

The Competitors

Violent Women Protagonists in Popular Cinema

A Creative and Critical Thesis

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Abstract

The Competitors: Violent Women Protagonists in Popular Cinema: A Creative and Critical Thesis is a practice-based PhD thesis in creative and critical writing. This research comprises an original feature length screenplay and an accompanying critical thesis.

The screenplay, *The Competitors*, is a dystopian western set in Britain 2053 and follows two women on a journey through a brutal landscape. The subjects of competition and violence are at the centre of this creative work, in particular in relation to expectations and representations of gender in popular cinema.

The accompanying critical element is a discussion of competitive, violent female protagonists in popular cinema. It is in the critical exploration of these subjects that I fully engage with the critical and creative tensions they hold for me as a writer.

The Introduction of the critical element provides an account of the critical and creative context of the PhD with particular focus on feminism and postfeminism, stylised and realist violence, and self versus other in relation to the subjects of competition and violence.

Chapter One discusses female action icons from the 1970s to the 1990s in terms of the violent woman in popular cinema.

Chapter Two looks at contemporary female action heroes and asks whether or not they have moved on from their iconic predecessors in terms of representations of the violent woman.

Chapter Three investigates how contemporary depictions of realist violence can provide new alternatives to the stylised representations of the violent women of Chapter Two.

The Conclusion to the critical element is an analysis of the practice of writing my own screenplay as I attempt to position my work within the critical and creative context discussed and in particular in the contested space created by the violent, competitive woman in film.

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Ned, who has ridden shotgun for me throughout. I hope I return the favour on your trails.

For Dolores

Preface: Creative/Critical Methodology

As a creative writer I seek to obscure things. For instance, my work is not transparent in terms of method and meaning. Take my opening sentence to this preface as an example. In regards to method, my sentence does not betray how it was conceived, drafted, rewritten or edited. As with most writers, my process is hidden. And in regards to meaning, in composing my introductory sentence I was being wilfully opaque. It could be said that the meaning of any writing is indeterminate. I certainly believe that when I hand my work over to readers/audiences I am asking them to make their own interpretations. In other words, they become the new writers of the text. But it is also arguable that as the first author I have some control over the boundaries of these interpretations. As a writer (and in particular a writer of mainstream cinematic narratives) the decision to craft a screenplay that is open in regards to meaning is a personal choice: rather than constricting interpretations, I strive to write a space of possibility. I like work that poses questions without necessarily providing answers; I enjoy ambiguity and even contradiction in stories as these elements bring us closer to human experience. However, this thesis is an act of academic research. Although it goes against my instinct and understanding as a creative writer to preface my screenplay with any kind of critical introduction it is my job as a creative/critical writer to expose the things that I usually hide. As such I begin by making explicit both my method and my meaning.

One reason to be explicit about my process is to make clear why I chose to write this research as a creative/critical project, as opposed to simply producing a lone screenplay or a self-contained critical thesis. Another reason is to provide an example for other researchers in this field of how the creative/critical process has worked for me. As can be seen from what I have written above, the creative and the critical are often in tension with one another. From the very beginning of this PhD I struggled with the question: how do the creative and critical fit

together? Every project is different and there are many ways in which the creative and the critical can connect, or not connect. One thing my research has clarified for me is that the distinction between the creative and the critical does not simply fall between my screenplay and my critical thesis. I have followed a research path that has led me to see that production and critique are inseparable: in other words all creative work is critical and all critical work is creative. This preface sets out how these two apparently distinct elements of practice-based research – the creative and the critical – can be implicated in one another.

To begin with I will provide a simplified, chronological breakdown of my process. I started this research knowing I wanted to write a western, *The Competitors*. My understanding of what this meant relied on common genre knowledge mostly acquired through watching and reading a vast number of western narratives.¹ I then chose to relocate my story to the UK because, as an English writer, I wanted to script something to be made by the British film industry. My decision to set the narrative in a dystopian future was an answer to questions raised by this very different geographical (and creative) space. I researched and wrote pieces on creative context and character biography before producing three drafts of a story outline. I then moved onto writing the screenplay, a process that went through nine drafts. This all took about two and a half years. At this stage I felt I had achieved as much as I could with the script and so I went over to the thesis to investigate the central questions surrounding competition and violence that the script had raised for me. My intention was then to return to the script. Beyond the research of actually writing the script I carried out another body of critical research into the theoretical context of violent women protagonists in popular cinema. This second layer of research and the writing of the critical element took a little over a year. Upon completion I was then able to return to my screenplay and after three more quick rewrites I produced the 13th, and final, draft.

It was in the practice of writing the script that I was able to recognise what my narrative was really about: competition and violence. But it was in the exploration of these subjects in my thesis that I found the space to fully critically engage with the tensions they hold for me as a writer. However, the way that I have described my process is not entirely true to its time line. Although I wrote the script, then wrote the critical element and then finalised the script, there was more creative/critical crossover than this description allows. A year into my research I was required to produce a piece of critical writing for my PhD upgrade panel and I will use this

¹ A fuller discussion of the creative context of this research project is provided in the Introduction of the critical element.

to provide the first example of how my critical thinking and understanding influenced my creative work. The best way to explain this is to state that although I had not fully come to terms with what I was writing (and what would be the subject of my critical element: violent/competitive women in popular cinema) I was making key decisions in terms of what I did not want my script or critical element to be. Through discussion at upgrade I clarified that I did not want to write a critical thesis about genre. Creatively, the western was my starting point but it was a foundation to my script that I essentially found to be uncomplicated. I was beginning to develop a narrative that meant my choice to use the western genre (and particularly the revisionist western genre) made sense. However, genre, and the western as an example of this, is anything but a straightforward subject. And certainly in regards to my project there were issues that I needed to address in the writing of the script (for example, the use of western tropes and stereotypes – something I discuss in the Conclusion of my thesis). But even though at this stage I had not uncovered the central critical question of my research I was sure I did not want to write a thesis on genre, not least because I did not believe that it posed a big enough problem to support it becoming my thesis question. Further, I was aware that my critical element would need to be narrow in focus and that to even mention genre would be to enter into a huge and varied arena that could easily take over my critical research. And so with the support of my supervisors and the upgrade panel I made the decision not to write theoretically about genre at all.

But the creative/critical interplay did not stop there. In terms of the creative writing process, I was also making decisions about my work that were based on critical interrogation of what I was writing. For example I made the choice that I did not want to write a rape-revenge film. Again, my definition of this relies on common understanding: a rape-revenge narrative takes the sexual assault of a woman as a justification for the victim to become a vengeful perpetrator of violence. I knew that my story was open to interpretation in this way but it was vital to develop it beyond this basic narrative type because I actively did not want women to represent the righteous good and men to represent the abusive bad within the world of the script. In the writing of my script it was important to me that I was not forming these kinds of simplistic categorisations however the work might be perceived by others. Rather, from my point of view, each character has their own complexities and contradictions, especially when it comes to the subject of violence.² And as I drafted and redrafted the narrative I recognised that the intent of this was to refuse a binary opposition of the sexes. As a feminist project I

² The Conclusion to my critical element discusses the development of my own approach to the writing of violence through examples taken from the earliest and the final draft of the script.

was not writing *The Competitors* as an anti-male diatribe but rather a work that aimed to represent nuanced portraits of men and women, all of whom were conflicted individuals.

Part of my interest in nuanced characters comes from my previously mentioned predilection for ambiguity within a narrative. Which takes us back to another critical decision I made in my creative process: I did not want my script to provide obvious answers to the questions it raised. One example of this is the creative context or setting. Influenced by dystopian narratives like *The Road* (McCarthy, 2006), I chose to imagine a narrative space of the future that was vastly different from contemporary Britain without giving a full explanation of what has happened to cause the change. I had written my creative setting and so I had an intricately outlined history of Britain's decline but with each drafting of the script the explanation slowly disappeared.³ In the end all that is left are clues that appear in the form of landscape or weather descriptions and half-comments hidden in the dialogue. This was something that developed a question that would hang in the air, without ever being answered, in order to create a final sense that the issues raised by the story are ultimately unresolved.

If the setting creates a backdrop question to the script this works to reinforce the greater questions that run through the narrative relating to characters: in particular, the open-ended motivations of the key players. An example of this comes from the rewriting of a backstory monologue at the end of the second act.⁴ In the very early drafts this monologue belongs to Dolly, one of the two central characters. As I work through Dolly's motivations I then hand this monologue space over to the second female protagonist, Nu. At each rewrite, Nu's monologue changes and then becomes more elliptical until eventually much of the speech in the scene is returned to Dolly, as she takes on the role of interpreter of Nu's motivations. By the ninth draft, Nu's monologue is just a few lines. This is in part because, as the script develops, it deals more and more in silences; Nu is in the end a character who would never give a speech, never mind an expositional one. However, as shown by my description of the changes I made to this scene, it was the process of writing and rewriting that formed my own creative research into these central characters and as their motivations became clearer my need to expose them diminished. By the time I finished the ninth draft had long been aware that I was circling the subject of violence but I had still not fully got to grips with what this meant. I decided I needed to step back from the script and that I was ready to move on to the

³ See Appendix A for a draft of the creative setting piece, a pre-script prologue draft and two early drafts of the opening script scenes that provide exposition on the context of the narrative.

⁴ See Appendix B for examples of 10 different drafts of this scene.

critical element where I could explore my interest in writing violence, both in relation to my own script and to the films that influenced it. During this process, time and again, I came back to the subject of competition. I had known from the first notes on my script that it would be called *The Competitors* – but its focus on competition, although often obvious, was just as often not transparent even for me as the writer. And so my critical work became instrumental as a tool to explore, both creatively and critically, the competition that infused my script. And this is how I arrived at a place where I could see the central question that I needed to address in my critical element was about the motivation of my protagonists. In other words, in order to complete my script, my critical essay had to interrogate the violent/competitive woman protagonist in popular cinema.

To critically contextualise my script I engaged with contemporary feminist and postfeminist theory, in particular in relation to the violent woman in popular culture. However, there is more than one way to approach a critical essay and certainly in terms of theoretical context it is valid to ask why in a critical investigation surrounding the practice of writing a screenplay I do not make use of any of the wealth of material specific to screenwriting. The answer is simple: this is not my background. Yes, I have read the screenwriting bibles by Syd Field ([1979] 1994) and Robert McKee ([1997] 1999) as well as a whole host of other lesser known how-to books but my formative training as a writer came in watching films and reading scripts, novels and plays. The Introduction to my critical element discusses my main creative influences for *The Competitors* but further to this, as a former literature student, when faced with a critical question I return to practices of research that are founded on reading both primary texts and critical and cultural theory specific to those texts. And this is the path I have followed in my critical element.

Finally, it is important to outline why the violent/competitive woman has become the central question of my PhD. However, as *The Competitors* and my critical element present a thesis on competition and violence in relation to the female protagonist in popular cinema I do not need to go into too much detail here. It is enough at this stage to introduce these subjects in relation to the context of my research as a preface to this thesis. Although my screenplay presents a world of the future, the narrative is about the cultural moment we inhabit now. Prior to starting the script I had been struggling with the idea commonly put forward that feminism is no longer necessary. All too often men and women alike invest in the concept that equality of the sexes has been achieved and that any concern about the status of women in

western society is outdated. In response to this I know that when I see the limited representation of women in decision-making and game-changing areas such as British and global government and business (never mind the dearth of diverse and complex female protagonists in cinema) that the work of feminism is absolutely necessary. Further, the way our contemporary culture encourages and justifies the objectification of the female body (far more than the male body) without widespread recognition of the damage this causes (to both sexes) is an attack on our progression towards equality. I believe we live in a time where women are still constantly made to feel that their most powerful tool is their sexuality and, even worse, that this is a good and even an empowering thing. The extent to which both sexes buy and sell these ideas – in particular the idea that the need for feminism is a thing of the past – is a problem. In fact, I find it a big enough problem to be the starting ground for the central question to my thesis. The reason this question takes the form of the violent/competitive woman is the subject that underpins the following research. For now I will simply state that violent/competitive women protagonists in popular cinema are both a product of and a reaction to the idea that the gender issue in our society has been resolved.

I have outlined how I came to write a thesis on violent/competitive women protagonists in popular cinema and so it is time to return to the question of creative/critical research. By making explicit my method and meaning this preface intends to show that my PhD has the potential to have been written in all number of different ways. It is written the way it is, and focuses on the things it does, because it is a product of my own very particular process as defined by my own very particular methodology as a creative/critical writer. By being explicit about my process I hope to reinforce the point that when using the terms critical and creative I do not mean to simply define between my critical element and my script. Rather, my aim is to expose how it has been impossible to separate the two elements of my research, even though initially they may appear removed from each other. My script was founded on the vast amount of critical exploration that writing a piece of creative work involves. And it was only through the act of composition in writing and rewriting my critical element that I was able to find a creative route to the heart of some of these critical questions. My critical element was also mainly founded on the creative research carried out through the practice of writing my screenplay. Finally, it was in the exploration of these creative/critical questions within a critical framework that I succeeded in producing a final draft of my creative work, *The Competitors*. Without the dual nature of this PhD I would not have been able to write either of the elements of this thesis as I present them to you now.

like an Olympian, to the great games, where the first- born of the world are the competitors.

“Friendship”, R.W. Emerson

I have a competition in me. I want no one else to succeed. I hate most people.

Daniel, *There Will be Blood*

THE COMPETITORS

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FADE IN:

A vast landscape of open valley hemmed by grey mountains. Far away a storm is gathering. In the lost distance A LONE RIDER emerges from the deep range and moves slowly, surely towards us.

1 INT. THE BLACK HORSE. GRASSINGTON -- MORNING 1

A dark and low establishment. Early morning heat. Even the carpet sweats - decades of muck and stale booze.

Through the gloom we begin to make out men - maybe 15 - filling the shadowed corners. And each one is peering out at - a table in the middle of the bar - with 5 more men seated around it. A high stakes card game.

CECIL SPRATT shows his hand. A flush. Like all the others he hasn't seen a bath or a razor in God knows how long - and by the look of him this game has been going all night. But the gleam in his eye tells us he's just laid out the winning cards.

Cecil moves his cribbage peg to the final place on the board.

Three of the other players push their pay-in to him - a belt, a knife, 3 hand-forged bullets.

But Cecil's not interested in these prizes. He's only got eyes for the man seated opposite him. He looks. We all look --

Even in this glut of alpha-males RED stands out. Flaming-haired but cold-blooded, he is unbalanced by repression so deep it has no end - a classic example of the abused becoming the abuser.

Red's colourless eyes move from Cecil's cards to his face.

Everyone's holding their breath -

Cecil's victorious glint falters -

And then Red smiles. And we can all breathe again. Except Red's eyes are mirthless.

Red stands. He's not tall, but compact - a powerful build.

Cecil gets up and follows Red out of the bar.

CUT TO:

2 EXT. GRASSINGTON -- CONTINUOUS

2

The two men step out into blazing sunlight. It's just past dawn but they're both forced to shield their eyes from the glare.

A couple of horses are tied up in front of the pub. And beyond them is the market square - full of nothing but dust.

Red pulls something out of his pocket. Cecil's trying not to look too full of it as he moves to take his trophy. But as he reaches out Red snaps the object back up.

Cecil blinks, perturbed.

Red casually flings it out into the middle of the square -

We watch the thing land in a puff of dirt -

Cecil turns back to Red -

Red's mouth smiles. He gestures to the prize with his head, encouraging Cecil to go after it -

Cecil hesitates - but he sees no choice. He reluctantly trots out into the middle of the square.

