a bed and they both work; and Alfie, the youngest child, has not got enough pocket money for a mouth organ. Although there is not an economic vacuum, there is a moral vacuum. The Sandigates exist within a multicultural working-class world of petty crime and immorality where there are cheating husbands; rigged boxing matches; stolen roller-skates; and people signing into disreputable boarding houses under the pseudonyms of 'Smith' or 'Jones'. One Bethnal Green resident even lodged an official complaint about the unremittingly bleak portrayal of London's east-end.63 An unlawful society is matched by family disorder, especially when Tommy Swann, both Rose's former lover and an emblem of the criminal underworld, crosses over the family threshold. As Tommy makes his way to the Sandigates, his impending encroachment on family life is marked through a suspenseful series of cuts to ever-closer shots of the Sandigates' house and street.

There is personal as well as financial friction within the family. The personality clashes are clearly distinguished: the step-mother is short-tempered, the father is decent and the children are fractious. Rose is a main cause of the unhappy family atmosphere. Rose's marriage to George establishes the look of an outwardly 'normal' family. However, her status as a step-mother (rather than 'mother') adds to the ill-feeling between herself and her adopted daughters. Vi dislikes calling her 'mum'. Rose is uncommunicative and argumentative, not least because she is anxious that Tommy Swann will be discovered. By harbouring an escaped convict in the home, Rose is responsible for aggravating family discord. The most noticeable tension is between Rose and her eldest step-daughter, Vi. The 'good-time' girl, Vi, is vain, self-centred and amoral: she paints her nails, has aspirations to be a singer, and is having an affair with Morry (Sidney Tafler), a married man and small-time black-marketeer. Vi, with her criminal associations, is an embodiment of Rose's younger self. In one scene, Rose and Vi physically fight when Vi cannot get into the locked

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63 Time Out 19/2/1992, microjacket for *It Always Rains On Sunday.*
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bedroom (where Tommy is in hiding) to fetch her hand-mirror. Unlike Rose, George is a sympathetic figure of moral authority. He tells Vi off for coming home drunk at 3am, and is concerned that Alfie may have stolen his newly acquired mouth organ. The children, who bicker, argue and brood, emphasise strains within the household. In this they differ from films where ‘innocent’ children are symbolic of the future, as in *The First of the Few* and *The Way to the Stars*, or of maternal guilt, as in *The Man in Grey* and *Brief Encounter*. Here, Vi and Doris are step-daughters, part of the package of Rose’s marriage to an older man who has treated her well. Rose, however, does not behave in kind. Instead she is an erring mother: not only is she bad-tempered, but she is also a liar and an adulterer.

As well as depicting familiar family problems (rationing, bickering and so forth), *It Always Rains on a Sunday* also deals with broader themes relating to social values and depicting the mother as a role in crisis. Secrets and lies within the discontented family context are underlined. In particular, Rose keeps a secret from the rest of her family. With her old flame, Tommy Swann, on the run from the police, Rose is determined to safeguard him without her husband and children’s knowledge. The thematic centrality of deception is indicated by the press campaign. Secrecy in a recognisably ‘realistic’ setting provided the keynote of the film’s publicity. ‘The secrets of a street you know’ was the recurring slogan on posters and in press advertisements. Moreover, the production company’s press release highlighted the mother’s major role in the violation of family loyalty. Information from Ealing Studios conveyed the slant of *It Always Rains on Sunday* towards female treachery: ‘the wife tries to hide her former fiancé not only from the outside world but from her own family.’

In *It Always Rains On Sunday* there is a familiar opposition between motherhood and desire; in this instance, the choice is between a decent man and a criminal. Rose explains to Tommy that she married George because ‘he was good to me’, but that she is hiding Tommy because she still loves him. Through an early flashback, we see Rose’s perspective on her old love affair. Gazing into the mirror

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64 My emphasis. ‘Ealing Studios Information’, microjacket for *It Always Rains On Sunday*.
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Rose remembers her courtship with Tommy Swann. In flashback, Tommy’s image is linked with pre-war happiness and carefree days; the things Rose lacks in family life. Rose herself appears as a peroxided and cheerful barmaid, whereas in the present she is dark-haired, drably dressed and with her face contorted into a permanent scowl. Tommy is a young spiv, smartly dressed in a pin-stripe suit with wide lapels, quite unlike Rose’s much older husband. When Tommy proposes marriage they lie together in the sunny countryside, the inverse of the shadowy home and rainy Sunday. In Rose’s memory, the affair with Tommy is very different from her stultifying and financially stricken postwar existence. It is these fond memories and Rose’s unexpectedly renewed desire which explain her motivation for harbouring Tommy on his escape from prison. Not only does she offer Tommy food and a place to rest (her husband’s bed), but Rose offers him herself. After Tommy dresses to leave, Rose throws her arms around his neck in a parting embrace, her wedding ring glinting significantly. Rose deviates from married respectability, but the film ultimately privileges a conservative resolution.

At a time when both criminality and the nature of motherhood were areas of concern, in the final instance It Always Rains On Sunday attempts to diffuse some of its tidings of social malaise. The social and moral orders are reasserted with the triumph of both law and maternal instinct. Tommy’s escape is thwarted. In a clear departure from the original novel, in which Tommy was to be hanged for a crime he did not commit, the film of It Always Rains On Sunday ends with the guilty man’s arrest. The interplay between film representation and widespread social concerns facilitated a ‘Help the police’ promotional campaign. Exhibitors were encouraged to draw interest in the film by emphasising the following:

In these difficult times of shortage, shady characters and black marketeers are more in evidence than ever. The police rely a great deal on the resourcefulness of the public [...] and this film ably demonstrates how they usually get their man in the end.

As part of the same moral thrust, Rose’s memories of Tommy are unveiled as heavily romanticised. Tommy, for example, can not remember giving Rose the engagement

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65 Collier (1947) A Film in the Making, 10.
66 Press book for It Always Rains on Sunday, BFI library.
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ring which she holds dear, and when cornered Tommy hits Rose without hesitation. Moreover, Rose suffers moral penance. Following Tommy's departure, Rose tries to gas herself, but ends up in hospital. The suicide attempt is the initial indication that Rose might feel remorse. On George's hospital visit, Rose's proper place within the family is both confirmed and assured. George fosters no resentment and Rose expresses maternal concern for the first time: Rose asks after Alfie worried that she, 'left him by himself [when] he was frightened'. The ending is conservative, reasserting the primacy of social order and the family, but not especially positive. Rose remains in hospital as the final shots show George walking home alone in the rain.

5.4 Summary

In spite of a range of official cultural discourses privileging the model of the nuclear family in the 1940s, an analysis of films from my sample indicates that popular British cinema did not constitute the nuclear family as an unproblematic ideal. This observation is in keeping with the idea that although films are a product of their time, they interact with society and social concerns without reflecting them in a straightforward way.

While those films made using a patriotic wartime frame of reference endorsed the ideal of the family, they did so in a tentative way. Both *The First of the Few* and *The Way to the Stars* emphasised that the nuclear family was a short-lived ideal; a structure threatened as a result of the war and the place of fathers within the war effort. Father figures were represented as making sacrifices for the war and women were ultimately projected as deferring to their husbands' choices. As a result, paternal role models sacrificed themselves (the upstanding characters R. J. Mitchell, David Archdale, and Johnny Hollis all die) throwing the stability of the family into question. A sense of hope was relayed through the use of children as emblems for the future. In each case children, usually a young son, indicated that a future generation of men will grow up, untainted by the hardships and evils of war.

Those films without such an overtly patriotic emphasis, usually from the mid and later forties, presented a more pessimistic view of the family. Instead of fathers
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throwing the family into disarray, mother figures were personally responsible for family tensions. In each case women were shown as potential or actual adulterers, a moral (rather than national) threat to the family unit. At a time when concerns circulated around the position of women in society (see Chapter 3), these films rehearsed contemporary anxieties about the nature of motherhood. Films with distant settings were the most extreme in outlook. *Madonna of the Seven Moons* was particularly exotic and ended with the death of the erring mother, Maddalena. The Regency narrative of *The Man in Grey* also resulted in the death of the trapped mother figure, Clarissa. Alternatively, those films that were nearer to home aimed to resolve the problematic nature of motherhood. In its modern frame, *The Man in Grey* presented a more classless society where women might not be entrapped by inauspicious familial circumstances. In *They Were Sisters* the ideal partners finally adopted children to form a nuclear family. Both *Brief Encounter* and *It Always Rains on Sunday* ended on the reassimilation of the mother into the family home.

In spite of the conservative endings, there was an entrenched ambivalence and pessimism towards the nuclear family. The resolution of *The Man in Grey* was still tainted by wartime uncertainty; the ending of *They Were Sisters* sat uneasily with the domestic problems throughout its narrative; social sanctions forced Laura home in *Brief Encounter*; and the family Rose will return to in *It Always Rains on Sunday* was anything but a happy, financially secure ideal.
CHAPTER 6: EXTENDED FAMILIES

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 has shown how notions of the nuclear family 'ideal' in popular British films from my sample were primarily articulated in one of two ways: either as a transient phenomenon in self-consciously patriotic films; or restricted to the conservative narrative closures of films with a more pessimistic perspective on family life. This chapter examines how three films focusing on the extended family form, *This Happy Breed* (1944), *Frieda* (1947), and *Madness of the Heart* (1949) depart from those centralising nuclear families. In particular, the portrayal of extended families in films from my sample does not possess an emphasis upon the mother within the family as a role in crisis.

The extended family can be defined through its contrast with the nuclear family, as previously discussed in Chapter 5. Whereas nuclear families consist of parents and their children, extended families quite literally 'expand' upon this kinship pattern. Extended families contain kin in excess of the nuclear family, either elaborating upon it 'vertically' (grandparents, for example) or 'horizontally' (aunts, cousins and so forth). On those occasions where an extended network of kin, beyond that of parents and their children, is represented in film as the locus of family support and strife, family dynamics introduce more relationships (sometimes interlaced with a greater degree of narrative complexity). This chapter analyses those popular feature films that focus upon extended families in which the family members live together in a single household. Therefore a film, such as *It Always Rains On Sunday* (1947), in which the central family is a nuclear unit (the Sandigates), but where there is also a narrative backdrop of extended kin ties and support networks woven throughout the wider community (the Hymes family), is not one of the case studies below.

During the 1940s, extended and nuclear families were treated differently by the state, and occupied differing positions within society and social perceptions. As outlined in Chapter 3, official sanctions governing wartime evacuation, the female workforce and the introduction of family allowances targeted nuclear, not extended,
families. Indeed, establishment views in general were anxious about the state of the nuclear family, but continued to stress its importance as a norm or ideal. Alternatively, people’s contemporary accounts frequently emphasised the practical necessity of support, both financial and social, from a wide range of family members. For many, war and post-war social changes, reinforced how the sanctioned idea of the nuclear family seldom matched their own experiences of social ‘reality’. Whilst inauspicious circumstances (evacuation and the loss of human life) separated ‘ideal’ nuclear families, other conditions (most notably an acute housing shortage) led to inevitable compromises, often pushing the nuclear family ideal still further out of reach. Although married couples usually desired a ‘place of their own’, economic constraints frequently required several family members to live together. However, as Leonora Pitt who married during the Second World War found, the practical advantages of the extended family environment were sometimes outweighed by the relatives’ personality clashes:

We lived in the front room of my mother-in-law’s house. We all ate together. From the beginning it became clear to me that she disliked me. [...] She told me the marriage wouldn’t last and Tom would soon find out his mistake. From that day on my life was hell.¹

Thus the extended family was a reality (often borne of necessity) for many, yet official discourses and personal accounts repeatedly validated the nuclear family as a more aspirational model of living.

Given that 1940s films operated within a wider context of anxiety about the nuclear family and that popular entertainment films often intersected with contemporary social concerns, there were but a few films that focused upon extended families. Moreover of those films that did, all omitted any ‘ideal’ model of the extended family. Two of the three films discussed employ the motif of extended families to address ‘typical’ English life (This Happy Breed and Frieda). In contrast to the temporary and restrictive nature of nuclear families seen in Chapter 5, This Happy Breed and Frieda both depict extended families as intrinsically adaptable over

time rather than overwhelmingly inflexible.\(^2\) Whereas Chapter 5 demonstrated that mothers within nuclear families were often a source of narrative tension, this narrative theme is not found in the three films foregrounding extended families. Instead, both *Frieda* and *Madness of the Heart* portray extended families as potentially hostile environments for female newcomers. The two main themes of the ‘extended family films’, typicality and hostility, are analysed in greater detail below.

6.2 ‘Typical’ British Families

Two films, *This Happy Breed* and *Frieda*, use the extended family to consciously project an image of a ‘typical’ English home. Moreover, they aim to typify more than just the family or home, but also the nation itself. In both films there are intentional links drawn between the extended family and the nation. This patriotic address is different from the relationship depicted between the nation and idealised nuclear families. In films such as *The First of the Few* (1942) and *The Way to the Stars* (1945) nuclear families represent ideals which have to be sacrificed for a greater national good, whereas in both *This Happy Breed* and *Frieda* extended families are a more explicit and direct embodiment of the nation and national spirit.

Extended families are used to typify the nation, in a way that is not apparent in any of the nuclear family films. As discussed in Chapter 5, films foregrounding the nuclear family, such as *Madonna of the Seven Moons* (1944) or *The Man in Grey* (1943), sometimes explored maternal and familial anxieties at a distance. Alternatively, and again elaborated upon in Chapter 5, where nuclear family films possessed more immediacy in their settings, they emphasised ordinariness over and above serving as characteristic examples of national experiences. Hence Laura in *Brief Encounter* (1945) is an ‘ordinary’ housewife at the centre of family life until her affair calls that very ordinariness, let alone any wider representative status, into question. Similarly, although the nuclear family household in *It Always Rains on Sunday* is framed as realistic and recognisable, it never actively articulates typical experiences of national resonance. Nuclear families in film either set the family and nation in opposition with each other (something most explicitly recognised through

\(^2\) With the nuclear families in ‘5.3 Secrets and Lies’, either the mother died or had to (re)adapt to domestic life, the family itself did not accommodate change.
Mitchell’s life and death choice in *The First of the Few*) and/or rehearse social anxieties. In these respects they differ from those extended families in film that suggest more of a continuum between family and national life.

**This Happy Breed (David Lean, May 1944)**

*This Happy Breed* is an episodic film about the ‘everyday’ life cycle of an extended family household, living in Clapham between the wars. The Gibbons family consists of the ‘basic’ unit of mother and father, Frank (Robert Newton) and Ethel (Celia Johnson), and their three children, Reg (John Blythe), Queenie (Kay Walsh) and Vi (Eileen Erskine). In addition there are two more characters: Aunt Syl (Alison Leggatt), Frank’s sister; and Mrs Flint (Amy Veness), Ethel’s mother. In *This Happy Breed* the extended family is intrinsic to an overall message underlining that the ‘national’ family goes on; it endures over time, accommodating and overcoming change and difficulty. Several narrative elements constitute this patriotic articulation of the extended family. From the title to its use of realistic detail, the film suggests both the typical nature of the family household and links it with the nation. A mode of cyclical time, interweaving familial and national events, further emphasises the extended family as an embodiment of the nation, while simultaneously indicating continuity and cohesion rather than rupture. However, in spite of its close association with the nation, the extended family in *This Happy Breed* cannot be viewed as an ideal. The family characters are coping, managing and surviving, and the emphasis is upon endurance rather than any aspirational goal.

The national address of *This Happy Breed* is apparent from the outset. The title itself is a self-conscious assertion that although the film is at one level about a family, it is also intended to represent more than an isolated instance of family life. The film’s ‘heritage’ title is taken from John of Gaunt’s ‘This England’ in *Richard II*, and has been recognised as perhaps the most quoted Shakespearean speech of World War Two.\(^3\) The title possesses connotations of reproduction and nurturing. It indicates that the subject matter of the Gibbons family is part of a more general

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‘breed’. As one critic enthusiastically noted, there is a national symbolism found in the words ‘This Happy Breed’ that would be absent from a film calling itself, ‘17, Sycamore Road’.\(^4\) There is a metonymic identification of the family house with the nation.\(^5\) The national symbolism is reinforced via the film’s opening shots and accompanying narration. At the beginning of the film the Gibbonses move into their house, while a male voice-over by Laurence Olivier accords their actions a degree of far-reaching applicability. The Gibbonses are not the only family re-establishing a home, instead, with the shot that pans down across identical rows of terraced houses, there is an emphasis upon a breed’s multiplication. The narrator audibly confirms the visual juxtapositions. ‘Hundreds and hundreds of houses are becoming homes once more’, he announces. The sentence uses the emotive terminology of ‘home’ to articulate national belonging and, for audiences in 1944, it would have prefigured the end of war in 1945.

The Gibbons’ family home acts as a key signifier of shared national experience. Indeed, the house’s narrative centrality featured in This Happy Breed’s publicity. The house, rather than any individual protagonist, was deemed, ‘the heroine of this new story’.\(^6\) Externally marked as one of many, the house is also intended to be average internally. Located in Clapham, the house is unlike the nuclear family homes discussed in Chapter 5: it possesses neither the luxurious splendours of houses in The Man in Grey and Madonna of the Seven Moons; nor the middle-class comfort of those in The First of the Few and Brief Encounter, or Lucy and William’s home in They Were Sisters (1945). The home in This Happy Breed, with its emphasis upon working-class ‘realism’, is closest to that depicted in It Always Rains on Sunday, but in spite of superficial similarities there are important differences between the two films. Realism for This Happy Breed meant showing in detail the ordinary wear and tear of family life, including such minutiae as fading wallpaper and a greasemark by the door.\(^7\) Colour film was used, but with the aim of avoiding the garish look often associated with the type of Technicolor already popularised by the American musicals.

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\(^4\) C. A. Lejeune (1944) *The Observer*, microjacket for *This Happy Breed*, BFI library.
\(^6\) ‘Publicity’, microjacket for *This Happy Breed*.
\(^7\) Richard Winnington (1944) *News Chronicle* 27/5/1944, microjacket for *This Happy Breed*. 166
of the 1930s. *This Happy Breed* was filmed using muted tones, and its colour 'realism' differs from the black and white *It Always Rains On Sunday*. *This Happy Breed*’s subdued Technicolor (as distinct from that found in ‘low-cultural’ films) can be attributed to the film’s propaganda imperative, ‘demonstrating a sense of mission, confidence and prestige’.8 Whilst *This Happy Breed* attempts to reproduce the ‘authenticity’ of family life as part of a typical ‘timeless’ national experience, *It Always Rains on Sunday* associates it with the specifics of London post-war devastation and disillusionment.

The use of time in *This Happy Breed* is of overwhelming importance. In place of the structure of suspense conventionally fostered by the actions of a primary character, a model of cyclical time lends cohesion to a more disparate narrative. There are several plots and the text is largely episodic, circular and repetitive.9 *This Happy Breed* is a film without a traditional ‘hero’ to instigate narrative action. Instead, several family characters are part of a saga which spans a twenty-year period (1919-1939) and a cyclical construction of time emphasises continuities between the extended family and the national family. Successes and failures are attributable to a sense of shared consciousness, rather than individual behaviour. In the film there is a model of time based on conceptions of family reproduction and continuity. Following the original construction of a cyclical view of time in history, *This Happy Breed* associates time with the unchanging character of the physical universe.10 Through interweaving national events with the cycle of family life, political and social upheavals are ‘domesticated’: the legacy of the First World War, for example, becomes a tour of the battlefields offered by Frank. Disruptions, both national and familial, are presented (as we shall see below) as short-term events, part of the inevitable ups and downs of life.

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10 Prior to the 19th century impact of the concept of evolution, astronomy did not indicate any evidence of trend. Celestial motions appeared to be the same whether they were read forwards or backwards, and the future was regarded as a repetition of the past. Consequently, primary emphasis was placed upon the cyclical aspects of time. See G. J. Whitrow (1989) *Time in History: Views of Time from Prehistory to the Present Day*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 185.
The motif of the extended family is essential in suggesting conservatism rather than change. As in *Brief Encounter*, the family is associated with temporal repetition. However, unlike *Brief Encounter* where time demarcates the personal (especially the maternal) restrictions of the nuclear family, time is mobilised in *This Happy Breed* to indicate more general patterns of human existence. Taken as a whole, the narrative structure of *This Happy Breed* forms a full circle, centred on the home. Beginning with the arrival of the Gibbonses at their house, it ends with the vacation of their property. In the final shot, Ethel and Frank Gibbons walk out of the front door with their grandchild, little Frankie. The child's name emphasises family continuity over generations. More importantly, the way in which the final shot varies from more traditional narrative closures is significant: as the camera pans out across the rooftops (the reverse of the original shot), it becomes indicative of renewal and a repeated cycle of life where all ruptures are healed.

During the course of the film, family life is persistently emphasised as adaptable, something which accommodates change into a stable equilibrium. Set outside the war period, *This Happy Breed* is able to represent the family as a secure cornerstone of peacetime society. In *This Happy Breed* the parents are constants, in that they indicate stability and continuity, whereas the children suggest how deviations from family norms are reincorporated, they are players whose actions are caught in a perpetual cycle.

As signifiers of steadiness, neither Ethel nor Frank is a source of narrative disruption. Ethel is permanently located within the home, whereas Frank reliably holds a job as a travel agent. Unlike the films discussed above in section 5.3, the mother's role is not called into question. There is no question of a mother's (potential) adultery, nor is there a tension between the routine of domesticity and the thrill of the outside world. As noted by Antonia Lant, *This Happy Breed* (by being set between the wars and referring to World War One) manages to avoid the effects that

11 See discussion of *Brief Encounter*, Chapter 5.
12 The long-sweep of continuity is particularly apparent because the child is named after his grandfather, Frank, rather than (as might be expected) after his own father, Billy.
the absence of women from the house has on the concept of ‘home’.\textsuperscript{14} Ethel, unlike the erring mother figures of The Man in Grey, Madness of the Heart, They Were Sisters, Brief Encounter and It Always Rains on Sunday is primarily a moral figure. It is, for example, Ethel who finds it hardest to accept her daughter’s affair with a married man.

In comparison, Frank’s character is less moral: in a fatherly talk on Reg’s wedding day, for example, Frank implies that adultery is all right as long as Reg always puts his wife first. Frank functions as a rational (not moral) constant, promoting a metaphorical, philosophical and political vision of conservatism and continuity. His pronouncement on the British as a ‘nation of gardeners’ uses a traditional metaphor emphasising the slow but sure processes of nurturing and growth.\textsuperscript{15} The nation is nostalgically presented as the ‘urban pastoral’: it is like ‘an extended family, organic, self-sufficient, knowable unto itself – even in the context of a massively urbanized and heavily populated environment’.\textsuperscript{16} Moreover, Frank’s utterances are invested with wisdom and authority. His recognition that the passing of time heals wounds and mellows views is invariably confirmed by narrative events, not least those involving Queenie and Reg. In This Happy Breed these children depart from the ‘moral’ family values vocalised by Ethel. However, the departures are temporary and presented as transient ‘phases’ in the rite-of-passage between childhood and responsible adulthood. Queenie absconds with a married man, but eventually returns to marry Billy (John Mills), the boy next door. In the flush of youth, Reg is an extreme communist, but his views are tempered with time and he is the first of the three children to settle down into married life.\textsuperscript{17} Marriage, home and family effectively occupy a political role by deploying the working class in defence of the status quo.\textsuperscript{18} The extended family of This Happy Breed, with Ethel and Frank at its helm, proves remarkably conservative.

\textsuperscript{15} Gardening is a traditional metaphor in English literature representing the maintenance of social order. See Marcia Landy (1996) Film, Politics and Gramsci, Minneapolis, London: University of Minneapolis Press, 120.
\textsuperscript{17} Landy explains how Reg is an index of the film’s attempt to water down political ideas. See Landy (1991) British Genres, 299.
\textsuperscript{18} See Aldgate and Richards (1994) Britain Can Take It, 211.
The negotiation of 'family time' in *This Happy Breed* is not only cyclical, but also interwoven with key events of national importance: such as the return of soldiers from the First World War; the Victory Parade; and the Munich Appeasement. The introduction of an explicit political dimension in a popular British feature film was an unusual phenomenon. It acts to combine the political and the personal. The disruptions of national events are, through their association with the familial, naturalised as part of a cyclical model of social change emphasising the conservatism and survival of the British people. As with many national narratives, the family is a means of figuring often violent, historical change as natural, organic time.\(^\text{19}\) There is not, as Andrew Higson and Marcia Landy have independently argued, a marked tension between the public and private.\(^\text{20}\) National and familial events do differ in editing, content and music; but they do not exist solely in opposition. As noted by Higson, the historical ‘spectacle’ of the public arena, unlike the ‘discourse’ of the episodic everyday drama, often lacks dialogue and is accompanied with harp music.\(^\text{21}\) However, in spite of these distinctions, both the film text itself and its accompanying publicity self-consciously link, rather than just separate or oppose, ‘ordinary’ people and the arena of politics. The images of national events are integrated into familial imagery in a manner indicative of national belonging. The national and familial fusion is most apparent when family members listen to the radio or see newspaper headlines announcing moments of national crisis.\(^\text{22}\) Both media allowed people to imagine (or create) a shared experience of identification with an extended community.\(^\text{23}\) Moreover, publicity addressed how the British spirit of endurance in *This Happy Breed* articulated a continuity between national events and ordinary kinds


\(^{20}\) Higson states that *This Happy Breed* separates ‘Politics’ and ‘History’ as concrete manifestations quite separate from the private world of the family. See Higson (1984) 'Five Films', 25; and Higson (1995) *Waving the Flag*, 263. Landy argues that there is a tension between the public and the private in *This Happy Breed*. See Landy (1991) *British Genres*, 299.


\(^{23}\) Benedict Anderson has argued that even members of the smallest nation never know or meet most of their fellow members, yet imagine their communion through mass rituals such as the everyday consumption of the newspaper. See Benedict Anderson (1991) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2nd edition, 1st published 1983), London: Verso, 6, 35-36.
of people, 'their kind survive Wars, Zeppelins, Heinkels, The Kaiser, Strikes, Political Upheavals, Despairs, Jubilations – the same as YOU'. This Happy Breed's overarching framework of cyclical time acts to contain and manage any uncertainty engendered by national events.

Through its use of a circular time structure punctuated with widely recognisable events, the extended family in This Happy Breed is more about symbolising general continuities over time, rather than the specifics of family ideals or family morals within the context of changing social circumstances and values. The extended family includes ‘ordinary’ 1940s character ‘types’ that occur elsewhere in British cinema. There is Ethel, the mother centrally located in the home (reminiscent of mothers in The First of the Few and In Which We Serve, 1942); the reliable father, Frank (akin to George Sandigate in It Always Rains on Sunday or Fred in Brief Encounter); the good-time girl, Queenie (like Vi in It Always Rains on Sunday); and the moaning aunt, Sylvia (similar to Iris’ aunt in The Way to the Stars). However, none of these types is awarded narrative primacy, something that would be an indication of a certain area of social concern (as with the centrality of the mother in many of the nuclear family films, for example). Nor do the types within the family combine to form an ‘ideal’ model. Instead, the emphasis is upon the family members coping with unfavourable situations. The extended family household is itself an unwelcome nuisance. Mrs Flint and Aunt Syl are living at number 17 out of necessity. In particular, Aunt Syl’s husband died during the war. She lives at 17 Sycamore Road because her own chances of motherhood and a family have been thwarted. Syl and Mrs Flint’s evident displeasure with life is underlined through their ceaseless bickering. Indeed, the difficulties presented within the extended family were pronounced enough to have provoked the question of whether Noël Coward’s choice of title for a film with ‘much breeding but precious little happiness’ was intended as a ‘cruel irony’.

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24 'Publicity', microjacket for This Happy Breed, BFI library.
25 Frustrated motherhood is also the narrative explanation for Syl’s neuroses, such as hypochondria and an obsessive allegiance to a spiritual cult. Hysteria, as in Madonna of the Seven Moons, is coded as a feminine response to family circumstances. As we shall see in Chapter 7, hysteria and madness is also associated with female, not male, children.
26 Edgar Anstey (1944) The Spectator, microjacket for This Happy Breed, BFI library.
Extended Families

As neatly summarised by Andrew Higson’s phrase ‘conservative populism’, *This Happy Breed* offers a conservative view of the ‘typical’ extended family as a means of both embodying the nation, and articulating national stability.\(^27\) Time, figured as a ‘natural’ process of nurture and regeneration, is central to the film’s patriotic perspective. The cycles of family life accommodate personal changes, thereafter reasserting the status quo. Political events do not threaten the equilibrium, but are integrated as part of this process. The family in *This Happy Breed* survives problems (family arguments and deaths) and articulates national belonging (the narrative integration of national events), rather than offers the unadulterated security of an isolated ideal. Another film suggesting the representative nature of the extended family is Ealing Studio’s *Frieda*. Like *This Happy Breed* before it, *Frieda* articulates a political message on a familial level. Both films use the extended family motif to indicate typical British experiences and both employ it as a manifestation of the nation. However, whereas *This Happy Breed* explicitly interlaces national and familial events to create a sense of continuity, *Frieda* implicitly connects the two in order to articulate and resolve a specific social and political problem.