Another man steps out of the pub. This is KID, his long-time nickname at odds to the ruin of his hard-aged face. And body - his right arm is roughly amputated at the elbow. Kid's eyes swim with dark-humour as he hangs casually behind Red.

A few less confident faces congregate at the grubby windows of the bar.

Cecil makes his way to the landing spot. He stoops and

-- BANG --

- a shot thuds into the ground by his hand. He starts back and turns to see -

Red holding a gun. Again Red gestures with his head for Cecil to pick up the object.

Cecil starts to shake. All that empty space around him and he's cornered. Tentatively he goes in again and

-- BAM --

- this time blood splatters into dirt as his right hand is severed. He SCREECHES and clutches at the place where his fingers once were.

Red remains unmoved.

Cecil looks back to him, his face distorted in surprise. He falls MUTE as he gives over to shock.

Red, again, gestures to the object at Cecil's feet.

Cecil - eyes glazing - robotically obeys and

-- BAM --

- his left hand shatters.

He slumps to the ground, staring at the bloody stumps at the ends of his arms.

Red strolls over to him.

Red's pale eyes rest on Cecil - no trace of a smile now. He nods to Cecil's winnings - the final offer.

Cecil sits watching the blood pulsing from what is left of his hands, unable to comprehend. Unable to act.

Red shrugs. He picks the object up out of the dust and turns to the horses. He looks down into his hand and we see -

a key fob.

He moves towards the horses and just beyond them we see -

a car - like some super-modern hybrid model. Except it's aged and rusting. Red slides into the driver's seat with Kid riding shotgun.

Red turns her over and they SCREAM out of town -

The ensuing cloud of dust settles on what we now recognise as a broken down Yorkshire village -

The dust settles in a thick, sticky layer over the blood-soaked form of Cecil as he lies on the ground, hugging his stumps, sobbing -

The dust settles as we realise our world is lost -

The dust settles on -

INSERT TITLE OVER IMAGE:

BRITAIN, 2053.

CUT TO:

A pair of dark eyes. They belong to DOLLY, who stands looking out of a window. She's undressed, wrapped in a ragged sheet, as she stares across the valley down to its dry river.

CUT TO:

4 INT. CAR -- CONTINUOUS

4

Red powering his car through Yorkshire country lanes. But now we see the green fields have been eroded by yellow, and brown - colours of burn and decay.

Red stares out at the deserted countryside - eyes fixed on something in his own head. His sought after prize.

CUT TO:

5 INT. BEDROOM. THE WATER RATS -- CONTINUOUS

5

Dolly, still watching, waiting.

And then a figure steps up behind her. A man, also undressed. PAW is in his 60s but his body is muscular and covered in a lifetime of scars. Given his appearance it's surprising how gently he slips his hands around Dolly's waist. He's about an inch shorter than her and he rests his unshaven cheek against her bare shoulder.

PAW
(softly, in a thick
Glaswegian accent)
Come on now, Doll.

Dolly does not respond but continues to gaze out the window.

PAW (CONT'D)
(encouraging)
Dolly.

Dolly's eyes focus, as if she's suddenly become aware of her surroundings, and of his presence.

PAW (CONT'D)
There's nothing you can do now. You
musnae dwell.

He soothingly strokes her belly. She glances down at where his hand lies - detached from his touch.

DOLLY
(trace of a South London
accent)
I'm not.

PAW
We'll keep trying.

DOLLY
I didn't realise that's wot we were
doin'.

Dolly pushes his hand away from her stomach. She continues to observe the desolate landscape.

DOLLY (CONT'D)
 You promised you'd take me away
 from this.

PAW
 Where do you want to go?

Dolly doesn't answer.

PAW (CONT'D)
 See. You dinnae know yourself.

DOLLY
 Maybe to London.

PAW
 Why?

DOLLY
 It's my home.

PAW
 There's nae such thing.

Dolly drops her gaze, rests her forehead against the pane. He draws her closer to him, a protective hold, and stares out of the window.

PAW (CONT'D)
 Look outside. This country is all
 there for the taking.

Dolly's eyes move over the empty view.

DOLLY
 Yeah. For you.

PAW
 That's right. For me.

He turns her and puts his rough hand softly on her cheek.

PAW (CONT'D)
 Stop looking for things that are
 lost.

He draws her mouth to his. She lets him take control.

CUT TO:

Red's car whining to a halt. We're in an old Yorkstone hamlet in the middle of nowhere. A pub, outhouses, and behind them stands a death-trap windmill fashioned from scrap car parts. Gear box mechanisms, an axle and even rusting panels for blades. It's stationary and silent in the dead heat.

Red gets out and surveys the wild valley down to the dry river - the same view that Dolly was just observing. Then he looks to the upstairs window of the pub.

A man appears from the stables. This is JORGE, the owner.

Red snaps away from the window. He throws the keys to Jorge and stalks inside. As he disappears -

RED
(wandering Glaswegian
accent)
Fill it and charge it.

CUT TO:

7

INT. STAIRWAY. THE WATER RATS -- MOMENTS LATER

7

Red comes through the doorway and moves quickly up the stairs. As he reaches the top landing

the door to the bedroom opens and Dolly appears. She sees him and stops dead.

He almost smiles.

They're within touching distance of one another and it seems that Red might actually reach out. But then Dolly steps away - as if she has remembered something. She glances back into the room.

Red's eyes go cold.

And now Paw's standing in the doorway behind her.

The two men face each other - Dolly stands in between. And we're seeing another side to Paw as he glares at the younger man. We wait for Red's monster to emerge -

And we wait.

Red drops his gaze to the floor and disappears down the stairs.

Silently Paw turns back into the room.

Dolly hesitates and then follows Paw.

CUT TO:

8

INT. BEDROOM. THE WATER RATS -- CONTINUOUS

8

Paw looking out the window. Dolly hovers on the far side of the small bedroom. Then -

DOLLY

Paw --

PAW

-- He'll no have my leftovers.

Dolly's face hardens.

DOLLY

Who says? It's not like you've never paid or nothin'.

Paw turns around. His eyes have lost all trace of affection. It's like looking at a different man.

And Dolly knows this Paw. She changes tack -

DOLLY (CONT'D)

I just wanna get out of here. No more 'open for business'.

An impeccable example of pride swallowing, she walks over to him and moves to put her arms around his neck.

DOLLY (CONT'D)

(softly)

I just wanna be with you.

But Paw's unmoved. He throws her away from him. She hits the corner of the sideboard.

PAW

The reason that body of yours lost the bairn is 'cause you're a whore.

Dolly's face burns red -

DOLLY

Maybe Red would be man enough to take care of me.

Paw turns to Dolly - eyes cold.

PAW

You want a real man?

Dolly sees she's in trouble and again tries to backtrack as she looks to Paw with a smile. Too late. The smile is smashed from her face by a thumping right hook as it lands in her turning jaw - her temple glances off the window and she's strung out on the floor -

Paw stands over her and unsheathes a vicious bowie knife -

PAW (CONT'D)
 We'll see how much mae son will do
 for you.

CUT TO:

9 INT. BAR. THE WATER RATS -- CONTINUOUS

9

Jorge and Kid drinking ethanol. Red stares at
 - a jar on the bar - full of assorted gun cartridges -
 - A SCREAM echoes from upstairs -

Red reaches out towards the jar - but at the last moment he changes direction, grabs a half-drunk bottle and necks it.

KID
 (playful - in a scouse
 accent)
 Yer da never was one fer sharin'.

Red stays silent - his colourless eyes stare coldly ahead, his fist white with his strangle-hold on the bottle.

CUT TO:

10 INT. DOLLY'S BEDROOM. THE WATERING HOLE -- NIGHT

10

The sound of THUNDERING RAIN.

12 On the dresser lies a pot of rouge and a copy of Madame Bovary, open at the title page, with the name 'Dolores Lochlain' handwritten inside. 12

On the bed, a writhing tangle of sheets and blood -

Paw has Dolly pinned face-down and is raping her. She tries to fight his hold. He responds with a thick punch to the back of her head.

Dolly's hand searches for an anchor in the sheets. Her fingers find Paw's red-smeared bowie knife. She grasps it.

Paw sees - throws her onto her back --

PAW
 I'll gie you a fightin' chance,
 Doll.

Dolly hesitates. Paw punches her in the mouth. She crumples. He leans in. Desperate, roused - she lunges with the knife. Their bodies meet. Paw's face registers surprise as he loses his balance -

They topple from the bed onto the floor -

- Dolly strains to untangle herself - Paw traps her in his grasp. He LAUGHS as he watches her fear playing out. But moment by moment the smile disappears from his face -

Dolly, in panic, does not notice. Until she slips free. Too easy. She looks down to see -

Paw - naked - mouth and eyes wide -

His knife hangs from a dark hole in his inner thigh -

The discarded white quilt thirstily soaks up a gush of bright red arterial blood -

Dolly starts up and away from the dying man. She stands in the corner of her room clasping the reddening bed-cover to her chest.

A CHORUS OF SHOUTS arise from downstairs -

Dolly stays stock still. She stares at the door -

The SHOUTS are swallowed by LAUGHTER -

-- Unthinking, Dolly moves into action -- She throws on shirt and jeans, rams a fistful of clothes into a bundle. She stuffs in her rouge and book, a box of matches from inside a drawer. Now - slower - she turns back to the bed. Trembling, she approaches Paw. But, avoiding contact, she bypasses him and reaches under her mattress. She pulls out -

- a short tin chain with an old-fashioned TEA-DIFFUSER attached to one end -

This carefully joins the bundle. She meets -

- Paw's staring eyes -

She exhales and takes hold of the bowie-knife and, turning her face away, draws it out of his groin -

Blood pumps everywhere -

Paw GROANS as his eyes fix on their final end -

Dolly bears the weapon in front of her as if it were infectious as she makes for the door -

Dolly looks down over the stairwell towards the bar -

The door is wide open. But the men are all facing away. Red is at the centre - surrounded by vicious mirth.

Dolly holds her breath and sneaks past the bar entrance to the back door. She silently frees herself into the night -

14

EXT. APPLETREEWICK -- CONTINUOUS

14

- and the downpour.

A glow from the bar window is the only light. Not a soul is visible. Beyond the few empty houses glistening in the wet is blackness.

A STRANGE NOISE cuts through the storm - a CREAKING, WHIRRING, METALLIC SOUND that issues from high beyond the barn. The windmill is in full motion.

Dolly hurries inside the barn -

15

INT. BARN. APPLETREEWICK -- CONTINUOUS

15

Dolly strikes a match to the candle by the door. Dim light bleeds into the barn to reveal -

rows of kegs and bottles surrounding a great distilling machine. And next to it - the car.

Dolly makes straight for the vehicle. Checks the ignition. Then all the usual hiding places for keys - sun shield - wheel arch - nothing. She moves to the front of the car.

A lead runs from the engine to a large junction box.

She yanks the plug out of the socket. Now, knife in hand, she crawls under the car -

16

EXT. APPLETREEWICK -- LATER

16

Dolly lets herself out of the barn. Only to confront -

The Lone Rider bearing down on her. Clad in a rain-darkened oilskin with a black hat that masks any features it's like a vision of the devil stalking towards her - and then past -

- Dolly remains suspended as she watches -

- the Rider pass by in a shadow of darkness, and draw up outside the pub -

And that's enough to get Dolly going. She flees into the pitch night -

- The Rider looks through the window to the drunken crew of men inside, then spurs the horse on into the dark -

CUT TO:

17

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE -- CONTINUOUS

17

PANTING BREATH and DRUMMING RAIN sounding through the darkness. The SKID and SUCK OF RUNNING FEET -

An empty, reverberating space. Out of the black, a shadowed barrier - a wall - pale stone pitches in front and then under. And now beyond - a ghost-platoon of trees -

Below - a ROARING din -

Storm-wet wood - hands reaching - Dolly's hands. In one, her bundle.

Nails bite into the bloated bark.

And then the trees kick on their axis and blurred darkness rushes forwards - mud and filthy hair - and now only speed and chaos -

And we find ourselves at the bottom of an embankment - at the edge of a boiling-black river. And Dolly's on her knees in the shallows, the bundle behind her, as she scrubs at her body, her face, her hands.

And still her hands. Even in the pitch downpour the dark stain glistens. But her bundle comes floating past - until it gets trapped in the water by submerged jetsam an armstretch out of reach.

We're with Dolly, as she wades deeper into the swollen waters. Inches away from our goal - reaching stiff fingers - she hooks it towards us - and then it is in her arms. She turns to the bank and we're struck by a sudden surge in velocity. And we're dragged down under the black waves --

Nothing but the sound of WATER RATTLING into lungs. Until - a resurrecting GASP as air is reached -

Dolly clings to a rock as wave after wave slaps across us. Her grip is failing - her cold hands slipping. We turn away from the onslaught and in the final moments of consciousness we see -

The Lone Rider on the bank.

And now -- the dark figure is beside us in the water -- and Dolly's being drawn back to land. And to life. As all that is dark - falls into BLACK -

18

INT. BAR. THE WATERING HOLE -- DAY

18

The three men are passed out - in a chair, on the bar, Red slumped over a table.

He comes around and staggers to his feet. He listens - SILENCE.

Still half-drunk and fuelled by his own disorientation, he turns and stumbles through the sweltering room towards the stairs.

CUT TO:

19

INT. DOLLY'S ROOM. THE WATERING HOLE -- MOMENTS LATER

19

Red crashing into the room. He stops at the sight of - the bloody sheets.

He moves slowly around the bed to discover - Paw lying in twisted rigormortis.

Red drops to his knees over Paw. He tries to lift him - his body is already awkward and stiff. Red draws his father in and holds him, face buried in Paw's neck. His hands grasp Paw's cold, white arms. And then he starts to shake him. Like he's trying to wake him up. But as the father ignores his son's despair Red's grief turns, until, in a blind rage, he is dashing his lost father's unprotesting head against the bare wooden floor.

CUT TO:

20

EXT. APPLETREEWICK -- MOMENTS LATER

20

Red charges out of the bar, flanked by Kid, with Jorge in pursuit.

JORGE

Kid, if you kill her you're gonna have to pay for her.

Kid turns on Jorge - threatening in his protectiveness of Red. Jorge hangs back. Kid goes to follow Red.

KID

How are we goin ter track her after the fuckin rain?

Red does not respond as he heads for the barn.

21

INT. BARN -- CONTINUOUS

21

The men enter to see -

- the charging cable unplugged on the ground -

Kid picks it up and turns on Jorge -

KID

Yous wus supposed ter charge the
car while it wus stormin.

JORGE

(confused)

I did!

But Red has already changed his focus to the barn's floor.

RED

(a whisper to himself)

That fucking girl.

KID

Did yous fill up the ethanol or was
that a real challenge too?

JORGE

You haven't traded me anything. You
never trade me anything.

KID

Did yous fill her up?

JORGE

Yes. But I want payment. And for
the girl as well.

Kid turns his back on Jorge.

JORGE (CONT'D)

Hey, cripple, don't ignore me.

As if Jorge hasn't spoken, Kid looks to Red.

RED

The fuel line's been cut.

Kid sees Red's focus -

a large, dark patch in the dirt floor under the car.

KID

Wa' the fuck?

JORGE

No way.

KID

She'd have ter be pretty fuckin
quick ter pick up that much.

(BEAT)

Can yous fix it?

RED

...

JORGE
Paw could have fixed it.

Kid lunges at Jorge. But Red holds him back. Red's eyes are dead.

RED
Find her.

22 EXT. ROAD TO GRASSINGTON -- DAY

22

Dazzling sunlight rocking back and forth. It is joined by a blurring of road, trees, sky - hot-white and unsheltered.

Dolly's bruised face is a swollen reminder to us of the ordeal she has undergone. Her eyes open as she's brought around by her own shivering - even in the scorching heat she is feverish with cold. She becomes aware of another source of heat - the one that holds her. She studies a shirt of indistinguishable colour - so abused with dirt, sweat and blood. Underneath it the beat and breath of her saviour, in whose arms she lies. And then she takes in -

a bolt action rifle -

a heavy-looking hand gun -

a rope -

a slingshot -

a knife -

skins -

- a long, thick, brutal-looking stick -

Dolly starts to struggle -

-- only to fall backwards off the horse -- She lands on her arse with an unceremonious THUMP.

The glaring sun blazes a halo over the stranger's head obscuring the visage of the Lone Rider - who looms over Dolly in an extreme 'hero' silhouette - until the horse jogs a step forward and the BLACK HAT cuts across the sun to reveal the Rider's face -

- not a he, but a she.

NU is weatherworn, with hard features and grit-grey eyes: her gaze is disturbing; her physique is lean and powerful - a woman formed and fired by the landscape she inhabits. And just as forbidding.

DOLLY
Where are you taking me?

NU
The next settlement.

Nu's voice is HOARSE and GRAVELLY - as if from lack of use.

Dolly's panic is subsiding - until - she casts around -

DOLLY
My things. Where are my things?

Nu takes Dolly's bundle out of a saddle bag and throws it down to her. Dolly grabs it and draws out

- the Tea-Diffuser -

Nu leans down and stretches out a rough and callused hand. Dolly shakily reaches for it and in a flash she's pulled back up onto the horse, BEAU, behind its rider. Dolly puts her bundle into the open saddle bag. Inside she sees

a 2013 Road Atlas.

DOLLY (CONT'D)
Are you stoppin' there too?

NU
No.

DOLLY
Where are you goin'?

No reply. Conversation over. The animal jogs on into the heat.

23 EXT. ROAD TO GRASSINGTON -- LATER

23

Dolly and Nu ride on in silence. Nu draws Beau off the road and over to a copse of trees.

NU
Get down.

Dolly does as she's told.

DOLLY
Why are we stoppin'?

Nu nods to the copse -

a small spring is welling up from the ground.

She leads Beau over to drink. She starts to take off Beau's saddle.

DOLLY (CONT'D)
Can't we just water him and keep
movin'?

Nu doesn't answer, but continues to untack.

Dolly glances over her shoulder along the road -

Empty -

She turns back to see -

Nu drinking beside her horse. Nu stops and pulls a piece of dried meat from her bag and her rifle from its sheath. She sits crossed-legged under a tree, rifle across her lap, eyes shut, sucking the meat.

DOLLY (CONT'D)
It's the middle of the day.

Nu's eyes stay shut.

DOLLY (CONT'D)
We need to keep goin'.

No reply.

DOLLY (CONT'D)
I don't have time to mess around
here.

Again - silence.

Dolly's temper rises - the same temper that got her in so much trouble with Paw. She storms over to where Nu sits.

From Nu's deepened breathing she appears to be asleep.

DOLLY (CONT'D)
I'm talkin' to you.

Dolly lifts her foot to kick Nu but before she can swing -

- Nu's hand holds Dolly's ankle like a clamp -

Then Nu opens her eyes.

NU
The animal needs water, food and
rest.

Nu drops Dolly's foot and closes her eyes.

Dolly is dumbfounded.

Then - eyes still shut -

NU (CONT'D)
Fill the flasks.

A collection of water carriers lie by Beau's tack; they're ancient, labels long disintegrated, definable only by shape and sun-bleached colours - coke, lucozade, lilt...

Dolly doesn't know what else to do except obey the command.

TIME CUT TO:

Dolly spark out on the ground. A shadow falls over her face. She wakes up - absolutely disorientated.

The silhouette of the mounted rider looms above her.

24

EXT. ROAD TO GRASSINGTON -- AFTERNOON

24

Dolly and Nu ride along the road. Still in silence. Suddenly Nu's frame becomes erect. Dolly looks up ahead to see a cloud of dust forming on the horizon.

CUT TO:

A DIRTY OLD MAN, in mind and matter, driving a cart up the road with a corral of horses lashed to the back.

CUT TO:

Nu minding him - alert but confident.

In contrast Dolly tries to keep her battered face hidden behind Nu.

As the Old Man approaches he gawps at the pair - obviously not what he's used to seeing on the road. Nu rides Beau into his path. He draws up the cart.

NU

Are these horses for trade?

He throws an eye over Nu and her get up.

OLD MAN

Not for hides.

Nu swings Beau around so Dolly can no longer remain hidden.

The Old Man ogles Dolly - and then a flash of recognition.

Dolly turns her face away.

NU

For her hair. The small one.

OLD MAN

She can have the small one. And then I'll throw in a horse and tack to boot.

He laughs raucously - obviously pleased by his own joke. And then he stops. It's plain he's serious.

Both women look at him. But with totally different reactions:

Nu is stoney -

Dolly straightens up and brushes her hair from her face -

Nu turns in her saddle and observes Dolly - bruised and pathetic.

Yet it's obviously good enough for the Old Man who clammers down from the cart.

Dolly moves to dismount but before she has a chance -

Nu spurs Beau on and away up the road -

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
(shouting after them)
Hey, come back! Hey!!

Dolly grasps hold of Nu to stop from falling as they speed away from him. Then, as the horse slows -

DOLLY
Wot did you do that for?!

Nu remains silent - but her face is fierce.

DOLLY (CONT'D)
(resentfully)
That was a good deal.

Nu gives no response as she drives Beau on up the road.

TIME CUT TO:

Dolly and Nu riding on. They round a bend in the road and come back against the river - already dry. Dolly looks up ahead -

A Victorian watermill and a disciplined line of newly crafted pylons carry an electricity cable into the waiting village of Grassington. And the view here is different - the abandoned fields are overtaken by a more ordered scene of recently harvested land, encircling the town.

NU
Get down.

Dolly slips down from Beau. Nu tosses Dolly's bundle to her.

DOLLY
Hey! You can't just leave me here.

NU

This is the next settlement.

DOLLY

I need a horse.

Nu starts to leave.

DOLLY (CONT'D)

Please, not here. It's too close. I
need to keep movin'.

Nu rides on, impassive.

Dolly makes a decision. She jogs alongside Nu -

DOLLY (CONT'D)

I killed a man. His son, Red, he'll
know I done it by now and he'll be
lookin' for me. I've gotta get
away. The people in this town know
me. That old man knows me. And they
all know Red. I can't stay here.
He'll find me. I don't know wot
he's planning but I can't hang
about to find out.

Without a flicker of concern Nu picks up the pace.

But Dolly throws herself in front of Nu and grabs hold of
Beau's bridle. Nu looks down at her -Dolly's beaten face is further disfigured by fear. She's the
embodiment of something to be pitied.

DOLLY (CONT'D)

Please.

As if Dolly wants to hide from her own turmoil she throws her
arms around Nu's leg and buries her face.Nu's brow furrows - like she cannot connect to these
emotions. She frees her leg and kicks Dolly away.

Dolly stumbles to the ground, a defeated heap. But then -

NU

Get up.

Dolly opens her eyes -

Nu is still towering over her -

Dolly hesitates - unsure of what she's supposed to do.

NU (CONT'D)

You can ride with me until it is
safe.

Nu reaches out her hand for the second time. Dolly tentatively takes it. But Nu does not lift her. First she's got rules -

NU (CONT'D)
We do things my way.

Dolly nods.

Nu draws Dolly up and hoists her back onto Beau. They move on in silence, skirting around the town of Grassington and onwards to the road north.

25

EXT. CAMP. ROAD TO SCOTCH CORNER -- EVENING

25

It's dusk as Nu turns Beau off the road and rides over an abandoned field. She directs him into a natural dip in the landscape. They dismount.

Nu takes off Beau's saddle. She draws out her rifle and a couple of snares. As she walks out of camp she orders back -

NU
Light a fire.

Dolly obediently starts to collect fuel.

TIME CUT TO:

Darkness. The SOUND of a STRIKING MATCH. Light reveals Dolly, a well set fire and no Nu. Dolly places the match to the tinder and the flames lick into life. She puts away her matches. As she blows the fire hotter Nu steps into its circle of light. She is carrying a snared rabbit.

Nu crouches over the flames and expertly skins the kill.

The SOUND of SKIN STRIPPING from flesh.

Dolly watches -

the hide peel away. Nu props up two sticks by the fire and lays the skin to smoke over them. Then she guts the rabbit, impales it on another stick and places it next to the heat of the fire. She separates the good offal from the entrails with her fingers and throws it into a tin from her pack. She places this on the fire underneath the rabbit.

Dolly looks like she doesn't know whether to be impressed or perturbed by this skilled butchery.

26

INT. BAR. THE WATERING HOLE -- NIGHT

26

Red and Kid sit at a table in electric silence. We know their search has been fruitless. Red grips a half-empty bottle.

Jorge appears at Red's side.

JORGE
(gesturing upstairs)
Girl or no girl, what are you going
to do about --

He doesn't get to finish the sentence. Like Red's been waiting all night, his chair crashes backwards as he throws himself at the landlord. Red is drunk, and inaccurate, but he gets his hands around Jorge's throat and the two men hit the ground.

Jorge's face goes beet as Red crushes his air supply.

Kid sniggers - finally a break in the tension.

But just as quickly as Red pounced on Jorge, he releases him.

Red climbs to his feet and sets his chair back in its place. He sits down and picks up his bottle.

Jorge scrambles out of the room, choking and spluttering all the way.

Kid looks at Red who sits just as he was before Jorge spoke.

KID
(grinning)
We'll find her.

Red doesn't look away from the space ahead of him. When he speaks it is through a closed mouth -

RED
Yes we will.

Dolly blearily comes round. And now she's aware that the camp is empty - Nu has gone. She casts about. Until her eyes settle on

-- a lone figure standing at a distance up the hill --

Nu holds her long, heavy stick in one hand - she has the other crossed over her chest - and she weaves the stick back and forth in front of her in a swift, sweeping motion. After a while she swaps hands.

Dolly watches, transfixed by the oddity of the scene and the hypnotic motion of the weapon. When she finally turns away she notices a tin in front of her - porridge. She sits up and starts to eat.

Dolly finishing off her breakfast as she studies Nu. Dolly looks down and spots

the Road Atlas protruding from Nu's bag -

Dolly glances up -

Nu has moved around so that her back is to Dolly -

Dolly takes out the Atlas and opens it. We see -

page after page shaded over with charcoal, roads struck through with black lines, and every so often a town encircled with a heavy black mark, and then crossed out.

Dolly leafs through the book -

about half of the pages are unmarked - those applying to the north of the country and to Scotland -

Dolly hits the back page and stops -

A blank leaf has been filled by a series of drawings - the rough art of a very young child. A house, green land, the figures of a girl and a woman, and - in the centre - a likeness of a red horse. Dolly moves her fingertips over the images - pictures that are somehow incongruent to the world we see. They come to rest on the horse.

Suddenly Dolly flicks away from the page, as if aware she has stumbled upon something private. The book falls open at another page and we see

an unshaded sheet but at its centre is the city of Newcastle, marked with the ominous black circle. And then a shadow falls.

Dolly looks up - and starts -

Nu is standing in front of her. Her arrival was absolutely silent. And as if Dolly's not freaked out enough, Nu's not wearing her neckscarf -

- An angry red scar stretches like a terrible smile over the skin of Nu's throat from one ear to the other -

DOLLY
(playing it cool)
So we're goin' to Newcastle?

Nu continues to glower at her.

DOLLY (CONT'D)
I just wanted to...

She trails off. She tries to hold Nu's gaze, but her eyes flit to -

- the scar -

Nu takes this in. Then -

NU

Treat me like one of your regulars -
do as I tell you. And I will keep
you alive.

Dolly's expression changes - the fear knocked aside by the greater force of her anger.

Nu snaps up the book and walks away.

Dolly watches her. Then she turns, spits into the dirt and starts to pack up.

28

EXT. THE WATERING HOLE. APPLETREEWICK -- MORNING

28

Red and Kid step out into the morning light - haggard with hangovers. Kid's playing with the bullet jar. Red looks up - in the distance the Old Man can be seen driving his cart and horses towards them from the road north.

TIME CUT TO:

Red and Kid on horse back. The Old Man standing at a safe distance - he looks none too happy as he ruefully eyes his two claimed horses.

KID

Who's the other bitch?

RED

I don't know. But you can have her.

Red spurs his horse and the two men ride out in a dust storm.

Jorge appears - he sees the jar in the dirt. He picks it up - empty - and smashes it back into the ground.

Jorge and the Old Man watch, impotent, as

Red and Kid disappear over the horizon.

CUT TO:

29

EXT. NORTH DALES -- DAY

29

Dolly and Nu ride in tense silence. As they approach a crossroads -

Nu draws up to full height. Every muscle is on alert.

We turn with Dolly to see her focus -

A young man, calls himself LUKE, approaches on a GREY horse.

Nu unsheathes her rifle and lays it across the brow of her saddle - directed at this unknown rider.

He tips his hat to the women. He looks strong and fit -

Now it's Dolly's turn to sit up straight -

Luke catches this and rides his horse up alongside Dolly.

LUKE

Hello ladies. We seem to be going the same way. Do you mind if I join you?

DOLLY

Help yourself.

Nu says nothing. The gun stays where it is.

But Dolly's already at work - she slips down from Beau and starts to walk between the two horses.

Luke looks surprised.

Nu looks suspicious.

As if to explain -

DOLLY (CONT'D)

This poor horse has been carryin' us both for miles.

LUKE

My poor horse has just had me for miles. I think he'd enjoy your company.

Luke flashes a willing smile and holds out a willing hand.

Dolly climbs up behind him - she expected nothing less.

LUKE (CONT'D)

Name's Luke.

DOLLY

Dolly.

Nu stays silent. She drops in back of the two - still training her gun on the stranger -

The three riders - in the same formation - cross a narrow stone bridge.

The A Road returns to two lane black-top - though these days the tarmac is a cracked, disintegrating grey.

Nu rides someway behind the two with her gun still on Luke. There's the SOUND of LIVELY, INDISTINCT CONVERSATION. It's apparent from Dolly's stops-out energy that with this new arrival she's reassessing her options for a protector.

A huge square construction marked 'Scotch Corner Hotel' comes into view. In front of the building is, bizarrely, a makeshift sign: 'Food and Drink'.

LUKE
Fancy some refreshments?

CUT TO:

Dolly and Luke riding into the car park, Nu following at a distance. JIM, the owner, comes out to meet them.

Nu watches what's going on but does not interject as Dolly disappears inside -

Nu dismounts and approaches the building - rifle in hand. And she's thumping with energy - like her body is winding up.

JIM, large and stomach churning, blocks her way.

JIM
No weapons inside.

Jim holds out his hand and for the first time looks at -

Nu's face - and sees this is no man.

Jim drops his hand as if he's changed his mind but Nu, seemingly unbothered, throws him the gun and continues inside.

31

INT. RESTAURANT. SCOTCH CORNER HOTEL -- MOMENTS LATER

31

Nu enters the rank remnants of a dining room. She is followed by Jim carrying her rifle.

Dolly and Luke are already seated at a table -

Does Luke throw Jim a look?

Jim shrugs as if in response to something. Then -

JIM
(to Nu)
And the rest of it.