*Frieda* (Basil Dearden, June 1947)

*Frieda*, like *This Happy Breed*, is, broadly speaking, a family melodrama.\(^28\) However, unlike the twenty year span of the latter, *Frieda* portrays the closing days and aftermath of the Second World War. In *Frieda*, as in *This Happy Breed*, there is a continuity (rather than opposition) between the family and the nation. Moreover, the extended family is centrally located in the narrative in order to explore and resolve the issue of how non-nazi Germans were to be treated in post-war British society. Individual family members all react with varying degrees of hospitality to the German nurse, Frieda. Each of their opinions broadly represents how people in British society might respond to a similar dilemma. During the exploration of this social problem,


\(^{28}\) It is also often defined as a ‘social problem’ film. Generic based film studies have tended to prioritise one over the other, although clearly there are aspects of both. Marcia Landy’s exhaustive account of British cinema genres treats *Frieda* as an exemplary post-war social problem film firmly located within a ‘sustained body’ of similar films directed by Basil Dearden. See Landy (1991) *British Genres*, 462. On the other hand, Terry Lovell emphasises that beneath the ‘surface’ of an Ealing social problem film, *Frieda* is predominantly a family melodrama. See Terry Lovell (1984) ‘Frieda’, in Geoff Hurd (ed.) *National Fictions: World War Two in British Films and Television*, London: BFI, 30-32.
family ties are invoked to emphasise both international bonding (Anglo-German) and national sameness (among Germans). However, the narrative trajectory simultaneously exposes aspects of the socially constructed nature of family relationships. It undermines the notion that kin related by ‘blood’ are necessarily alike, and that such kindred always provide the strongest source of individual affiliation.

The extended family in *Frieda* is the ‘typical’ family. There is a continuum from the family to nation, established from the outset. As in *This Happy Breed* the extended family is an embodiment of the British people and the family house is a metonym for the nation. Robert Dawson (David Farrar) initially articulates the representative nature of his family as he explains to Frieda (Mai Zetterling) the nature of Britain and Britishness. Dawson outlines a conservative vision of British nationality, easy-going and good-natured, founded upon the Southern English middle-classes. Notably, he proposes that Britain is a nation of families (not people or individuals). Denfield, he says, is an ‘ordinary’ English town, made up of families that are like his own and have lived there for many years. The Dawson family is thereby established as representative of a ‘national family’, something which the film’s ‘social problem’ dimension underlines as a narrative requisite.

*Frieda*’s plot revolves around what, in 1947, was a contentious issue: namely, how Germans and Germany should be treated after the end of World War Two. ‘Courageously presenting a great controversy of our time’, *Frieda* was unequivocally promoted as a topical post-war product.\(^{29}\) The film was part of a wider post-war expediency renouncing ‘Vansittartism’ in order to expel sentiments that might damage the prospects of new political alignments.\(^{30}\) Unlike *This Happy Breed* with its wartime address privileging heritage and continuity, *Frieda* deals with the changing circumstances of post-war society. *Frieda* does not project a national unity founded upon a depoliticised working-class family, instead it bypasses the issue of potentially problematic class allegiances by adopting a conservative middle-class

\(^{29}\) Poster slogan, press book for *Frieda*, BFI library.

family as a manifestation of national characteristics. As noted by Terry Lovell, the Dawsons are 'emblematically “English”', without the wartime emphasis (of films such as *Millions Like Us*, 1943) on the transcendence of internal differentiation to establish a common identity. By associating the Dawson family with the nation, *Frieda* evades any notion of Britain as a class-divided society in order to deal with an international question on a moral and familial level.

The German and British people are represented by the 'simplifications' of Frieda and the Dawsons respectively. The publicists saw the marketing potential of far-reaching political and international implications. There was a much touted recognition that the problem of Frieda’s future was also, ‘a problem, in a much more complex way, of the conquered country she has left’. Drawing analogies between Frieda and Germany, and the Dawson home and ‘your’ typical home (located within the Britain and the international community) posters and press releases asked, ‘Would you take Frieda into your home? Would you accept Germany into the family of Nations?’

Billed as a ‘social problem’ film, *Frieda* articulates a political problem at a social level, with the extended family being the key unit of the social fabric. Society is not fundamentally flawed; for example, *Frieda*, although set post-war, lacks signifiers of the urban iconography of destruction characteristic of *It Always Rains on Sunday*. Rather, the extended family of the Dawsons with its members’ differences of opinion is the moral barometer by which outsiders are judged.

Several figures constitute the ‘typical’ Dawson family. The internal dynamics of the Dawson household are unusual if understood solely in terms of familial relationships. This observation supports the view that the Dawsons are not just a family, but are intended to embody wider national experiences and perceptions. There are several aspects of the Dawson family that cannot be adequately explained unless *Frieda* is interpreted in the light of wider national resonance. In particular,

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32 Microjacket for *Frieda*, BFI library.
33 Microjacket for *Frieda*.

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there is the enigma of Tony (Ray Jackson), Robert's stepbrother. Robert's father died in the First World War and Tony, aged about ten, must have been born from their mother's subsequent marriage. However, Tony's father is never mentioned or seen during the course of the narrative. A second, although less pronounced, anomaly is the character of Judy (Glynis Johns). Once married to Robert's brother, Alan (Patrick Holt), Judy remains within the Dawson family home, calling her mother-in-law, 'mother', without any mention of her own parents or family status.

Tony and Judy's places within the Dawson household ensure that there are family representatives of various 'national' tendencies. Tony, for example, indicates a childhood perspective, while Judy provides a model of responsible and conventional femininity. In addition, Judy's role, when viewed in conjunction with Nell (Flora Robson) and Mrs Dawson (Barbara Everest), establishes a female dominated model of the family and, by extension, underlines the 'national' loss of male life engendered by war.

The reactions of family members to the 'threat' of Frieda are an indirect means of rehearsing how the British nation could or should deal with post-war Germany: whether Britain (the Dawsons) should tentatively accept (Tony, Judy, Mrs Dawson, Robert) or reject (Nell) Germany (Frieda). On certain occasions, the mise-en-scène introduces some suspicion about Frieda's character and allegiance. Most notably, there is a puzzling and contradictory montage with shots of Frieda and Robert working on a farm. Throughout the sequence, a voice-over (a letter from Mrs Dawson to Judy) explains that Frieda is settling in, and loves housework and cooking, yet the use of Nazi 'good Aryan' iconography, idealising health, nature, strength, and blonde beauty deepens audience doubts about Frieda.\(^4\) Taken overall, however, the narrative development gradually displaces doubt, hostility and suspicion with the hesitant acceptance of Frieda (and Germany). Tony, for example, exposes the contradictions of adult morality when faced with the discrepancy between theoretical and practical judgements. In practice Tony finds he is unable to hate Frieda, although he has been taught to despise all Germans. Judy personally accepts Frieda, in spite of

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her love for Robert, by keeping ‘everything under control’.\textsuperscript{35} Mrs Dawson warms to Frieda as both discover they have lost relatives as a result of the war. Robert eventually falls in love with Frieda and invites her to marry him.\textsuperscript{36} The theme of rejection is espoused primarily through Aunt Nell (although the arrival of Frieda’s Nazi brother, Ricky (Albert Lieven), temporarily shakes everyone’s convictions) who claims Frieda is ‘party to a monster’s crime’. With Nell standing for parliament as a Labour candidate, the political ramifications of Frieda’s situation within the family are at their most overt. During her campaign speech Nell is forced to address the issue as a political one even though she had wanted ‘the matter [of Frieda] to be personal for me and my family’. Significantly, the closure of Frieda relies upon Nell’s reversal of opinion. Nell’s change of views can be regarded as in keeping with the immediate post-war concerns of the Labour government. For example, the foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, espoused Labour’s pragmatic desire to draw Germany into a western alliance against Communism.\textsuperscript{37} Moreover, the final humanitarian message that, ‘you can’t treat humans as less than human, without becoming less than human yourself’, echoes Victor Gollancz’s 1946 plea for the protection of ‘civilised’ Western values, including the fundamental respect for the ‘spiritual equality of all human beings’.\textsuperscript{38} Thus the film’s closing message, spoken by Nell within the family home, indicates a familial acceptance of Frieda, but one that also has wider political and social overtones.

What is interesting about Frieda is not only how an extended family is used to articulate the need for a national acceptance of Germany, but how in the process the film exposes the socially constructed and contradictory nature of family relationships.

\textsuperscript{35} This is a female model of emotional management akin to that of Toddy in The Way to the Stars, see Chapter 5.
\textsuperscript{36} An alternative reading has been offered by Landy (1991) British Genres, 462-465. She argues that Robert’s treatment of Frieda hints at his own resistance to family, community and marriage. Moreover, Landy argues that the nature of the family (as well as Robert’s position within it) is questioned. In particular, she describes how Frieda unleashes the cruelty of the family and community, giving the lie to Robert’s earlier idealisation of home. Landy, however, has exaggerated the extent to which tensions undermine the well-meaning efforts of the film. Robert’s initial reluctance to accept Frieda situates him as an integrated member of his family and community (given that both shun the German nurse) and indicates a rejection of loveless marriage founded upon a sense of indebtedness, rather than marriage per se. Moreover, the ‘cruelty’ is moderate and short-term, within six months the community has assimilated Frieda into its midst.
\textsuperscript{38} Victor Gollancz (1946) Our Threatened Values, London: Victor Gollancz, 10.
Extended Families

On the one hand, the ‘strength’ of family ties is used to suggest sympathy, common ground and mutual bonding. On the other, those same ties are subsumed to alternative social allegiances (albeit those sometimes replicating an ‘ideal’ familial relationship).

The theme of common family bereavement, for example, is used to establish a degree of empathy between Frieda and Mrs Dawson. The two both have family photographs, indicators of an everyday family practice used to construct and reinforce a sense of ‘being family’. In this instance, Frieda and Mrs Dawson’s family photographs symbolise how they define and maintain the fragmented realities of their families. The photographs precipitate a mutual exchange about the close relatives both have lost as a result of war. Moreover, the early narrative introduction of Frieda’s unhappiness about her familial losses helps present her as a sympathetic character. This employs the same convention as *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) which courts audience compassion for Theo (Anton Walbrook), a ‘good’ German, as he recounts the ‘loss’ of his children to the Nazi party.

In spite of the theme of bonding, ‘blood’ ties in *Frieda* are not invariably the strongest social attachments. Paradoxically, *Frieda* constructs Britain as a nation of like-minded families, while also exposing the limitations of common descent as a cognitive framework. As already noted above, Judy refers to Mrs Dawson as ‘mother’ although there is no biological tie between them. The terminology of the address indicates that (maternal) behaviour, not ‘biology’, plays the most important role in determining affiliation. Similarly, there is Frieda’s relationship with her brother. Ricky uses the emotive force associated with kinship terminology to assert 39 Bernardes notes how photographs are commonly used to construct a sense of ‘family’. See Jon Bernardes (1997) *Family Studies: An Introduction*, London: Routledge, 90. Alternatively, in another popular film of the 1940s, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), the empty pages of a photo album symbolise the loss of family ties.


41 Here, the theme of mutual loss cementing German and English friendship is similar to the theme of mutual sacrifice underlining Anglo-American co-operation and harmony in *The Way to the Stars*. Moreover, in *The Way to the Stars* Toddy and Johnny also bond by showing each other family snapshots. See Chapter 5.

42 The conventional obverse is the unsympathetic German devoid or destructive of family ties as portrayed in the *49th Parallel* (1941). See Chapter 8.

43 Thus Mrs Dawson behaves as if she were a mother to Frieda. For a discussion of other familial analogies in popular British feature films from my sample see Chapter 8.
that as brother and sister, 'we are one'. However, once again the biological link is not accorded narrative affirmation: Frieda is a 'good German', quite unlike her brother. Overall, any insistence that 'blood is thicker than water' is called into question because of the implicit national dimensions of Frieda. The narrative closure rests on Nell's change of mind, countering the 'fascism' inherent in her earlier conviction that there is a common 'essence of Germanism', something 'inborn, in the blood'. A film that privileges (by exploring a familial level) the message that Germans cannot be held equally culpable, mitigates against a deterministic 'biological' reductionism, be it either an assertion of familial or racial sameness. In Frieda people are judged according to their behaviour, rather than their birth. This is why Mrs Dawson is Judy's 'mother' and why Frieda, a German, is ultimately accepted into the family.

Frieda, like This Happy Breed, uses the model of the extended family as a symbol of the nation. However, Frieda addresses and resolves a specific post-war social problem, namely the treatment of Germans and Germany. In the process, Frieda begins to hint at the potential hostility with which a family might treat an outsider. It has been suggested that Frieda, with its disruptive female 'Other', explodes the notion of the integrated family or community at a time when post-war concerns revolved around the reintegration and stability of the family. However, Frieda largely contains any underlying conflict (the family adjusts to Frieda and ultimately accepts Frieda’s presence even after the unveiling of her brother as a Nazi). Frieda is not a good example of the excess of sex and violence (belying containment) that John Hill finds at the heart of all Basil Dearden's social problem films. The idea of familial hostility finds greater realisation elsewhere. An explosion of the notion of the integrated family and community is more apparent in the post-war melodrama Madness of the Heart than it is in Frieda. This is largely because Madness of the Heart does not aim to resolve a social problem. Unlike Robert's marriage to Frieda, there is no sense of 'duty' underlying the narrative of Madness of the Heart. Without a socially responsible address to the people of Britain, Madness of the Heart does not emphasise a typical or unified vision of family, community and nation.

6.3 The Hostile Family

Unlike *This Happy Breed* and *Frieda*, *Madness of the Heart* does not use the motif of the extended family to embody an image of the nation. It has no explicit national address. *This Happy Breed* was part of a wartime project emphasising social unity (above class divisions) and continuity at a time of uncertainty, and *Frieda* belonged to a tradition of post-war pragmatic humanitarianism, articulating the need for accepting Germany into the 'family of nations'. As films addressing national issues, both *This Happy Breed* and *Frieda* attempt to contain seeds of rupture in a way that *Madness of the Heart* does not. The extended family in *This Happy Breed* is a stable environment, and the family in *Frieda* restrains and manages much of its antipathy to outsiders. In contrast, *Madness of the Heart* portrays the extended family and its immediate environment as inhospitable. Whereas in *Frieda*, the extended family could only psychologically affect an 'outsider', in *Madness of the Heart* the family is more acutely threatening and hostile.

*Madness of the Heart* (Charles Bennett, July 1949)

*Madness of the Heart* is at odds with any wider post-war desire to stress the stability and reintegration of the family and the community. The narrative focuses on Lydia Garth (Margaret Lockwood), a woman who loses her sight, then marries a French aristocrat, Paul de Vandiere (Paul Dupuis), and attempts to live harmoniously with his family. The film is set in post-war France and London. Scenes in the foreign location allow for the portrayal of the negative extremes of behaviour, including attempted murder. Instead of emphasising a wife's incorporation into the family, *Madness of the Heart* dramatises her exclusion by both members and friends of the family. Blindness is the ostensible reason for Lydia's rejection. However, it is the implications of Lydia's blindness, framed in terms of her inability to meet the requisites of traditional motherhood, which are narratively significant. This is underlined by the film's closure. It is Lydia's regained sight that facilitates her reunion with Paul. However, although Lydia's sight indicates her renewed potential as a wife and mother, the divisions within the extended family are not healed. Lydia

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46 Popular British films from my sample often use foreign or historical settings to explore potentially controversial themes and issues. See, for example, the discussions of *The Wicked Lady* (Chapter 4); and *The Man in Grey and Madonna of the Seven Moons* (Chapter 5).
Extended Families

and Paul meet in London, abandoning his family in disarray rather than symbolically ‘mending’ the ruptures within it. As such, the film dramatises the post-war re-establishment of family life as inherently problematic and unstable.

Rather than emphasising the reintegration of family life, *Madness of the Heart* suggests that the extended family is atypical, dangerous and inhospitable. Although it uses a similar narrative trajectory to *Frieda* (both films share the theme of whether an adult woman will be accepted into her husband’s family) *Madness of the Heart* does not present the family as an emblem of Englishness. The family and home in *Madness of the Heart* are characterised by their exceptional nature. In particular, the family is aristocratic and French, and the house is a mansion. Unlike the extended families in *This Happy Breed* or *Frieda*, the de Vandieres are not situated as part of a wider community or nation of ‘like-minded families’. A panning shot of the rural surroundings before external shots of the family house, for example, serves to emphasise its remoteness and isolation, rather than establish its similarity with others.

Instead of representing a home like many others, the de Vandieres’ house is intimidating because of its imposing grandeur. On Lydia’s arrival at the de Vandieres, the household’s vastness is conspicuously presented. Comtesse de Vandiere introduces the numerous family members and servants lined-up outside the house. The household includes eight servants and the family: Paul; his father, the Comte (Raymond Lovell); his mother, the Comtesse (Marie Burke); his sister, Felicite (Pamela Stirling); and his young nephew, Gustav.\(^47\) The only character from the wider French community is the neighbour, Verité (Kathleen Byron), whose persistent presence at the family home is never fully explained. In terms of the narrative she is treated as if she were a family member. As in *Frieda*, ‘biological’ ties are not always paramount. Verité, is like a daughter to the Comte in the same way that Judy (in *Frieda*) is a ‘daughter’ to Mrs Dawson. However, unlike Judy, Verité is primarily a disruptive narrative force. Verité is a scheming (rather than honourable) rival for Paul’s affections. In particular, Verité plots with the footman, Joseph (Maxwell Reed), to kill Lydia. Incorporated into the narrative as a type of family member, not

\(^47\) No name for the child acting Gustav is available.
as a key representative of links between the community and the family, Verité’s underhand activities suggest familial disorder rather than a conservative or stable continuum between the family and wider society.

The de Vandiere family is not a microcosm of community or nation, and it is divorced from any explicit notion of a representative British experience. The family in *Madness of the Heart* is extraordinary and although the film does not attempt a political articulation of a stable or adaptable model of family and community life, it does explore general social concerns about the family at a distance. As in other Gainsborough melodramas, such as *Madonna of the Seven Moons*, the use of a relatively remote foreign setting permits the representation of extreme circumstances and behaviour, and allows controversial issues to be implicitly addressed. The most violent aspects of the narrative occur on French, rather than British territory: notably, Lydia’s attempted murder, and Verité’s death in a car crash (over which the BBFC expressed concern that there should be no ‘unpleasant scenes’ when the car catches on fire’). England, by contrast, is a less dangerous place. When Lydia, for example, retreats from the hostility she encounters from members of the de Vandiere household she returns to the relative safety of ‘home’ in London. France is used as a location to symbolically explore the problems associated with the post-war reconstitution of family life through a melodramatic lens.

In the scenes set in France, *Madness of the Heart* suggests the difficulty of a wife’s assimilation into domestic life. In keeping with 1940s concerns over changing women’s (rather than men’s) roles, it is Lydia’s ability to be a conventional wife and mother that is called into question. By way of contrast, Paul’s aptitude for fatherhood is beyond reproach. Paul is never criticised and he is consistently presented as a marriageable man. Dr Simon Blake (Maurice Denham), Lydia’s employer and a respectable voice of male authority, unreservedly approves of Paul’s relationship with Lydia. Dr Blake is, for example, happily amused to discover that Paul mentioned the name of the wrong restaurant in order that he might dine alone with Lydia. Moreover, Paul himself never shows hesitation or doubt about his own role as husband and

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father. From their initial meeting, Paul actively pursues and courts Lydia. According to Lydia’s diary entries, they meet every day of the week. He also proposes to Lydia at the earliest opportunity, that is on the first occasion that they meet after she resumes her place in the ‘outside world’. Paul does not have any reservations about marriage, fatherhood and family life.

Although Paul accepts and marries Lydia, she is ostracised and driven away by his extended family. ‘Love for his wife or loyalty to his family – which shall he choose?’ was one of the film’s slogans. Lydia’s physical blindness is the ostensible reason for her rejection by her husband’s family, but it is what her blindness represents that is most important. In Madness of the Heart blindness is not a disability in its own right, rather it is constructed as a means of articulating anxieties about conventional female roles and family life. The symbolic connotations of Lydia’s blindness undergo a subtle shift of emphasis throughout the film. In the first instance, blindness is associated with a retreat from marital commitment and responsibility; thereafter blindness is a means of expressing personal reservations about family life; finally, blindness symbolises irresponsible motherhood, and is the grounds for family rejection.

At the film’s outset, Lydia’s loss of sight is associated with a retreat from the responsibilities of adult womanhood. Lydia is first introduced dressed as a novice and staying in a convent. This is the place where, following her sudden blindness, she has withdrawn from the outside world. Lydia’s flight from adult sexuality and responsibility is underlined not only because of the religious order’s connotations of chastity, but also because we learn that this is where Lydia was once happy attending school. Symbolically, Lydia has returned to her childhood. It is only on the command of the Reverend Mother (Cathleen Nesbitt) that Lydia is forced to re-enter the outside world and negotiate the complexities of the demands placed upon women as potential wives and mothers.

When Lydia is forced to return to her ‘normal’ life, blindness is no longer deployed as a symbol of flight from adult responsibility. Instead, blindness is used as a means of expressing reservations about marriage from a female point of view. Lydia willingly takes on the responsibility of her old job, yet is unsure about marital commitment. She tells Paul that, ‘a blind wife would not be fair [on him]’. At this early stage in the film, the narrative offers little to substantiate her statement. Certainly Paul himself does not agree that marriage to Lydia would be a terrible burden, otherwise he would not have proposed. Moreover, Lydia has proven her competence by returning to her former job. Given that blindness itself does not impede Lydia from resuming her working life as a single woman, her hesitation about marriage hints at more general reservations about marriage and family life. Furthermore, the film’s omission of Paul and Lydia’s marriage ceremony suggests a resistance to an idealised conception of marriage and the family. It eradicates any romantic notions conventionally associated with representing a white wedding.

It is only following Lydia’s arrival at the de Vandiere household, that her blindness is used to connote imperfect or unconventional womanhood and, as a result, familial rejection. For example, Paul’s father, Comte de Vandiere, rejects Lydia as a suitable daughter-in-law both on account of her blindness and her lack of traditional femininity. He is surprised that Lydia worked before marriage and explains that she is not the conventional de Vandiere wife, as represented in the gallery of family portraits. He tells Lydia that de Vandiere wives are decorative rather than serviceable. Lydia’s lack of sight is further used to represent (potential) maternal incompetence. On at least one occasion Lydia leaves her knitting in the garden. This carelessness arouses the hostility of Felicité, Paul’s sister, who fears that Lydia is endangering her young son, Gustav. Felicité announces that there can be no excuse for such an oversight, not when Gustav is at risk from scratching himself with the needles. Gustav, like the sons in *The Way to the Stars*, *The First of the Few*, and *The Man in Grey*, is a symbol of uncorrupted childhood innocence and vulnerability. The suggestion is that Lydia is an unfit wife who cannot be trusted to look after children of her own. Lydia’s representation as an unsuitable candidate for motherhood is underlined by the circumstances surrounding her pregnancy and miscarriage. When pregnant, Paul rejects Lydia. This is because Paul been led to believe (by Verité and
his father) that Lydia is having an affair with Max (David Hutcheson), an Englishman. Although Lydia is innocent, Paul is ready to assume the worst. Also, upon discovering the truth, he travels to apologise to Max, but offers no apology to Lydia. Moreover, Lydia miscarries as a result of an accident precipitated by her lack of vision: while eavesdropping on Paul’s father and Verite, Lydia falls down the garden steps.

The converse is that, towards the end of the film, when Lydia regains her sight she is no longer a figure of maternal imperfection. Following an operation in London, Lydia returns to the de Vandiere household, able to see. On this occasion she is not a liability. As Verite remarks, Lydia’s senses are acute for her to avoid the kitten on the stairs. Lydia is no longer dangerous to small, fragile creatures. Furthermore, with her sight restored, Paul’s father accepts her as a daughter for the first time. He even commands Verite (his previous choice for daughter-in-law) to write a telegram, asking Paul to wait for Lydia’s arrival in London, in an attempt to reunite the couple. However, although Lydia is reconciled with Paul, the family is left in ruinous disarray. Paul and Lydia meet in London, away from the extended family. The last images of Paul’s ‘family’ are those of his father, aged and incapacitated, arguing with Verite (who subsequently dies in a car crash). Instead of integrating the married couple and the family, Madness of the Heart offers an incomplete narrative closure. The reunion of Lydia and Paul is tentative. It occurs in an airport, an archetypal transient zone. Moreover, even this renewed happiness occurs in Britain, thereby fracturing rather than cementing the wider family group.

In Madness of the Heart, unlike This Happy Breed or Frieda, the family is hostile, unable to adapt to change and not successfully reconstituted by the narrative closure. Throughout the film, Madness of the Heart employs Lydia’s blindness as a means of addressing some of the implications of an adult woman’s responsibilities. Rather than presenting a positive view of family life, the film stresses reservations about marriage from a female point of view. In addition, the narrative proceeds to affirm that the reservations are grounded. The family is, for example, inhospitable to Lydia. The negative vision of family life is only partially resolved at the end of the film. Four aspects underpin the closure: Lydia regains her sight, Lydia is accepted by
the Comte; Verité dies; and Paul and Lydia reunite. These elements partially 'heal' rifts in the family. In particular, Lydia's restored vision is an indication that she is prepared and able to assume the full responsibilities of motherhood. However, in spite of her new capabilities and her acceptance by Comte de Vandiere, the extended family is never asserted as a location of happiness and stability. Paul and Lydia reunite elsewhere.

6.4 Summary

Among the popular films from my sample, far fewer address extended families than the nuclear family form. This imbalance can be related to contemporary concerns. As explained in Chapter 3, during the 1940s, the endurance of the nuclear (not the extended) family was a main source of social anxiety. Moreover, in official discourses, the nuclear family was often promoted as a social ideal. By way of contrast, extended families were usually thought to be a social necessity rather than a source of aspiration.

Of the three films foregrounding extended families, two use the extended family as an embodiment of the nation, and one portrays the extended family in a remote context. Both *This Happy Breed* and *Frieda* are shaped by their self-consciously patriotic frames of reference. Both emphasise the continuities between a 'typical' family, community and nation with a view to stressing the incorporation of national problems within a stable model of society. In *This Happy Breed* the upheavals of key national events are 'domesticated' through their integration with the cycles of family time. Overall, *This Happy Breed* stresses social cohesion, conformity and continuity over and above national disruption. Alternatively, in *Frieda*, a specific national problem is addressed at a familial level. The post-war treatment of Germany by Britain is narratively displaced. The national issue is broached as a social problem and articulated as the treatment of Frieda by the Dawson family.

The third film focusing on the extended family, *Madness of the Heart*, lacks the patriotism common to both *This Happy Breed* and *Frieda*. Instead of self-consciously addressing the nation, the extended family in *Madness of the Heart* is
extended at a distance. Whereas *Frieda* combines aspects of melodrama and the 'social problem' film, *Madness of the Heart* is a melodrama without any sense of didactic social responsibility. Instead of resolving a problem and presenting the extended family as an adaptable microcosm of the nation, *Madness of the Heart* privileges the extended family as a deeply problematic institution. In particular it exposes difficulties relating to the post-war reintegration of the family. Instead of offering a conservative or stable picture of the family, *Madness of the Heart* indicates hesitancy about family life from a women's point of view and represents the family itself as irrevocably damaged. Of the three, *Madness of the Heart* is the only film which makes no concerted attempt to project the family as integral to the stability, community and consensus of Britain. Thus there is a key distinction between the connotations of the extended family in the two films with a self-conscious patriotic address (*This Happy Breed* and *Frieda*) and the one without a similar 'national' point of view (*Madness of the Heart*).
CHAPTER 7: CHILDREN

7.1 Introduction

This chapter is primarily about those films where children are central to the narrative. The emphasis is upon children as an integral part of family contexts. Traditionally, in both history and sociology, children have been examined as part of ‘the family’. Only recently has there been a growing tendency to focus upon children and childhood as worthy of study in their own right. A criticism of the traditional approach is that it tends to subsume ‘the child’ into the wider field of the family.¹ In devoting Chapter 7 to children, childhood representations are included in a wider analysis of the family, but they are not marginalised within the discussion. Instead, children are accorded a proportion of significance (both in degree and type) in direct relation to their depictions in the popular British films of the 1940s.

In this specific instance, there are two main reasons why it is appropriate to examine the role of children in a study about the family. First, as we shall see below, children are frequently central to the narratives of popular 1940s films. This constitutes sufficient grounds for devoting an entire chapter to their portrayal.² Second, in those popular films focusing upon children, it is the children’s familial status (not their educational or leisure experiences) that determines both their behaviour and circumstances. Modern Western childhood is commonly experienced in three arenas: the family, school and play (the child is not a worker within the formal labour force).³ However, in film, the two latter arenas are less important than the former. Familial circumstances, even (or especially) when in disarray, consistently determine children's physical and mental states in films. These ‘symbolic’ states of being are, in turn, indicative (as explained below) of adult concerns and preoccupations as much as the material circumstances of children themselves.