Nu pulls out and hands over her side arm like it's an outdoor coat and he's the waiter. She takes the seat along from Luke.

Jim looks impressed by the relative hoard as he disappears into another room with her weapons.

LUKE

(charm offensive)

It's unusual to meet women on the road. Unaccompanied. Where you ladies heading?

But Nu's on her own offensive - she marks him.

Dolly breaks the silence -

DOLLY

Don't bother - she's mute. I've got much more to say for myself.

Luke retrains his focus onto Dolly.

LUKE

I bet you do.

He studies Dolly.

Nu studies him.

32

INT. KITCHEN. SCOTCH CORNER HOTEL -- LATER

32

Jim stands over a blackened pan of porridge on an open fire. He holds Nu's rifle in his hands and strokes it lasciviously.

The porridge splurts in the pan -

33

INT. RESTAURANT. SCOTCH CORNER HOTEL -- CONTINUOUS

33

Luke is all over Dolly but she backs off - she wants something and she knows how to play this game.

Nu sits apart - assessing.

Jim enters with a pan in his left hand stacked with three bowls. In his right hand he carries Nu's rifle. He deals out the bowls. Then he pulls up a chair and sits too close to Nu -

Now even Dolly notices -

- dead-fish lust in Jim's eyes -

Jim pours the gluey slop into the bowls as he caresses Nu's gun. He hovers the pan over her bowl and then lowers the gun so that

the nozzle trails down Nu's chest and rests between her legs.

JIM

So what are you going to do for
your dinner?

Nu levels her gaze down to the nozzle and then back up to Jim. Her face is impassive.

Dolly looks to Luke for assistance but he is watching Nu.

JIM (CONT'D)

I said what are you going to do for
your dinner?

Jim gives the gun a nudge so that it jolts Nu between her legs. Again, she does not respond.

DOLLY

(imploring)

Luke?!?

Again, Luke ignores Dolly.

JIM

(deadly aggressive)

I said what are you going to do for
your dinner, bitch!??!

Moving the gun backwards for a hard thrust Jim is not prepared when -

Nu lifts her leg and flips the barrel away. And then -

a kick - precise, fast, hard - she shatters Jim's chair leg.

He lurches forward, off balance and -

Nu swipes the pan towards his right arm -

Napalm porridge coats his hand which shocks open -

A SCREAM! -

The gun falls - Nu's hand is already there, waiting. Grip. Twist. The gun is under his jaw -

The CRACK of the rifle drowns the CRACK of a man's cranium.

Bone, blood, brains and a complete human consciousness exit Jim's head -

But Nu's not done yet... She turns, she sees -

Dolly - in stasis. And -

Luke reaching for his own gun --

Dolly now sees this and by instinct moves into action. She grabs hold of Luke's gun hand. He's offset.

And in the same moment Nu stands - pulls back the bolt action on her rifle - strides forward -

She walks directly over Luke. Crashes his chair over backwards - no finesse - just composed violence.

One foot on his neck as she crushes it to the floor -

She cracks the gun butt downwards - unforgiving - smashes his wrist.

His gun hand is lifeless.

Dolly's SCREAMING now, caught under him, as she draws her own hands away -

Nu moves swiftly down and unholsters his gun -

She stands with both weapons aimed directly at Luke's pretty little face...

DOLLY

No! NO!!

In the ensuing silence we hear a GURGLE, perhaps a plea, issue from the vicinity of Luke's trapped throat.

Nu considers his trembling features. She's made her choice.

She slowly lowers the weapons...

Luke breathes relief...

So does Dolly.

But - almost too fast to know - Nu shifts her position. She swivels the rifle. Another two full-weighted hits of the gun butt. But this time not the wrist. This time -

the skull - and then -

the brain -

And then it's all over. Except for -

Dolly, lying right beside his crushed head, gaping in horror.

Nu thrusts Luke's gun into her belt, collects the casing from her fired round and makes her way through into the back room after her own sidearm.

Dolly struggles out from under Luke and stares after Nu.

And then Nu's back - and her tempo's up another notch. She searches - a desk in the corner - drawers on the floor - nothing - Jim's body - all his pockets -

And from somewhere inside, Dolly starts to protest.

Nu makes for Luke. Dolly throws herself at Nu. Dolly's beyond speech - all we hear are a series of sounds emanating from a heady mix of shock and revulsion -

With a backhand Nu knocks Dolly away from her, off her feet.

Dolly clasps her face as she watches

Nu searching Luke's body. And then Nu's found it -

- a set of keys -

She strides from the room.

A moment and then Dolly chases after her -

CUT TO:

34

INT. KITCHEN. SCOTCH CORNER HOTEL -- CONTINUOUS

34

Nu enters followed by Dolly, her face blotched with fresh knuckle marks and anger -

Nu passes the fire and her weapon and to the other side of the room. We haven't seen this part before. Pantry shelves, practically bare. But more importantly - right by where Jim was rubbing himself - what looks like -

a cage.

Dolly sees it too. Immediately she stops - we can almost hear the HISS of her evaporating momentum - we know this is going to be nasty -

Nu takes Luke's keys and tries the lock - it clicks open. She moves in and over to something of indistinguishable form curled on the floor. She places a firm hand onto it and rolls it over into the firelight. And now we can just about make out -

the remains of a naked woman. Mutilated and emaciated she hardly seems real - but she is. Or was.

Or is. A shudder of movement - an attempt at a shallow breath.

Nu crouches down and puts her hand on the woman's throat. She waits. Another grating inhalation. Nu lifts the woman's eyelid with her thumb

- yellow pus glazes the unseeing eye.

Nu lowers the lid. She draws her knife and slits the woman's throat.

Nu stands up and sheaths her knife. She walks out of the cage towards the door. She picks up her handgun.

Dolly opens her mouth, as if to speak, but no sound comes out.

NU

-- Bring the foodstock.

Nu walks out.

Dolly tries not to look at the dead woman as she robotically follows Nu's orders and takes the small bag of oats from the shelf.

35 INT. RESTAURANT. SCOTCH CORNER HOTEL -- CONTINUOUS 35

Dolly passes through carrying the bag. At the spectacle of the two faceless men she cannot look away.

36 EXT. SCOTCH CORNER HOTEL -- MOMENTS LATER 36

Dolly exits to see -

Nu is already riding off the roundabout down the slip road to the A1.

Luke's horse is standing, riderless, in the car park.

With shaking hands Dolly fastens the sack to the Grey. She mounts and hastens after Nu.

As she catches up they hit the A1 -

- The rolling dales have abruptly disappeared and a flat, grey landscape only interrupted by the tree lines of long-gone roads stretches either side of the dual-carriageway. We're used to seeing riders crossing vast prairies, deserts, ranges, but this desolate motorway is something different - eerie. Dolly and Nu ride on - the only sound METAL STRIKING TARMAC - along the winding, empty expanse of asphalt as they pass a sign -

-- 'The North' --

37 EXT. FIELD -- NIGHT 37

Dolly and Nu ride across a dark field. There's a clear sky and pale moonlight reflects onto their faces. Nu pulls up by a covering of trees. The women dismount.

TIME CUT TO:

Dolly lying on her side - the embers of the fire reddening her face, half-hidden by her arm. But from under this protective posture we can see her eyes - watching -

Nu with the Atlas open in front of her. She has a tin box with an array of tools laid out on a strip of material: a few small, finely whittled bones, an old wooden ruler, a number of tiny pieces of rock - arranged in order of size - each carved with its own identifying mark.

The Atlas shows a page of handwritten chemical names next to marks that correspond to those on the rocks. There are instructions - neatly, precisely inscribed.

Nu takes the used casing from her rifle out of her pocket.

CUT TO:

Nu cleaning out the casing.

CUT TO:

Nu reshaping the casing with her bone tools. She pushes out the spent primer and with a needle-sized bone she takes out the anvil and cleans it.

CUT TO:

Nu tapping the contents of three little paper twists onto a page of the book. She mixes the fine, pale powder, meticulously fills the primer and replaces the anvil. She carefully presses the primer flush into the casing end with a smooth stone.

CUT TO:

The ruler - set up as a balance scale with a bottle lid on one end. Nu places one of the small rocks as a weight on the other. She takes a little plastic bottle and uses the tip of her knife to weigh out its black powder contents into the lid. Then she uses a loose page of her Atlas and funnels the powder into the casing.

Nu takes out a final piece of material. It holds a single handcast lead bullet. She pushes it into the top of the casing. She measures it against the ruler, pushes again, measures. She puts the reloaded cartridge into her rifle and bolts it home. She carefully repacks her tools.

Dolly stares out from under her arm - her eyes wide.

A RHYTHMICAL SCRAPING SOUND.

Nu methodically rotates the blade of her knife against a whetstone. She removes her hat - this is the first time we've seen her without it. Her hair is earth coloured and short. She takes her razor sharp knife and by touch she begins to shave her own head.

38

EXT. SCOTCH CORNER HOTEL -- DAY

38

Red hunkers down on his haunches in the car park as he reads tracks in the gravel.

Kid appears from inside the hotel.

KID

Red - yous need ter come and see this.

39

INT. SCOTCH CORNER HOTEL -- MOMENTS LATER

39

The men stand over the ripe bodies of Luke and Jim. Kid pokes Jim with his toe.

KID

(smirking)
Who the fuck is this then? Yous think he had a bad pint?

RED

I'd say one of them used tae own that second horse.

KID

Wa' second horse?

RED

The one that's riding with Doll.
Two sets of tracks came in - one straight, one heavy - overburdened.
Two left - both straight.

KID

This isn't the work of no women.

Kid inspects Luke's pulverized skull.

KID (CONT'D)

But they sure as fuck didn't do it ter themselves.

Kid grins at his own joke. But Red's expression could not be more serious.

40

EXT. A1 -- AFTERNOON

40

Dolly and Nu ride along the motorway. Nu is looking at - piles of dumped rubbish - mostly sewage - scattered along the road up ahead.

Nu pulls up Beau and draws out the map.

DOLLY

There must be a settlement.

Nu doesn't answer. She closes the map and squeezes Beau into a canter. She points him at the central reservation. They fly across and disappear off the motorway into the trees beyond.

Dolly stares after her, then looks around -

No one in sight.

She contemplates the road to town. But in the end she kicks the Grey forward and manages an awkward jump of the barrier as she follows Nu off the motorway.

CUT TO:

Dolly weaving through trees - she hits the woods' edge -

The terrain opens up into a flat meadow. Nu is cutting across its centre. Dolly drives the Grey after her.

Dolly slows as she pulls level with Nu.

DOLLY (CONT'D)

There are people back there.

NU

Yes.

DOLLY

Well, where are we goin'?

NU

Around.

DOLLY

You said you'd take me somewhere safe.

NU

...

Dolly reins the Grey back and tucks in behind Nu - her exasperation too much to hide.

Dolly is collecting firewood. She looks up -

Nu is surveying a murky pond. Nu turns away from the water and takes out her knife. She selects and cuts a long, straight branch from a tree and then walks back to camp.

Dolly sets the fire.

Nu trims the branch into a pole. She peels thin, continuous strips of bark from it's surface.

Dolly pulls her matches out of her pocket.

Nu looks up at the box's RATTLE.

NU

Where did you get those?

Dolly smiles - she's finally gained some positive interest.

DOLLY

They were a gift.

NU

Can you light a fire without them?

DOLLY

No.

Nu puts her hand out and Dolly passes her the box.

Nu inspects it.

NU

Things like this make you forget
how to manage without.

She throws the box back to Dolly.

Dolly catches it, deflated. She goes to open it but -

NU (CONT'D)

No.

Nu gets up and pulls some of the wood from the set fire. She uses her knife to peel off tinder.

Dolly looks on - she couldn't feel any more helpless.

CUT TO:

Nu rubbing a stick between her palms, pushing it down into a groove in the prepared wood. A small spiral of smoke emerges from the tinder - Nu crouches down and blows into it.

A flame jumps out into the air -

Dolly smiles, until -

Nu stamps the fire out.

NU (CONT'D)

You do it.

Dolly goes to take Nu's tools but Nu's foot is in the way.

Nu gestures at two unformed pieces on the pile.

Dolly picks them up and puts her hand out for Nu's knife.

Nu stares back at her.

Dolly fetches Paw's bowie knife from her pack. She returns to the fire to find Nu using her bark strips to bind her knife to the end of her pole.

NU (CONT'D)
(without looking up)
Never leave it out of reach.

Dolly regards the knife, skeptical. Then she sits and starts to prepare her tinder.

TIME CUT TO:

Dusk. Dolly rubs her two pieces of wood together. She winces and drops the stick. She blows on her raw palms. Frustrated, she picks up her knife and throws it into the ground.

Nu appears over her. She is holding three fish. She reaches down and pulls Dolly's knife out of the rough earth.

NU (CONT'D)
Look after your blade.

Nu hands it back, sits down and starts to unbind her spear.

Dolly eyes her knife -

DOLLY
It belonged to the man I killed.

Nu starts to work descaling and gutting the fish.

NU
That is the story of most weapons.

Dolly takes in Nu's own expansive collection.

DOLLY
Ok. I get the idea. Lessons learnt.
Can I use my matches now?

Nu picks up a cleaned fish and starts to eat it raw.

Dolly flushes -

DOLLY (CONT'D)
That shit you put in your bullets
isn't growin out the ground.

Nu regards Dolly with a level gaze.

DOLLY (CONT'D)

Handloaded bullets aren't any
different from a scavenged box of
bullets - or a box of matches.
They're all gonna run out one day.

NU

My ammunition only has to last as
long as Luke's, Red's...yours. That
gives me a level playing field.
But when your matches are gone, and
there's no one to light your fire
for you...

Nu throws one of the raw fish to Dolly's feet and turns away.
Dolly looks down at the fish, silenced.

TIME CUT TO:

Morning - Dolly is packing up. As she pulls on her boots she draws her knife from one of them. She weighs it in her hand.

Nu walks into camp, back from her training. She places her stick on the ground, close to Dolly and goes over to Beau. She tucks up with her back to Dolly.

With an eye on Nu, Dolly puts the knife into her belt and surreptitiously approaches the stick. She stoops to pick it up and her body jerks - surprised by the weight. She lifts the instrument with two hands and inspects it. As she scrutinizes its end she sees -

- strands of hair, matted into the fractured wood -
her hands spring open and she drops the stick.

Nu turns at the SOUND. She stalks towards Dolly, never taking her eyes from her. In this continuing movement Nu stoops and brings the stick up into her hand.

Dolly steps backwards.

DOLLY

I... I just wanted to look at it.

NU

So look at it.

Nu throws the stick and Dolly catches it.

DOLLY

I've seen it.

Dolly tries to hand it back to Nu. But Nu does not take it.

NU

And you have seen me use it?

Dolly nods.

NU (CONT'D)
Show me.

Dolly doesn't know what else to do. With both hands she tries to weave the stick in front of her.

NU (CONT'D)
Use one hand.

Dolly obeys but she can hardly manage the weight.

NU (CONT'D)
Do not carry the weight, use it.

Dolly's struggling. But her swing is becoming more fluent.

NU (CONT'D)
Now hit me.

Dolly stops.

DOLLY
No.

NU
I said hit me.

Dolly's trembling now, yet she still does not move.

Nu crouches like she's about to pounce -

Dolly starts to weave the stick again -

Nu stares her in the eyes -

Dolly stares back. She's gathering momentum. And then, all of a sudden, she lunges at Nu -

But, one-handed, Nu disarms her and with a wide sweep cracks Dolly in the leg with the stick -

Dolly falls to the ground. She puts her hand to her knee as she looks up at Nu, stunned.

NU (CONT'D)
Get up.

Dolly stays were she is.

NU (CONT'D)
I said, get up.

Dolly looks away. She cowers as she waits for the next hit.

Nu glares down at her. Then she turns and walks away to her horse. She rides off without a backwards glance.

Dolly shudders.

TIME CUT TO:

Nu regaining the motorway. Dolly follows back onto the tarmac. Nu slows, and Dolly finds herself riding ahead.

TIME CUT TO:

Dolly - still in the lead as they branch off on a slip road. From behind, Nu's eyes bore into the back of Dolly's head.

Dolly squeezes the reins to stop her hands from shaking.

CUT TO:

42 EXT. PUB. NEWCASTLE - EVENING

42

Dolly and Nu approaching the remnants of a derelict road side inn.

Nu scans the ground. Without warning she swings down from Beau, unsheathes her rifle and stalks straight into the abandoned building.

Dolly hesitates as she sits alone in the fading light. Then she jumps down and runs inside after her.

43 INT. PUB. NEWCASTLE -- CONTINUOUS

43

Dolly enters the internal gloom -

Through the dark we can make out that the place has been ransacked - even walls are missing -

Dolly stumbles over the rubble in search of Nu. She reaches the staircase - half intact.

- A CREAK SOUNDS from upstairs -

Dolly pauses - and then follows the noise -

She arrives at the top of the stairs and makes her way along the corridor. She stops in front of a door - ajar. She pushes it open to reveal

a small bedroom. This place is like a shadow of Dolly's last home in Yorkshire. Stripped bare.

Dolly steps inside and peers around. Someone enters the room behind her -

DOLLY

This place gives me the creeps.

She turns -

A small, filthy MAN stares at her - eyes shining through the dark.

- Dolly SCREAMS -

Not a moment passes before Nu's in the room - we didn't even hear her coming - and she's got her rifle wedged in between the Man's shoulder blades. He raises his hands - and his whole body quivers.

DOLLY (CONT'D)

No!

Nu doesn't look at her.

NU

(to the Man)

Turn around.

The man hobbles around. But he keeps his head lowered and without being asked clammers down onto his knees.

NU (CONT'D)

How long have you been here?

MAN

(hesitating)

Months... maybe more.

NU

Look at me.

The man raises his twitching features towards Nu.

Nu lowers her rifle.

Dolly takes a breath.

NU (CONT'D)

I am searching for someone who passed this way. A long time ago.

Are there any trading posts for the main road?

MAN

(quietly)

You could try the collier. Most people travelling through trade with him.

NU

Where?

MAN

You can't miss him - if you know what you're looking for.

CUT TO:

44

EXT. NEWCASTLE SUBURBS -- LATER

44

Dolly and Nu ride in silence along a dark street. They enter a post-war estate. The place is dead - a prefab ghost town. They pass between two concrete council block towers.

Nu draws Beau to a halt. She scouts at something further up the road. Dolly follows her gaze. We see

- a black silhouette, like an abstract cut-out, framed against the night sky -

CUT TO:

45

INT. MINE ENTRANCE -- MOMENTS LATER

45

Dolly and Nu lead their horses through a dank tunnel. Nu is carrying her rifle in hand.

Through the gloom we make out an old-fashioned lift grate.

Nu stops and looks around -

to the side of the grate is a winch.

Nu wrenches open the gate and steps inside. She shuts herself into the lift. Through the grate -

NU

If you hear trouble go back down to the estate. To the north tower block. I will find you.

She nods to the winch.

Dolly looks at it - unsure what to do. She grasps it with both hands and tries to wind it. Nothing.

Nu watches in silence.

Dolly tries again, this time she puts her full weight into the task. There's a creaking sound and then - all of a sudden - the winch jerks forward -

The lift jolts down a foot.

Dolly - already sweating - starts the slow, hard job of winding Nu down the shaft --

CUT TO:

Nu descending the pitch shaft. A filtering light breaks through from below. And then an opening - but the view is obstructed -

- by two men.

And one is training a shotgun at Nu's head -

The lift jars to a stop. The unarmed man reaches forward and draws open the grate - the other keeps Nu in his sights. Nu advances -

The light falls on her face.

The armed man lowers his gun. And now we can see their faces. The one with the gun is just a boy. They're both Chinese. And their faces are both blackened with coal dust.

46

INT. MINE ENTRANCE -- CONTINUOUS

46

Dolly struggles with the winch. She tries with all her might but it won't budge. Then it jerks - in the wrong direction. Dolly pushes against it and all of a sudden she's flung backwards as the winch starts to move of its own accord.

There is a GRUMBLING SOUND approaching up the shaft.

Dolly picks herself up just as

the lift appears. The grate SCREECHES open and out steps the boy, GEORGE.

Dolly stays completely still.

George takes Beau's bridle and leads the horse into the lift. He turns back.

GEORGE

(thick Geordie accent)
Ye should have rung the bell.

Dolly looks up to where he points and we see -

a bell hanging from a rope in the roof of the lift.

47

INT. MAIN TUNNEL. MINE -- MOMENTS LATER

47

Dolly steps out of the lift to find

Nu and BARRY waiting for her.

We look around the cave to see a contraption beside the lift that catches the ground water run-off. Underneath it a small coal fire is burning. Barry draws across a lever that diverts the water from over the coals to a large storage vat. The winch mechanism from down here is obviously steam powered.

BARRY

Ye can leave the horses here.
George will take care of them.

Dolly notices a hollow in the rock by the side of the lift. A goat stands watching the newcomers, chewing on a bundle of dry grass.

CUT TO:

Barry leading Nu and Dolly through the mine tunnel. They turn off into

a larger opening that forms into a dead-end, now a makeshift living room. There's a fireplace and kitchen area, a table, four chairs and a few accumulated odds and ends -

On a wall hangs a family heirloom - a bust old flatscreen.

And at the table are two more children: a boy, MARCUS, and a girl of around 8, MAISIE.

Dolly's taking this all in but Nu is preoccupied, even agitated. She focuses on Barry -

NU

I am searching for two men.

This statement hangs in the air - Nu's voice SOUNDS STRANGELY in the underground cavern.

Barry and Dolly turn to her.

NU (CONT'D)

I have information they passed through Newcastle. A few years ago.

There's SILENCE. Nu's odd appearance, the alien urgency in her speech -

NU (CONT'D)

They might have been travelling with a child.

Barry stares at Nu. Then, from the other side of the room -

MAISIE (O.S.)

Grace.

Nu's attention falls for the first time on -

Maisie - who steadily returns her gaze.

Dolly studies Nu -

Nu's face is impenetrable.

Barry sits at the table with Nu. Dolly stands to the side, an on-looker. The children have been sent elsewhere.

BARRY

I thought it was a big journey -
it's a long way te gan - two lads
with such a little lass.

NU

(intently)

You know where they were heading?

Barry stays silent, his eyes flit down to

- Nu's scarred, capable hands -

and then back to her face. Nu holds his silence and his gaze.

BARRY

They were good folk. Stayed awhile.
Don't remember the first lad's name
- he kept himself to himself. But
the other one, Will, he was
friendly, like. And he gave so much
attention te his lassie.

NU

He is not the father.

BARRY

What's this all aboot?

NU

It is important I find them.

There is an undefinable power to this statement. Barry
scrutinises Nu's face. Their eyes meet but Nu's are
impervious. Barry stays silent. A stand off. Then -

NU (CONT'D)

Those men stole that child.

Barry's face darkens.

BARRY

I know the name of their farm.

NU

(to Dolly)

Get the book.

Nu sits at the table poring over her map. She's marking out a route determined by the new information.

BARRY

(to Dolly)

Are you heading north with her?

Dolly doesn't answer.

BARRY (CONT'D)
You're from the City aren't ye?

DOLLY
Yeah. I used to be.

BARRY
(about Nu)
Where's she from?

Dolly shrugs, she doesn't know.

BARRY (CONT'D)
I've not been to London. I did
everything I could not te have te
gan there. Why live te someone
else's order, with curfews and
rations and the like, when ye can
fend for yerself?

As Barry speaks Maisie appears - she carries a mug of milk.
She passes Nu - glances at her - but keeps a wide berth.

Nu returns the look - she seems strangely uncomfortable under
the gaze of the child.

Maisie relaxes as she reaches Dolly. She carefully offers her
the mug with a proud smile.

MAISIE
It's goat's milk.

Dolly smiles back and warmly accepts it.

BARRY
What aboot our other guest?

Before he can get an answer, Maisie darts out of the room.

BARRY (CONT'D)
Every time we had another kid we
talked about gunna London. For
their sake. Te be safe. But we
always decided against it. Maybe
that was selfish.

DOLLY
Where's their mother?

Barry stays silent.

The awkwardness is cut short by a SHOUT from down the tunnel.
The SOUND of CHILDREN ARGUING, then someone CRYING. Barry
looks tired. He stands up and leaves.

Dolly sits for a moment, pensive. Then she takes the milk to Nu. She holds it out to her.

DOLLY (CONT'D)
It's goat's milk.

Nu doesn't look up.

DOLLY (CONT'D)
This seems like a safe place.
Unless you want me to come with
you?

NU
It makes no difference to me what
you do.

DOLLY
Right. Who cares what I do? Except
Red.

We can only see Nu's profile, her face downcast, but something in her manner has changed. And when she speaks we hear her voice crack -

NU
But what is it in him that makes
him want to find you?

Dolly looks confused by the strange question. Silence falls. The glass of milk stays on the table between them, untouched.

50 INT. MINE -- NIGHT

50

Nu checking on Beau. Then she heads back down the tunnel. As she passes the living area she pauses at the SOUND of VOICES -

CUT TO:

51 INT. LIVING AREA. MINE -- CONTINUOUS

51

Dolly and Barry in conversation.

DOLLY
Sorry to interrogate you before. I
didn't mean to bother you.

BARRY
Folk don't ask.
(pause)
I lost my wife. She was taken.

CUT TO:

Nu. As she listens she reaches under her neckscarf and scratches at her own scar.

CUT TO:

Barry and Dolly.

BARRY (CONT'D)

I came home. The place had been broken into. The kids were hiding in the store room - they said she'd locked them in there. I called for her doon the tunnels but she never answered. I went out looking. I suppose she must have tried to escape. Usually they keep lasses alive. I found her a few miles doon the road -

Barry falls into silence. Nothing is said for a while. Then -

DOLLY

I'm sorry --

BARRY

-- It was a long time ago.

Dolly nods. She contemplates the fire. Then -

DOLLY

I left London with my family for one of those communities of farms. We got jumped on the way. I dunno what happened to the others.

There's nothing more to say as they both ponder the fire.

CUT TO:

Nu listening outside. She lets go her scar and turns away from the room.

53

INT. BEDROOM. MINE -- LATER

53

Dolly enters the unlit space. Nu is already asleep on the floor. Dolly undresses and hangs her clothes on the dank wall. She lays down on the bed and stares into the dark.

54

EXT. BP STATION. A1 -- LATER

54

Red and Kid ride into a derelict BP station. Except it's buzzing. There must be 30 men in the forecourt - drinking, playing cards, fighting. Beyond there's a building, the gutted shell of a Little Chef, with more men inside.

Red jumps down from his ride and stalks through the crowd towards the entrance, Kid in tow.

55 INT. LITTLE CHEF -- CONTINUOUS

55

Red enters what was once the restaurant - now set up as a bar. Behind the counter is a BARMAN serving drinks. At the other end the room has been partitioned off with stacked boxes. Red moves straight into these private quarters.

CUT TO:

Red entering the darkened space -

In the bad light we can make out movement and we can hear the odd MOAN or SHOUT. A number of figures come into focus around the room.

Red approaches one and we see -

a woman, with a man on top of her.

Red scans over her face and then moves on to the next group - a woman and three men.

He passes by to the last figure -

a woman lying alone on the ground. He lifts her dark hair to look at her face. A stranger. She's unconscious, or worse.

A PUNTER pushes in front of him.

PUNTER

Get in line.

Red moves aside. He doesn't even seem to register what would normally have been a mortal affront. He's distracted - in the corner we see -

a number of small children, huddled in a sleeping pile. A boy, not even five, is awake - staring at Red.

Red turns away.

Kid stands behind him - assessing the wares. Red leaves him to it.

CUT TO:

Red reentering the bar. He heads straight to the Barman.

RED

Give me a bottle.

BARMAN

Is that old-timer with you?

RED

What of it?

BARMAN

I take ammo, weapons, horses, fuel,
food in that order.

RED

I'm looking for two women.

BARMAN

It'll cost you. The number's
normally the other way round.

RED

They passed through here a day or
two ago.

BARMAN

Not through here.

Red's eyes are burning cold.

RED

We tracked them here.

BARMAN

Well then you'd have found them in
that there room.

Red stares him down.

This customer's making the Barman nervous.

BARMAN (CONT'D)

Look. They probably cut around. If
they were heading for somewhere to
get supplies they might have passed
by the Angel. It's about the only
place to stop this far north. Now
what are you trading?

Red takes out a thin-bladed knife.

BARMAN (CONT'D)

(unimpressed)

What the fuck's that?

RED

It's a skinning knife. I could peel
you from head tae toe and still
keep you alive.

Red reaches over the bar and takes the bottle out of the
Barman's unresisting hand. As he leans forward he whispers -

RED (CONT'D)

I'm trading you your hide. It's up
tae you if you want tae wear it or
hang it on your wall.

Red turns and walks outside -

The Barman puts his hand under the bar towards an old,
battered cricket bat. But he doesn't bring it out. He rests
on the bar to steady himself.

56

EXT. BP STATION -- LATER

56

Red sits alone at the edge of the forecourt. Half way through
a bottle of ethanol, his back to the party, he stares out up
the road ahead. Kid comes over and kicks back beside him.

KID

Let's party, you and me, like the
old days.

RED

That was never my scene.

Kid laughs -

KID

We'll do it in Paw's memory.

RED

That's no how I'll remember him.

KID

You mean you can remember him not
hangin out of a whore? That's big
talk...

Red gives Kid a look that the older man obviously recognises -
Kid trails off mid-jibe. He looks down and his eyes fall on
the stump of his arm.

KID (CONT'D)

I wus left fer dead. I was just
a... a kid. He brought me up ter
yer ma's room. Yous wus there in
the bed. Yous watched yer ma fix me
up. He invited me into his family.
He took charge of me.

RED

We've all got our stories.

KID

Yeah, but I tell mine best.

RED

What about her's? What was my ma's
story?

KID

It's not good fer as many laughs.

(PAUSE)

She meant a lot ter him.

RED

I don't want tae hear it.

KID

Course not, that's why yous asked
the fuckin question.

(PAUSE)

He wus bladdered. But he didn't
have ter take yous with him. Yer
not all that easy on the eye. He
could have left yous there with the
other whores. Whatever yous think -
I'm not the only one who wanted ter
have yous around. Yous can't judge
a man by one act.

RED

What about the rest of it? What
about Dolly?

KID

What about Dolly?

RED

(confused)

I don't know.

(BEAT)

Maybe I'm glad someone finally put
him in his place.

KID

Bollocks. Just see him fe wa' he
wus.

RED

And what was he?

KID

A leader. He understood. Life is
about one thing. Pure and simple.
Competition. If yous don't win,
someone else will. So yous take
what yous want. And yous fuck up
anyone who gets in yer way.

Kid looks to Red but it's impossible to read his dark expression.

KID (CONT'D)

You're yer father's son. Now yous
need to step up. Take charge. I'll
do whatever yous want, any of these
fuckers would, if yous provide.
Just be like him.