² Something less appropriate for men or fathers as, although interesting, these characters are rarely foregrounded in the narratives of the popular 1940s feature films from my sample.
The physicality and mentality of childhood (the experience of being a child) are aspects associated with the definition and imagery of children. Definitions of children and childhood are complex, not self-evident. Following Diana Gittins, the notion of 'the child' consists of at least three layers of meaning: including dependency; some expression of kinship; and 'embodiment and biology' or, put more simply, factors usually relating to age. All three aspects, particularly the latter, are open to interpretation. For example, there is no agreed age at which being a child ends. Moreover, at a symbolic level, chronological biological development is less important than the notion (and accompanying associations) that 'the child' is transitory; that childhood does indeed end and is ultimately replaced. The idea of transition from child to adult allows for a specific construction, from an adult point of view, of what it means to be a child. This is the imagery of childhood.

The 'adult-centric' ways in which children are presented have been noted elsewhere. Jane Pilcher, with regard to sociological theory and research, explains how children are usually studied according to an 'orientational' metaphor (whereby childhood is simply preparation for adulthood, the central stage of life) in terms of what they will become, rather than in their own right. In the popular films from my sample, similar themes underpin the portrayal of children and childhood. Attempts to depict common experiences of childhood, children for their own sake, are missing. The children in these popular films (presumably unlike the characters portrayed in the children's films that were screened at cinema clubs) do not primarily serve to invite identification from actual children situated among cinema audiences. Instead of assuming the child as spectator, the representations of children (both those peripherally and centrally located in the narratives) operate as symbols of adult preoccupations, including adults' needs and fears. The idea of transition, as the key means of conceptualising a notion of loss, is central to such a perspective.

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5 This is true both within a single society at any given moment in time as well as cross-culturally or through history. See Gittins (1998) *The Child*, 3-4.
7 Throughout the course of history, childhood has been invented by adults according to adult concerns and children have been treated according to adults' cultural assumptions. See LuAnn Walther (1979)
During the 1940s, childhood was most often constructed in accordance with a dominant model emphasising the differences between adults and children. The conceptions of childhood widely employed in this decade had previously (throughout the 19th century) undergone a similar ideological development to that of 'the family'. So that by the 20th century, a specific 'classless' construction of childhood (like the notion of the ideal nuclear family) was widespread. There was, as Diana Gittins explains:

...a myth, a story, of a universal childhood which all children were entitled to, regardless of social class. This childhood was held up as a time of innocence, dependence and happiness that somehow existed in a world outside the harsh realities of life...8

Emphasising similarities between children this 'myth', which endures today, has and continues to associate childhood with innocence and vulnerability.9 These are manifestations of mental and physical characteristics that are thought to be lost in any transition to adult status.

The 'myth' of universal childhood finds expression in the popular feature films of the 1940s. Certainly, in the films discussed so far, children are widely associated with innocence. The analyses in Chapters 4 and 5 indicate that where children are present (but not central) within the film narrative, innocence is the key factor in their portrayal. In these instances, the symbolic functions of children draw heavily upon the childhood 'myth'. In most cases the children are babies or toddlers, their immature bodies signifying vulnerability and dependency.10 Two tendencies of the portrayal of children in the nuclear and extended 'family films' are apparent.

9 The endurance of a particular vision of childhood is well recognised. For example, the charity Children's Express recently identified the most common media stereotype as the 'kid as victim'. See Angela Neustatter (1998) 'Kids – What the Papers Say', The Guardian 8/4/98, 8.
10 Children in Western society are defined primarily by their bodies which are 'read' in a selective way. They are interpreted as signifiers of children's perceived vulnerability and dependency, establishing differences between adults and children in terms of a marked opposition. See Jenny Hockey and Allison James (1993) Growing Up and Growing Old: Ageing and Dependency in the Life Course, London: Sage, 75-103.
First, there is the sense that children, specifically male children, are a hope for the future. This is the case with the films articulating a short-lived nuclear family ideal such as *The First of the Few* (1942) and *The Way to the Stars* (1945). Situated in the tradition of Rousseau (whereby children are considered good by nature) these images of baby boys signify innocents born into a corrupt war-torn world. Here, gender as well as goodness is an important signifier of hope. In both these patriotic films with a wartime address, key father-figures die and sons indicate the possibility of filling the vacuum left by their deaths. The second tendency emphasises that children are the innocent victims of adult wrongdoing. In particular they are shown to passively suffer because of maternal selfishness, inadequacy and negligence. This is the case with children in *The Man in Grey* (1943), *They Were Sisters* (1945), *Brief Encounter* (1945), and *Madness of the Heart* (1949).

The image of children as innocents, symbolising hope and in need of protection from an adult world and adult misdemeanours finds further expression both in informal discourses and in more official policies from the 1940s. First-hand testimonies frequently convey how children served as an uplifting symbol of hope. Marjorie Townsend, for example, recalls how a postcard picture of her baby son sent in 1944 to her husband, John, in a Japanese camp helped boost morale:

They had all been told how England was suffering. NOW they all slapped each other on the back and said, 'If England can produce babies like that she certainly isn’t done for yet!’ So our little son did his bit for England, too!

The idea that children are vulnerable to corruption from improper social influences is apparent in the practices and principles of welfare organisations and

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In terms of cinema, for example, the need to protect children has long been enshrined in the philosophy behind censorship. Throughout the 1940s there was no formal system of British censorship to match the American Hays code. Instead, A.T.L. Watkins (the secretary of the British Board of Film Censors) described how general standards existed by which each film was judged; including the principle of assessing the effect of the film on children.\(^\text{13}\) Indeed, concerns about the detrimental effects of the cinema on children were apparent throughout the decade. In 1947, for example, a committee was appointed specifically to consider the ‘effects of attendance at the cinema on children under the age of 16’.\(^\text{14}\) Reporting in 1950, the committee’s findings stressed the passivity and vulnerability of children. They agreed with the view that a child’s training for citizenship could be seriously harmed by repeated exposure to ‘escapist’ films where ‘social values and responsibilities are unknown’.\(^\text{15}\)

The widespread notion of childhood (in which children, innocence, dependence, passivity and vulnerability are all closely equated) is often misleading. It denies children agency and ignores variety, often omitting negative experiences of childhood and ignoring ‘bad’ children. Clearly, children are not always the unwitting victims of circumstance. For instance, whereas evacuation was premised on the desire to protect dependants from adversity, some experiences of evacuation suggest a different actual scenario. Take for example the case of one evacuee, Veronica, housed with a prostitute, and aware of all the men coming to the woman’s house long before anyone else:

I loved her. I really thought she was lovely. I was eight years of age and she used to give me money at night to go to the local cinema. I sat there night after night [...] and I used to come home in the dark and go around by the old churchyard where this old tramp was sleeping out. I used to taunt this old tramp [...] I made his life absolutely miserable.\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{13}\) Transcript for BBC Light Programme, ‘Now’s Your Chance’, 19 November 1949: 19.30-20.00, 14.
\(^{15}\) HMSO (1950) Report on Children and the Cinema, 47.
In this case, although the authorities deemed it necessary to rebillet Veronica away from pernicious adult influences, she did not see herself as vulnerable. Instead, Veronica pitied the tramp for being the victim of her poor behaviour. On other occasions when evacuated children did not conform to a childhood ideal they were often labelled as ‘problem children’, and housed in places known locally as ‘awkward evacuees’ homes’. Hostel staff, for example, found that London children in particular ‘were unbilletable because they were socially unacceptable – bed-wetters, potential criminals or medical liabilities – severe eczema, severe asthma’. Thus, the experiences of childhood evacuation often undermined the notion that led to its inception; namely, the ‘myth’ that all children under 16 years were ‘angelic’, dependent and in need of protection.

Significantly, feature films deal with the generalised notion of childhood rather than the multitude of varied material experiences. In film, ‘the child’ is a simplified ‘symbolic’ representation as distinct from embodied girls and boys whose life chances vary according to the circumstances (gender, class, ethnicity and nation) into which they are born. In the films from my sample where children are peripheral in the narrative (as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6), they symbolise either hope or vulnerability. Those popular feature films where children are centrally located within the narrative (Chapter 7) do not dwell upon children as symbols of hope, but do share the theme of vulnerability.

In the popular films from my sample that foreground children, three overlapping tendencies in representation can be identified. First, focal children are signifiers of innocence; the unwitting victims of unfortunate circumstances beyond their control (The Fallen Idol, 1948; Oliver Twist, 1948; The Winslow Boy, 1948). Second, there is a transitory theme of child to adult; entailing a fraught quest for identity or rite-of-passage, and involving either social or moral decline (Fanny by

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19 This observation relies upon Gittins’ demarcation of overlapping, intertwining and contradictory levels on which ‘the child’ and ‘childhood’ exist. These are the symbolic and material levels (as discussed here) and also the psychological level, consisting of memories relating to personal experiences of childhood. See Gittins (1998) The Child, 12.
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Gaslight, 1944; Great Expectations, 1946; Caesar and Cleopatra, 1946). Finally, the child’s psychological inability to achieve a rite-of-passage through to adulthood can structure the narrative (The Seventh Veil, 1945; Hamlet, 1948). In the majority of these instances (and most pronounced in The Fallen Idol, Oliver Twist, Fanny by Gaslight, Great Expectations, and Hamlet), the family is the problem and solution to children’s crises.

7.2 Heirs of Rousseau

The theme of the innocent child is a significant one. The prevalence of identifying children with purity has already been noted with regard to those films where children are present in the narrative. It is equally pertinent for popular films from my sample which foreground children in their narratives. Where focal children are innocents, the films often rely upon a conceptual opposition between children and adults. The latter are invariably figured less favourably than the former. In films such as The Fallen Idol, Oliver Twist and The Winslow Boy key adults or (aspects of) adult society are deceitful, violent, corrupt, or unjust. In some aspects the films function as elegies to lost innocence, connoting a sense of post-war disillusionment. Their visions contrast with the tentative optimism of childhood symbolism characteristic of The First of the Few or The Way to the Stars.

During the late 1940s, films employ the notion of the innocent child to articulate adult preoccupations. For example, The Fallen Idol laments the symbolic passing of naivety, Oliver Twist offers a more explicit meditation on the social forces and injustices that impinge upon the ideal sanctity of childhood, and the child’s trial in The Winslow Boy highlights difficulties pertaining to British justice and human rights.

The articulation of adult concerns is achieved through presenting the child as innocent, but certain experiences of childhood as problematic. Occasions when the ‘ideal’ separation between a child’s world and the adult world begin to break down represent departures from the untroubled ‘golden age’ idea of childhood and offer the primary narrative impetus in the three films discussed below. The main child
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characters in *The Fallen Idol*, *Oliver Twist* and *The Winslow Boy* are presented as the victims of circumstances that remove them from the 'natural' protection of their families, prematurely thrusting them into a relatively more dangerous adult environment. In each of the three films innocence is repeatedly invoked as the defining 'essence' of what it means to be a child.

*The Fallen Idol (Carol Reed, September 1948)*

*The Fallen Idol*, with its narrative in which one boy's illusions are unexpectedly shattered, emphasises the dual themes of innocence and loss. Felipe (Bobby Henrey), a child of about eight years old, is left in the care of the butler, Mr Baines (Ralph Richardson), and the housekeeper, Mrs Baines (Sonia Dresdel), while both his parents are away for one weekend. Felipe mistakenly thinks he sees Baines murder his wife and lies to the police in an attempt to protect his friend. As we shall see below, the childish vulnerability of Felipe is established from the outset by the use of mise-en-scène. However, although childhood is associated with innocence, both visually and through dialogue, it is not presented as a 'golden age'. In particular, the film dwells upon the controlled aspects and loneliness of childhood experiences. The separation between the childish world that Felipe inhabits and the 'uncontrolled' world of adults is clearly demarcated. Childhood is not ideal, but it still represents a realm of moral and spiritual worth in contrast with adult life. In the absence of parental attendance, Felipe finds himself 'trespassing' into an adult world of lies and deceit. It is only with the return of his parents that the narrative is resolved.

An adaptation, undertaken jointly by Graham Greene and Carol Reed, *The Fallen Idol* is based upon Greene's 1935 short story, *The Basement Room*. In its original form, replete with a murder committed by the most sympathetic character and an unhappy ending, Greene considered *The Basement Room* to be 'unfilmable'. Hence the process of creating a script for the screen involved sizeable alteration. Instead of straightforwardly replicating a story, *The Fallen Idol*, as Greene himself

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20 *The Fallen Idol*, with its parental absence, has been considered an exploration of the theme of family neglect that was evident in the family literature of the 1940s. See Marcia Landy (1991) *British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930-1960*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 309.

recognised, is a good example of how, 'expansion is a form of creation'. In the film, the worlds of adults and of children are opposed in a ways that are more apparent than in the earlier short story.

The film introduces a new setting and pivotal plot changes (so as not, according to Greene, to imperil box-office success), creating a vision of childhood located in a 1940s context and set apart from an adult world. Whereas the original story is set in a Belgravia House, *The Fallen Idol* changes the scene to a Foreign Embassy. Reed and Green considered the 1930s Belgravia house a period piece and had no desire to make a historical film. Thus the Embassy provides a temporal reference point, inviting the film's theme of loss to be read within a specifically post-war context. Moreover, the Embassy background (in conjunction with Felipe's distinctive French accent) highlights Felipe's 'separateness'. Unlike the 'Philip' of *The Basement Room*, the 'Felipe' of the film is doubly incongruous: because he is French and because he is a child. Here, familial circumstances define Felipe's status. As the son of an ambassador, there is a compounded sense of loneliness and isolation, both as a foreigner in a strange country and as a child encountering an adult world.

Plot changes relating to Mr Baines and Felipe further stress childhood isolation. In order to develop a prolonged cycle of suspense in *The Fallen Idol* (unlike in *The Basement Room*) Mr Baines is innocent and Felipe is wrongly convinced of his guilt. Through emphasising misunderstanding, there is an emphasis upon the cognitive boundaries that separate children from adults. For example, Felipe finds it incomprehensible that the police believe his lies, but disregard his attempts to tell the truth.

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26 In *The Basement Room* Philip refuses to lie in order to protect his friend, Baines. As a result, the story ends abruptly, without using a developed suspense structure. See Greene (1950) *The Fallen Idol*.
Moreover, the differences between adulthood and childhood are visually inscribed. Felipe is persistently framed as a spectator, rather than participant, of the adult world. He is featured as a voyeur, seeking to understand the secrets of adults.27 The first shot is a close-up of Felipe peering through the balcony railings at the adults below. A later exchange between Mr and Mrs Baines is a particularly good example of how Felipe’s separateness, together with his viewpoint, are suggested cinematically. Mr and Mrs Baines pass each other on the staircase, going in opposite directions. They are filmed in a long shot, from Felipe’s point of view as he sits at the top of the stairs, and their words are hardly audible. As Gene D. Phillips has identified, the shot not only implies the cold, divergent quality of Mr and Mrs Baines’ relationship, but it also suggests that Felipe is too far removed from the adults’ private world to understand what passes between them.28 A similar symbolism of separateness characterises the teashop scene: Mr Baines and Julie (Michele Morgan) discuss their romantic affair, and Felipe again observes a world he knows little about. At first, he cannot hear their conversation, then, upon entering the teashop, he does not understand it. Mr Baines and Julie contrive to get messages across that are not comprehensible to Felipe, but that are apparent to an adult viewer. Julie, for example, is introduced to Felipe as Baines’ ‘niece’.

In spite of The Fallen Idol’s ‘child perspective’ (low camera angles frequently replicate a child’s eye view), adult audience members receive information that is not available to Felipe and the film privileges an adult reading of childhood as a period of innocent incomprehension of adult lives. Thus, many reviewers shared the view that the film gained ‘freshness and stature and meaning’ from being shown through a child’s viewpoint.29 However, almost paradoxically, that ‘childhood’ viewpoint was not understood from an empathetic position. Take for example the following reflection upon Felipe. It demonstrates how adult pre-occupations with memory, hope and loss were brought to bear on interpreting The Fallen Idol:

29 Evening Standard 30/9/1948, microjacket for The Fallen Idol, BFI library.
...the fair, fragile little boy becomes at once endearing and indescribably pathetic. He is a symbol, evoking in all of us the half-forgotten childhood of splendid faded dreams and lost illusions.30

In addition to specific types of camera shots, Felipe’s physical appearance also signifies his child status. Throughout The Fallen Idol, Felipe looks ‘angelic’. Indeed, Bobby Henrey was chosen to play Felipe on the basis of his picture on the jacket of a book written by his parents.31 With no previous acting experience, it was Bobby Henrey’s outward image that was deemed important. Reed wanted Henrey to embody a ‘natural’ expression of emotions, unhindered by the habitual mannerisms and defences possessed by adults.32 To this end, The Fallen Idol literally uses the child’s body to communicate emotion: for example, when he is upset Felipe twiddles a piece of string, arches his back or twists his legs. The ‘natural’ expressiveness of childhood was achieved through asking Henrey to imitate gestures selected by Reed. So that although Reed considered Henrey to be ‘copying me copying him’, Reed was actively engaged in the process of constructing an image of ‘the child’ with the physical body as a fundamental signifier.33

Although the physical appearance of Felipe is indicative of an idealised innocence, childhood itself is not presented as an unequivocal ‘golden age’. Ennew writes of modern childhood that it has two essential aspects: it is structured by an age hierarchy, and is seen as a ‘golden age’ of happiness and innocence.34 The child in The Fallen Idol may be an innocent, but childhood is not a time of happiness.35

The film is permeated by a sense of loneliness, passive resistance and control. Felipe, as described above, is presented as a separate and, by extension, lonely figure.

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30 Daily Telegraph 3/10/1948, microjacket for The Fallen Idol.
35 Marcia Landy’s ‘psychoanalytical’ interpretation of The Fallen Idol as a ‘male oedipal conflict’ suggests that the film does not idealise ‘youth as innocent’. She could, however, be referring to the experience of childhood, rather than the notion of the child. The film, she argues, ‘portrays a young boy trapped in the lies and violence that surround him’. See Landy (1991) British Genres, 33, 310.
Moreover, Felipe is subjected to unwelcome adult rules and regulations, especially those of his ‘mother’ surrogate, Mrs Baines, who is presented as sinister, shrill and overbearing. Her shadow on a wall precedes her first screen appearance; and the mention of her name at the zoo is followed by a cut to a close-up of a squawking parrot. Felipe’s dislike and disrespect for Mrs Baines is vocalised in the simplest of terms, ‘I hate you’, and manifests itself through disobedience: Felipe eats between meals; keeps his pet snake; and leaves the house when he is sent to his room.

Whereas (resisted) control is an integral part of Felipe’s childhood experience, the main adult characters lack restraint. Whilst Mr Baines has had a romantic affair (rather than contained his feelings), Mrs Baines is associated with excess, both shrieking at Felipe and obsessively stalking the Embassy. It appears that childhood is (to a certain extent) protected, but that adulthood is left unchecked, resulting in a moral lapse marked by spiralling lies and secrets. Mr Baines asks Felipe not to tell his wife about Julie, likewise Mrs Baines wants to know if Felipe, ‘Can keep a secret?’ The web of deceit ends with Felipe’s misguided attempt to lie to the police. The theme that adults or adult society are not to be idealised is one of kind, rather than degree. Given his naivety, Felipe is as upset by discovering that Mr Baines fabricated heroic stories of his youth, as by thinking that Mr Baines is capable of murder.

Of further interest is the way in which, following Felipe’s disillusionment, the narrative is resolved. Instead of ending with the police convinced of Mr Baines’ innocence (a resolution which could satisfactorily restore narrative equilibrium), The Fallen Idol closes with the return of Felipe’s parents. Although Mr and Mrs Baines act as surrogate parents, they function primarily to symbolise the hypocrisy and compromises in and of adult society. With the narrative closure, Felipe is ‘safely’ relocated within the sphere of adequately protected family life. Significantly, although the film begins with the departure of Felipe’s father, it ends with the return

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37 Felipe’s lies to the police do not undermine the film’s overall image of moral childhood. Incidents have been inserted into the film which show the growth of Felipe’s conviction that lying is morally good when done to protect a friend. See Phillips (1974) Graham Greene, 53-54.

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Children of both his mother and father. As seen in Chapter 3, the mother during the late 1940s was a particularly potent symbol. A conventional prerequisite for the ideal home and family life, the mother’s return implies childhood care, and indicates that Felipe’s unwitting trespass into adult territory is (at least temporarily) at an end.

As a whole The Fallen Idol contrasts the innocence of childhood with the deceptions of adulthood, implying that the latter is fundamentally flawed. The ‘childhood: adulthood’ opposition establishes the narrative context for an exploration of what happens when an uncomprehending child, removed from the care of his parents, finds himself in a ‘foreign’ adult world. Above all else, childhood is associated with moral purity, yet it is not presented as an unequivocally ‘happy’ time. An underlying narrative theme, affirmed by the film’s resolution, indicates that children are innocents in need of protection. Not appearing elsewhere in the film, Felipe’s mother is a symbol of the restoration of familial life and ‘normal’ protected childhood. In two other popular films of the 1940s, Oliver Twist and The Winslow Boy, that also share a focus upon childhood innocence, a more explicit social commentary can be found.

*Oliver Twist* (David Lean, July 1948)

The character of Oliver still permeates 20th century consciousness as that of the archetypal innocent child. He remains the iconic orphan victim, both of familial and social circumstances. The works of Charles Dickens are well known for their themes of social injustice, often articulated through the presentation of children. The release of the film version of *Oliver Twist* in 1948 was also read as a social critique. As in *The Fallen Idol*, innocence receives embodiment in the physical stature of the child lead. Cinematic devices (notably diegetic sound, lighting and background music) are also employed to underline themes of childhood vulnerability and isolation. Moreover, cuts made to the original novel add to the construction of adult society as particularly inhospitable and cruel. As in *The Fallen Idol*, experiences of childhood are determined by familial separations. Whereas Felipe in *The Fallen Idol* is left by his parents for a weekend, Oliver (John Howard Davies) endures a more fundamental familial disruption, something that accompanies *Oliver Twist*’s greater
degree of explicit social critique. Oliver is thrown abruptly into an uncaring world because he loses his mother. However, the family is both the initial problem and the solution to the narrative trajectory. Like Felipe, Oliver’s traumatic experiences are only ‘healed’ when he returns to the protection of his family.

Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* is part of the traditional canon of English literature. Partly on account of its Dickensian origins, the 1948 film version has become similarly established as part of a critically acclaimed canon of indigenous British filmmaking. Three tendencies have been recognised in Dickens’ general approach to representing children. First, children are often the ‘other’, special and spiritually wiser than adults. Second, they are located in and of society; they are born heroes in their emotional innocence, but thereafter victimised by a ruthless society as represented by parents and adults. Finally, children are often associated with death and pathos; they need to be sacrificed in order to achieve a better social world. Of the three, the second tendency is most relevant to Dickens’ *Oliver Twist*. It is the theme of an innocent child victimised by society that also dominates the 1948 film adaptation, and provides some social critique.

*Oliver Twist*, through presenting a child amidst criminality and poverty in an urban setting outside the home, offers a more explicit social message than *The Fallen Idol*. The force of the film’s social critique is not tempered by its use of a historical setting. The 1830s were so different in appearance from the bombed and rebuilt streets of post-war Britain that the production designer, John Bryan, relied upon studio settings for the whole film. Nevertheless, in 1948, through depicting Victorian ‘evils’ (the workhouse, education system, the underworld, and unreconstructed capitalism) *Oliver Twist* focused attention on the continuing need for post-war reconstruction and the founding of a welfare state. Indeed, some of the visual images are so extreme that Duncan Petrie has likened them to Nazi death

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39 *Cineguild Publicity*, microjacket for *Oliver Twist*, BFI library.  
camps: for him, the workhouse's cold stark environment in combination with the pale, thin, shaven headed boys evokes the horrors of World War Two.\textsuperscript{41}

Publicists were quick to exploit the potential (but less disturbing) parallels between the 1830s and the late 1940s. The film was interpreted in the light of 1940s developments, emphasising the continued relevance of Dickens' London. One scene, for example, involved the studio recreation of the 19th century Smithfield market. Promotional material suggested that, 'Dickens knew all about “spivs”', and a parallel was drawn between the barrow-boy in his 'flashy clothes and gaudy neckware' and the 'ubiquitous' post-war black-marketeer.\textsuperscript{42} An article was also circulated with the intention of familiarising modern-day viewers with the atmosphere of 1830s London.\textsuperscript{43} Again, comparisons and contrasts were drawn between the 19th and 20th centuries. For example, the thieves' 'flash-talk', a secret language which was constantly changed for safety, was compared with, but found to be unlike 'today's jargon or rhyming slang'.\textsuperscript{44}

Within a 1940s British context, Oliver's 19th century plight potentially retained a humanitarian social message. Namely, that some of the aspects (and potentially some of the horrors) of Victorian society might not have disappeared post World War Two.\textsuperscript{45} Within an international context, a different contemporary message was found. Instead of well-intentioned social critique, the film was held to embody racist attitudes. \textit{Oliver Twist} presents Oliver as a child victim at the hands of Fagin (Alec Guinness), one adult representative of a ruthless society. At its time of release many regarded Fagin's characterisation as anti-Semitic, something profoundly inappropriate, especially given a post-war climate. Thus, in America, the film's

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41} Duncan Petrie (1996) \textit{The British Cinematographer}, London: BFI, 98.
\item \textsuperscript{42} \textit{Cineguild Publicity}, microjacket for \textit{Oliver Twist}.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Peter Hunt 'Dickens's London', \textit{Cineguild Publicity}, microjacket for \textit{Oliver Twist}.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Hunt 'Dickens's London', microjacket for \textit{Oliver Twist}.
\item \textsuperscript{45} See Philip Simpson (n.d.) 'NFT Programme Notes'; \textit{Renown Pictures Exhibition Campaign Book}, microjacket for \textit{Oliver Twist}.
\end{itemize}
release was blocked for two years.\textsuperscript{46} In Berlin, Jewish demonstrators clashed with police as they attempted to stop the film from being shown.\textsuperscript{47}

If Fagin's 'Jewish' characteristics represent the worst aspects of adult society, then Oliver's boyish youth is the exact opposite. Just as Bobby Henrey was chosen to play Felipe in \textit{The Fallen Idol} on account of his physical appearance, production news for \textit{Oliver Twist} relentlessly stressed how difficult it was to discover someone who looked like a 'fragile, neglected orphan boy'; even from the 1500 applications for the role.\textsuperscript{48} This indicates a discrepancy between the symbolism of childhood and its material manifestation. For example, Ronald Neame believed he could not find someone to match his desired image of Oliver because free milk, cod-liver oil and orange juice made actual boys 'tough and healthy-looking' youngsters.\textsuperscript{49} With John Howard Davies, Neame eventually found the vulnerable appearance he sought, and it became the keynote of the film's promotional campaign. The British film posters lacked a slogan and displayed Oliver 'silent' and petrified, held at knife-point by either Bill Sikes (Robert Newton) or Fagin; the two main representatives of corrupt adult society. The vulnerable Oliver image, with its powerful appeal to adult sentiment, was successfully integrated into the National Savings Campaign. Borrowing from the film's 'asking for more' sequence, a large picture of Oliver holding out his plate was accompanied by the caption, 'National Savings "Asks for More" for your country's prosperity'.\textsuperscript{50}

In \textit{Oliver Twist}, the connotations of childhood are indicated not only through physical appearance, but also through the use of specific cinematic devices, especially music and lighting. Sir Arnold Bax's score is scant. It has been suggested that the first thing you notice about the music is how little there is of it.\textsuperscript{51} The initial scenes are particularly important. Filmed in black and white, the opening shots of a stormy night are accompanied only by the sounds of wind and rain, yet following the birth of

\textsuperscript{46} It was released in 1951 with 12 minutes of cuts.
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Manchester Guardian} 22/2/1949; \textit{Daily Telegraph} 22/2/1949, microjacket for \textit{Oliver Twist}.
\textsuperscript{48} Microjacket for \textit{Oliver Twist}.
\textsuperscript{49} Microjacket for \textit{Oliver Twist}.
\textsuperscript{50} Press book for \textit{Oliver Twist}, BFI library.
\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Independent on Sunday} 25/6/1995, microjacket for \textit{Oliver Twist}. 202
Oliver, crying and a piano tune symbolically instil ‘life’ into the bleak environment. Thereafter, throughout the film, when Oliver appears he is accompanied by Harriet Cohen’s rendition of a piano piece. The recurring music is a solo, stressing Oliver’s own solitary status. The recurring child’s theme also signifies Oliver’s vulnerability within society. David Lean considered that the ‘delicate [solo] passage’ emphasised ‘the isolation of the little boy in a world of bullying adults’.

This ‘world of bullying adults’ is a twilight world of shadows. Many scenes are notable for Guy Green’s use of darkness. Fagin’s lair, for example, is always shot in a low-key style, emphasising a sinister sense of foreboding. Characters appear as silhouettes, the cinematography drawing on the Hollywood vogue for film noir, and restoring a Dickensian vision that had been lost in the bright, pastoral imagery of 1930s Dickens’ adaptations. Indeed, it is because the film’s world appears so ‘dark’ (a conventional visual indication of cruelty and violence) that Oliver Twist was recently assessed as a long way from heritage Dickens. Moreover, darkness is thought to permeate the whole film. Even when Oliver encounters his rich benefactor, the sunny scenes are flecked with thick shadows.

The process of adaptation also contributed to the sharply drawn opposition between a dark adult world and a vulnerable, innocent child. The film Oliver Twist, as discussed above, shares Dickens’ focus upon a child victimised by society. It also, through the activity of condensing and re-writing, constructs a stronger polarity than that found in Dickens’ story. Editing parts of the original, first published as a serial, 1837-1839, was inevitable: Lean calculated that the complete novel would last ten

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52 ‘Music’, microjacket for Oliver Twist.
53 It has been argued that the combination of nightmarish shadowy lighting and elaborate sets provides a ‘larger-than-life’ world in which characters emerge as caricatures and the force of Dickens’ social comment is lost. See Robert Murphy (1992) Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain 1939-49, London: Routledge, 135.
55 Jeffrey Richards explains how during the depressed 1930s, Victorian England represented a fantasy of good-will. Dickensian adaptations produced at MGM and Universal were brightly lit, cheerful and upbeat. See Richards (1997) Films and British National Identity, 334-340.
56 Independent 22/6/1995, microjacket for Oliver Twist.
57 Independent 22/6/1995, microjacket for Oliver Twist.
hours as a film. David Lean and Stanley Haynes wanted to produce a film with a clearly defined, varied, fast-moving, linear structure. Thus 'duplicated' scenes were removed as were references to the 'good' Maylie family that care for Oliver for several months. The result is a film that focuses on the novel's 'core', that is, the London underworld. The alterations, undertaken to create a conventional film narrative, also emphasise a negative image of the adult social world.

The film Oliver Twist represents a cruel and inhospitable adult society, not least because the most malevolent adult figures from the original novel are all retained: Fagin, Sikes, and Mr Bumble (Francis L. Sullivan). Oliver, within an adult society permeated by thefts and bribery, is at danger of corruption. His potential fate is to become as amoral as the other children, like The Artful Dodger (Anthony Newley), who have been exposed to adult vice. As in The Fallen Idol the child's situation can only be happily resolved through the restoration of protective parental authority. A familial resolution is pre-figured twice during the film: once when Mr Brownlow (Henry Stephenson) first discovers Oliver and takes him home; and once when Nancy (Kay Walsh), in a fit of 'maternal' remorse, attempts to reunite Oliver with Mr Brownlow. The film privileges the message that the proper place for Oliver is with his next of kin. The closing shot imitates a conventional resolution. Oliver walks hand in hand with Mr Brownlow (his grandfather, the closest thing an orphan has to a father), then runs into the arms of the housekeeper (a maternal substitute, previously seen nursing Oliver back to health).

Oliver Twist, like The Fallen Idol, draws an opposition between an adult world and a child's world. Both present childhood as a state of innocence and naivety. However, whereas in The Fallen Idol most of the action takes place within an Embassy, in Oliver Twist a substantial amount of screen-time is devoted to portraying urban slums and adults outside the domestic environment. The latter's greater emphasis on social conditions offers a more direct social critique, even given its

58 'Production Story', in Cineguild Publicity, microjacket for Oliver Twist.
59 Terry Staples (1986) 'NFT Programme Notes', microjacket for Oliver Twist.
60 The Artful Dodger's amorality is fostered by adults and circumstance: Fagin, for example, requires him to steal in return for his keep and bribes a reluctant Dodger to spy on his friend, Nancy.
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historical setting.\textsuperscript{61} In keeping with an image of the child as a victim, both \textit{Oliver Twist} and \textit{The Fallen Idol} use conventional narrative closures suggesting that the family ultimately offers the best environment for an innocent child. The theme of childhood innocence is also articulated in \textit{The Winslow Boy}. Here, there is a slightly different perspective. Although the child's predicament provides narrative motivation, the film emphasises the boy's family, and in particular the role of his father. In addition, although the film deals with injustice, it is primarily about the interaction between the family and middle-class rights, respectability, and the legal system, rather than any class-specific abhorrent social conditions.

\textit{The Winslow Boy} (Anthony Asquith, September 1948)

\textit{Oliver Twist} and \textit{The Winslow Boy} are two period films that deal with the theme of injustice, but in very different ways. Whereas \textit{Oliver Twist} depicts an orphan undeservedly amidst social depravity, \textit{The Winslow Boy} presents a middle-class boy deprived of his right to have a fair trial.\textsuperscript{62} Unlike \textit{Oliver Twist}, \textit{The Winslow Boy} is based on a true story. It takes as its subject the Archer-Shee Affair of 1912. In \textit{The Winslow Boy} an Osborne naval cadet is accused of stealing a 5s postal order and expelled without a hearing. The boy's father risks bankrupting his family in an effort to hire a barrister and take the case to court. In some respects, \textit{The Winslow Boy} is an anomaly in a chapter on childhood. The child is pivotal to the plot, yet the father is the key figure in the film. Nevertheless, it is worth analysing. The film confirms the hypothesis that the image of the vulnerable and innocent child is used to mediate adult preoccupations.

\textit{The Winslow Boy} introduces the vulnerability of the child early in its narrative. As in \textit{The Fallen Idol} and \textit{Oliver Twist}, the child is exposed to 'danger' when outside the protection of the family. Ronnie Winslow (Neil North), a 12-year-old cadet, is falsely accused of stealing. It is an occasion when, away from home for the first time,
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his family is unable to shelter him. Ronnie’s ‘childishness’ is emphasised on his return to the family house. He hides in the garden attempting to avoid his father. Through Ronnie’s inability to confront his father directly, the narrative establishes his immaturity. When unwillingly forced to speak with his father, Ronnie’s youthfulness is again stressed. This time it is in a plea for empathy and leniency. His mother, Grace Winslow (Marie Lohr), implores her husband ‘please don’t forget he’s only a child’.

Not only is Ronnie young and vulnerable, but he is also the innocent victim of an injustice. Although accused of a crime, the film consistently privileges the message that Ronnie is innocent. It is effectively the British legal system, not Ronnie, that is on trial. This is especially apparent in two instances. Once when Ronnie is cross-questioned by the barrister, Sir Robert Morton (Robert Donat), and then again during the trial sequence. On both occasions the film characters’ motivations do not share the meaning privileged to cinema audiences. For instance, Morton questions Ronnie in order to establish whether he is innocent or guilty. However, from a spectator’s point of view, Ronnie is innocent and the scene’s tension derives from whether Morton will arrive at the ‘right’ conclusion. Similarly, the Attorney-General’s statement that Ronnie is ‘entirely innocent of the charge brought against him two years ago’ confirms what viewers already ‘know’ about Ronnie. The statement’s significance resides in the realisation that justice has been served.

Although ostensibly about the rights of the child, The Winslow Boy deploys the notion of childhood innocence to articulate adult needs and fears. In a film that calls itself The Winslow Boy, it is significant that the father is the main subject, whereas the child’s viewpoint is omitted. Adult concerns occur on at least two levels. First, there is a theme of social respectability. The father is driven by a desire to defend his family name as much as by a desire to protect his child. Second, the ‘private’ case is presented in the light of ‘public’ matters. An individual injustice escalates into a national affair, and a successful final outcome provides a narrative resolution that confirms the power of British justice.
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The battle to prove Ronnie's innocence is conducted by his father, Arthur Winslow (Cedric Hardwicke), in an attempt to maintain the family's honour. The concern strikes a chord with post-war attitudes to names and ancestry that stressed the personal significance and stereotyping of Christian names, but the greater pride associated with the family background of surnames. The father himself, Arthur Winslow, is presented as respectable. He is hardworking; a churchgoer; and lives with his wife, children and servant in a spacious middle-class house in Wimbledon, a well-regarded London suburb. The fight of Arthur Winslow is, at least in part, about familial respectability. This is why Grace's accusation that 'pride and stubbornness' govern her husband's behaviour holds such resonance.

The attempt to safeguard the family name exposes an interesting paradox. Arthur Winslow must risk destroying his family in order to ensure its continued respectability. In taking his son's case to court, Winslow endures financial ruin and social ridicule. He also jeopardises the futures of his other son and daughter. Concerned about status, Winslow hires Morton, the most expensive barrister in the country, disregarding Morton's mercenary reputation for ignoring minor 'personal' cases. After 42 years of work, Winslow exceeds his overdraft limit and is forced to ask Dickie (Jack Watling), his elder son, to leave Oxford University for a job at the bank. Moreover, his daughter, Kate (Margaret Leighton), is also adversely effected. Her fiancé breaks off their engagement because of pressure from his 'high-minded' father who believes that the 'name of Winslow is becoming a laughing stock'.

_The Winslow Boy_ focuses on the father's sacrifice and the possible dissolution of the family. This is something that Grace disapprovingly drives home. 'You talk about sacrificing everything for your son', she says, but 'you are destroying yourself and me and your family'. The tension between saving and destroying the family, together with the theme of personal sacrifice, is reminiscent of earlier 1940s films which foreground an ideal notion of the nuclear family. _The Winslow Boy_, in which the legal system threatens and stands opposed to the family, resembles _The First of

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63 M-O A: FR 2392 'Attitudes to Names and Ancestry’, June 1946. 207
the Few and The Way to the Stars in which the nation opposes the family and creates contradictions. All three films require fathers to make sacrifices; however, Arthur Winslow acts more on behalf of his family than the father figures of The First of the Few and The Way to the Stars who act for the national good. As noted elsewhere, The Winslow Boy constructs a view of paternal heroism, dependent on an ethos of elf-sacrifice and service.

In focusing on the father, family sacrifice, and the implications of the father-child relationship, The Winslow Boy is an anomaly among the popular post-war British features from my sample. Whilst infrequently portrayed as a developed character, it is logical that (when represented) the father should act as the ‘redeemer’. As identified in the popular films of the 1940s from my sample, the mother is usually represented as a role in crisis, threatening the family. In The Winslow Boy although the father risks familial cohesion and harmony, his aim is to restore the family (its name and respectability), not (as is often the case with mothers) to risk the family through personal immorality and attempt to escape from its stifling confines.

If The Winslow Boy demonstrates an adult preoccupation with social respectability, then equally it indicates adult social concerns about injustice. Throughout the film, Ronnie’s case is not represented ‘in itself’ as an individual matter of little consequence. Instead it is both ‘of the family’ and ‘of society’. Not only does pursuing the case threaten the family, but it also has wider social implications. The right to a fair hearing is presented as about the rights of people as citizens, rather than a more specific campaign on behalf of beleaguered children. Robert Morton, for example, convinces the House of Commons that a guilty conviction without a trial is in breach of the Magna Carter, the archetypal document of human rights and liberty. The matter is one of national concern, as connoted by the trial’s punctuation with recurring shots of newspaper vendors and headlines. Moreover, there is some indication that the film was based on the Archer-Shee affair

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64 See ‘5.2 The Nuclear Family Ideal’, Chapter 5.
66 See ‘5.3 Secrets and Lies’, Chapter 5.
precisely because of what that specific trial represented about the legal system (rather than the protagonists involved). Namely, that in the popular imagination, it constituted an internationally recognised occasion on which the power of British justice was proved. This message is underlined in the narrative. When considering how the case’s successful outcome might best be represented to the press, Winslow suggests a headline notable for its democratic dimension. His phrase, ‘people’s triumph over despotism’ recapitulates the tone of the whole film. By using a child and minor misdemeanour the film stresses how the British practice of justice reaches even the remotest parts of the land.

The father in The Winslow Boy fights for his family and for people’s rights. In addition it is worth noting that although the theme of the innocent child mediates adult concerns, there is a gender bias. Protecting the name of the family reflects a male concern with inheritance and patrilineal descent. Moreover, although the fight in court is fuelled by the desire to ‘let right be done’, the film militates against women’s rights. This occurs through the narrative treatment of Kate, the daughter. She is a suffragette, indicating a political motivation on behalf of women. However, the narrative questions the validity of her judgement. Kate’s feminism is challenged by the men (her father and Morton) and becomes an ‘ambiguous entity’. For example, Kate mistakenly evaluates Morton, confirming her father’s appraisal. Moreover, a mutual flirtation in the final scene implies that Kate will marry Morton in the end, thereby underplaying her militancy.

In summary, The Winslow Boy is interesting in that it offers a literal translation of the idea of childhood innocence articulated in other film texts (such as The Fallen Idol or Oliver Twist). Ronnie’s ‘innocence’ receives legitimate recognition, as confirmed by the outcome of a court case. However, as in The Fallen Idol and Oliver Twist, the child is employed to explore adult preoccupations. In The Fallen Idol

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70 As noted above, the idea is also symbolised in the films where children are present, but peripheral: The First of the Few, The Way to the Stars, The Man in Grey, They Were Sisters, Brief Encounter, and The Madness of the Heart.
Felipe's naivety highlights adult deceit and in *Oliver Twist* the innocent orphan underlines adult and social corruption. In *The Winslow Boy*, Ronnie's innocence is the crux of a narrative based around the father, foregrounding both male preoccupations with the family and 'national' concerns with social justice. Other films from the 1940s deal with similar adult preoccupations: the films from my sample which foreground children undergoing a transition to adulthood also emphasise the themes of children's vulnerability, social conditions, immorality, and corruption.

### 7.3 Rites-of-Passage

In films focusing upon children as innocents, the experience of childhood is often rendered problematic, usually because of a child's interaction with a more amoral, corrupt or unjust adult world (*The Fallen Idol, Oliver Twist, and The Winslow Boy*). In other films from my sample, there is a more pronounced transitional perspective. Problems result from the process of becoming an adult, rather than from a young child's experience in an adult world. The central characters of the 'transitional' rites-of-passage films (*Fanny by Gaslight, Great Expectations* and *Caesar and Cleopatra*), and also of the 'denial' films (*The Seventh Veil* and *Hamlet*) of the following section, '7.4 Madness and Female Hysteria', are not young children. Instead, for most of the narrative, they are aged 16 years or above. These are 'adult children': both the potential parents of the next generation who have not yet resolved their relationships with their own parents, and children corrupted by an adult world but who have not yet achieved a perfect entry to it.

Films such as *Fanny by Gaslight, Great Expectations* and *Caesar and Cleopatra* all present a fraught transition from child to adult. Both *Fanny by Gaslight*...

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71 There were, as today, practical restrictions upon the employment of child actors, especially those under 12 years. This helps to explain why the parts played by child actors in the 'transitional' films, *Fanny by Gaslight* and *Great Expectations*, are so limited.

72 Sarah Harwood makes a useful distinction between two types of actual (as opposed to absent or metaphorical) child representations: the adult 'child' (working through their own maturation), and the 'child-as-child' (below the age of majority). See Sarah Harwood (1997) *Family Fictions: Representations of the Family in 1980s Hollywood Cinema*, London: Macmillan, 124-125.

and *Great Expectations* explore and diffuse class tensions and anxieties within the context of an immoral society, whereas *Caesar and Cleopatra* is less about class relations, emphasising the theme of the corrupting nature of female power and ambition. All three films witness some degree of ambivalence towards adult status. It entails some loss of innocence and is only achieved after a period of social (*Fanny by Gaslight*) or moral (*Great Expectations, Caesar and Cleopatra*) decline. Yet in the interests of creating a positive narrative closure, it is also associated with the protagonist’s greater confidence or self-discovery.

**Fanny by Gaslight (Anthony Asquith, May 1944)**

Set in Victorian England, *Fanny by Gaslight* is about the life of an illegitimate daughter of a cabinet minister. The film focuses on Fanny Hopwood’s progression from child (Ann Stephens) to betrothed adult (Phyllis Calvert). It is a ‘female initiation drama’ in which the protagonist confronts a series of obstacles on her path to self-discovery.\(^7^4\) Fanny suffers social decline, rather than any moral fall from grace. She is a victim of familial circumstances and social prejudices, but remains a figure of emotional purity. Fanny is more ‘respectable’ than the upper-class characters in the film. Thus *Fanny by Gaslight* privileges the message that class divisions are not founded in reason. At its time of release, publicists emphasised the remoteness of the film, yet in one important respect *Fanny by Gaslight* articulates a wartime message. Fanny’s rite-of-passage symbolises a desirable social transition; from class-bound to classless society. Fanny’s exclusion from ‘polite’ society is narratively resolved through pledging a cross-class marriage and a distinctly egalitarian wartime message permeates the film’s resolution.

The opening scenes of *Fanny by Gaslight* portray Fanny’s 9th birthday and perform a dual function. First, mysteries surrounding Fanny’s identity are introduced: a strange man gives her a valuable birthday gift.\(^7^5\) Second, Fanny’s childhood innocence is established: ignorant of her father’s source of income, she wanders into ‘Shades’ without realising that this ‘club’ below the family house is a brothel. At age

\(^7^4\) Landy (1991) *British Genres*, 212.  
\(^7^5\) Landy (1991) *British Genres*, 212.
9, both quiet Fanny and her vain friend, Lucy (Gloria Sydney), are represented with a view to what they will become as adults: the former is to remain a figure of emotional purity, whereas the latter becomes an image conscious Gaiety chorus girl (Jean Kent). The narrative omits ten years and resumes with Fanny’s return from boarding school on her 19th birthday, an occasion that symbolises the end of childhood innocence. Given that Fanny was sent to school to be sheltered from her father’s business, on her return, she is no longer protected from society. Instead of progressing from child to respectable adult, a downward spiral of events makes the transition difficult.

In Fanny by Gaslight social decline both marks the closing of ‘childhood innocence’ and prevents Fanny from marrying, an indicator of conventional and respectable ‘womanhood’. Neither married nor residing with her parents, Fanny is in a state of limbo. This is especially true given a Victorian setting. The 19th century was a time when a daughter would typically pass from the possession of her father to her husband.

Fanny’s social decline stems from her unexpected familial break-up and revelations about her family background. William Hopwood (John Laurie), Fanny’s father, is killed by Lord Manderstoke (James Mason) and Mary Hopwood (Nora Swinburne), her mother, dies from an illness shortly afterwards. Fanny, forced to find a new identity for herself, is the ‘archetypal orphan of romance’. Due to the sudden change in her family situation, Fanny has to work for a living, and is consequently relegated to a low social class. Fanny becomes destitute, works as a servant, learns that she is illegitimate (the daughter of Mary and a cabinet minister, Clive Seymore, played by Stuart Lindsell), and works as a barmaid. The last occupation is particularly significant because of where it ranks in a hierarchy of social respectability. Whereas domestic service has conventionally been a female occupation located in the ‘private’ sphere, bar work entails negotiating a traditional ‘male-dominated’ area. The job’s connotations would not be lost on the audiences of

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Throughout the film, Fanny is shunned by higher social classes, constituting a pronounced theme of class conflict. Fanny loves Harry Somerford (Stewart Granger), Clive Seymore’s solicitor, but their relationship encounters prejudice. The force of class hostility is figured through the disapproval of Harry’s mother and his sister, Kate (Cathleen Nesbitt). Kate, for example, expressly warns Fanny not to marry Harry because his political career depends upon his social connections.

Although Fanny’s passage to respectable adulthood is presented as socially unacceptable, it is simultaneously privileged as morally right. Throughout adversity, Fanny is a self-sacrificing ideal of womanhood. She is, for example, prepared to forfeit her own happiness and never see Harry again. Moreover, Fanny’s high morality distinguishes her from the more fortunate upper-class characters, also implying that class snobberies, ostensibly about decency and respectability, are mistakenly founded. Fanny’s selflessness, for example, compares favourably with Kate’s selfishness. Even when Harry is seriously injured, Kate would rather he die than for him to see Fanny. Furthermore, other characters with ‘respectable’ backgrounds are likewise associated with selfishness and immorality. Lord Manderville is an aristocrat, but he is also a murderer, a brothel customer, and a womaniser who pursues affairs with both Mrs Seymore (Margaretta Scott) and with Lucy. Mrs Seymore, again a member of the upper classes, not only has many adulterous affairs, but also drives her husband to suicide through blackmail. While Lucy, Fanny’s childhood friend from a stable (if not upper class) family background, first becomes a chorus girl and then a ballet dancer in Paris; occupations and a continental location which possess connotations of moral laxity.

At a time when concerns circulated about moral conduct and probity, publicists sought to distance the Victorian vision of immorality from wartime London.
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*Fanny by Gaslight*, like the post-war production of *Oliver Twist*, took Victorian London as its subject, but the two were marketed in very different ways. *Fanny by Gaslight* lacked the pedigree of a Dickens' adaptation. It was based on Michael Sadleir's 1940 novel, a pastiche of the 'sensation' novels of the 1860s. Instead of emphasising possible similarities between the present and the past, press material for *Fanny by Gaslight* focused on how London in the 1940s was a more respectable environment than it had been in the 1870s:

> Night clubs of today are tame replacements of the notorious “dives” and “night-houses” of the 1870s. London after dark between Haymarket and Leicester Square was lit with wine, women and song in the saucy ‘seventies..."79

Nevertheless, the ‘untamed’ past was brazenly marketed for its potential voyeuristic appeal:80

> In “Hopwood’s Shades” filmgoers will see an expensive “dive,” a haunt of well-to-do swells and their experienced women, a soft-carpeted hideaway where the gaslight flickers against the palms, chuckles and only an occasional protest come from the curtained alcoves, bawdy girl singers kiss elderly patrons’ brows and kick their heels among the gilt tables.81

Publicity emphasised the ‘escapism’ of *Fanny by Gaslight*. But the film text itself articulates a negative ‘1940s view’ of class divisions. Fanny’s rite-of-passage from child to adult allows for the exploration and resolution of class difference. Fanny’s morally undeserved plight indicates the injustice of class prejudice, underlining the wisdom in Harry’s statement that, ‘it’s time people were judged on what they are, not on their parentage’ and his prediction that, ‘100 years from now, less, there’ll be no such thing [as class distinctions]’. With the film’s closure Fanny finally adopts the conventional role of an adult woman, irrespective of class boundaries. Defying Kate, she nurses Harry to health and is committed to their

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80 It was also banned in America for not conforming with the Hays code.
81 *Press book for Fanny by Gaslight*. 

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marriage. Fanny’s closing bedside address suggests a new-found confidence that has an unmistakably egalitarian appeal:

Harry, we’re going to be married. We’re going to have a home and children. You’re going to get well. You’re going to live.

The notion of family that Fanny invokes is one potentially available to all. It is a family that binds different classes together, symbolically annealing social division and conflict. In this wartime film, the child’s tempestuous rite-of-passage to adulthood is bestowed with the force of social redemption.

As in those films focusing upon children as innocents (The Fallen Idol, Oliver Twist, The Winslow Boy) Fanny by Gaslight presents the child in order to articulate adult concerns. By portraying a traumatic transition from child to adult, it explores and diffuses the dangers of class divisions within a historical setting. If Fanny by Gaslight is a female initiation drama, then Great Expectations with its similar emphasis upon an orphan child, the mysteries surrounding identity, and the path of self-discovery can be regarded as a ‘male initiation drama’. However, whereas in Fanny by Gaslight the protagonist maintains her virtue throughout social decline, Great Expectations is characterised by the reverse. Pip’s social ascent is accompanied by moral decline.

Great Expectations (David Lean, December 1946)

Made post-war, Great Expectations was produced as a prestige literary adaptation for an international market. The ‘heritage’ appeal of the Dickensian tradition for British cinema has been noted with reference to Oliver Twist. Adapting ‘classics’ conformed to a critical demand for literary respectability. Furthermore, as with the other less ‘respectable’ adaptations, it also offered the appeal of a recognisable story. Although the screenplay for Great Expectations necessitated

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82 See above, 200.
84 In 1947 the News of the World reviewer personally found Great Expectation’s plot so bad he thought it would not have reached the screen if it was by an unknown, but he realised millions were as familiar
certain changes to Dickens’ original story, it adheres closely to the tendencies in portraying children found elsewhere in 1940s films. In particular, Pip (Anthony Wager/John Mills) is a victim of familial and social circumstances. Pip’s character development becomes a morality tale to be read within the context of post-war society. In portraying misconceptions about class, the film had didactic potential (especially for children), culminating in a controversy over censorship. Moreover, the ending, although less explicit than that found in the wartime address of Fanny by Gaslight, has an egalitarian appeal. It implies a reconciliation of class conflict.

Whilst explicitly intended to enhance Britain’s status, the choice of Great Expectations (rather than another Dickens’ novel) implicitly suggested a bias towards a certain imagery of the child. As explained above, the works of Dickens’ possess three main tendencies in their representation of children. Both Great Expectations and Oliver Twist are part of the same Dickensian approach. This is the one that has most affinity with the portrayal of focal children elsewhere in popular 1940s cinema. The Dickensian idea that children are located in and of society, born emotionally innocent and then victimised by parents or adults, has similarities with the notion of the child in The Fallen Idol, The Winslow Boy, Fanny by Gaslight and The Seventh Veil. The two other Dickensian tendencies receive short shrift in the British cinema of the period. The Dickensian idea that children are spiritually wiser than adults is only occasionally implied (as with the peripheral character of Toby in Frieda). Moreover, despite the realities of children dying in the blitz, children in the popular films from my sample are neither associated with death and pathos, nor with the idea that they need to be sacrificed in order to achieve a better social world. Indeed, in

with Great Expectations as they were with that most ubiquitous item of the 1940s, the ration book. See microjacket for Great Expectations, BFI library.

Great Expectations, like Oliver Twist, was produced with the intention of creating a prestige film. Even costumes were intended to showcase British talent on an international stage. For the first time in six years, British companies provided slipper satin and moiré fabrics for the film industry in an agreement between George Gray of Bond Street and the Rank Organisation. Great Expectations was to be ‘an ambassador for British manufacture’, illustrating what could be done in the sphere of fashion when austerity restrictions were removed. See ‘Cineguild Publicity’, in microjacket for Great Expectations.

See above, 200.

87 Only the ‘metaphorical child’, Clive Candy, in The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp is associated with (symbolic) death. See ‘7.5 The Metaphorical Child’, Chapter 7.
films where children are present (rather than focal) in the narrative the opposite is the case; they are associated with life and hope, and their presence is a pre-requisite for an improved society.

As well as the actual choice of *Great Expectations*, the way the novel was altered for screen adaptation is significant. Practical cuts (made in order to construct a two-hour film from a 500-page novel) create shifts in emphasis and thus in meaning. A detailed analysis of the film’s structural pattern reveals three main changes: Pip’s education as a gentleman is shortened; several parallels between characters are omitted; and the ending is altered. The combined effect is to create a film that, like *Fanny by Gaslight*, is an initiation drama with pronounced themes of morality, class and romance. Truncating Pip’s gentlemanly education curtails the possibilities for pleasurably viewing Pip’s ‘immoral’ frivolity in London, dwelling instead on the innocence of his early years and his later stage of moral reclamation. The only character parallel remaining in the film is that between Estella (Valerie Hobson/Jean Simmons) and Pip, which offers a greater focus upon ‘romantic leads’. Moreover, at the end of the film romance is also brought to the fore. Pip is not shown to have contemplated marrying Biddy (Eileen Erskine), consequently his reunion with Estella is not overshadowed by other failed romantic intentions.

*Great Expectations* with its modified Dickensian roots, is a film that shares more general 1940s tendencies in representing the child. There is a notion of the child as an unwitting victim of both familial and social circumstances, and adult behaviour. There is also a pronounced moral trajectory, presenting the passage from child to adult as a difficult one.

Pip, like children in *The Fallen Idol, The Winslow Boy* and *Fanny by Gaslight*, suffers because of his familial and social circumstances. He is a fostered orphan, beaten by Mrs Joe (Freda Jackson) and of low social status, who loves the

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89 McFarlane (1996) *Novel to Film*, 112.
90 McFarlane (1996) *Novel to Film*, 110-111.
emotionally cold, upper class Estella. It is this troubled and impoverished family background that helps establish the narrative explanation for Pip’s disastrous acquisition of expectations. Pip’s expectations are determined primarily by his desire to become a gentleman worthy of Estella’s attentions. Moreover, the realisation that Magwitch is his benefactor highlights how Pip, vulnerable and trusting, has consistently been the victim of adults’ desires and drives. He has been manipulated by both Miss Havisham (Martitia Hunt) and by Magwitch (Finlay Currie). Havisham, driven by her hatred of men, encouraged Pip to believe that she was his benefactor. She wants his heart to be broken by Estella. Alternatively, Magwitch uses Pip to live out his own impossible fantasies and ambitions of becoming a wealthy London gentleman.

The film outlines Pip’s development from the innocent and fearful child that helps Magwitch on the marshes, through his fall from moral grace in London, until the discovery of his benefactor and subsequent moral redemption. Pip (like Fanny in Fanny by Gaslight) is a Victorian orphan forced to find his own identity through enduring and overcoming a series of discoveries and ordeals. The film’s moral tone is emphasised through the use of narration. John Mills’ voice-over occurs 12 times in the film, generally ‘locating’ the narrative by noting either the passing of time or a change in setting. However, Brian McFarlane has identified two important occasions when the voice-over performs a more complex function connected with Pip’s moral growth. As in the novel’s first-person narration, these are instances when the mature Pip unfavourably reflects back upon his earlier conduct. For example, Joe Gargery’s (Bernard Miles) visit is accompanied by the following remorseful voice-over:

As I watched Joe that Tuesday morning... let me confess that, if I could have kept him away by paying money, I would have done so. In my efforts to become a gentleman, I had succeeded in becoming a snob.