Suddenly Kid grabs Red in a head lock and as he speaks he roughly knuckle-burns Red's scalp -

KID (CONT'D)

Let's get wasted.

Kid lets Red go. Red stays where he is - silent - his eyes shining.

KID (CONT'D)

Then we'll get a posse together -
go find that slut and rip her a few
new holes. You're yer da's boy - a
born fucked up murderous son of a
bitch. Enjoy it.

But in the turn of an instant - Red's eyes are dead. He gets up and throws the bottle to Kid.

RED

He meant nothing. I dinnae want to
hear his name again.

Red turns and paces away, to be gathered up by the night.

57

INT. BEDROOM. MINE -- MORNING

57

Dolly waking - panicked, disorientated. No idea what time it is. She looks to the floor -

It's bare.

CUT TO:

58

INT. LIVING AREA. MINE -- MOMENTS LATER

58

Dolly wanders into the living area. No one's about. She pulls her damp jacket around her and shivers. She sets the fire and draws her matches from her pocket. Dolly guiltily looks around, as if Nu might be watching. She strikes a match.

It crumbles in her hand.

Another - the same. She inspects the box - the cardboard is swollen with the damp of the mine - the matches are ruined.

Dolly stares impotently at the fire. Fear seeps into her face. A FOOTSTEP and she spins around, hurriedly hiding the matches behind her back -

Barry stands in the doorway -

DOLLY
Where is she?

CUT TO:

Dolly sprinting to the stable area -

The Grey and the goat stare at her. No sign of Beau.

CUT TO:

59

INT. MINE ENTRANCE -- MOMENTS LATER

59

Dolly racing the Grey along the tunnel towards growing daylight. Suddenly she's in the sunshine as she gallops up a steep slope, desperate for a vantage point. She's gasping - breathless with panic - as she draws up beside an iron structure. She spins her horse - scanning the countryside - and then -

SLAM CUT:

BLACKNESS. But this is not a black out. This is Dolly's POINT OF VIEW -- the city falls into great black holes that eat into the landscape - like some kind of deep, festering disease. The entire countryside is slashed wide with the plague of open face coal mines that stretch in scarred lines to the horizon --

- Dolly takes in the dark landscape -

Directly over her looms the abstract shape from last night. Except now we can identify our own British Ozymandias - the colossal wreck of what was once the Angel of the North.

60

EXT. NEWCASTLE SUBURBS -- CONTINUOUS

60

Nu rides up into the backstreet hills. She reaches a brow and stops. She looks around her to see

endless rows of empty houses, flanked by corner shops, cafes, chippers - all ravaged by looters.

She looks back in the direction of the mine and her face clouds. She turns away, continues forward, her expression darkening with each step.

61

INT. LIVING AREA. MINE -- LATER

61

Barry is cooking dinner. There's the NOISE of the lift. Then FOOTSTEPS in the tunnel. They come to a stop at the entrance to the living area.

BARRY

She came back with ye then? I
didn't hear the bell.

There's no reply. He turns around to see -

Red.

62 EXT. OPEN FACE COAL MINES. NEWCASTLE SUBURBS -- LATER 62

From between the mounds of abused earth - the lone figure of Dolly rides - searching -

63 INT. LIVING AREA. MINE -- CONTINUOUS 63

Men fill the kitchen: Red, Kid and three new faces - GUT, MICK and BEAN. Barry sits at the table - Red occupies Nu's chair from last night.

BARRY

I don't know what you're talking
about.

RED

That isnae the truth.

BARRY

No one's been here.

RED

You're a working man, aren't you?

Barry doesn't answer.

RED (CONT'D)

Let me see your hands.

Barry puts his hands behind his back but Mick and Gut grab him and force them out, palms up. Red studies them.

RED (CONT'D)

These are working hands. My father always said - a man isnae a man if he disnae have working hands.

Red draws his thin-bladed knife. He tests its edge. Then he places the blade at the heel of Barry's palm and with one small cut slices lightly through the skin -

Barry's face shouts pain but he keeps his mouth shut -

Red stares into his eyes -

Red holds the blade against the open cut and grasps the skin flap with his free hand. Slowly, skillfully, agonizingly, he lifts and cuts.

He peels away, in a single piece, the layer of skin - from the palm of Barry's hand - right to the fingers tips -

64 INT. TUNNEL. MINE -- LATER

64

Maisie wanders along in her own 8 year old world -

65 INT. LIVING AREA. MINE -- MOMENTS LATER

65

Maisie enters the kitchen to find -

a sea of threatening faces turned towards her. At the centre her father stares out at her. His hands are a mess of red pulp. He starts forward when he sees his daughter but is held down by Gut -

Mick collars Maisie -

Red smiles.

66 EXT. NEWCASTLE SUBURBS -- LATER

66

Dolly rides back towards the mine -

67 INT. MINE ENTRANCE -- MOMENTS LATER

67

Dolly leads her horse into the lift and drags the grate closed. She RINGS the bell.

Dolly travels down in darkness. The light from below starts to show. The opening appears. The lift jolts to a halt. Dolly steps to the grate only to see -

someone standing in the shadows. For a moment it looks like Nu. But then -

RED

Hey Doll.

Red steps into the light. Like a blood-baited dog he thrusts his hand through the grate and grabs her wrist -

By instinct she clasps hold of the handle and uses her full force to slide the grate open -

Red's arm is caught in the collapsing grid. He takes hold of the handle from his side and forces the grate shut. He draws out his arm and then starts to drag the grating open again -

Dolly strains against him but she's not strong enough - she has no choice but to dash through the opening and past him down the mine.

Red gives chase. He catches up to her and snatches her by the hair. He drags her into the living area.

68 INT. LIVING AREA. MINE -- CONTINUOUS

68

Red thrusts Dolly up against the wall.

He holds her there, pinned. She waits for his attack.

But for the second time we have seen, Red does not make his move. As the fire illuminates her face Red's eyes warm. He softens his grip.

DOLLY

I didn't mean to kill him.

Red lets her go and drops his eyes to the ground - utterly confused, ashamed.

RED

I'm not here for him.

DOLLY

What do you want?

RED

(a whisper)

I don't know.

DOLLY

Are you here to hurt me?

He looks up, urgent.

RED

I can't.

DOLLY

Wot?

RED

Why did you run?

DOLLY

I thought...

RED

...I'd want blood for what you did?

DOLLY

Don't you?

RED

No. I want you.

DOLLY

Why didn't you stop him?

RED

You should have chosen me.

DOLLY

I was scared.

RED

Of him?

DOLLY

And of you. I still am.

RED

You dinnae need to be scared. I willnae let anyone hurt you again. I want to look after you.

DOLLY

Where are the family?

RED

Who?

DOLLY

The people who live here.

RED

They're safe.

DOLLY

Is Kid with you?

RED

I sent him out looking for you.

DOLLY

He'll kill me when he gets back.

RED

No he willnae. I willnae let him.

DOLLY

Why? Why are you doing this?

RED

(a deep whisper)

I love you.

Dolly doesn't know how to react. Red tenderly reaches out and takes her in his arms. She allows him to.

RED (CONT'D)

None of this had to happen. I would have killed him for you. I'd kill anyone for you, Doll.

- This last statement hangs in the air -

RED (CONT'D)
Tell me this is what you want.

Dolly hesitates.

Red sees Dolly's uncertainty. He takes her face and kisses her. Dolly cannot help but pull back from him. His grip becomes desperate. He kisses her again, his finger tips imprinting red marks on her cheeks.

But something in Dolly has changed. Giving herself away to this man is somehow no longer simple. Dolly, unable to submit but too scared to stop him, looks down to see -

- blood stains on the floor -

Dolly GASPS. And then the BELL RINGS. Red lets go.

RED (CONT'D)
Wait here.

Red walks back towards the lift.

Dolly remains petrified: the blood, the situation - in this moment all her faculties have failed. There's the sound of VOICES. She looks up -

Red reappears followed by the gang. On sight of Dolly the men fall into silence. They face her as one - like a four-headed, hungry animal.

Red puts himself between the men and his woman.

RED (CONT'D)
She's mine.

He glares at them - ready to take on any challengers.

Bean looks like he might be prepared to have a go. And Gut and Mick are restless.

BEAN
We didn't come all this way just to look. There's enough to go round.

RED
She belongs tae me.

GUT
And what do we get?

RED
I'm no making deals. I'm telling you how it is.

GUT
Who decided you could do that?

KID
 (to Gut)
 Watch it you fat fuck! There's
 enough of yous ter go around too.
 (to Red)
 Throw them a bone.

Red's outnumbered and the men look dangerous. But he stands his ground.

RED
 Go and play with the family.

DOLLY
 No!

RED
 (to Dolly)
 Shut up.

The men, disgruntled, look at one another. None of them are ready to make the first move. Kid encourages them away.

Dolly throws herself onto Red -

DOLLY
 Don't. They can have me --

RED
 I said shut up!

And now Dolly's temper has tipped.

DOLLY
 Not makin' deals? You can't control them.

He strikes her and she falls to the ground.

DOLLY (CONT'D)
 Paw always said you were weak. Just like a woman. You'll never live up to him.

And she's done it again. She's pushed the button. And suddenly Red appears in front of her like an embodiment of his father.

He grabs Dolly by the hair and drags her up onto the table. He yanks at her belt. Dolly tries to fight back and Red punches her in the face. She falls limp, stunned by the blow. Red rips down her trousers. He unbuckles his own -

The men are all standing close now, enjoying the show.

RED
 (to the gang)
 Get out! Get the fuck out of here!

Moodily they acquiesce and move away down the tunnel.

Red opens his trousers as Dolly comes around -

She starts to struggle again and manages to pull herself free. She falls to the floor and attempts to crawl away -

Red grasps her by the ankle. He begins to draw her back towards him.

DOLLY

Please don't hurt them. I'll do anything. You win.

At this Red stops dead. He fixes on Dolly. She almost smiles in disbelief that she's controlled him -

But then Red's eyes move away from Dolly to a space just behind her - Dolly turns and sees -

Nu standing over her. She's glaring down the barrel of her rifle - eyes battleship-grey against her coal-blackened face -

Red's face is pallid in contrast -

Red relinquishes his hold on Dolly, who is in stasis -

Nu pulls her to her feet.

And now Red stands. He's got one hand holding up his trousers, the other raised in the air.

Nu steps towards him -

Red starts to back out of the room -

NU

Stay where you are.

RED

You shoot me and those men will be in here before you have a chance tae run.

Nu scans past him. She edges after him out of the room, leading Dolly behind her.

CUT TO:

Red backing down the tunnel to the other living spaces. Nu holds her rifle on him as she backs herself and Dolly in the opposite direction towards the lift.

RED (CONT'D)

I know where you're going.

Nu narrows her eyes.

RED (CONT'D)

The Chink was a wee bitch. He told me everything. And, Doll, there's nothing left of his family worth saving.

And then Red disappears from sight.

Dolly gapes into the space where he stood. But Nu thrusts her onwards. They reach the grate. Nu pushes Dolly inside.

NU

How many are there?

DOLLY

Five, I think.

Nu hands Dolly her gun.

NU

Beau is out top. Go to the tower block. If I am not there by dawn then leave. The map is in the saddle bag. If you fire the gun, collect the casing and reload it. Use the instructions. Be precise.

Dolly stares at her, unspeaking.

NU (CONT'D)

Find the child and take her away from those men.

But Dolly still doesn't respond.

NU (CONT'D)

Did you hear me?

DOLLY

You came back for me.

NU

Did you hear what I said?

DOLLY

Yeah. But how? I can't.

NU

Yes you can.

Nu draws the grate shut between them.

DOLLY

What are you doin'?

NU

Someone has to operate this.

DOLLY

But you got down.

NU

I climbed the shaft.

DOLLY

How will you get back up?

Nu doesn't respond.

DOLLY (CONT'D)

How are you goin' to get out?

Again Nu is silent. And before Dolly can remonstrate the THUNDER of FOOTSTEPS DRUMS down the tunnel -

Nu throws the lever to activate the winch -

Dolly is consumed by blackness as she flies up the lift shaft.

CUT TO:

Nu covering the lever with her rifle. The NOISE of the lift moving up and away -

The first of the men comes into view - Gut is bearing down on her. He raises his gun -

-- They FIRE simultaneously --

CUT TO:

Dolly. The ECHO of the SHOTS and then the Grey's SCREAMS from below. The NOISES reverberate into an eerie silence. No more footsteps. Just the SOUND of the LIFT.

CUT TO:

Red and the men flattening themselves against the wall.

CUT TO:

Gut lying dead in the tunnel.

Nu crouches by the lever. She looks up to the lift shaft - willing the thing to arrive. She ejects her spent casing and pockets it. Then she checks her ammo -

Only two rounds for Luke's handgun and one for the rifle -

She crawls up to Gut's prostrate form. She takes his gun. Someone again scopes from up the tunnel. Nu fires the last rifle shell at them as cover. She checks Gut's chamber -

- empty -

And then a CLANG as the lift stops. The SCREECH of the grate from above - OPEN and then SHUT.

Nu steps back to the lift and throws off the lever -

The water diverts to the tank -

She ejects her final rifle casing and pockets it -

CUT TO:

Red and his men. TWO SHOTS SOUND. Nu's last. Then a long silence. The men look at each other - what's going on?

KID

Let's just go fe it.

Red nods. They all raise their weapons. As one they round the corner to find -

Nu standing in the middle of the tunnel, Luke's handgun lying spent at her feet, her rifle pointed to the ground. She raises her hands above her head.

Kid looks to Red, confused. The men approach. As they bypass Gut's bulk they slow - they look down at their feet -

swimming in water. And we see -

the destination of Nu's final two shots - the base of the water tank, the last dregs draining out into the tunnel. The lift's disabled from below.

Red snatches the rifle from Nu's raised hand and in one swoop he cracks the gun butt into the back of her head. Nu slumps to the floor.

69

INT. LIVING AREA. MINE -- LATER

69

A blur of colours slowly takes shape to reveal - Red, Mick and Bean towering over -

Nu, as she starts to come round, seated on a chair. Her weapons have been taken away. She tries to move but her hands are trussed behind her back and her ankles are tied onto the chair. She eyeballs the men.

Kid enters.

KID

(to Red)

I've sealed the holes. But it's gonna take a couple of hours fe the ground water ter build up. Until then that lift's about as useful as a light switch.

Red turns to Nu.

RED

Well that gives us time tae get
acquainted.

(to the men)
Who wants tae go first?

Bean steps forward and eagerly positions himself over Nu. He unbuckles his trousers but as he moves towards her he can't get into place.

BEAN

Get her out the chair. I can't do
it like this.

Red nods assent. Mick takes out his knife and cuts Nu's feet loose -

- The last strand of the tie breaks and Nu's already buried her foot deep in Bean's groin -

Bean doubles over in pain.

Mick, a near-giant of a man, answers with a crunching punch to Nu's jaw - the chair flies backwards and she's left sprawled out on the floor.

MICK

(derisorily)
You want to keep her hands tied?

Bean's not recovered but anger dims the pain.

BEAN

You fucking bitch.

He grabs the knife from Mick and staggers towards Nu.

Nu watches him approach. Body taut. Eyes focused.

As Bean nears her he moves to the side, out of the reach of her legs. Now he's over her and he pins her lower half with his body weight as he starts to cut at her clothes. But he's not watching her face, and so he's not prepared as - she thrusts forward, head first, and bursts his nose against her forehead.