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91 McFarlane (1996) Novel to Film, 112.
92 McFarlane (1996) Novel to Film, 122-123.
The voice-over, by an older Pip, privileges a negative moral evaluation of his younger self, implying that he has learnt from and relinquished the ‘snobberies’ of his past career as a ‘gentleman’.

There is a class dimension in the voice-over as in much of the film. The implication is that the moneyed Pip is less of a ‘gentleman’, in the sense of being honourable, respectful and hard-working, than Joe Gargery. Indeed, the film’s ending is in keeping with the negative valuation of class differences overall. As noted elsewhere, Pip’s and Estella’s personal reconciliation at Satis House is also a symbolic reconciliation of class conflict: the two are equals in terms of background, while the house itself signifies an ossified attitude to class that needs to be discarded. Guy Green’s lighting reinforces a sense of dismantling the old. He evokes the house’s gloomy decay until the film’s climactic sequence when Pip tears down the curtains, allowing warm light to flood the room.

On release, the moral tone of Great Expectations was widely recognised. The film was thought to heed to the conventional and didactic morality of the Dickens’ original, a story traditionally taught in schools. As one reviewer astutely remarked:

...the plot conforms to every copperplate precept in a Victorian copybook. Pip’s selfish pursuit of social standing and his shabby treatment of the humble but devoted Joe Gargery end badly for him. Honest labour is shown to have its own reward.

Unlike films such as The Fallen Idol or Fanny by Gaslight which were generally considered adult in content, Great Expectations was widely thought to be well-suited for children. However, the BBFC awarded Great Expectations an adult certificate. Both the churchyard scene on the marshes and Havisham’s death were considered unsuitable viewing for children. Given the film’s moral tone, the ‘A’ certificate

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93 McFarlane (1996) Novel to Film, 111.
95 Evening Standard 19/12/1946, microjacket for Great Expectations.
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aroused some controversy. Censors were meant to be protecting children from potentially corrupting influences, and it seemed inappropriate that a ‘provocative’ American film such as The Outlaw (1943) was permissible entertainment, whereas an English ‘classic’ such as Great Expectations was not.

Great Expectations conveys a ‘Victorian’ morality that can be read in the light of war and post-war trends in the portrayal of children in order to mediate adult social concerns. Pip’s rise and fall articulates class difference and prejudice. Using the vantage-point of an older Pip, reflecting back upon his life, privileges a negative evaluation of elitist attitudes. An implied need for overcoming class barriers is graphically depicted in the final scene when Pip and Estella reconcile at Satis House. Another post-war film, Caesar and Cleopatra, also deals with the transition from child to adult. This time however, there is an emphasis upon gender rather than class difference.

Caesar and Cleopatra (Gabriel Pascal, January 1946)

Like Oliver Twist and Great Expectations, Caesar and Cleopatra was a ‘prestige’ film. In an attempt to break an international market vast amounts of time and money were spent (the film cost triple its £470,000 budget), arousing criticism that there was an excessive use of studio space, personnel and resources during a period of austerity. Publicly, Pascal invoked his wartime commitment in order to defend his position: ‘Remind the Association of Cine-Technicians that I was the only man who had the guts to carry on at Denham during the Blitz’. However, at the film’s premiere his tone was more flippant: Pascal introduced Sydney Box as Britain’s most successful producer, then pointing to himself, added ‘I am the most expensive!’ As with Fanny by Gaslight and Great Expectations, Caesar and

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96 Hostility culminated at the annual conference for The Association of Cine-Technicians with a resolution passed 218 votes to 33 that Gabriel Pascal should be, ‘severely censured for the inordinate length of time taken to produce “Caesar” (three years) and allowed to make more films in Britain only under special control’. See Daily Express 29/4/1946, microjacket for Caesar and Cleopatra, BFI library.

97 Daily Express 29/4/1946, microjacket for Caesar and Cleopatra.

98 Item 1.5 ‘Muriel and Sydney Box Diary’, Muriel and Sydney Box Collection, Special Collections, BFI library.
*Children*

*Cleopatra* takes as its subject matter a child’s maturation. However, rather than present the child alone as the central protagonist, the film focuses on the relationship between the childlike Cleopatra (Vivien Leigh) and the paternal Caesar (Claude Reins). The film implies more about gender than it does about class divisions. With its indication that the growth of female ambition is problematic, unless directed towards motherhood and domesticity, the film possesses post-war connotations regarding the relations between the sexes.

Whilst the extravagance of *Caesar and Cleopatra* was a cause for concern, the aspects relating to its portrayal of a child ‘coming of age’ did not court similar controversy.\(^9\) At most, *Picturegoer* readers considered the script boring and not suited to the cinema.\(^10\) Publicists and reviewers implicitly recognised Cleopatra’s transitory role by likening her to a ‘child-woman’.\(^11\) The child’s fall from grace and, more specifically, the amorality of female ambition were themes that seemed attune with post-war representations and attitudes.\(^12\) Furthermore, there are certain similarities between Cleopatra and the protagonists of *Fanny by Gaslight* and *Great Expectations*. The child Cleopatra is initially presented as naive; her transitory period to adulthood is associated with (moral) decline; and she is characterised by a degree of self-realisation at the end of the film.

Due to her beliefs, outward appearance and her relationship with her brother, Cleopatra is at first figured as a naive child. She has faith in myths and superstitions, believing, for example, that the Romans live on human flesh. When Caesar first sees Cleopatra he even recognises her as a ‘divine child’, rather than as the Queen of Egypt. Moreover, Cleopatra and her younger brother, Ptolemy (Anthony Harvey), are presented as child rivals who bicker and vie for adult attention. Just as George

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100 ‘Caesar and Cleopatra: Fans’ Reactions’, *Picturegoer* 2/2/1946, 14.

101 Microjacket for *Caesar and Cleopatra*.

102 The narrative of *The Winslow Boy* also counters the tenability of female ambition outside the home.
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Bernard Shaw’s original 1898 play stresses Cleopatra’s youth, so does the film. In both, Cleopatra is 16 years old (rather than the historically accepted 19 years). In addition, a new scene written by Shaw for the film emphasises that Cleopatra is a child who needs to be told by her nurse, Ftatateeta (Flora Robson), to take a bath every night, rather than once a month.

The transition from child to adult is associated with Cleopatra’s moral decline. Intent on becoming Queen, Cleopatra is corrupted by the force of her political ambition. Cleopatra reaches her lowest (moral) ebb when she commands Ftatateeta to murder Pothinus (Francis L. Sullivan) for his attempt to persuade Caesar of her treachery. Her judgement is flawed, and the killing precipitates an Egyptian attack. Cleopatra’s childish incompetence is contrasted with Caesar’s wisdom. Indeed the murder of Pothinus is historical fabrication purposely introduced in order to demonstrate Caesar’s superiority.

Caesar consistently occupies a benevolent paternal role towards Cleopatra. His aim is to transform her from a child into ‘a real, real Queen’. Before Cleopatra is even aware of Caesar’s identity, he starts the process of education by explaining that Queens should not be afraid of slaves; ensuring that she dons state clothes and the crown; and by forcing her to face Caesar alone. The age difference emphasises Caesar’s position as authoritative guide. One scene dwells upon Cleopatra’s amused realisation that Caesar is a bald, old man. Although there is a flirtation between Cleopatra and the substantially older Caesar, there is a lack of romantic intrigue. The film’s only kiss is platonic, given by Caesar to Cleopatra, on the forehead. Caesar is a mentor, upon whom Cleopatra is dependent.

Narratively, the film undermines Cleopatra’s ambition to be a ‘real’ Queen. Not only does Cleopatra need Caesar’s philosophical guidance, but she is also forced

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103 George Bernard Shaw’s screenplay adheres closely to that of his original satirical play of 1898: both versions of Caesar and Cleopatra bestow Caesar with heroism and wisdom, and Cleopatra with a lack of insight and sophistication.


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Children to rely upon his physical protection when he saves her from a besieged lighthouse. Even at the end of the film, Cleopatra is not presented as an independent monarch. Caesar leaves Rufio (Basil Sydney) behind in order to assist Cleopatra in governing the Egyptians. Moreover, she fails to abide by her decision not to forgive Caesar, preferring instead to bid Caesar farewell in return for his pledge to send her a man. Still reliant on Caesar’s good will, Cleopatra cries at his departure, and awaits the arrival of Mark Anthony as her future husband. As in other popular post-war British films from my sample, such as *The Winslow Boy* and *Frieda*, female political ambitions are not narratively sanctioned. Cleopatra’s non-domestic femininity has disastrous consequences, and the film’s resolution lies with the implied assimilation of Cleopatra into a more quiescent adult role. The final shot of Cleopatra, guarded protectively by Apollodorus (Stewart Granger), and passively gazing at Caesar’s departing boat, confirms her powerlessness.

During the 1940s, *Caesar and Cleopatra* received publicity because of its ‘extravagance’, becoming a focal point for debating the merits of making films with a view to penetrating an international market. What was less controversial was its conservative and patronising tone towards women. Cleopatra is a naive child, who descends into treachery and, unable to master the demands of her political position, finally awaits the arrival of a husband from overseas. This was an apt theme for post-war Britain; a time when women had ‘come of age’ by adopting new war-related roles, yet ones which they were expected to relinquish with the return of male combatants. *Caesar and Cleopatra* presents the transition to womanhood as problematic, but does not articulate any similar difficulties in relation to men. Adult masculinity is not an area of equivalent concern. Further gender discrepancies are apparent in the depiction of children and madness found in two popular films from the 1940s, *The Seventh Veil* and *Hamlet*.

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105 For example, Kate’s feminism in *The Winslow Boy* is gradually diffused throughout the narrative. For a discussion of how Nell’s political priorities in *Frieda* are portrayed as inappropriate see Charlotte Brunsdon and Rachel Moseley (1997) “She’s a Foreigner Who’s Become a British Subject”: *Frieda*, in Alan Burton, Tim O’Sullivan and Paul Wells (eds.) *Liberal Directions: Basil Dearden and Postwar British Film Culture*, Wiltshire: Flicks Books, 129-136.
7.4 Madness and Female Hysteria

In both *The Seventh Veil* and *Hamlet* the child’s inability to take on an adult role is figured through the motif of madness. During the 1940s, psychological explanations for behaviour gained popular currency, and this tendency became apparent in film. As would be expected, cinema presented a partial view of psychological theory. Feature films retained the basic premise that psychoanalysis sought to understand the individual through recourse to family relationships and childhood experiences. But within a 1940s context, what is interesting is the gender bias inherent in the films’ approach.

At a time when many men and women suffered psychological disturbances as a result of wartime experiences and subsequent post-war readjustment, madness in popular British feature films from my sample was figured as a specifically female phenomenon. It is overtly romanticised, often used in the melodramatic mode to symbolise a female inability to function as a responsible adult. The association of madness with female romantic intrigue explains the choice of a title such as *Madness of the Heart* for a film where no literal ‘madness’ is apparent in the narrative. Moreover, themes about neurotic fear were generally regarded as ‘highbrow’, even when such experiences were widespread. As one reviewer noted:

...the cause of mental trouble is supposed to be above the head of the ordinary person – although in real life all of us, surely, are closely acquainted with at least one case of nervous disorder and are, unfortunately, likely to know many more before the full results of the war become manifest.\(^{106}\)

In *The Seventh Veil*, Francesca cannot fulfil her adult destiny (to become a married woman) because she is psychologically affected by her experiences as a child. Hysterical behaviour, as in popular films like *Brief Encounter, A Place of One’s Own* (1945) and *Black Narcissus* (1947), is only associated with the female. Moreover, it can be read as a denial of, if not *Madonna of the Seven Moon’s* liberating escape from, the conventional adult responsibilities of women.
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Hamlet confirms, rather than contradicts, madness as one signifier of female inability or reluctance to shoulder the burdens of adulthood. The Shakespearean play is notorious for its contrary interpretations. A frequently posed question is whether Hamlet, the child Prince, is mad. However, the film version attempts to foreclose this as a narrative possibility. With the privileged reading of Hamlet, there is an attempt to underplay Hamlet's childlike status and disassociate him from madness. In the preferred reading, Hamlet is not troubled by insanity, but by the trait of indecision. The latter functions as a lesser assault on the control, independence and wisdom held to mark adult masculinity. Alternatively, Ophelia is presented as a child innocent who succumbs to madness when the demands of adult femininity become too much to bear.

Madness, in both The Seventh Veil and Hamlet, is caused by familial circumstances, and signifies a female inability to progress from a position of child vulnerability into an adult role. The emphasis upon the adoption of adult femininity (rather than adult masculinity) as a narrative problematic suggests an anxiety about female roles. This is in keeping with other portrayals, particularly those of the erring mother found in several post-war films foregrounding the nuclear family.107

The Seventh Veil (Compton Bennett, October 1945)

Combining a psychological theme and star names, The Seventh Veil was widely considered to occupy a middle ground between 'prestige' adaptations and the 'vulgar' pleasures of films such as Fanny by Gaslight. The Seventh Veil begins with Francesca Cunningham (Ann Todd), a young pianist, lying in a hospital bed. She then attempts suicide. To discover the cause of her mental illness (she has a fixation on her hands as well as a suicidal tendency), a psychologist, Dr Larson (Herbert Lom) places Francesca under hypnosis. An account of Francesca's life is then told, with her voice-over, in flashback. It starts from when Francesca is 14 years old, explains how after the death of her father she went to live with her guardian, Nicholas (James Mason), and proceeds until the narrative present.

107 See discussion of the 'problem' mother, Chapter 5.

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The main theme, as relayed through flashback, is the controlling nature of the 'oedipal' relationship between the tyrannical father-figure Nicholas and the vulnerable Francesca. According to Francesca (under hypnosis) Nicholas possessively blocks her attempts to court other men. Thus Francesca is trapped as an adult 'child', unable to undergo a rite-of-passage to maturation. As in *Caesar and Cleopatra*, there is a gender dimension between a male mentor and female 'child'. It requires a man's influence as 'master' to nurture a woman's talent.  

In *The Seventh Veil* disrupted familial circumstances foster female neurosis, yet (even in Francesca's subjective account) do not affect men in the same way. In the flashback, Francesca is a romanticised victim of her circumstances as signified by the emotional release of her piano music. Classical concertos, and the use of Rahmaninoff in particular, reprise the romantic angst of Laura Jesson in *Brief Encounter*. Music is 'of the emotions' and Francesca's fixation that she cannot play the piano suggests how Francesca has denied her adult feelings for Nicholas. Alternatively, Nicholas, who has also been subject to family break-up, is not driven to suicide and insanity, but only to solitude and vicious jealousy. Masculinity, relative to Francesca's extreme, is not problematic. Although his mother's desertion provides the narrative explanation for why Nicholas only hires male servants, he does not require any 'expert' psychoanalytical assistance, nor is he as self-destructive as his ward, Francesca.

As noted elsewhere, the doctor's role in restoring the woman in society is crucial: Larson instigates Francesca's story, unravels Francesca's attachment to Nicholas, and enables her to return to him not as a child but voluntarily as a

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109 An alternative view, offered by Tessa Perkins, is that masculinity's most disturbing aspects are raised, yet they are elided in Larson's summary of events. See Perkins (1996) 'Two Weddings', 277-279.
The film’s narrative structure, with its dual emphasis upon Francesca’s narration, and the doctor’s ‘correct’ reading of her ailment is important. Although a large proportion of screen-time is allocated to Francesca’s interpretation of her experiences, the psychoanalyst plays a central role, revealing how medical institutions normalise women’s position. The emphasis upon female madness, which needs to be understood by (male) authority, was apparent in the film’s press campaign. The film’s slogan, ‘It strips bare a woman’s mind’, implied there are specifically female defensive barriers which need to be uncovered. Furthermore, a publicity stunt focused on the irrationality (if not hysteria) of female behaviour and its opposition with the reason of science. Professionals, doctors and lawyers were invited to a screening of The Seventh Veil followed by a discussion in which key questions for debate included: ‘Can science show a woman what man she should love?’ and, ‘Why does a woman sometimes chose for a mate, a man who’s cruel and heartless in preference to one who’s kind and thoughtful?’

The film’s resolution in which Francesca chooses Nicholas over and above two other suitors, signifies the acceptance of adult responsibility and the restoration of familial ‘normalcy’. Francesca rejects the ‘good times’ and avenues of ‘escape’ that are associated with Peter (Hugh McDermott), a player in a club band, and Max (Albert Lieven), with whom she had planned to live, unmarried, in Italy. With the conservative closure, Francesca symbolically heals the ruptures in the family. Not only does she overcome her fixation on her hands (a madness which manifests itself as a child’s fear – Francesca was caned at school, resulting in her failure of a piano exam), but she adopts an adult female role that restores the woman within the home. Appropriately, by the end of the film, Nicholas has replaced his mother’s portrait with that of Francesca.

111 Tessa Perkins explains how Francesca’s account makes it clear that she wanted to escape from Nicholas’ excessive control and, consequently, considerable ‘work’ must be done to make sense of her final choice to stay with him. This is achieved through Larson’s position as an ‘expert’, providing the authoritative explanation of her trauma. See Perkins (1996) ‘Two Weddings’, 278.
In *The Seventh Veil* as in certain other popular films of the 1940s madness is a female ailment. In relation to adult women, a film such as *Madonna of the Seven Moons*, dramatises madness or hysteria as an escape from the stifling constraints of domesticity. For the female 'adult child', Francesca, madness is a 'veil' denying adult emotions and a temporary retreat (rather than realised flight) from adult responsibilities and commitment. With its medical 'cure' Francesca's desire for independence is resolved and she is assimilated into a dependent domestic role. The conflation of madness with women and (more specifically) the female, rather than the male, child is apparent in another popular feature film from the 1940s, *Hamlet*.

**Hamlet (Laurence Olivier, June 1948)**

*Hamlet* is a late 1940s 'prestige' film based upon a play of contradictory meanings and interpretations. On translation to the film medium, an attempt was made to establish a single preferred reading of the play, especially with regard to the portrayal of Hamlet (Laurence Olivier), the most equivocal character. In so far as the film underplays Hamlet's youth, the notion of the child is not foregrounded in the narrative. Thus, *Hamlet* is discussed below with a view to how its negation of the male child's madness interacts with meanings found among other popular film texts of the period. In keeping with the usual association of madness with women or the female child, Ophelia (Jean Simmons) in *Hamlet* is an innocent driven to madness and suicide, whereas Hamlet is a man characterised by fatal indecision rather than insanity.

Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet*, exists in three versions, the First Quarto, the Second Quarto and the First Folio, and is open to many readings. Whether Hamlet is mad or manipulative is a major debate. There are also political questions relating to Hamlet's succession and the role of the monarchy. What is notable about the late 1940s film adaptation is a conscious attempt to construct a simplified narrative structure from a play of ambiguity. Laurence Olivier described the abridged screenplay as an 'Essay in Hamlet' with a 'story easy to follow for people who are

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deterred by Shakespeare himself.\textsuperscript{115} Text-editor, Alan Dent, modified dialogue for ease of understanding, giving rise to a wave of fidelity criticism.\textsuperscript{116} Moreover, the film omits many of the play's textual complications and seeks to privilege a specific view of Hamlet. As a film, Hamlet deals explicitly with familial matters, and precludes political intrigue. Given that Hamlet is the Prince of Denmark, the familial is (to a certain extent) political. But this is 'Hamlet without the State of Denmark': war, invasion, civil unrest, Fortinbras, Rosencratz, and Guildenstern are all cut.\textsuperscript{117} The result is a greater emphasis upon personal relations: both familial, Hamlet and his mother, Gertrude (Eileen Herlie), and uncle, Claudius (Basil Sydney); and romantic, Hamlet and Ophelia.

The concern with the 'personal' locates Hamlet as a specific post-war product of the British film industry.\textsuperscript{118} Popular films at this time frequently represented concerns about renegotiating gendered (rather than international) roles and identities.\textsuperscript{119} Hamlet intentionally disregards historical accuracy, presenting the sets as abstractions occupying any time in the remote past. The cinematographic style emphasises poetic qualities and artistry, rather than 'authenticity'.\textsuperscript{120} Desmond Dickinson's black and white, deep focus photography emphasises movement, with long takes of actors freely wandering around the set.\textsuperscript{121} Costumes are intentionally linked with the conception of 'timelessness': the King and Queen's regal clothes are based upon playing cards; Hamlet wears a medieval doublet; and Ophelia is in almost Victorian dress.\textsuperscript{122} The tendency towards a hybrid fusion of styles within an 'inauthentic' setting is something that, as Pam Cook finds with the Gainsborough

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item See letters to The Times 12/5/1948 and 15/5/1948; 'Text of the Film', Manchester Guardian 3/9/1946, microjacket for Hamlet.
\item William Whitebait 'The Film Hamlet', microjacket for Hamlet.
\item At other historical moments Hamlet has been staged with an overt political emphasis. For example, a late 1980s Rumanian production portrayed Denmark as a totalitarian police state. See Richard Andrews and Rex Gibson (eds.) Hamlet, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 242.
\item One exception being Frieda which represented concerns about national roles through the motif of the family. See Chapter 6.
\item Olivier (1948) 'An Essay', in Cross (ed.) The Film Hamlet, 11-15.
\item Desmond Dickinson (1948) 'Camera and Lighting', in Cross (ed.) The Film Hamlet, 33.
\item Olivier (1948) 'An Essay', in Cross (ed.) The Film Hamlet, 11-15.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
costume dramas, allows an exploration of controversial contemporary concerns.\textsuperscript{123} With Hamlet, male madness and, by implication, anxiety about male roles is not stressed. However, themes relating to female madness and, again by implication, anxiety about female roles are retained.

In spite of a familial emphasis, the role of Hamlet as a child is downplayed. Hamlet does not succeed to his father’s throne, but any childlike stasis is largely countered: both by establishing a clearly demarcated preferred reading of Hamlet, and by Laurence Olivier’s specific embodiment of the character. From the outset, the film privileges a single reading of Hamlet. Explicitly announced with an authoritative voice-over, audiences are prescriptively told what they should expect. ‘This is the tragedy of a man who could not make up his mind’, states a male narrator. Thus, Hamlet is a man (not a child) and he is indecisive (not mad). The preferred reading is also found in the film’s press campaign. In it, unhappiness is the defining characteristic of Hamlet’s psychological make-up. Hamlet is ‘an unhappy, distracted Prince who hesitates fatally’.\textsuperscript{124} Similarly, reviewers shared the view Hamlet was ‘never mad’, but a ‘thoughtful, noble and dignified man’ instead.\textsuperscript{125}

The manliness of Hamlet is (less intentionally) underlined through casting. Laurence Olivier sought to distance his own persona from that of Hamlet. Explaining why he dyed his hair blonde, Olivier said he wanted audiences to say, not ‘There is Laurence Olivier dressed like Hamlet’, but ‘That is Hamlet’.\textsuperscript{126} Nevertheless, it was impossible for Olivier to disguise his advancing age, and at least one reviewer thought bleached hair aged him unnecessarily.\textsuperscript{127} Unlike Bobby Henrey in The Fallen Idol and John Howard Davies in Oliver Twist, Laurence Olivier does not embody the vulnerable innocence associated with a widely held notion of the child. His very

\textsuperscript{123} Pam Cook (1996) Fashioning the Nation: Costume and Identity in British Cinema, London: BFI, 80-115
\textsuperscript{124} Press book for Hamlet.
\textsuperscript{126} Olivier (1948) ‘Prologue’, microjacket for Hamlet.
\textsuperscript{127} C. A. Lejeune ‘Hamlet the Dane’, microjacket for Hamlet.
screen presence is an image that militates against Hamlet as a young Prince. It also further undermines the narrative possibility of male neurosis. It is difficult to read *Hamlet* as an oedipal conflict when, as one reviewer noted, you are watching a Hamlet who is old enough to ‘be the father of his own mother’.128

The character of Ophelia constitutes a key contrast with that of Hamlet. Although both could potentially be represented as children driven to insanity, this is only true of the former. Ophelia’s childlike innocence and mental disturbance contrasts with the image of Hamlet as a sane man. The preferred reading of Ophelia is unlike that of Hamlet. The same press material that describes Hamlet as ‘unhappy’, sees Ophelia as driven ‘to madness, then to suicide’.129 Moreover, Ophelia’s flowing white, almost Victorian, dress is meant to symbolise innocence and Simmons’ self and star persona foster an appearance of immaturity, something that Lawrence Olivier’s Hamlet fails to encapsulate.130 Not only is Ophelia projected as mad, but her madness (like that of Francesca in *The Seventh Veil*) symbolises a denial of adult femininity and culminates in a (successful) suicide attempt. Ophelia retreats, singing like a child, from the emotional problems associated with adulthood, especially her fraught relationship with Hamlet. The imagery that surrounds Ophelia’s suicide evokes the cusp between childhood purity, the white dress, and adulthood, the falling petals of ‘deflowering’.

Ophelia’s madness, within the context of a *Hamlet* without male madness, articulates more general concerns of the 1940s, namely those regarding the (re)negotiation of female roles. The daughter, not the son, is a cause for concern. Similar concerns are apparent in the post-war films that construct the mother, rather than the father, as a role in crisis. Interestingly, Hamlet’s mother (an archetypal threat to the family) redeems herself by deliberately drinking poison in an attempt to save her son’s life.131 Thus Gertrude is metaphorically reassimilated into the domestic sphere before she dies. The idea of metaphor in relation to film is defined and

128 Lejeune ‘Hamlet the Dane’, microjacket for *Hamlet*.
131 Gertrude’s action is often presented as accidental or ambiguous.
developed at length in Chapter 8. Nevertheless, it is also briefly appropriate for one additional film in this chapter, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943). This film does not literally present a ‘child’, but in its presentation of Blimp as ‘childlike’ reprises some key themes in the notion of the child discussed above.

### 7.5 The Metaphorical Child

The young children of *The Fallen Idol*, *Oliver Twist* and *The Winslow Boy*, and the ‘adult children’ of *Great Expectations*, *Fanny by Gaslight*, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, *The Seventh Veil* and *Hamlet* are actual child representations that are central within the film texts. Actual children may also be present (not central) in the narrative and connote either hope for the future or a mother’s neglect, usually in wartime and post-war films respectively. In contrast, Clive Candy in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* is a metaphorical child. As a metaphorical child, Candy is the central protagonist within an unusual wartime narrative of romantic pessimism. As Sarah Harwood has noted, conflicts enacted on a metaphorical canvas seem to be ‘unrepresentable in actual family terms’. Through Candy, the ‘metaphorical child’, the theme of lost moral innocence is figured. This is something that was not explored in actual family representations until the post-war period and the release of films such as *The Fallen Idol*, *Oliver Twist*, *Great Expectations*, and *Caesar and Cleopatra*. Moreover, unlike both wartime and post-war films from my sample, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* highlights the male (not the female) as a role in crisis.

*The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, June 1943)

The film, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, has been discussed at length elsewhere. It has a prologue and epilogue set in 1942, and (in flashback) charts the

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134 The idea of the metaphorical child is one theme among many. For other issues relating to the film see James Chapman (1995) “‘The Life and Death of colonel Blimp’ (1943) Reconsidered”, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 15, 1: 19-54, which assesses the historiography, censorship and reception of the film; Ian Christie (ed.) (1994) *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, London: Faber and Faber, which reproduces the script and an array of documents relating to the film; A. L. Kennedy (1997) *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, London: BFI, a personal response to the film’s themes of
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life story of General Clive Wynne-Candy (Roger Livesey) over four decades. As both publicists and reviewers have discovered, it defies easy categorisation. The film’s posters indicate an uncertain marketing strategy. One, not finding any parallels, describes *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* as ‘a new kind of motion picture entertainment’ and another, unable to fix a coherent pitch, calls the story romantic, exciting, tender, humourous, adventurous and great. Reviewers criticised the film for its lack of clarity in purpose. Unlike the majority of popular British feature films from the 1940s, the central relationship is one of friendship between rivals. *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* does not explicitly represent courting, marriage, nuclear families, extended families or children. It does however, draw upon the notion of the child for its construction of the central adult protagonist, Clive Wynne-Candy.

Unlike the original David Low cartoon, the Candy of the film is vulnerable and naive. In a film that highlights the conflict between the old and the new, traditional and modern warfare, the chivalrous English soldier is a metaphorical child. Unlike the majority of 1940s popular films from my sample, masculinity in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* is not represented in a coherent, relatively unproblematic way. Instead, there is a focus on (re)negotiating male identity within a changing world. Candy is an innocent who, amidst the evils of total warfare, represents an anachronistic continuity with the past. Although he (literally) ages forty years during the course of the narrative, he does not ‘mature’ (modify his ethos). The cyclical plot device, in which the same actress (Deborah Kerr) plays three different female

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Press book for *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, BFI library.


Although the central friendship between Theo Kretschmar-Schuldorff (Anton Walbrook) and Candy has been interpreted as implicitly ‘homoemotional’: made acceptable and invisible by the maleness associated with Candy’s world of battlefield camaraderie and ex-public school allegiances. See Stephen Bourne (1996) *Lesbians and Gays in British Cinema 1930-1971*, London: Cassell, 61-62.

Richards and Aldgate (1983) *Best of British*, 64.

The films of Powell and Pressburger reveal strains in the cinematic apparatus of World War Two’s attempt to formulate coherent representations of masculinity and femininity. See Lant (1991) *Blackout*, 197.
Characters in Candy’s life, stresses both continuity and Candy’s (unfulfilled) romantic idealism. Her reappearance expresses unity over three stages in Candy’s career which are otherwise clearly demarcated by period and cinematographic style: Technicolor is used for the 1900s; World War One Flanders is shot in greys and khakis; and full Technicolor heralds a return to the modern day (1942).

As a whole, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* can be read as a search for belonging, in which Candy (looked after by arbitrary authorities, trusting, open and painfully innocent) lives the life of a child. Deprived of ‘home’ and of emotional fulfilment, there is a repeated emotional pattern, characterised by a sense of loss. The end of the film is the symbolic death of Candy: his radio talk is cancelled, and his house is bombed out. Candy’s ‘death’ is about the end of childish innocence. Moral ideals of sportsmanship and fair play fail in the face of total war. This may be regarded as a conservative defence of the past, elegiac in tone. Instead of the birth of the actual child indicating hope, here the death of the metaphorical child suggests the opposite. There is, unusually for films of this period, some threat in the post-war future.

The metaphorical child, like the children (albeit to varying degrees) in *The Fallen Idol, Oliver Twist, The Winslow Boy, Fanny by Gaslight, Great Expectations, Caesar and Cleopatra, The Seventh Veil, and Hamlet,* signifies vulnerability and innocence, and is the narrative subject of adult concerns. However, as distinct from such children, a focal metaphorical child allows for a pessimistic, rather than optimistic narrative closure. In *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* a symbolic death is narratively permissible.

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7.6 Summary

During the 20th century a specific notion of the child as an innocent and
carefree notion of childhood as a time of happiness has developed as a dominant model in social and
cultural discourses. In the 1940s, the idea that children were vulnerable innocents
was evident in the practices and principles of welfare organisations and official bodies. Film censorship was based, in part, upon a desire to shield children from adverse influences. Similarly, evacuation was founded upon the belief that children needed protection. However, the equation of children with innocence, dependency, passivity and vulnerability, was partially misleading. It denied children agency, and did not articulate the varying material experiences of children from different circumstances, such as those of gender and class.

Feature films dealt with the simplified notion of the child as a vulnerable innocent. The child was represented on a 'symbolic' level which had more to do with adult concerns and preoccupations than the material circumstances of children. Some class and gender distinctions, traumatic and unhappy experiences (departures from the simplified child 'ideal') were dramatised, usually to be resolved according to a conservative morality. The restoration of the young child within the family or the maturation of the child to the status of potential parent (with the inference of starting a new family), were common ways in which the adult social concerns, raised by the narrative, were symbolically resolved. Films represented children in order to explore a wide range of wartime and post-war concerns about social change and readjustment.

Among the films from my sample that focused upon children, there were three main tendencies in representation. The first, as with those films where children are peripheral in the narrative, portrayed young children as signifiers of innocence. In The Fallen Idol, Oliver Twist and The Winslow Boy children are the unfortunate victims of circumstances beyond their control. In each case, occasions when a division between a protected child's world and the adult world break down provide the narrative impetus. The films deal with different adult concerns. The Fallen Idol mourns a loss of innocence; Oliver Twist offers a critique of adult society and social conditions; and The Winslow Boy questions the functioning of British justice. Each
film employs the child’s restoration within the family in order to infer a positive resolution to the issues raised. In *The Fallen Idol* Felipe’s parents return home; Oliver is reconciled with his grandfather; and Ronnie Winslow is found innocent, clearing the family name.

The second tendency employed a transitional theme from child innocent to mature adult. In *Fanny by Gaslight*, *Great Expectations*, and *Caesar and Cleopatra* there is a fraught quest for identity or rite-of-passage, involving either social or moral decline. Again adult preoccupations are mediated. This time they are understood via the process of maturation. Both Fanny and Pip’s rites-of-passage reveal anxieties about social class; while *Caesar and Cleopatra* exposes post-war femininity as problematic. All three films resolve narrative concerns as the adult ‘children’ become fully-fledged adults and thus potential parents. Romantic resolutions in both *Fanny by Gaslight* and *Great Expectations* suggest class reconciliation, whereas the narrative closure of *Caesar and Cleopatra* domesticates Cleopatra’s political ambition and supplants it with a desire for a husband and, by inference, a family.

The third and final tendency involved a psychological retreat from adulthood. In *The Seventh Veil* and *Hamlet* the madness of the child is a denial of adult responsibility. In both films, madness is only associated with the female child, Francesca and Ophelia, and not the male adult, Nicholas, or male child, Hamlet. The two films indicate how, post-war, problems with renegotiating female roles (as with *Caesar and Cleopatra*) were foregrounded within narratives. *The Seventh Veil* resolves female dilemmas through Francesca’s return to her guardian as an adult (rather than child). In *Hamlet*, Ophelia dies suggesting both fidelity to the original text and the impossibility of resolving the contradictions inherent in adult womanhood.

One final film, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* did not illustrate a tendency, but highlighted how a metaphorical child could represent controversial issues. Clive Candy, with his childlike status, articulates the loss of moral purity and innocence in a film released in 1943. This is a theme that only achieved
representation through (non-metaphorical) children in the post-war period (a loss of innocence or moral decline was portrayed in *The Fallen Idol, Great Expectations*, and *Caesar and Cleopatra*). *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* also focuses upon a crisis in masculinity, something that was usually elided in other 1940s film representations. Yet it was not just the metaphorical child that appeared in film. As explored in the following chapter, metaphorical families were also depicted in popular 1940s feature films.
CHAPTER 8: ALTERNATIVE FAMILIES

8.1 Introduction

Throughout Chapters 1 to 7, this thesis has primarily analysed the 'actual' family representations that are found in the narratives of popular 1940s British feature films. However, the case of The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp (1943) in Chapter 7 indicates a second tendency. With its metaphorical child in the form of Clive Candy, The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp suggests how family allusions can be made in film. Through analogy and metaphor, individuals and groups that are not literally 'kin' may be portrayed in terms of the family and familial ideals. The function of this chapter is to emphasise that the idea of the family is an important construct for rendering non-familial structures comprehensible according to commonly held cultural understandings.

There is a useful nomenclature that describes the pervasiveness of the family at both material and abstract levels of understanding. A distinction has been made between 'familism' and 'familialisation'.\(^1\) The former refers to pro-family ideas and families themselves, whereas the latter involves the rendering of other social phenomena in the form of families. Discussion so far has been dominated by analyses of families in film (familism), but it is important to recognise the appearance of less explicit manifestations of family values (familialisation). Just as socio-cultural discourses can render facets of film production like families, narrative aspects of film texts are also subject to familialisation.

The most high profile example of the familialisation of British cinema production is the case of Ealing Studios. In his autobiography, Michael Balcon acknowledged that there might be some validity in the view that Ealing was like an 'inbred' family.\(^2\) Moreover, Balcon's own exposition, in which he became a figure of paternal benevolence, overseeing a small team of workers who co-operated amicably under his guidance, implicitly used the emotive connotations of the family to describe

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describe his position as a producer. Others have more explicitly interpreted the internal dynamics of Ealing studios as like those found within a family. For example, Charles Barr has conceptualised Ealing’s output as indicative of the ‘cosiness, and the frustrations, of life in the Ealing “family”’, and Charles Drazin stresses how the Ealing environment was a ‘kind of family’ tied together by bonds of loyalty, security, and moral values. Further, less specific, examples of familialisation also found their way into critical commentary. The successes of British cinema within an international context, for example, could be likened to an ‘ailing child’ starting to mature into a ‘brilliant adolescent’.

In terms of the popular films from my sample, social phenomena are rendered as if they were like families via both analogy and metaphor. Dialogue in films uses analogy to infer information about social relationships, while juxtaposed images forge associative links between social groups and family life. The linguistic analogies, as discussed in section 8.2 below, are relatively straightforward ways of making comparisons. Metaphors in film are more complex. A definition of metaphor and analyses of how metaphorical families are invoked through varying combinations of dialogue, juxtapositions, oppositions and distortion is outlined in three interlinked sections. The first, ‘8.3 Metaphorical Families’ sees how male, female, and mixed social groups are figured as substitutes that are inimical to actual families. The second, ‘8.4 The National Family’ describes how patriotism is associated with the people’s war vision of Britain as one happy family. The final section, ‘8.5 Social Breakdown and Dystopia’ analyses how oppositions and distortion project anti-social values and metaphorical family breakdown.

8.2 Blood is Thicker Than Water

Analogy is a common linguistic form. They are also perhaps the most obvious way in which the idea of the family comes to bear on film representations of social phenomena. Dialogue in film utilises common social expressions that liken

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5 Irish Times 10/3/1947, Item 14 Carol Reed Collection, Special Collections, BFI library.
interpersonal relationships to ideals of familial behaviour: primarily those of trust, loyalty, solidarity and admiration. Family analogies presuppose a familial model in which the ties between kin are 'natural' and unchanging, and are the strongest affiliation that any individual experiences.

The principle of analogies is that of comparison. It is 'a process of reasoning from parallel cases, but with the two cases remaining separate and unchanged'. The use of family terms of reference in relation to non-family (or distant family) members within popular films from my sample connotes positive values. In themselves, the family analogies are fleeting references in dialogue. They do not structure narratives. However, their location within the wider context of the film narrative is significant in that it indicates some ambivalence. The analogies in the films from my sample are imbued with irony, offering audiences understandings (initially) denied to the characters within the films and, to some extent, calling into question the validity of a familial model of family values.

Three examples illustrate the use of family analogy. In The Wicked Lady (1945) Caroline emphasises the closeness of her relationship with Barbara, her cousin, by explaining 'we are more like sisters'; in The Fallen Idol (1948) Mr Baines introduces his lover as his 'niece'; and in Maytime in Mayfair (1949) Eileen describes Michael’s intention to find Henry a nice girl as ‘fatherly’ behaviour. In each instance the analogy articulates a specific meaning: that of trust, legitimacy, and admiration respectively. Yet given the three statements’ broader narrative contexts, in each the immediate interpretation conflicts with the actual meaning. Barbara is a wicked lady who cannot be trusted; Julie is not a legitimate relative, but is Baines’ mistress instead; and Michael is a philanderer, intent on seducing Eileen rather than ‘fathering’ Henry. The family analogies are not casual reflections of everyday speech. Instead, their irony highlights tensions and dislocations between the ideal of the family and actual social behaviour. The notion of comparison and tension is particularly important with reference to another film convention, that of metaphor.

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8.3 Metaphorical Families

Metaphor is an area of contention, both in relation to literature and regarding film. Terence Hawkes offers a simple literary definition of metaphor as the 'linguistic processes whereby aspects of one object are “carried over” or transferred to another object, so that the second object is spoken of as if it were the first'.\(^7\) The main area of literary dispute centres upon what can be designated a metaphor: whether simile is a form of analogy or of metaphor, and where distinctions between synecdoche and metonymy can be drawn.\(^8\) With film, there has been hostility as to whether metaphors exist at all. Certain literary critics have argued that the extension of the concept beyond linguistic categories empties it of precision, while some film theorists have argued that the photographic image is a literal representation possessing intrinsic meanings that militate against figurative interpretations.\(^9\)

In spite of its contentious nature, metaphor remains a crucial means of understanding film.\(^10\) As in literature, metaphor in film is a means to 'understand the unknown through reference to the known, through associative relations'.\(^11\) Its usefulness has been demonstrated by recent work concerned with developing a stylistics of metaphor appropriate to film. Trevor Whittock's taxonomy of metaphors details ten 'metaphoric formulas'.\(^12\) For Whittock, cinematic metaphors are found both within the film image itself as well as constructed from relating one image to another by editing. This is a significant move away from the critical tradition derived from Eisenstein, in which editing is considered the means of creating cinematic metaphor. In relation to metaphorical families and the popular films of the 1940s, two of Whittock's metaphoric formulas are most relevant. These are the (traditional) 'Juxtaposition (diaphor)', by which juxtaposed images convey figurative meanings, and also the 'Distortion (hyperbole, caricature)', in which there is a deviation from

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8 For definitions of the three 'traditional' categories of metaphor (simile, synecdoche, and metonymy) see Hawkes (1972) *Metaphor*, 2-4.
9 The hostility towards the suggestion that metaphors exist in film is described (with examples) by Whittock (1990) *Metaphor and Film*, 2, 24-25.
what is constructed as normal. Juxtaposition is important in films such as *Scott of the Antarctic* (1948) and *Black Narcissus* (1947), while distortion is used in *Odd Man Out* (1947). Yet such taxonomic classifications are only ever a starting point for an investigation of metaphor.

Metaphor, by its very nature, defies rigid classification. Depending upon associative links between two objects or categories, metaphor is creative and expansive. With every metaphor ideas are transformed and new meanings, beyond the parameters of literal words or images, are fostered. The 'boundless' character of metaphor demands that any inclusive definition be pitched in general terms. To date, Sarah Harwood provides the definitive description of metaphorical families (also referred to as 'metafamilies') as 'powerful social communities in which a familial structure can be discerned'. Such powerful communities are found in the male explorers of *Scott of the Antarctic*, the nuns of *Black Narcissus*, and the ballet company of *The Red Shoes*. Each of these social groups contains the 'strong parent figures and dependent children organised in a hierarchical structure' that characterise metafamilies.

The films construct metaphorical families through several processes - such as intertextuality and shared cultural understandings. These are important as, most obviously, metaphorical parents and children mimic conventional portrayals and notions of actual family characters bound together by blood or marital ties. Moreover, juxtapositions within films elicit cognitive links between metaphorical and actual families. Metaphorical families are placed 'side by side' with actual families both visually, as in *Scott of the Antarctic* and *Black Narcissus*, and through dialogue and narrative development, as in *Scott of the Antarctic, Black Narcissus*, and *The Red Shoes*. The mechanisms foster mental associations, inviting comparison and contrast between the metaphorical and the actual families portrayed. The tension between different categories is a fundamental aspect of metaphorical thought. As Trevor

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13 Whittock himself argues that although there are recurrent forms that generate metaphors, a definitive taxonomy of cinematic metaphor is not possible. See Whittock (1990) *Metaphor and Film*, 68.


Whittock explains, metaphors entail the juxtaposition of similarities and dissimilarities, involving ‘a collocation of ideas based upon disparity as well as an association of ideas based on analogy’.\textsuperscript{16}

There are common themes among these metaphorical family films. In \textit{Scott of the Antarctic}, \textit{Black Narcissus} and \textit{The Red Shoes} the metafamily is associated with some form of work or ambition that is figured as inimical to actual family life. In each instance, metaphorical families are in competition with actual families. The two categories (metaphorical and actual) cannot co-exist in mutual harmony. Instead, there is a tension between actual and metaphorical families that has a gender dimension. The male ambition of the explorers in \textit{Scott of the Antarctic} is associated with patriotic pride. Male belonging to the metaphorical family is constructed as dangerous, but not destructive. It is more problematic for the men’s wives than for the men themselves. Alternatively, female belonging to the metaphorical families in \textit{Black Narcissus} and \textit{The Red Shoes} is associated with the repression of ‘natural’ impulses, and is inwardly destructive.

\textbf{Scott of the Antarctic (Charles Frend, December 1948)}

The all male group in 1940s films has received academic attention elsewhere, but only in relation to the shifting concept of ‘masculinity’, rather than in specific terms of its portrayal as a metaphorical family.\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Scott of the Antarctic} is a story based upon the famous South Pole expedition of 1910-1913. Although released post-war, planning for the film started in 1944. Based on Scott’s diaries and consultations with the expedition’s 14 survivors, the intention was to produce a patriotic film founded on a ‘true’ story that had itself been a source of inspiration for people during the First World War.\textsuperscript{18} In \textit{Scott of the Antarctic} the explorers are figured like a hierarchical and co-operative family. They constitute a metaphorical family juxtaposed with the actual marital relationships of both Captain Scott (John Mills) and Dr Wilson (Harold Warrender).

\textsuperscript{16} Whittock (1990) \textit{Metaphor and Film}, 10.
\textsuperscript{17} In terms of the dynamics of masculinity it has been argued that the male group in 1940s war films provides men with emotional support and intimacy. See Christine Geraghty (1984) ‘Masculinity’, in Geoff Hurd (ed.) \textit{National Fictions: World War Two in British Films and Television}, London: BFI, 63-64.
\textsuperscript{18} ‘NFT Programme Notes’, microjacket for \textit{Scott of the Antarctic}, BFI library.
Scott is the metaphorical father, making decisions, leading and dominating the group. He instigates the expedition, raising money and assembling the members. The Antarctic is Scott’s ‘wife’. As Kathleen (Diana Churchill), his actual wife, remarks, Scott’s first love is the Antarctic. ‘You knew the Antarctic long before you knew me’, she says. The other explorers are more childlike, dependent on Scott’s guidance. Together the men are a metaphorical ‘happy family’: a hierarchical team, united by trust. As noted elsewhere, celebratory shots of comradely grit and an explanation of group loyalty in the face of danger dominate the narrative.¹⁹ Throughout the harshest conditions the explorers never argue. Commentators were split as to whether this was, as Roger Manvell stated, an accurate reflection of events or whether it was, as John Prebble of The Sunday Express thought, a naive belief that a group of men in an isolated place never develop hatreds.²⁰ Either way the film is a ‘familialised’ interpretation of Scott’s diaries and one that seeks to consciously glorify the past. It contrasts with later historical interpretations which emphasise Scott’s incompetence together with infighting of the expedition, negative aspects which only became apparent with the 1968 reprint of Scott’s diaries.²¹

The oppositions, tension and incompatibility between actual and metaphorical families are most apparent at the beginning and end of the film. The opening sequences, set in Britain before the expedition departs, illustrate wives’ reservations about the trip. Mrs Wilson (Anne Firth), for example, cries on her husband’s shoulder. Marriage and actual family ties are a hindrance to the metaphorical family group. Thus Oates is recruited at least partly on the condition of his unmarried status. As the ship sails, with the metafamily leaving behind the explorers’ wives, the band plays ‘Will ye no come back again’. Moreover, the final sequences when the explorers are close to death contrast images of the bleak Antarctic with flashbacks to their families at home. The narration emphasises ‘all five of us have mothers and wives’. Juxtapositions highlight the similarities, dissimilarities and incompatibility of the metaphorical and actual families. In many respects the conventions are the same as those employed in In Which We Serve (1942), another film in which the male group

²⁰ Chichester Quarterly Spring 1949; Sunday Express 5/12/1948, microjacket for Scott of the Antarctic.
²¹ ‘NFT’, microjacket for Scott of the Antarctic.
is a metafamily. Captain Kinross (Noel Coward) is the 'father', the ship is his 'wife' (described by Kinross' actual wife as her 'permanent and undefeated rival'), and the crew, particularly the stoker (Richard Attenborough) as the 'truant' who deserts his post, are like children. In Which We Serve also employs a sequence of flashbacks between naval and actual family life.

In both Scott of the Antarctic and In Which We Serve, male belonging to a metaphorical family group of explorers or servicemen is imbued with patriotism. Both films were thought to capture 'national characteristics' such as understatement and self-effacement. Whether they praised the film or not, most reviewers shared the view that situations in Scott of the Antarctic were handled with 'reticence' (Chichester Spring Quarterly), indicative of the British 'stiff upper lip' (The Daily Telegraph), and 'as English as cricket on a village green or a nice cup of tea' (News of the World). The two films, Scott of the Antarctic and In Which We Serve, superficially suggest failure, Amundsen reaches the Antarctic first and Kinross' ship sinks, but are about triumph in the face of adversity. They are testimonies to the 'human' (male) spirit. Metaphorical families are incompatible with actual families, but this is not constructed as 'unnatural' for the men involved. Alternatively, Black Narcissus and The Red Shoes construct metaphorical families that are inimical to actual families, but their existence designates problems for women and for Britain, rather than any pronounced patriotism.

Black Narcissus (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, May 1947)

Whereas Scott of the Antarctic and In Which We Serve construct male groups as metafamilies, in Black Narcissus a female group is familialised. The Anglican nuns who move to Tibet are like a family. There is a hierarchy, with Sister Clodagh (Deborah Kerr) as the Sister Superior in charge of the other nuns. The English agent, Mr Dean (David Farrar), is a father figure who describes the 'natives' as children. Moreover, the nuns attempt to open a school and a dispensary in order to look after

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actual ‘native’ children. There are definite allusions to colonialism. The nuns, for example, teach the Indian children a selective English vocabulary, including emotive words such as ‘warship’ and ‘bayonet’. Moreover, their ‘colonial’ presence is unwelcome. A caretaker explains that the people do not want a school.

The metafamily of nuns represents the repression of ‘natural’ female desires and is inimical to actual family life. Interaction with the exoticism of the East disrupts the metaphorical family by precipitating hitherto unacknowledged aspects of female sexuality. *Black Narcissus* is, as billed by the film posters, ‘A story of exquisite yearning’. On arrival the nuns are immediately confronted with the ‘otherness’ of the Orient. Their home is an ancient palace, replete with erotic murals, 8,000 feet high in the Himalayans, where royalty once housed concubines. The exoticism of their surroundings is emphasised through Jack Cardiff’s use of Technicolor to recreate lush tropics shot primarily within the studio. Costumes designed by Hein Heckroth underline the contrast between chastity and exoticism. Whereas the nuns dress in plain white robes, the main Indian characters wear bright colours and have numerous costume changes. General Dilip Rai (Sabu) is dressed in colourful silks and brocades, and Kanchi (Jean Simmons) has five costume changes. Post-war publicists acknowledged the co-operation of the Board of Trade in acquiring the luxurious fabrics, and noted that, unlike for the nuns, there was ‘no austerity here’.

The East has a destabilising impact on the women of the metafamily. One reviewer astutely identified the film’s dominant ‘theme of frustrated womanhood’. Three of the Sisters experience longing and changes. Sister Philippa (Flora Robson) starts planting flowers instead of vegetables. Sister Ruth (Kathleen Byron) tries to

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26 Press book for *Black Narcissus*, BFI library. While the nuns in *Black Narcissus* yearn for desires (beauty and men) not fulfilled by the metaphorical family, the men in the metafamily of *Scott of the Antarctic* are identified with an ‘inexorable yearning towards one’s own kind’. See Harper (1994) *Picturing the Past*, 115.
27 Press book for *Black Narcissus*.
28 *Monthly Film Bulletin* 31/5/1947, microjacket for *Black Narcissus*. 246
seduce Mr Dean and attempts to murder Clodagh, her imagined rival for his affections. Ruth’s instability is figured as an effect of the exotic East. With Ruth’s change of clothing, from white habit to red dress, she symbolically embraces the ‘colour’ of the Orient. Finally, Sister Clodagh’s ‘familial’ memories are reawakened. Several flashback sequences depict Clodagh’s courtship before she joined the order. As in *Scott of the Antarctic*, the device of flashback focuses attention on the opposition and incompatibilities between the metaphorical family and actual family life. In the United States, the comparative effect produced objections from the Catholic Legion of Decency. For the American market, the flashbacks were censored. This occurred because of the Legion’s objections to the suggestion that nuns might favourably recall the past in relation to life in the order.

In *Black Narcissus*, the metaphorical family of nuns and actual family life are mutually exclusive. The metafamily represses ‘natural’ womanhood, aspects of which are unexpectedly revived from contact with Oriental excess. According to Mr Dean, Clodagh is ‘nicer’ and ‘human’ only after her memories of conventional femininity have been restored to her consciousness. Alternatively, for Sister Ruth (the weaker character, who ‘needs to feel important’), the conflict between chastity and desire drives her insane. In *Black Narcissus*, the metaphorical family cannot be successfully sustained. The death of a baby is the catalyst for the climactic sequences that seal the nunnery’s fate. An Indian baby with a fever is brought to the pharmacy for medication, Sister Honey (Jenny Laird) administers castor oil, but the child reportedly dies shortly afterwards. Two parallel interpretations are important. First, the Sisters’ failure to nurture the ‘natives’ and their subsequent retreat from the Himalayas echoes the role of British colonisers in India. Second, not only are the nuns unsatisfied with their substitute ‘family’ life, they cannot fulfil their ‘natural’ maternal roles within the metaphorical family confines. As with certain other post-war films, such as *The Red Shoes*, *Black Narcissus* articulates contradiction and conflict within women’s social roles.

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29 As with Maddalena/Rosanna in *Madonna of the Seven Moons* (See Chapter 5) a costume transformation accompanies Ruth’s ‘madness’ and the accompanying onset of her ‘transgressive’ desiring and wilful female behaviour.


31 As noted in Chapter 7, the death of children was rarely acknowledged in the popular films of the 1940s from my sample.
Alternative Families

The Red Shoes (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, July 1948)

The Red Shoes, unlike either Scott of the Antarctic or Black Narcissus, figures a mixed social group as a ‘family’. The ballet company is a metaphorical family with Lermontov (Anton Walbrook) as a controlling father-figure and the dancers as his children. The hierarchical arrangement is clearly demarcated with Lermontov constructed as a dominating figure of authority. In some respects his ‘Svengali’ role reprises that of Nicholas (James Mason) in The Seventh Veil (1945). However, whereas Nicholas is a guardian to Francesca (Ann Todd) alone, Lermontov is like a father to all his dancers, male and female. The Red Shoes lacks the Oedipal trajectory of The Seventh Veil. The primary conflict for Vicki Page (Moira Shearer), the young dancer and central protagonist of The Red Shoes, is between actual family life (domesticity) and her metaphorical family (creativity).

The ballet company is a closely knit hierarchical community both associated with and opposed to actual family life. Sarah Street shares the view that the company is represented as a family, but that it is also a corporate allegiance which must overrule personal commitments. One key scene marks the metaphorical connection between Lermontov’s ballet company and the notion of the family. The former is explicitly understood in terms of the latter. On Lermontov’s birthday, members of the ballet company are dining together at a restaurant. The celebration is familialised. As Lermontov remarks, ‘It seems a long time since I sat down to supper with my entire family’. Moreover, when Julian Craster (Marius Goring), the composer, and Vicki’s absence is detected, it fractures the ‘happy family’. A company member explains that there is a romance between ‘Romeo Craster’ and ‘Juliet Page’. The literary comparison of Romeo and Juliet with Julian Craster and Vicki Page, adds to a metaphorical understanding of Julian and Vicki’s place within the ballet company. Both are like children, and both are condemned for their romance. The comparison also forewarns of impending tragedy.


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Lermontov relentlessly articulates the incompatibility of family life with existence in the ballet. He refers to one female dancer as ‘imbecile enough’ to get married; persistently warns female dancers against ‘idiotic flirtations’ and marriage; and calls love ‘adolescent nonsense’. Within the metafamily, as Cynthia Young identifies, the repression of female sexuality is fundamental to stability.\textsuperscript{34} In Lermontov’s address to women, there is an explicit gender bias. Actual family life and the metaphorical family are mutually exclusive for women, not men. This is the crux of Vicki’s dilemma, and the key narrative dynamic. When Julian is expelled from the ballet company, Vicki follows him and the two marry. When Vicki returns, she is forced to choose between dancing and being a ‘faithful housewife’.\textsuperscript{35} Passion, compulsion and female conflict were conveyed in press advertisements that read, ‘...dance she did and dance she must – between her two loves’.\textsuperscript{36}

In \textit{Black Narcissus} the metafamily of nuns represses female ‘yearning’, in \textit{The Red Shoes} the metaphorical family is simultaneously restrictive (excluding married women) and expressive of female ambition and achievement outside the home. It answers Vicki’s desire to become a successful ballet dancer. The ballet company is associated with the creative expression of Vicki’s talent and ambition. It is opposed to her ‘natural’ role as wife of Julian Craster. There is a stylistic opposition between the ‘artistry’ of Vicki’s ballet dancing and the ‘naturalism’ of her life with Julian. Within the film, the Red Shoes ballet, for example, is presented in exaggerated terms that would have been impossible to recreate in ‘real’ life. The ballet is a significant narrative determinant. It was conceived in response to Michael Powell’s request to design a ballet that was ‘the reason for the whole film’.\textsuperscript{37} The sequence lasts for approximately 14 minutes, including a continuous solo, numerous scene changes, split images, and changes in film speed. The ballet simultaneously communicates the fantasy of wish-fulfilment as Vicki dances beyond the capabilities of any actual dancer, and anticipates audience demand for cinematic spectacle. Moreover, there is


\textsuperscript{35} The theme of a female conflict between marriage and desire is also discussed in Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{36} Press book for \textit{The Red Shoes}, BFI library.