The force of the blow tips him backwards off her as he raises his hands to his broken face - big mistake -

Nu recoils one of her freed legs to her chest and with lethal power and accuracy she drives her boot into Bean's hands -

Her kick forces the knife he holds upwards - it grinds through the cartilage of Bean's nose cavity into the soft cushion of his brain. He drops to the floor.

A moment as the men take this in -

The only SOUND the BUBBLING of BLOOD.

Nu looks up at the others, her face dark as hell. Her eyes are dancing, her scalp is a naked mess of scars. And then, for the first time, she smiles - a vicious painted grimace - her teeth glistening with her own blood.

The men stare at her - stalled.

She scouts behind them to -

her weapons in the corner. But there's no reaching them.

And now the men advance, and then they're on her - their feet and fists pound into her body and face.

70 INT. TOWER BLOCK. NEWCASTLE -- CONTINUOUS

70

Dolly hides in a stairwell. She holds Nu's gun in her shaking hands. She looks up to Beau -

the horse stands over her - pacing with nervous excitement.

The gun falls with a CLATTER to the ground and disappears into the shadows.

Completely silent, Dolly's body jerks as she weeps out her own impotence.

71 INT. STOREROOM. MINE -- LATER

71

A dark space - a door opens and light floods in. It's an old kit room - the only enclosed area - and now it's stacked with coal and wood. Nu's dead-weight body lands with a THUMP on the floor. The door slams shut - darkness. And SILENCE. And then a shallow, rattling breath.

CUT TO:

72 INT. MAIN TUNNEL. MINE -- CONTINUOUS

72

The men look knackered but high after their violent frenzy.

KID

(to Mick)

She's no fucking fun unconscious.

RED

It disnae matter now. We should have enough water tae fire the lift.

He hands Nu's rifle to Kid.

RED (CONT'D)
 I've got a couple of rounds for
 this rifle.
 (to Mick)
 Stay here and watch her. We'll find
 Doll.

MICK
 (smirking)
 I'll watch her all right.

RED
 That door stays bolted. She's still
 got value.

CUT TO:

73 INT. STOREROOM. MINE -- CONTINUOUS

73

Darkness. We're becoming accustomed to it. And through it we can make out the shape of Nu, lying on the floor. From outside there is the SOUND of the MEN LEAVING. Then a shimmer as Nu's eyes flick open. Awake. At work.

74 EXT. NEWCASTLE -- DAWN

74

Red and Kid riding slowly through the suburban estate. Red looks for tracks but the tarmac gives nothing away.

RED
 You search these houses - room by
 room. I'll look through the mines.

He peels off and rides out of the estate.

CUT TO:

75 INT. STOREROOM. MINE -- CONTINUOUS

75

A weak light filtering through the gaps in the door -
 Nu is propped up in the corner - her blackened face is swollen and streaked with blood. With slow, painful movements she works, winds and knots a long strip torn from her tattered shirt. She stops and inspects it. Nu drags herself along the floor, feeling as she goes. Just as she reaches the fuel pile her hand stops -

a loose piece of rock on the ground. She digs out the flint with her fingers and holds it in her open palm.

CUT TO:

The goat carcass roasting in the fire place. Strips of meat smoke overhead.

Mick sits at the table gnawing at a goat rib - Bean's body still a heap on the floor. Mick looks up from his breakfast -

A trail of smoke is floating in through the doorway -

He stands, grasping the goat rib, and walks out into the tunnel. He sees -

smoke filtering through the storeroom door. Flames already lick up underneath the wooden barrier. He throws the bolt. The hot metal scorches his hand and he jumps back -

- the rib falls to the floor -

the door swings open and smoke billows into the tunnel - a strange WHIRRING SOUND - And through the smoke Nu appears. She's propped against the doorway winding her wrist just over her head - a two foot stretch of material forms a blurred, dynamic halo in the air above her. She releases her fingers. The material whips out into a long strip, and from it's centre - almost too fast to see - a black object zips across the tunnel and -

smashes into Mick's open mouth. Tooth and coal shards fly. Mick staggers to the ground before the remnants of the rock have hit the floor -

And now Nu's pulling herself out of the doorway and along the tunnel wall. As she crosses the tunnel in pursuit of her weapons she falls to the floor. But she keeps going, dragging her trammelled self over the cut rock. And then - a BONE-CRUNCHING CRACK - literally. Nu looks up to see -

- the goat rib - snapped under Mick's boot as he looms overhead -

He moves heavily forward, picks Nu up by her neck and throws her across the tunnel -

She crashes into the rock wall and slumps to the ground. She tries to crawl away but he's on top of her again and again she's hurled into the air and dashes against the floor -

Nu opens her bloody eyes to see

- the broken rib just in front of her -

Gasping for air she draws herself forward but as she reaches it she collapses to the ground. And now Mick's on top of her as he lifts her again. But this time she's dead weight. With both hands he victoriously holds her limp body out like a trophy.

And then Nu opens her eyes -

And in the same breath her right hand appears in a blur as it moves forward and up into the side of Mick's gullet. And before we really know what's happened, she draws away -

Nu hangs, observing the surprised Mick, the jagged half of the goat rib in her hand. Mick doesn't even have time to drop her before a stream of bright carotid blood spurts from his throat. He attempts to step forward and his heavy form crashes to the floor.

Nu drags herself out from under Mick's hulk and over to the living area. She eventually makes her belongings and reequips herself. Her progress is slow and laboured as she pulls herself up to some kind of standing against the wall. On a shelf she finds -

- a tin with a couple of lead weights inside -

She pockets them. Next she fists the smoking meat over the fire into a sack hanging from the hearth. Then she starts to push her way down the tunnel in the opposite direction from the lift - the direction of the family.

From behind her the Grey's SCREAMS reverberate through the mine - now thick with smoke -

CUT TO:

Nu reaching the sleeping area. She hangs onto the entrance wall and stares inside. Her face does not tell what she sees but her stillness does. She turns and begins her arduous journey to the exit -

CUT TO:

Nu passing the body of Gut. She arrives at the grate -

The Grey is going crazy in all the smoke -

Nu throws the lever and the shaft ECHOES the lift's approach. The lift arrives and Nu uses her last surge of strength to drag the grate open. She hangs from it, staring at -

the hatch in the top of the lift, her entrance to a climb up the shaft -

And then she slumps to the ground.

The Grey's SCREAMING.

There's no way out.

77

EXT. NEWCASTLE ESTATE -- CONTINUOUS

77

Kid, on foot, carries Nu's rifle, as he searches a row of back gardens. Red is nowhere to be seen.

CUT TO:

78

INT. TOWER BLOCK. NEWCASTLE -- CONTINUOUS

78

Dolly is huddled, catatonic. Only the shallow rise and fall of her chest stops her looking like a corpse.

CUT TO:

79

EXT. NEWCASTLE ESTATE -- CONTINUOUS

79

Kid makes his way to the towers. The SOUND of BEAU SNORTING. He listens, and then moves at speed to the north block.

CUT TO:

80

INT. TOWER BLOCK. NEWCASTLE -- CONTINUOUS

80

Dolly. FOOTSTEPS outside. She becomes alert. Her breathing quickens. She scopes around for the gun. Panic rises as it's nowhere to be seen. She gropes into the shadows of the stairwell - nothing. She abandons her search and looks around for something else. Her eyes fall on -

Nu's stick - tied to Beau. The FOOTSTEPS are right outside.

CUT TO:

Kid entering, rifle raised, to see -

Beau. And no one else.

He makes his way up the stairs -

CUT TO:

Kid reaching the first floor. He looks down the long balcony either side -

- empty -

He passes along the walkway, tests each door as he goes -

CUT TO:

Kid taking the next flight. He reaches the second level and moves out onto the walkway -

- No one to be seen -

Again he starts to check the doors -

CUT TO:

Kid testing the final door. It opens. He raises the rifle and walks into the dark flat. He moves slowly from room to room -

the place is preserved in immaculate condition, set up as if the owner has just popped out, except everything is covered in a fine layer of black dust.

After the last room reveals no one Kid lowers the rifle and walks back out into the sunlight. And into -

Dolly.

Kid moves to raise the rifle but -

Dolly is already swinging with Nu's stick. Her blow is inaccurate, but her force is true, and Kid has to drop the rifle to catch hold of the end of the stick -

Dolly tries to shake him off - she shoves the captured weapon at him with all of her might -

Kid, surprised by the sudden push, takes a step backwards and steadies his bulk on the balcony edge. He LAUGHS, excited by her ferocity -

There is a mighty CRACK -

Before either can react the rotten rail disintegrates under Kid. He clings onto the stick as he sways over the drop -

Dolly grips the other end -

For a split second their eyes meet, Kid's smirk is still hanging on his face -

But Kid's hand loses grip and -

he plummets to the ground -

A DULL THUMP.

Dolly looks over the broken rail -

Kid lies on the ground, his arm and both his legs splayed in the most unnatural of poses.

Dolly steps away, picks up Nu's rifle, turns and runs.

CUT TO:

81

EXT. NEWCASTLE ESTATE -- MOMENTS LATER

81

Dolly races Beau up to the mine entrance. The air is filled with smoke. She jumps down and runs inside.

CUT TO:

82

INT. MINE ENTRANCE -- MOMENTS LATER

82

Dolly reaches the grate. From below she can hear the SCREAMS of the Grey. She tries to winch up the lift but it won't budge - the gate below is open. She gives up and tries the grate - locked. But

- a small gap opens where the lower catch is broken -

Dolly heaves with all her strength and manages to wedge her thigh into the opening. Half-crushed she struggles the rest of her body through -

And now she hangs off the grate over the drop down the shaft. The opening snaps shut. She scopes her options -

The stone walls below the grate are as good as sheer.

She looks to

- the suspension cable hanging from the centre of the roof -

Dolly doesn't look down again, doesn't really stop to think, but flings herself into the air and -

lands clinging to the cable. Every part of her body that she can wrap around this lifeline is clamped in place as she inches her way down into the mine.

CUT TO:

83

INT. MINE -- MOMENTS LATER

83

Nu is passed out in the opening of the lift. The Grey HYSTERICAL nearby. And then there's a METALLIC THUMP -

The trap door in the lift roof rises and Dolly drops through -

She runs to Nu and shakes her - no response. She looks over to the lever, then peers through the smoke. Her eyes rest on -

the Grey as it reefs at its halter -

CUT TO:

- a halter rope being fed over the lever -

Dolly steps back into the lift where the Grey and Nu wait for her. She throws the grate shut and yanks the rope - the lift disappears towards the surface.

CUT TO:

84

EXT. MINE -- MOMENTS LATER

84

The Grey careers out into the sunshine followed by Dolly as she struggles under the dead weight of Nu. Dolly clears the smoke and drops to her knees. She lays Nu down on the ground. Even now she is slowed by the sight of -

Nu's blackened, bloody form.

Beau appears at her shoulder and Dolly grabs a canteen of water. She splashes it into Nu's face.

Nu COUGHS and opens her eyes. She sees -

Dolly's anxious gaze above her.

DOLLY

Where are the others?

Nu shakes her head.

CUT TO:

Dolly hefting Nu up onto Beau. Now Dolly's up on the Grey.

DOLLY (CONT'D)

Did you kill Red?

Nu does not answer.

CUT TO:

Dolly and Nu riding painfully slowly across the surface of an open faced mine. Nu lolls over her saddle. Around them coal dust billows into a black clouded wake. Dolly pivots, squinting around through the dark fog -

They reach the far side and ride up out. Dolly directs the horses back along the mine ridge -

CUT TO:

Nu and Dolly making their way across the rocky mine edge. The terrain becomes too much for the horses. Nu slides down from Beau, rifle in hand, but she staggers to the ground. Dolly runs to her aid. She grabs food and water and assists Nu up the incline.

CUT TO:

The women reaching a vantage point of the entrance to the mine valley. Nu is spent. Dolly slides her to the ground against a rock. Nu weakly checks her rifle. Nu pulls a strip of goat meat from the bag and sucks on it.

86

EXT. NEWCASTLE SUBURBS -- DAY

86

Red rides back towards the estate. Something catches his attention. A scent on the wind. He looks up towards the Angel and sees -

smoke billowing from beneath the hill.

He charges his horse onwards.

CUT TO:

Red arriving at the opening to the mine - it's smoking like a chimney stack. His horse remonstrates against the black air. He's forced to ride away. He scans the ground and then turns and races down to the estate.

CUT TO:

Red riding through the estate. The place is eerily silent.

RED
(calling out)
Kiiiiid!

No reply as he heads for the tower block.

CUT TO:

Kid - apparently dead. But then his eyes open and he looks up to see -

Red.

KID
I'm ok. I'm gonna be ok.

Red raises his gun.

KID (CONT'D)
It's just a flesh wound.

Kid starts to laugh but it disintegrates into a whimper - a strange, unsettling sound from this hardened old-timer. He tries to move but his body is shattered.

KID (CONT'D)
Please. Red. Please.

Red does not look away. A SHOT RINGS OUT.

87

EXT. THE AMBUSH POINT -- EVENING

87

The setting sun.

Nu sits crouched against the rock. She watches the path below. She is breathing heavily, the mental exertion of her focus weighs on her abused frame.

Dolly's eyes move between Nu and the empty valley.

Nu becomes aware of Dolly's gaze.

NU

I will not lead him to where I am going.

DOLLY

How do we even know he's comin'?

NU

He has come this far.

Nu watches the valley.

Dolly slumps down against the rock - she no longer looks out for Red's arrival. Then -

DOLLY

Wot happened to those children?

Nu does not move or answer.

DOLLY (CONT'D)

I might as well have killed them myself.

NU

I do not think about the lives I am responsible for ending.

DOLLY

We're not the same person.

NU

We are both killers.

Now it's Dolly's turn to stay silent.

Nu continues to look out into the valley as the flames of the sun reflect and disappear deep into her eyes - consumed into a world that is as dark and unknowable as the landscape that shelters her.

And then she raises her gun. And we hear THE ECHO OF HOOVES.

Dolly turns and peers over the precipice -

A rider has appeared on the far side of the mine valley and moves at speed along its floor -

Dolly glances at Nu -

And, strangely, Nu's previously laboured breathing is now calm. A stillness has descended on her. She tracks the rider with her rifle -

As he approaches we see it is Red.

Dolly holds her breath.

Nu does not - but she does squeeze the trigger and she does FIRE A SHOT clean across the scarlet sky. The SNAP of the rifle REPEATS through the air -

Yet Red keeps riding. Until - what seems like an age later - his body reacts to the bullet as it thumps into his flesh. He is momentarily forced backwards before his reflexes cause him to hunch against the hit and he slumps forward onto the neck of his horse. The horse continues to gallop with no one to guide it until it disappears from view under the shadow of the quarry edge. It reappears on the other side - riderless.

Nu lowers her rifle, automatically ejects the cartridge and puts it in her pocket. Only then, like a delayed reflection of Red, does she slump against the rock.

Dolly stands, open-mouthed, in unresolved shock. Then -

NU (CONT'D)

Find him.

Dolly looks in disbelief to see -

Nu holding out the rifle to her.

DOLLY

You got him.

NU

Maybe. But you need to make sure.

DOLLY

You wot?

NU

You need to finish him.

CUT TO:

Dolly making her way down the rocky hill-side with the rifle in hand. Her movements are far more assured than when we first met her.

CUT TO:

Dolly reaching the base of the hill. She works her way through the maze of blackened rubble. She stops dead.

- A foot protrudes from behind a large rock -

Dolly grips the rifle and traverses around the rock to see -

a second foot, then legs, torso, and finally - Red's face. His eyes are open - they stare fixedly ahead. It's hard to tell how much blood there is as the sun casts it's final crimson shadow directly onto him.