\textsuperscript{37} ‘NFT programme notes’, microjacket for \textit{The Red Shoes}, BFI library.
another layer of meaning in which the ballet itself is a metaphor for Vicki’s own conflict between her career and conventional femininity.\(^{38}\) The ballet is imbued with intentional reflexivity and, with its interweaving of Andersen’s fairy tale with Vicki’s ballet story, can be analysed as a meditation on ballet, music, performance and cinema.\(^{39}\)

Ultimately, as in *Black Narcissus*, contradictions and conflict are presented as a facet of female experience that is left unresolved. In *Black Narcissus* the unity of the metafamily disintegrates. In *The Red Shoes* Vicki cannot chose between Julian (actual family life) and the ballet (her metaphorical family) and dances to her death. Vicki’s ‘suicide’, in which she (like her character in the ballet) cannot stop dancing, transcends, but does not reconcile, the boundary between ‘art’ and ‘life’. Reviewers tended to criticise the ending as unnecessarily gruesome. Particular objections were raised to showing ‘red blood’.\(^{40}\) Nevertheless, it can be read as a peculiarly apt and disturbing graphic response to the culmination of associations and oppositions presented throughout the film. It also retains the element of explicit horror from Hans Andersen’s fairy tale.\(^{41}\) The metaphorical families of both *The Red Shoes* and *Black Narcissus* restrict or repress female behaviour and desire. As in *Scott of the Antarctic* and *In Which We Serve*, metafamilies are constituted by groups of people which rival actual families. Alternatively, in *Henry V* (1945) there is a patriotic address that figures the nation as a more abstract form of ‘family’.

### 8.4 The National Family

Links between the British (English) nation and family life are readily apparent in films featuring actual extended families, such as *This Happy Breed* and *Frieda*.\(^{42}\) In both films, English families are an explicit and direct embodiment of the nation and national spirit. The notion of the family was also invoked in a less literal and more inclusive way in relation to the nation. The film *Henry V* presents the nation itself as familialised, rather than through the motif of an actual family.

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\(^{38}\) As with the theatre sequence within *Hamlet*, the Red Shoes performance within *The Red Shoes* signifies that art may be ‘truth’, or can elicit an emotional response more than real life.


\(^{40}\) *Evening Standard* 23/7/1948, microjacket for *The Red Shoes*.


\(^{42}\) See Chapter 6.
Henry V (Laurence Olivier, January 1945)

Conceived early in 1942 and commissioned by the Ministry of Information, Henry V was intended to boost British morale during the Second World War. The film projects a sanitised vision of war in the spectacular tradition. Its opening address dedicates the film:

...to the commando and airborne troops of Great Britain. The spirit of whose ancestors it has been humbly attempted to recapture in some ensuing scenes.

The title announces and encapsulates the patriotic sentiment of the film that is to follow. It also introduces the notion of a national spirit conveyed in terms of a familial idiom, namely shared ancestry. As a whole, Henry V presents the nation as a united family of men. The bond of common experience and the smallness of the English army (relative to the French) elicit familial associations. However, it is a less precise and more diffuse vision of familialisation than that found in the films discussed so far. Unlike Scott of the Antarctic, In Which We Serve, Black Narcissus, and The Red Shoes, in Henry V actual families are not juxtaposed with metaphorical families. Instead, the nation in Henry V is a familialised hierarchical community which invites comparison with the popular imagery of World War Two Britain and the notion of the 'people's war'.

The metaphorical family group of Henry V includes four captains: Gower (Michael Shepley), Fluellen (Esmond Knight), Jamy (John Laurie) and Macmorris (Niall MacGinnis). They are representatives of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland who all co-operate under the benign leadership of King Henry (Laurence Olivier). In war, Henry's men, regardless of background, become a band of brothers whose differences are elided by the eloquence of the King and by their common goal. Moreover, Henry is an honourable father figure. In a scene indicating Henry's sense

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of 'paternal' responsibility (that his cause is good), he chooses to sit, unrecognised, amongst his soldiers at their campfire. The negative aspects of Henry's character, such as the speech in which he threatens Harfleur with rape and plunder, are deleted. 46 Read within the context of 1940s Britain the brotherhood of soldiers on the Eve of Agincourt, 1415, could be seen as 'World War Two soldiers', and the Crispin speech became a 'recruiting call'. 47

The family is an important motif in an additional respect. It provides a positive narrative resolution. The union of the British and French Royal families indicates the successful unification of two nations. On release this was recognised as a 'happy coda' by at least one reviewer. 48 The film omits Shakespeare's pessimistic epilogue. The Chorus no longer relates how, despite Henry's triumph, his son, Henry VI, proceeds to lose everything that has been gained, making 'England bleed'. 49 Instead, there is the image of Katherine (Renee Asherson) and Henry, hands clasped in betrothal, implying that they will persevere happily into the future. 50 The marriage signifies a mutual union distinct from the Shakespearean text in which the rape of Katherine is akin to Henry's conquest of France. The film frames history, with British victory and a positive familial resolution, as a rehearsal for World War Two. 51

*Henry V* and *Scott of the Antarctic* focus attention on male embodiments of national spirit presented through familialised communities, those of the army and explorers respectively. In general, popular cinematic conventions of British patriotism in films from my sample foster the construction of both actual families (*The First of the Few*, *The Way to the Stars*, *In Which We Serve*, *This Happy Breed*) and familialised male groups (*Scott of the Antarctic*, *In Which We Serve*, *Henry V*). Alternatively, in the *49th Parallel* (1941), an unusual film in which Nazi soldiers are foregrounded, families and familial structures are not depicted among the central group.

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51 By using the opening and closing frame of an Elizabethan Globe theatre, it also mobilises the cultural connotations of Shakespeare for British heritage, and (as with *Hamlet or the Red Shoes*) can be read as a meditation upon the interrelationship between performance and actuality.
8.5 Social Breakdown and Dystopia

Familialised male structures in *Scott of the Antarctic*, *In Which We Serve* and *Henry V* all convey a sense of bonding and ‘brotherhood’. When metaphorical families in films from my sample include women (*The Red Shoes*, *Black Narcissus*), the metafamilies become a core focus of narrative disruption, indicating tensions in the post-war image of the woman as wife and mother. One more tendency among ‘Alternative Families’ can be identified. On the rare occasions where popular feature films articulate society itself at crisis (rather than society threatened by external disruptions or by the changing gender-specific circumstances of the ‘mother’), cohesive familial structures are expelled or relegated to the textual margins. In the *49th Parallel* the Nazi soldiers are indicative of German society, but not of a ‘civilised’ or ‘domesticated’ familialised formation, whilst in the distorted post-war cityscape of *Odd Man Out* the imagery of broken metafamilies and a damaged society coalesce.

*49th Parallel* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, October 1941)

The *49th Parallel* is a propaganda piece, financed by the Ministry of Information, and made with the explicit intention of drawing America into World War Two. It focuses on the escape of a group of Nazi soldiers and their flight across Canada. The international message is that although ‘today’ German forces are in Europe, by tomorrow it might be ‘the whole world’. During the episodic narrative the Nazi soldiers encounter a diverse range of people (including French Canadian trappers, German Hutterites, Native Americans, and an Englishman), each revealing variants of democratic values.\(^{52}\) On release, the foregrounding of Nazi characters provoked some controversy.\(^{53}\) It confounded audience expectations that feature films centred upon heroic individuals and groups. Moreover, the *49th Parallel* transcends other narrative conventions. Unlike most popular 1940s film narratives the *49th Parallel* does not articulate the personal or familialised relationships of its main protagonists.

\(^{52}\) Ironically, among the Canadians there is a sense of unity in diversity that is absent from the fragmented and disintegrative totalitarianism of the Nazis. See Landy (1991) *British Genres*, 148.

\(^{53}\) See *Documentary Newsletter* 11/1941; *New Statesman* 18/10/1941, microjacket for *49th Parallel*, BFI library.
The Nazis are not a familialised group. They represent the New Order of the German nation, but one (unlike democracy) that is not founded upon family values. Whereas male groups in Scott of the Antarctic or In Which We Serve are bound together by loyalty and trust, and governed by benign leadership (familial articulations of national spirit); the Nazi soldiers in the 49th Parallel constitute a non-familial metaphor for German society. The Nazi group is structured with the strong dominating the weak. There is authoritarian leadership, internal dispute, and brutality without provocation or remorse. The Nazis are repeatedly called 'gangsters'. The reference labels their actions criminal, thereby defining a wartime rhetoric that identifies the Germans as the legitimate ‘enemy’.

In the 49th Parallel the Nazi soldiers are opposed to the family. Their behaviour manifests itself as the anti-thesis of family life. The extended encounter between the Nazi soldiers and the peaceful Hutterites provides the film’s most notable contrast. Both groups are German, a mutuality that provokes potential comparisons. Emphasising a distinction with Nazi amorality, the Hutterites are a religious community structured as a metaphorical family. Although ostensibly ‘communist’ (as stressed by publicists), the Hutterite world possesses a clearly defined hierarchical structure. It is a miniature utopia in which gender roles are stereotyped: Hutterite women are biddable, headscarved and content in traditional tasks. Moreover, explicit recourse to familial terminology draws attention to their status as a metafamily. As described by a young Hutterite called Anna (Glynis Johns), they are ‘brothers and sisters under God’. The Hutterites are also, for Anna, a type of substitute family. She explains how Nazi soldiers were responsible for the death of her actual family. ‘They’ killed her father and drowned her mother, thereby reinforcing the notion of the ‘enemy’ as an enemy of the family. Furthermore, in response to Lieutenant Hirth’s (Eric Portman) lecture on the New World Order, Peter

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56 ‘General Film Distributors Publicity’, microjacket for 49th Parallel.
58 Here analogy functions as a facet of metaphor that enhances its visibility. As Susan Hayward explains, metaphors, through the process of rendering the unknown visible, usually draw attention to themselves. See Hayward (1996) Key Concepts, 218-219.
Alternative Families

(Anton Walbrook), the Hutterite leader, announces that although the Nazis may be Germans they are not 'brothers'. The incompatibility of Hutterite and Nazi values is underlined via the incident involving Vogel's (Niall MacGinnis) wavering commitment to Nazism. When Hirth learns of Vogel’s desire to join the Hutterites, the Nazi response is an immediate execution on the grounds of desertion.

The *49th Parallel* presents Nazi soldiers as mercenary individuals lacking traditional family values and opposed to familialised communities and family life. When the 'enemy' becomes humanised (as with Vogel) there is an accompanying loss of commitment to Nazism. The portrayal belongs within the wider wartime circulation of anti-Nazi propaganda. As in the Ministry of Information pamphlets produced to incense people against Germany, in the *49th Parallel* the family and 'home life' are rendered obsolete under Nazi rule.\(^5\) The film most closely resembles the 1941 leaflet on Nazi education in which the horrors of totalitarianism were contrasted with a vision of democratic Britain infused with familial and religious values. A subheading describes Germany as a place where, 'Each child is but a unit in the national stock-farm'. It then proceeds to describe the disintegration of German family life:

...home life, like traditional religion, scarcely exists now in Nazi Germany [...] It is rarely indeed that all members of the family can be at home together [...] Family ties are kindly and sentimental, whereas the youthful Nazi glories in being hard and unemotional – an automaton among his fellow automata.\(^6\)

In the *49th Parallel*, as in early 1940s propaganda more generally, the notion of the family functions as an index of democracy. In both, the idea of the family is employed to stress the distinctions between Nazi barbarism and democratic civilisation.\(^6\) Alternatively, in a film where the forces of democratic morality appear to be breaking down, any familialisation is also presented as chaotic and fragmented. This is the case with the dystopian vision of *Odd Man Out*.

\(^{5}\) The correlation is indicative of the Ministry of Information's direct and sizeable investment in the production of *49th Parallel*.


\(^{6}\) Landy explains how the *49th Parallel* is structured by a binary opposition between the forces of civilisation and the forces of barbarism. In the face of this dichotomy, she argues that class differences tend to recede. See Landy (1991) *British Genres*, 148
Odd Man Out (Carol Reed, February 1947)

In narrative structure, Odd Man Out shares some similarities with the 49th Parallel. Both films are episodic and focus on the flight of the protagonist(s) across either a landscape or cityscape. Yet the source of audience empathy in each film is different. In the 49th Parallel the brutality of the Germans marks them out as The Invaders of the American release title. In Odd Man Out, Johnny MacQueen (James Mason), in spite of his associations with an illegal Irish organisation (a thinly veiled IRA), is a wounded fugitive who suffers rather than inflicts suffering on others. The role was a departure from Mason's usual casting and conflicted with his established star image. The Mirror noted that although James Mason was usually seen, 'ill-treating defenceless females, [he was] now experiencing the joys of taking it instead of dishing it out'. Johnny, as the 'Odd Man Out', is a solitary figure, and the film can be aptly described as 'melodrama of betrayal'. The source of Johnny's betrayal is a society that lacks humanity. Whereas the encounters in the 49th Parallel are with people representing facets of democracy, Johnny's encounters are with people that are fundamentally self-interested.

Social breakdown in Odd Man Out is figured through a distortion metaphor. Distortion results from 'a clash between the object filmed and the manner of its filming'. In Odd Man Out Robert Krasker's distinctive cinematographic style subverts audience expectations of specific film contexts. The film, like the archetypal dystopian post-war vision created by Krasker for The Third Man (1949), employs tilted camera shots. The extreme angles indicate a sense of moral dislocation. Other distortions suggest that the film is a 20th-century parable. Johnny's hallucinations, accompanied by an array of technical effects, culminate in his delirious proclamation from Corinthians. 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels and have not charity, I am become a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal', he says. The emphasis is upon Johnny as a martyr-like figure within a harsh world.

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62 The Mirror 31/5/1947, microjacket for Odd Man Out, BFI library.
64 Whittock (1990) Metaphor and Film, 35.
65 Whittock explains how presenting things askew in The Third Man is a departure from normal shots and implies something about the loss of moral balance in Vienna. See Whittock (1990) Metaphor and Film, 35.
Alternative Families

The distorted dystopian vision of *Odd Man Out* is figured as a metaphorical broken family. There is no sense of unity through diversity (as articulated in films such as *Henry V* or *In Which We Serve*); there is only fragmentation and paranoia. Whereas metafamilies are hierarchies, usually bonded by trust and legitimacy, the low key lighting of *Odd Man Out* hints at a metaphorical broken family suffused with darkness, paranoia and suspicion. Society is fractured: recurring motifs, such as city street views of front doors shutting and people’s profiles against window frames, emphasise the boundaries between individuals and a sense of isolation. There are children on the urban streets that lack principles and loyalties, and constitute an ‘anarchic substratum’. The children (present, but not central in the narrative) differ from conventional optimistic portrayals. They are not the moral innocents indicative of hope that characterise popular wartime narratives (such as *The First of the Few*, 1942, or *The Way to the Stars*, 1945) focusing on actual nuclear families. The sanctity of ordered (actual or metaphorical) family life is absent from *Odd Man Out*’s narrative. Dai Vaughan explains how one woman’s comment actively scorns the idea of home and comfort as, amidst the congestion and heated tempers on an overloaded tram, she calls out, ‘Come in and warm yourself, Constable’.

In *Odd Man Out*, there is a bleak vision of society lacking humanity and figured as a broken or dysfunctional metafamily. Whereas popular British films with a patriotic wartime address often foreground families or familialised communities, *Odd Man Out* is an example of post-war pessimism, focusing on the tragedy of a lone male figure. A rarity among the popular films of the 1940s, *Odd Man Out* anticipates the greater focus upon masculinity and male problems that can be found in the film narratives of the 1950s.

8.6 Summary

Whereas Chapters 4 to 7 focused upon actual family forms, this chapter has dealt with more abstract aspects of familial representation. Throughout Chapter 8, ‘Alternative Families’, the notion of familialisation is paramount. The observation

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that non-family categories may nevertheless be described in familial terms has provided a basis for understanding a range of alternative families in popular British feature films.

The recurrence of certain terminology supports the view that familialisation occurs within the diegesis of feature film. The family is used as a shared frame of reference to connote positively evaluated behavioural ideals in films such as *The Wicked Lady*, *The Fallen Idol*, and *Maytime in Mayfair*. Yet within these three narrative contexts, the analogies between close kin and non (or distant) kin also offer audiences access to a degree of irony. There is a dual emphasis highlighting that films rarely possess a one-dimensional morality in relation to the family.

Metaphorical families in film all share hierarchical structures with parent figures and dependent children. They can take a variety of forms. Male groups, such as explorers, the navy and the army, are presented as metaphorical families in both wartime and post-war films. Films such as *Scott of the Antarctic*, *In Which We Serve* and *Henry V* all communicate positively framed metafamily values that are integral to the national spirit. Women in metaphorical families are more problematic. Two post-war films, *Black Narcissus* and *Red Shoes*, focus on the contradictions in female experience. Both posit the irreconcilability of metaphorical and actual family life.

The family in popular film, be it either the metaphorical male family (*Scott of the Antarctic*, *In Which We Serve* and *Henry V*) or the actual extended family (*This Happy Breed*, *Frieda*), is often a signifier of the democratic national spirit. Conversely, where democracy is articulated as absent or broken, family life is also missing, marginalised or fragmented. In the *49th Parallel* the Nazi soldiers are the antithesis of family life. In *Odd Man Out* society is figured as a dysfunctional metafamily: parent figures and children exist, but they do so as individuals who are not strong and dependent, respectively.

The metaphors in all the films work on the premise of shared cultural understandings. They operate through the use of association and oppositions, processes by which categories coalesce and meanings are transferred between them.
Alternative Families

In *Scott of the Antarctic* the metaphorical family of explorers is opposed to the actual family lives of Captain Scott and Dr Wilson. In *Black Narcissus* the metafamily contrasts with both the exoticism of India, and with Clodagh’s youthful courtship. For Vicki in *The Red Shoes*, life in the ballet company and life as a wife are opposed. *Henry V* intertwines heritage, nationality and shared ancestry from its initial dedication onwards. The Nazi soldiers of the *49th Parallel* represent the totalitarian inverse of the democratic metafamily of Hutterites and in *Odd Man Out* a distortion metaphor challenges conventional expectations of a familialised and ordered ‘moral’ society. The metaphorical families make the unknown ‘knowable’: they infer information about diverse social groupings by employing cultural understandings about what it (ideally) means to be family.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has demonstrated how popular feature films of the 1940s are texts imbued with layers of cultural and social significance regarding society and, more specifically, the family. Diverse as it was, British cinema production during the 1940s was clearly a product of its times. It is unthinkable that the commercial success of films such as *The Wicked Lady* (1945) or *The Seventh Veil* (1945) could be repeated by similar treatments of such subject matter today.¹ The most popular British films of the 1940s were popular precisely because they related or were perceived as relating to the concerns and topical issues of the decade. As highlighted throughout this thesis, the family was widely discussed during the 1940s as a major cause for concern and, as such, family life was also a fundamental preoccupation in narrative film. However, certain feature films, unlike establishment commentators, also entertained the relatively controversial idea that the nuclear unit was not always a beneficial environment for its family members. This Conclusion begins by offering a brief summary of each chapter’s main findings; thereafter it extrapolates the main themes that emerge from the thesis as a whole. Finally, some suggestions for further research are outlined.

Chapter 1 demonstrated that British cinema history is a field that, until recently, has been dominated by two perspectives: orthodoxy and reclamation. Both approaches adopt ‘narrow’ views and definitions of British national cinema. The former has focused upon critically acclaimed pieces of British filmmaking: thereby the orthodox approach has been effectively engaged in constructing a canon of revered film texts, rather than describing the diverse products of British cinema more generally. Alternatively, the process of reclamation has analysed less esteemed British films from the 1940s, but has still not done justice to the diversity of British filmmaking during the decade. The main finding of Chapter 1 was to identify a new, but underdeveloped approach to British cinema that can be referred to as revisionism.

Conclusion

In summary, Chapter 1 identified how this left a gap in the literature for a full-length revisionist study of popular British cinema, 1940-1949.

Building on the theoretical insights of Chapter 1, Chapter 2 established and described the methodological approach that enabled a systematic revisionist study to be put into practice. In particular, Chapter 2 detailed the rationale for the sampling procedure that was adopted. The chapter explained that selecting popular films according to the categories found in two separate primary sources, *Picturegoer* and *Kinematograph Weekly*, was an advance on the ‘traditional’ method of relying upon Josh Billings’s assessments in *Kinematograph Weekly* alone.

With Chapter 3, the thesis broadened the perspective, providing insights drawn from sociology and history, and relating them to the disciplines of cinema history and film studies. The literary overview (sections 3.2 and 3.3) evaluated approaches to the sociology and historical sociology of the family, concluding that the family was an abstract social construction not directly matched by the many and varied ways in which actual people lived. As such Chapter 3 demonstrated that the family was a valid area of study in relation to social thought and understanding: that is, in terms of how its representations articulate value-judgements, assumptions, morality and meaning, rather than in terms of any descriptive accuracy. The latter part of Chapter 3 summarised the main family centred debates that proliferated throughout the 1940s. It demonstrated that the family was a pervasive feature of commentary in the 1940s. More specifically it suggested that establishment observers voiced a considerable degree of ‘moral panic’ about traditional family values and often vilified women who deviated from their ‘correct’ roles as dependent wives and mothers as a major threat to family size and stability.

Chapters 4-8 all examined the popular film texts from my sample in considerable depth. Each chapter established thematic tendencies in relation to the filmic portrayals of specific types of familial portrayals: courting and marriage, nuclear families, extended families, children, and alternative families. Moreover, each chapter related the themes found in films to attitudes and experiences located elsewhere in society.
Chapter 4 described how courting was a theme deployed in film marketing and that the popular association of courting with cinema-going also allowed film-makers to introduce a degree of self-reflexivity directly into their productions. It found that courting in wartime and postwar films was often idealised, whereas the marital relationship was not. Moreover, although the Final Romance is the conventional conservative closure for commercial narrative feature films, it was not always used in popular British feature films of the 1940s. In wartime films, closures were sometimes ‘unstable’, indicating the sense of uncertainty engendered by World War Two, whilst in post-war films endings departing from the ‘norm’ sometimes courted controversy. In summary, Chapter 4 suggested that the patriotic discourses of wartime films emphasised the need to commit to personal relationships, whereas post-war films were more inclined to present the negative and/or ambivalent aspects of married life in both comic and dramatic form.

With Chapter 5, the thesis examined films that focused on nuclear families - the main area of official anxiety about family life. As stressed in Chapter 4, there were distinctive differences between wartime and post-war film narratives. Popular British wartime films tended to idealise the nuclear family in a way that was markedly less apparent in the post-war period. In post-war films, nuclear families were repeatedly threatened by the adulterous behaviour of the erring or feckless mother, and the family itself was often presented as a site of maternal boredom, routine, and loneliness. Even the wartime films that possessed a more positive view of nuclear family life were characterised by a degree of paradox and ambivalence. On occasions when the sanctity of the nuclear family was underlined it was accompanied by uncertainty about its future: the nuclear family was simultaneously projected as a bedrock of the nation and as something that was fragile and in a state of wartime jeopardy. Just as the popular British post-war films discussed in Chapter 4 tended towards a pessimistic appraisal of married life, post-war films also often foregrounded the negative aspects of nuclear families.

In Chapter 6, a different treatment of the family (to those found in Chapters 4 and 5) was identified among a small minority of films. Whereas Chapter 5 explained how nuclear families were usually presented as fragile ideals (wartime narratives) or
restrictive environments (predominantly post-war narratives), Chapter 6 detailed how extended families were portrayed in distinct terms. In contrast with the notion of the nuclear family as something that was fragile and threatened, certain patriotic films demonstrated that the extended family was adaptable and could accommodate changing social circumstances. However, the extended family was less frequently central to the narratives of popular films (than that of the nuclear family) and, once patriotic concerns had subsided, it too was presented in a more pessimistic light. The key insight of Chapter 6 was that, unlike the nuclear family films, the mother’s role within the extended family was not a ‘problem’. Nevertheless, women were still sometimes presented as ‘problems’: either in terms of their unmarried ‘good-time girl’ status, or as ‘newcomers’ to the extended family environment.

The next chapter moved away from the prevailing discussion of relationships among adult family members that dominated chapters 4, 5 and 6. Instead, Chapter 7 analysed those popular British feature films where children were central to the narratives. The chapter demonstrated that films which highlighted children’s status, activities and experiences, usually belied their thematic focus upon adult needs and concerns. Children in popular films from my sample were repeatedly invoked as symbols or icons rather than as characters in and of themselves. The dominant tendency was for popular feature films to present children as innocent, vulnerable and in need of protection. Such representations of children were variously used to mediate contemporary (1940s) preoccupations about society: especially those concerning adult immorality, social injustice, class inequality and female ambition. With the portrayals of children, once again familial circumstances were constructed in ambivalent terms. Although family background, especially break-up, often precipitated narrative disruption by displacing children from their ‘normal’ protected positions in society, families and the Final Romance (indicative of incipient families) were also often crucial to narrative resolutions. Thus, the family environment, more so than other arenas of childhood experience (such as education or leisure), was presented as fundamental to childhood and children’s development.

The final chapter of film analysis, Chapter 8, outlined how the notion of the family was an important structuring device even where narratives did not explicitly
centre upon actual family relationships. Focusing upon the allied concepts of analogy and metaphor, Chapter 8 explained how the idea of the family rendered non-familial structures comprehensible according to commonly recognised cultural understandings. The chapter saw how linguistic analogy in film often called into question the validity of familial ideals. It also identified how metaphorical families were often figured in film as inimical to actual family life. Popular film narratives from my sample portrayed metafamilies of men (in wartime and post-war films) as less conflict ridden than those constituted by all female or mixed social groups (in post-war films). Finally, Chapter 8 noted how on the rare occasions that films presented society in crisis they were devoid of cohesive central family forms, metaphorical or otherwise.

Taken in combination, Chapters 4-8 illustrated that the family was a significant feature of popular British feature films, 1940-1949. This area has not been previously explored. Thus this thesis is the first to have undertaken a systematic analysis of British cinema and the family. It has arrived at four main findings:

- popular British cinema, 1940-1949, was characterised by diversity;
- families in some shape or form were a pervasive element of British cinema during the 1940s;
- familial representations were characterised by a multi-dimensional morality;
- and women (especially in their roles as mothers and wives) were frequently figured as a ‘problem’ or ‘threat’ to the family and family life, fathers were presented as less central to family life, and children were usually portrayed as innocents.

From the early stages of research and analysis, the film sample indicated that popular British films, 1940-1949, were from diverse genres, studios, producers and directors. As a whole, popular British cinema defied categorisation as a homogenous entity. Moreover, individual films did not necessarily succumb to rigid taxonomical classification by genre or production company. This first finding established the parameters for the subsequent enquiry. It indicated that a revisionism whereby ‘classics’ were analysed on the same terms as previously unstudied or barely studied
films was the best way of accommodating both the diversity of British cinema and the potential for themes and narrative patterns to be shared between films.

Thereafter, a systematic method of ‘nearly close textual analysis’ revealed that families were a recurring feature of popular British films. Each film from my sample that was available for viewing was susceptible to a familial analysis. Different familial formations, from courting and marriage through to alternative families, were found to be central to the film narratives in question. Popular films consistently focused upon the personal and the familial, interpersonal relationships between individuals, over and above factors directly relating to larger social institutions and organisations. On many occasions families, family status, and familial relationships were used to mediate ‘wider’ social concerns and preoccupations, such as those relating to class and gender inequalities.

Given that a diverse range of films portrayed a variety of familial formations it is logical that no single perspective on family life was relayed throughout popular British cinema, 1940-1949. Unlike establishment views which generally presupposed that the nuclear family was a definitive ideal, films were not characterised by a one-dimensional morality. Feature films were seldom inclined to present unchallenged the sanctity of the family. Instead they were usually characterised by a degree of ambivalence, if not paradox, towards family life. Films addressed both the negative and positive aspects of families: underlining that families might be restrictive or individually damaging, yet sometimes also fundamental to ‘positive’ narrative resolutions; or that families might be fragile and threatened, yet the essential bedrock of the nation. These contradictory elements in the portrayal of families derived partially from the textual demands of the film medium: conflict, such as familial disruption, is a conventional method of promoting audience interest. However, what is of greatest significance is how that conflict and disruption was repeatedly figured.

One dominant theme emerged from the variety of familial portrayals analysed in this thesis. Women in film, rather than their male counterparts, were usually presented as both central to and disruptive of domesticity and family life. Thus women, more often than men, were a central ‘problem’ within the narratives of
Conclusion

popular British feature films. Female characters, for example, (including those of female children) were inclined to suffer from competing personal and familial demands, and 'madness' or hysteria, whereas male characters were not. In particular, female characters (especially those found in post-war narratives) were often feckless good-time girls or mothers who erred from their conventional roles. In such instances the female characters were ultimately either reincorporated into the domestic sphere or narratively punished for their transgressions (or even both), but not before the narratives had afforded considerable opportunities for audience members to vicariously watch their exploits. By way of contrast, father figures were usually presented as peripheral to family life, and children were often figured as the innocent victims of their familial and social circumstances.

In conclusion, popular 1940s feature films, with their focus upon women and female roles as sites of narrative disruption, intersected with the non-filmic discourses and debates that constructed women as the main 'threat' to the family. However feature films, unlike the 'official' views found elsewhere in society, were seldom inclined to consistently sustain a conservative model of the nuclear family as an ideal. Feature films rarely expressed a sense of 'moral panic' about the family as something unequivocally sacred to society. Instead, within the constraints of a conservative censorship, films presented many facets of families without necessarily sanctioning any form of familial ideal. Feature films were a commercial venture and those that achieved success at the box-office presented audiences with avenues of escape, catharsis and wish-fulfilment, instead of straightforward moral didactism.

It is usual for all texts, not just those of popular films, to present or open up many avenues, and this thesis is no exception. This conclusion marks the beginning, not the ending: for it highlights how revisionism can fruitfully be pursued in relation to British cinema history, but only starts to accomplish such a task. Of future interest will be investigations of the film and family that include the films from my sample that were, at the time of this research, unavailable for analysis; or studies that assess whether similar familial themes were apparent in less popular British films, 1940-1949, or in popular feature films produced in other decades or other countries. Knowledge is never finite and although British cinema 'now exists as an object for
study' with contours that are visible, there is still a long way to go before it is fully mapped.²

## APPENDIX 1: ANNUAL ASSESSMENTS

### 1.1 Kinematograph Weekly Awards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Biggest Box-Office Attraction</th>
<th>Most Popular and Consistent Stars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Bette Davis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Foreign Correspondent</td>
<td>Spencer Tracy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ninotchka</td>
<td>Clark Gable</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>William Powell</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Myrna Loy</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ginger Rogers</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ronald Colman</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wallace Berry</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gary Cooper</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Errol Flynn</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Robert Taylor</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tyrone Power</td>
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<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>49th Parallel</td>
<td>Leslie Howard</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Great Dictator</td>
<td>Charles Boyer</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pimpernel Smith</td>
<td>Laurence Olivier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All This and Heaven Too</td>
<td>Bette Davis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lady Hamilton</td>
<td>Vivien Leigh</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South American George</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>Mrs Miniver</td>
<td>Leslie Howard</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First of the Few</td>
<td>Bette Davis</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How Green Was My Valley</td>
<td>Greer Garson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reap the Wild Wind</td>
<td>Tyrone Power</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Holiday Inn</td>
<td>James Cagney</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Captains of the Clouds</td>
<td>Clark Gable</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sergeant York</td>
<td>Walter Pidgeon</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Joan Fontaine</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gary Cooper</td>
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<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>Random Harvest</td>
<td>Tyrone Power</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In Which We Serve</td>
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<td>Casablanca</td>
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<td>Hello, Frisco, Hello</td>
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<td>The Man in Grey</td>
<td>Humphrey Bogart</td>
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<td>Ronald Colman</td>
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<td>Ingrid Bergman</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>BIGGEST BOX-OFFICE ATTRACTION</strong></td>
<td><strong>MOST POPULAR AND CONSISTENT STARS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>For Whom the Bell Tolls</td>
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<td>Bette Davis</td>
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<td>Joan Fontaine</td>
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<td>Fanny by Gaslight</td>
<td>Ingrid Bergman</td>
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<td>1945</td>
<td>The Seventh Veil</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Madonna of the Seven Moons</td>
<td>Bette Davis</td>
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<td>Old Acquaintance</td>
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<td>Arsenic and Old Lace</td>
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<td>Mr Skeffington</td>
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<td>The Bells of St Mary’s</td>
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<td>Road To Utopia</td>
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<td>Tomorrow is Forever</td>
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<td>Brief Encounter</td>
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<td>Anchors Aweigh</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kitty</td>
<td>Stewart Granger</td>
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Appendix 1.1

**BIGGEST BOX-OFFICE ATTRACTION**

**1946**
- The Corn is Green
- Spanish Main
- Leave Her to Heaven
- Gilda
- Caravan
- Mildred Pierce
- Blue Dahlia
- Bedelia
- The Years Between
- O.S.S.
- Spellbound
- Courage of Lassie
- My Reputation
- London Town
- Caesar and Cleopatra
- Meet the Navy
- Men of Two Worlds
- The Overlanders

**1947**
- The Courtneys of Curzon Street
- The Jolson Story
- Great Expectations
- Odd Man Out
- Frieda
- Holiday Camp
- Duel in the Sun

**1948**
- The Best Years of Our Lives
- It Always Rains on Sunday
- My Brother Jonathan
- Road to Rio
- Miranda
- An Ideal Husband
- Naked City
- The Red Shoes
- Green Dolphin Street
- Forever Amber
- Life With Father
- The Weaker Sex

**MOST POPULAR AND CONSISTENT STARS**

**1946**
- John Mills
- James Mason
- Margaret Lockwood
- Anna Neagle
- Michael Wilding
- Bing Crosby
- Bob Hope
- Cary Grant
- Alan Ladd
- Bette Davis
- Humphrey Bogart
- Barbara Stanwyck
- Deborah Kerr
- David Farrar

**1947**
- Charlie Chaplin
- Anne Crawford
- Bob Hope
- Bing Crosby
- Dorothy Lamour
- Lana Turner
- Clark Gable
- Linda Darnell
- Irene Dunne
- William Powell
- Alan Ladd
- Gregory Peck
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Biggest Box-Office Attraction</th>
<th>Most Popular and Consistent Stars</th>
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<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Oliver Twist</td>
<td>Joan Crawford</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Fallen Idol</td>
<td>Ann Sheridan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Winslow Boy</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Deborah Kerr</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Margaret O’Brien</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marlene Dietrich</td>
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<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>The Third Man</td>
<td>Alan Ladd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Johnny Belinda</td>
<td>Bob Hope</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Secret Life of Walter Mitty</td>
<td>Fred Astaire</td>
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<td>Paleface</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Scott of the Antarctic</td>
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<td>The Blue Lagoon</td>
<td>John Mills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Maytime in Mayfair</td>
<td>Danny Kaye</td>
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<td>Easter Parade</td>
<td>Bing Crosby</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Red River</td>
<td>Jean Simmons</td>
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<td></td>
<td>You Can’t Sleep Here</td>
<td>Judy Garland</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ginger Rogers</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Margaret Lockwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Cary Grant</td>
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1.2 *Picturegoer’s* Gold Medal Awards

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOP TEN STARS (FEMALE)</th>
<th>TOP TEN STARS (MALE)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1940</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Joan Fontaine - Rebecca</td>
<td>Laurence Olivier - Rebecca</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bette Davis - The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex</td>
<td>James Stewart - Mr Smith Goes to Washington</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bette Davis - The Old Maid</td>
<td>Laurence Olivier - Pride and Prejudice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Margaret Sullivan - The Mortal Storm</td>
<td>Spencer Tracy - Edison the Man</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greer Garson - Pride and Prejudice</td>
<td>Spencer Tracy - Northwest Passage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greta Garbo - Ninotchka</td>
<td>Robert Taylor - Waterloo Bridge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vivien Leigh - Waterloo Bridge</td>
<td>Burgess Meredith - Of Mice and Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosalind Russell - The Women</td>
<td>James Stewart - The Mortal Storm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diana Wynward - Gaslight</td>
<td>Errol Flynn - The Private Lives of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deanna Durbin - It’s a Date</td>
<td>Elizabeth and Essex</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Louis Hayward - My Son, My Son</td>
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</table>

| **1941**               |                       |
| Greer Garson - Blossoms in the Dust | Laurence Olivier - Lady Hamilton |
| Vivien Leigh - Lady Hamilton | Eric Portman - 49th Parallel |
| Olivia de Hallivand - Hold Back the Dawn | Robert Newton - Major Barbara |
| Bette Davis - All This and Heaven Too | Laurence Olivier - 49th Parallel |
| Joan Crawford - A Woman’s Face | Charles Boyer - All This and Heaven Too |
| Lana Turner - Ziegfeld Girl | Anton Walbrook - Dangerous |
| Mary Astor - The Great Lie | Moonlight |
| Bette Davis - The Letter | Leslie Howard - Pimpernel Smith |
| Deborah Kerr - Love on the Dole | Philip Dorn - Underground |
| Bette Davis - The Great Lie | Walter Pidgeon - Manhunt |
|                       | Nelson Eddy - Bitter Sweet |

| **1942**               |                       |
| Greer Garson - Mrs Miniver | Alan Ladd - This Gun for Hire |
| Vivien Leigh - Gone With the Wind | Leslie Howard - The First of the Few |
| Teresa Wright - Mrs Miniver | Clark Gable - Gone With the Wind |
| Bette Davis - In This Our Life | Walter Pidgeon - Mrs Miniver |
| Joan Fontaine - This Above All | Van Heflin - Johnny Eager |
| Jeanette MacDonald - Smilin’ Through | Robert Donat - The Young Mr Pitt |
| Ida Lupino - Ladies in Retirement | Robert Newman - Hatter’s Castle |
| Ingrid Bergman - Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde | Gary Cooper - Sergeant York |
| Diana Barrymore - Between Us Girls | Nelson Eddy - The Chocolate Soldier |
| Googie Withers - One of Our Aircraft is Missing | Monty Woolley - The Man Who Came to Dinner |

| **1943**               |                       |
| Greer Garson - Random Harvest | James Mason - The Man in Grey |
| Margaret Lockwood | Ronald Colman |
### Appendix 1.2

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>TOP TEN STARS (FEMALE)</th>
<th>TOP TEN STARS (MALE)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>Ingrid Bergman</td>
<td>Humphrey Bogart</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ann Sheridan</td>
<td>Roger Livesey</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rosamund John</td>
<td>Laurence Olivier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anna Neagle</td>
<td>Ronald Reagan</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Betty Field</td>
<td>Paul Lukas</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Deborah Kerr</td>
<td>Pierre Aumont</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Phyllis Calvert</td>
<td>Robert Cummings</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teresa Wright</td>
<td>Anton Walbrook</td>
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<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>Bette Davis - Now Voyager</td>
<td>Bing Crosby - Going My Way</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ingrid Bergman - Murder in Thornton Square</td>
<td>James Mason - Fanny by Gaslight</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jennifer Jones - Song of Bernadette</td>
<td>Barry Fitzgerald - Going My Way</td>
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<td>Greer Garson - Madam Curie</td>
<td>David Niven - The Way Ahead</td>
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<td>Phyllis Calvert - Fanny by Gaslight</td>
<td>Stewart Granger - Love Story</td>
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<td>Celia Johnson - This Happy Breed</td>
<td>Spencer Tracy - The Seventh Cross</td>
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<td>Margaret Lockwood - Love Story</td>
<td>Gary Cooper - The Story of Dr Wassell</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ida Lupino - The Hard Way</td>
<td>Orson Welles - Jane Eyre</td>
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<td>Irene Dunne - The White Cliffs of Dover</td>
<td>Robert Newton - This Happy Breed</td>
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<td>Joan Fontaine - Jane Eyre</td>
<td>Fred MacMurray - Double Indemnity</td>
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<td>Greer Garson - Valley of Decision</td>
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<td>Bette Davis - Mr Skeffington</td>
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<td>Phyllis Calvert - Madonna of the Seven Moons</td>
<td>John Mills - The Way to the Stars</td>
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<td>Rosamund John - The Way to the Stars</td>
<td>Gregory Peck - The Keys of the Kingdom</td>
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<td>Joan Fontaine - The Affairs of Susan Dorothy McGuire - The Enchanted Cottage</td>
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<td>Anna Neagle - I Live in Grosvenor Square</td>
<td>Claude Reins - Mr Skeffington</td>
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<td>Margaret Rutherford - Blithe Spirit Renee Asherson - Henry V</td>
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<td>Douglass Montgomery - The Way to the Stars</td>
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<td>Michael Redgrave - Dead of Night</td>
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<td>1946</td>
<td>Anna Neagle - Piccadilly Incident</td>
<td>Gregory Peck - Spellbound</td>
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<td>Celia Johnson - Brief Encounter</td>
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<td>Dorothy McGuire - The Spiral Staircase</td>
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### Appendix 1.2

**TOP TEN STARS (FEMALE)**

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<th>Year</th>
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<th>Name 2</th>
<th>Film 2</th>
<th>Name 3</th>
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<th>Name 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Olivia de Hallivand</td>
<td>The Dark Mirror</td>
<td>Margaret Lockwood</td>
<td>The Wicked Lady</td>
<td>Joan Crawford</td>
<td>Mildred Pierce</td>
<td>Deborah Kerr</td>
<td>I See a Dark Stranger</td>
<td>Gene Tierney</td>
<td>Leave Her to Heaven</td>
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<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Anna Neagle</td>
<td>The Courteens of Curzon Street</td>
<td>Mai Zetterling</td>
<td>Frieda</td>
<td>Jane Wyman</td>
<td>The Yearling</td>
<td>Ingrid Bergman</td>
<td>Notorious</td>
<td>Jean Simmons</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John Mills</td>
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<td>Michael Wilding</td>
<td>Anna and the King of Siam</td>
<td>John Dall</td>
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<td>Trevor Howard</td>
<td>Brief Encounter</td>
<td>James Mason</td>
<td>The Wicked Lady</td>
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**TOP TEN STARS (MALE)**

<table>
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<th>Name 2</th>
<th>Film 2</th>
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<th>Film 7</th>
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<td>1946</td>
<td>Rex Harrison</td>
<td>Anna and the King of Siam</td>
<td>John Dall</td>
<td>The Corn is Green</td>
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<td>Brief Encounter</td>
<td>James Mason</td>
<td>The Wicked Lady</td>
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<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Richard Todd</td>
<td>The Hasty Heart</td>
<td>Larry Parks</td>
<td>Jolson Sings Again</td>
<td>Gregory Peck</td>
<td>Twelve O’Clock High</td>
<td>John Mills</td>
<td>Scott of the Antarctic</td>
<td>Jane Wyman</td>
<td>Johnny Belinda</td>
<td>Jeanne Crain</td>
<td>Pinky</td>
<td>Margaret Lockwood</td>
<td>Madness of the Heart</td>
<td>June Allyson</td>
<td>Little Women</td>
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vii
### Appendix 1.2

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<th>Year</th>
<th><strong>Top Ten Stars (Female)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Top Ten Stars (Male)</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Michael Wilding - Maytime in Mayfair</td>
<td>Olivia de Hallivand - The Snake Pit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kirk Douglas - Champion</td>
<td>Ingrid Bergman - Joan of Arc</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dirk Bogarde - The Blue Lamp</td>
<td>Claudette Colbert - Three Came Home</td>
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<td>Alan Ladd - After Midnight</td>
<td>Greer Garson - The Forsyth Saga</td>
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<td>Alec Guinness - Kind Hearts and Coronets</td>
<td>Anna Neagle - Maytime in Mayfair</td>
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1.3 *Motion Picture Herald* Money Making Stars in British Pictures

Results are from questionnaires distributed to British exhibitors to determine the top money-making British stars in British productions (based on comparative box office receipts). *MPH* and *IMPA* are abbreviations for *Motion Picture Herald* and *International Motion Picture Almanac*. The latter is a summary of the former, printed once every two years.

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<td>George Formby</td>
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<td>Arthur Askey</td>
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<td>Will Hay</td>
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<td>Will Hay</td>
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<td>Gordon Harker</td>
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<td>Charles Laughton</td>
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<td>John Mills</td>
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### Motion Picture Almanac ‘Money-making stars in British pictures’

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<td><em>(MPH, 166:1, 46)</em></td>
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<td>David Farrar</td>
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<td>Jack Warner</td>
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1.4 Motion Picture Herald Biggest British Grossers

Lists of money-making films (at the British box-office) were not printed in the Motion Picture Herald prior to 1948. For 1948 and 1949, the titles are listed in order of gross. The symbol ‘*’ designates a film registered as British.

1948 Big Money-Makers (MPH, 174: 2, 44)
Spring in Park Lane*
Best Years of Our Lives
My Brother Jonathan*
Road to Rio
Life With Father
It Always Rains on Sunday*
Naked City
Oliver Twist*
Unconquered
Red Shoes*
The Fallen Idol*
The Weaker Sex*
Sitting Pretty
Green Dolphin Street
Miranda*
Forever Amber

1949 Big Money-Makers (MPH, 178:1, 24)
The Third Man*
Johnny Belinda
Maytime in Mayfair*
Paleface
Scott of the Antarctic*
Easter Parade
Blue Lagoon*
Red River
The Secret Life of Walter Mitty
The Hasty Heart*
APPENDIX 2: CORRELATION

2.1 *Kinematograph Weekly* Categories

**KEY**

- marks each year for which the *Kinematograph* category appears
- shaded categories are used in the calculation of film scores, Appendix 2.2

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KEY
• - marks each year for which the Kinematograph category appears
□ - shaded categories are used in the calculation of film scores, 2.2

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2.2 Calculation of Film Scores

**KEY**

TTSf Pg - Top ten stars (female) *Picturegoer*

TTSm Pg - Top ten stars (male) *Picturegoer*

BOA Kw – Biggest box-office attraction, *Kinematograph Weekly*

MPS Kw - Most popular and consistent stars, *Kinematograph Weekly*

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<th>BOA Kw</th>
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Appendix 2.2

**KEY**

TTSf Pg - Top ten stars (female) *Picturegoer*

TTSm Pg - Top ten stars (male) *Picturegoer*

BOA Kw – Biggest box-office attraction, *Kinematograph Weekly*

MPS Kw - Most popular and consistent stars, *Kinematograph Weekly*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film Title</th>
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Appendix 2.2

KEY
TTSf Pg - Top ten stars (female) *Picturegoer*
TTSm Pg - Top ten stars (male) *Picturegoer*
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### Appendix 2.2

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### KEY

- TTSf Pg - Top ten stars (female) *Picturegoer*
- TTSm Pg - Top ten stars (male) *Picturegoer*
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- MPS Kw - Most popular and consistent stars, *Kinematograph Weekly*

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Appendix 2.2

**KEY**
TTSf Pg - Top ten stars (female) *Picturegoer*
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| Hasty Heart, The                  | 0       | 1       | 0      | 0      | 1          |
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2.3 British and American Final Film Scores

A summary of the results of Appendix 2.2 ‘Calculation of Film Scores’, ranked according to score. Only those films that were ‘popular’ (scoring 2 and above) are listed below.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>POPULAR FILM TITLES - GB</th>
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<td>Ninotchka</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Northwest Passenger</td>
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<td>Old Maid, The</td>
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<td>Pride and Prejudice</td>
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<td>1940</td>
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<td>All This and Heaven Too</td>
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<td>Pimpernel Smith</td>
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<td>Lady Hamilton</td>
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<td>Great Lie, The</td>
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<td>Hold Back the Dawn</td>
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<td>Gone With the Wind</td>
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<td>This Above All</td>
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<td>How Green Was My Valley</td>
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<td>Man Who Came to Dinner, The</td>
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## Appendix 2.3

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<td>Going My Way</td>
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<td>Love Story</td>
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<td>Murder in Thornton Square</td>
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<td>Story of Dr Wassell, The</td>
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<td>Cover Girl</td>
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<td>Madame Curie</td>
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<td>Seventh Cross, The</td>
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<td>Song of Bernadette, The</td>
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<td>Sweet Rosie O’Gradie</td>
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<td>Mr Skeffington</td>
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<td>Affairs of Susan, The</td>
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<td>Bells of St Mary’s, The</td>
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<td>Two Mrs Carrolls</td>
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xxiii
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<td>Easter Parade</td>
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## APPENDIX 3: FILM SAMPLE

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<td>Winslow Boy, The*</td>
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* - films viewed on video and analysed in detail, Chapters 4-8
FILMOGRAPHY

This filmography includes information about all the British feature films cited in the text as well as those from my final film sample (Appendix 3). Credits and release dates are derived from Dennis Gifford (1986) The British Film Catalogue 1895-1985, London: Newton Abbot. Films that have been viewed are marked ‘*’, and those that are used as case-studies for film analysis, Chapters 4-8, are accompanied by my own plot synopses. The following abbreviations are used:

- pc production company
- p producer
- d director
- s story; source; screenplay
- sc screenplay (adaptation)
- ap associate producer

1922

1940
March: The Briggs Family. pc Warner Brothers p A. M. Salomon d Herbert Mason s Brock Williams sc John Dighton.

1941


July: Dangerous Moonlight. pc RKO p William Sistrom d Brian Desmond Hurst s Shaun Terence Young sc Shaun Terence Young, Brian Desmond Hurst, Rodney Ackland.


Synopsis: In 1941 five escaped Nazi soldiers flee across Canada in an attempt to reach the American border. On their journey they encounter a variety of people, including: French Canadian trappers, German Hutterites, Native Americans, and an Englishman.
1942

*April: *The Foreman Went to France.*  
   * pc Ealing  
   * p Michael Balcon ap Alberto Cavalcanti  
   * d Charles Frend  
   * s J. B. Priestly  
   * sc John Dighton, Angus Macphail, Leslie Arliss, Roger Macdougall, Diana Morgan.

*June: *The Young Mr Pitt.*  
   * pc Twentieth Century Production  
   * p Edward Black  
   * d Carol Reed  
   * s Viscount Castleross  
   * sc Frank Lauder, Sidney Gilliat.

July: *Salute John Citizen.*  
   * pc British National  
   * p Wallace Orton  
   * d Maurice Elvey  
   * s (novels) Robert Greenwood (Mr Bunting, Mr Bunting at War).

*August: *The First of the Few.*  
   * pc Misbourne-British Aviation  
   * p Leslie Howard, George King, John Stafford, Adrian Brunel  
   * d Leslie Howard  
   * s Henry C. James, Katherine Strueby  
   * sc Anatole de Grunwald, Miles Malleson.  
   * Synopsis: *Wing Commander recounts in flashback how the inventor of the spitfire pursued his work, but sacrificed his health.

*October: *In Which We Serve.*  
   * pc Two Cities  
   * p Noël Coward, Anthony Havelock-Allan  
   * d Noël Coward, David Lean  
   * s Noël Coward.

*November: *Went the Day Well?*  
   * pc Ealing  
   * p Michael Balcon ap S. C. Balcon  
   * d Alberto Cavalcanti  
   * s Graham Greene  
   * sc Angus Macphail, John Dighton, Diana Morgan.

1943

*April: *The Bells Go Down.*  
   * pc Ealing  
   * p Michael Balcon ap S. C. Balcon  
   * d Basil Dearden  
   * s (book) anonymous  
   * sc Stephen Black, Roger Macdougall.

*June: *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp.*  
   * pc Independent Producers-Archers  
   * p d s Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger.  
   * Synopsis: *Old-fashioned gentleman soldier’s life story from the 1900s-1942.

*July: *The Man in Grey.*  
   * pc Gainsborough  
   * p Edward Black  
   * d Leslie Arliss  
   * s (book) Lady Eleanor Smith  
   * sc Margaret Kennedy, Leslie Arliss, Doreen Montgomery.  
   * Synopsis: *Told in flashback from a wartime setting, a Regency beauty marries a faithless husband, and is killed by his lower-class lover.

*September: *Millions Like Us.*  
   * pc Gainsborough  
   * p Edward Black  
   * d s Frank Lauder, Sidney Gilliat.

*November: *The Lamp Still Burns.*  
   * pc Two Cities  
   * p Leslie Howard d Maurice Elvey  
   * s (novel) Monica Dickens (One Pair of Feet)  
   * sc Elizabeth Baron, Roland Pertwee, Major Neilson.

*December: *The Demi-Paradise.*  
   * pc Two Cities  
   * p Anatole de Grunwald d Anthony Asquith  
   * s Anatole de Grunwald.

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1944


*May: This Happy Breed. pc* Two Cities-Cineguild p Noël Coward, Anthony Havelock-Allan d David Lean s (play) Noël Coward sc David Lean, Ronald Neame, Anthony Havelock-Allan.

Synopsis: A family saga of everyday life, interwoven with national events, 1919-1939.


Synopsis: An illegitimate Victorian daughter is left destitute, but falls in love with the executor of her late father’s will.


August: *They Came to a City*. pc Ealing p Michael Balcon ap Sidney Cole d Basil Dearden s (play) J. B. Priestly sc Basil Dearden, Sidney Cole.


Synopsis: Pianist with a weak heart goes to Cornwall and falls in love with a seemingly irresponsible man.

*December: Madonna of the Seven Moons. pc* Gainsborough p R. J. Minney d Arthur Crabtree s (novel) Margery Lawrence sc Roland Pertwee, Brock Williams.

Synopsis: Modern daughter’s return home (1930s Italy) triggers mother’s amnesia and double life.

1945

*January: Waterloo Road. pc* Gainsborough p Edward Black d sc Sidney Gilliat s Val Valentine.

*January: Henry V. pc* Two Cities p d Laurence Olivier s (play) William Shakespeare sc Laurence Olivier, Alan Dent.

Synopsis: Henry V fights a victorious battle at Agincourt.

*March: A Place of One’s Own. pc* Gainsborough p R. J. Minney d Bernard Knowles s (novel) Osbert Sitwell sc Osbert Sitwell, Brock Williams.

Synopsis: In 1900 a retired couple buy Bellingham House. Their companion becomes possessed by the ghost of a woman who was murdered there forty years previously.


*October: The Seventh Veil. pc* Theatrecraft/Ortus *pd* John Sutro, Sydney Box *d* Compton Bennett *s* Muriel Box, Sydney Box. *Synopsis*: Suicidal pianist recalls her unhappy life with her domineering guardian.

*December: Brief Encounter. pc* Independent Producers-Cineguild *executive producers* Anthony Havelock-Allan, Ronald Neame *pd* Noel Coward *d* David Lean *s* Noel Coward (Still Life). *Synopsis*: Suburban mother of two recalls how she nearly consummated an affair with a respectable doctor.

*December: The Wicked Lady. pc* Gainsborough *pd* R. J. Minney *d* Leslie Arliss *s* Magdalen King-Hall (Life and Death of Wicked Lady Skelton). *Synopsis*: Noblewoman adopts a highwayman disguise to alleviate her boredom.

1946


*August: Piccadilly Incident. pc* Associated British Picture Corporation *pd* Herbert Wilcox *s* Florence Tranter. *Synopsis*: Suburban mother of two recalls how she nearly consummated an affair with a respectable doctor.
Filmography

Synopsis: Boy has mysterious funds to go to London and become a gentleman.

1947
*February: Odd Man Out. pc Two Cities p d Carol Reed s (novel) F. L. Green sc F. L. Green, R. C. Sheriff.
Synopsis: Leader of an illegal organisation is on the run in an Irish city.

Synopsis: Well-meaning nuns make an ill-fated attempt to establish a school in the Himalayas.

May: The Courtneys of Curzon Street. pc Imperadio p d Herbert Wilcox s Florence Turner sc Nicholas Phipps.

*June: Frieda. pc Ealing p Michael Balcon ap Michael Relph d Basil Dearden s (play) Ronald Millar sc Ronald Millar, Angus Macphail.
Synopsis: Frieda, a German nurse, helps an English prisoner of war, Robert, to escape. Once home Robert feels obliged to marry Frieda, but many of his family and the local community object to her presence.

July: Holiday Camp. pc Gainsborough p Sydney Box d Ken Annakin s Godfrey Winn sc Muriel Box, Sydney Box, Peter Rogers, Mabel Constanduros, Denis Constanduros, Ted Willis.

Synopsis: One rainy Sunday, a step-mother risks hiding her escaped criminal ex-lover at home.

1948
*January: An Ideal Husband. pc London p d Alexander Korda s (play) Oscar Wilde sc Lajos Biro.
Synopsis: Mrs Cheveley blackmails the honourable politician Sir Robert Chiltern in an attempt to gain his public support for a canal scheme.


*April: Miranda. pc Gainsborough p Betty Box d Ken Annakin s (play) Peter Blackmore sc Peter Blackmore, Denis Waldrock.
Synopsis: A doctor brings a mermaid to London and she wrecks havoc on three marriages.

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April: Spring in Park Lane. pc Imperadio p d Herbert Wilcox s (play) Alice Duer Miller (Come Out of the Kitchen) sc Nicholas Phipps.

*June: Hamlet. pc Two Cities p d Laurence Olivier s (play) William Shakespeare. Synopsis: Tortured Prince attempts to avenge his father’s murder.


*July: The Red Shoes. pc Independent Producers-Archers p d Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger s (story) Hans Andersen sc Emeric Pressburger, Keith Winter. Synopsis: A young ballet dancer joins the Ballet Lermontov, but is forced to choose between her career and her husband.

*September: The Fallen Idol. pc London-Reed p David O. Selznick, Carol Reed d Carol Reed s (story) Graham Greene (The Basement Room) sc Graham Greene, Lesley Storm, William Templeton. Synopsis: Ambassador’s son believes he witnesses the butler murder his wife.

*September: The Winslow Boy. pc London-British Lion Production Assets p Anatole de Grunwald d Anthony Asquith s (play) Terence Rattigan sc Terence Rattigan, Anatole de Grunwald, Anthony Asquith. Synopsis: Father fights to clear his son’s name in court.


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March: The Blue Lagoon. pc Pinewood-Individual p Frank Launder, Sidney Gilliat d Frank Launder s (novel) H. DeVere Stacpoole sc Frank Launder, John Baines, Michael Hogan.


May: Adam and Evelyn. pc Two Cities p d Harold French s Noel Langley sc Noel Langley, Lesley Storm, George Barraud, Nicholas Phipps.

*June: Kind Hearts and Coronets. pc Ealing p Michael Balcon ap Michael Relph d Robert Hamer s (novel) Roy Horniman (Israel Rank) sc Robert Hamer, John Dighton.
*June: *Maytime in Mayfair. *pc* Imperadio *pd* Herbert Wilcox *ss* Nicholas Phipps.

*Synopsis:* Inheritor falls in love with the manageress of his dress shop, but finds he has a rival for her affections.


*Synopsis:* Blind typist marries a French aristocrat, but finds his family and friends inhospitable.

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