And then he looks at us.

CUT TO:

Nu lying unconscious against her rock.

A figure appears over her. Dolly stands and observes Nu. Then she reaches down and pulls Nu up. Nu can't keep her feet. She's not with it but Dolly's already got Nu's weight underneath her as she carries Nu down the hillside. In her haste Dolly does not see -

the food bag discarded by Nu's rock.

CUT TO:

Dolly riding the Grey and leading Beau. Nu is passed out on his neck as they make their way out of the coal mines.

88

EXT. A68. NORTHUMBERLAND -- DAWN

88

Dolly leads Nu, still lying on the neck of her horse. They're travelling through thick fog - its wetness causes the dirt to run in streaks off Nu's face.

The sun is rising, starting to burn away the whiteness, but the landscape remains ghostlike. A long, undulating road stretches down the valley and disappears into distant hills. The women look like wraiths in the mist. Dolly shakes with cold. She stops her horse and looks back at Nu -

She is unmoving.

Dolly drives the Grey on. Beau follows behind.

89

EXT. CAMP. NORTHUMBERLAND -- NIGHT

89

Nu lies on the ground.

Dolly pulls an old T-shirt out of her bundle and unwraps her knife. She gently cuts Nu out of her lacerated shirt. She dresses her in the faded tee and then bundles her in Dolly's own jacket and everything else she has to hand. But Nu shivers and sweats all at once. Dolly feeds her water.

She checks the content of the flask and carefully screws the lid on tight.

Dolly rummages through their belongings. And now she searches desperately. She stops as she remembers the meat bag back at the mines. In her hand is all the food they have left -

the end of a bag of oats.

She puts it back next to the near-empty water flask and looks at Nu. Then she looks to her knife. She picks it up and heads into the trees.

CUT TO:

Dolly in camp. She's set a fire. And now she's attempting to light it. She has all her tools prepared and her knife at her side. But try as she might the spark is not coming. Dolly looks at her palms, red raw from her efforts and the reopened cable burns. She fixes her focus and keeps going.

TIME CUT TO:

Dawn. A fog has settled over the camp.

Dolly lies shivering in the cold. The only covers are piled over Nu. The firewood lies untouched by heat. Too chilled to sleep Dolly gets up. She takes her knife out from under her saddle - her makeshift pillow - and handles it. Then she stows it in her belt. She begins to tack up the horses.

90

EXT. A68. NORTHUMBERLAND -- MORNING

90

Dolly and Nu ride on. Nu still lies over Beau's neck as Dolly leads her forwards. They cross a bridge -

the river beneath is bone dry -

91

EXT. A68. NORTHUMBERLAND -- EVENING

91

Dolly is again working at lighting a fire. She drops the spindle in pain. Her hands are bleeding. She turns away frustrated. But as she looks back -

a tiny whiff of smoke spirals up from the tinder.

She falls to her knees and starts to blow. The smoke thickens and then a flame appears. Dolly turns to Nu, elated -

Nu lies pale and unknowing on the ground.

Dolly turns back to her fire. Despite the circumstances her face is alright. She starts to feed the flames.

92 EXT. THE BORDER -- DAY

92

A massive mountain landscape. Dolly looks out into the first valley of Scotland. Behind her a sign reads

"Welcome to Scotland's Borders - Scotland's leading Holiday Break"

93 EXT. SOUTRA SUMMIT WINDFARM -- AFTERNOON

93

The women ride up a steep incline. At the top we see -

an army of decrepit white metal windmills - those left standing are stock still in the dead heat.

- A CREAKING noise - One windmill shifts its sails, picks up speed. There's a PATTERING sound and a fat raindrop bursts on Dolly's cheek. Then another. Suddenly it's raining fast.

Dolly grabs the collection of flasks and opens her grinning mouth to catch the storm -

CUT TO:

Night. Still raining. Dolly is huddled in the tarp on her horse, hunched against the downpour. She looks over at -

Nu, wrapped in her oilskin, shivering violently.

CUT TO:

94 INT. CAVE -- NIGHT

94

Nu lies by a fire. She opens her eyes.

Dolly pours oats into warming water.

The bag is now empty - the food gone.

95 EXT. THE CLYDE -- AFTERNOON

95

Dolly leads the way as the women ride on across country. They reach the brow of a hill. Dolly draws up her horse. Nu joins her at her side - she is awake but sickeningly pale. From where they stand they now overlook

the river Clyde. It stretches out ahead and as far as the eye can see to either side as it cuts the land in two. Further in the distance is the bridge. But in between, away to the east is the city of Glasgow.

Dolly leans down and pulls off her boots. She slings them together with a spare shirt and hangs them around her neck. Then she spurs on her horse and plunges towards the river.

CUT TO:

The women at the water's edge.

DOLLY
Can you swim it?

NU
Can you?

Dolly sets her expression and gees the Grey into the Clyde.

The women make their way across: Nu clings onto Beau while Dolly swims side by side with the horses.

CUT TO:

Dolly and Nu emerging on the north bank into a different world. The City suburbs have been replaced with dramatic rocky scenery. We've reached the gateway to the highlands.

Dolly looks to Nu and we see

- her face - ashen from the cold of the swim.

The women ride their horses fast on towards the north.

CUT TO:

Dolly turning off the main road. Nu follows as they start along the West Highland Pathway -

CUT TO:

Dolly riding ahead along a forest track. There is a faint LAPPING SOUND. She rounds a turn and comes to a halt -

Loch Lomond shines in the autumn sunlight.

CUT TO:

The women riding single file on the loch side in the last moments before dark. The glass-like water reflects their forms in the timeless silence of the fading light. Above the loch massive hills loom - the full extent of their range hidden in an evening mist.

Dolly returns to camp carrying the rifle and Nu's empty snares but no kill. She lays the hunting tools down and her eyes fall on

- Nu's stick -

CUT TO:

Dolly standing at the edge of the loch, meditatively working the stick. Her breath smokes in the cold morning air.

97

EXT. HIGHLAND PATHWAY -- DAY

97

The women riding up to the Bridge of Orchy. They are both wrapped in a strange assortment of their own clothes and gear. Nu's bundled up in her animal skins, formed into a makeshift blanket. The horses snort white steam from their nostrils. Dolly stops. She looks to the sky -

A single white flake appears through the air and spirals down to land on her face. Then another, and another...

CUT TO:

Dolly and Nu riding up a steep forest track with snow falling all around. They encounter the remnants of an old wooden fence. Dolly leans over and picks up the last of the man-made picket pales. She snaps them into pieces as she rides along and places each piece under the tarp behind her. She hands pieces to Nu, who stows them in her saddle bag.

CUT TO:

Dolly and Nu riding through zero visibility snow fall -

CUT TO:

Dolly and Nu digging out a snow hole with their cooking tin, knives and hands.

Nu struggles and collapses into the snow.

But Dolly works for the both of them.

They crawl inside and Dolly pulls out the drinking flask. They both swig - and that's their supper. Dolly produces the collected wood and gets to work on a small fire.

CUT TO:

A small flame, choking on damp tinder. Dolly grabs her pack and brings out her copy of Madame Bovary. She rips out the pages, one by one, as she feeds her fire.

CUT TO:

Dolly emerging from the hole into a blinding white glare. She squints against the sunlight as it burns up from the snow and then she ducks back inside.

DOLLY

It's bright.

She picks up a lump of charcoal from the dead fire and thumbs a black streak under each of her eyes and across her mouth. Then she turns to Nu.

CUT TO:

Dolly and Nu, faces painted, struggling through snow that builds over their horses' bellies -

CUT TO:

Dolly and Nu are on foot. Dolly holds the rifle and walks behind Nu, who limps after a trail of prints through the snow. Nu stops. She staggers and falls. Dolly tackles her up to sitting but Nu is unable to stand again.

CUT TO:

Dolly fighting silently through the snow, carrying the rifle. She looks ahead to a bluff. From behind it we can see

a small billow of smoke rising into the sky.

She crouches down and battles to the incline. As she reaches the slope she gets onto her belly and crawls up towards the smoke. Dolly peers over the top of the bluff to see -

- a stag, snorting out puffs of steamy breath into the air.

She moves noiselessly into position and makes aim. She holds her breath as she tries to stop from shaking. She bends her trigger finger - stiff with cold.

-- A CRACK SHOCKS across the moor --

The deer starts up as the round explodes into the snow by its hooves.

CUT TO:

Dolly grappling through the snow. She slips into a bluff and claws her way back out.

CUT TO:

Dolly reaching the deer tracks. She looks at the ground - tries to identify the entry hole of the bullet. But she sees no sign. Desperate, she starts to dig.

CUT TO:

Dolly digging up the snow. But now with no aim - furiously wasting her limited energy. She stops. Wet with sweat. She slumps down and stares blankly out -

the stag is still in sight - the only interruption to the empty landscape ahead of her -

CUT TO:

PANTING BREATH. Dolly running through the snow. She reaches Nu and the horses and makes straight for the Grey. She grabs the bridle. Dolly drops the rifle and draws out her knife.

Again, her hand shakes.

She turns her back to the animal. She catches her breath. But she does not move. Then her face cracks. She lowers her head and walks away from the horse. She seats herself in the snow across from Nu and takes in the sight of the older woman:

Nu sits upright with her eyes shut. The tarp has fallen open to reveal her scar. We can also see her borrowed T-shirt and, faded to near-invisibility, the Barbara Kruger logo -

- Buy me

I'll change

your life -

Dolly observes Nu in this weakened state -

DOLLY (CONT'D)
We'll find her.

NU

I know.

Dolly watches Nu - assessing the situation. Then -

DOLLY
She's your kid, right? Gracie.

Nu puts her freezing hands into the jacket pockets. She opens her eyes and draws out the tea-diffuser -

NU
What is this?

DOLLY
It's a tea diffuser. My mum gave it to me as a medal.

NU
For what?

DOLLY

I don't remember. I just remember
feeling proud to win it.

Nu inspects the diffuser and then turns her gaze out over the horizon.

Nu's dark and bloody form is framed in isolation against the relentless white of the moor.

NU

You know what we will find. And you
know what I will do. Nothing will
stop me.

DOLLY

I don't believe this is about
revenge.

NU

You are right.

DOLLY

I know. You came back to help me.

NU

No. I came back to finish things.

DOLLY

And your daughter?

NU

This is not about her. Not anymore.
I stopped thinking about her a long
time ago.

Nu holds Dolly's gaze for a moment. Then she turns away and her eyes again fix on some indeterminate point in this stark, open landscape.

DOLLY

Then what is this all about?

Dolly waits but Nu does not look back to her or speak again. Dolly frowns - unconvinced. Stiff and tired she allows herself to sit for awhile. Then -

DOLLY (CONT'D)

We need to keep moving. I think
we're close.

Nu doesn't respond.

Dolly rises and puts her hand on Nu's shoulder. Nu slumps over onto her side. Dolly sinks to her knees and shakes Nu but she is unresponsive. She slaps her face, gently at first, then harder. Nu does not regain consciousness.

We can hear Dolly's HEART THUMPING as she stands. She turns to the Grey. Without hesitation she strides forward, draws her knife as she walks, grabs the bridle and thrusts the blade into her horse's heart -

-- A SCREAM - like the world is being rendered in two --

CUT TO:

Dolly awash with blood hacking through the Grey's carcass -

CUT TO:

Dolly catching the warm, thick blood in a bottle.

CUT TO:

Dolly pouring the dark liquid onto Nu's lips. Nu lies limp as Dolly tries to get some of the blood down her throat.

CUT TO:

Nu unmoving on the tarp as

Beau and Dolly pull her on through the snow. Dolly swigs from the bottle. A moment later she doubles over and wretches up the blood. She pulls herself to standing and pushes on -

CUT TO:

Dolly driving Beau forward as they drag Nu across the darkening moor.

Dolly takes a laboured step. Then another. Then she falls.

CUT TO:

Dolly and Nu's bloody forms. The snow around them a shocking red. In the dying light we can now see, just a little further on from where their bodies lie, a farm.

FADE TO BLACK:

98

INT. BEDROOM. THE HOGG'S FARM -- MONTAGE OF TIME:

98

DOLLY'S POV:

Blurred images of a small bedroom - a cracked ceiling - faces close and far - until they all begin to clear into one face - A CHILD. She looks down, worried, eager. And then - shadowy forms in the background. Men. Watching. Waiting.

TIME CUT TO:

Dolly opening her eyes with a start. She is drenched with sweat. She looks around her to find -

she is alone. She takes in the room. Sparse but homely.

With slow, awkward movements, she gets herself out of bed. She's still in her travelling clothes - no one has undressed her. Except her boots are at the end of the bed. She reaches inside them, looks for something, but comes up empty-handed. Agitated, she scans the room. Her eyes fall on the bedside table, and the object she is searching for -

- her knife -

She takes it up and slips out of the room.

99

EXT. HALLWAY. THE HOGG'S FARM -- CONTINUOUS

99

Dolly creeps down the dark hallway. She reaches a door and stealthily opens it. Inside we see -

Nu in bed. Unconscious. Deathly pale. But her chest is rising and falling in an even rhythm.

Dolly exhales. And then she starts -

A figure is sitting in a chair in the corner of the room - so still he went unnoticed. He stands and approaches and we see ELI HOGG - an old, white-bearded man with large, soulful eyes. He opens the door fully to encourage Dolly to enter.

She stands her ground, grips the knife behind her back.

ELI

Come in. She'll respond better tae
a friend.

He turns to a dresser and picks up a bowl of water. He takes out a soaking compress and places it carefully on Nu's forehead. Nu moves her head - weak but restless.

Dolly cautiously enters the room.

ELI (CONT'D)

She's been mighty sick. For a wee
while there we weren't sure she
would pull through. I didnae want
the bairn to see her. But Gracie's
been occupied with you.

Dolly turns at the name -

DOLLY

Gracie?

ELI

My granddaughter. She's been
keeping vigil at your bedside for
two days.

(MORE)

ELI (CONT'D)

She'll be disappointed tae have
missed you waking. But she'll be
back any minute.

Dolly stows her knife into the back of her belt and covers it with her shirt. She approaches the bed. Eli steps aside -

Nu's wasted form is more changed than we have realised. And her left arm is bound against her chest.

DOLLY

Has she come round at all?

ELI

No. But give her time. She's a
tough'n. And you? You seem in fair
form?

DOLLY

I just needed a good sleep.

Dolly turns away from Nu to find Eli standing close to her. His presence is so gentle she was unaware of his proximity.

ELI

I'm Eli.

DOLLY

Dolly.

ELI

Would you like tae come down and
join my family for a bit of supper?

DOLLY

Thank you. But I want to stay here.

Eli nods and leaves the room.

Dolly turns back to the bed - to what lies in front of her.

TIME CUT TO:

Morning. Dolly wakes. She's still sitting but with her head and arms on the side of Nu's bed. Dolly looks up and sees -

a tray of food left waiting for her on the sideboard.

TIME CUT TO:

Dolly sitting with Nu. Outside we hear the SOUND of A CHILD'S LAUGHTER. Dolly moves to the window and surveys the view -

A small farmyard, covered in snow, and then white as far as the eye can see. And just below the window a wood pile with two figures at work. ANGUS, Eli's son-in-law chops wood, while the Child, a girl of around 8, stacks the fallen pieces. This is GRACE.

ELI (O.S.)
She wants tae see you.

Dolly turns to see -

Eli at the door. He carries another tray.

ELI (CONT'D)
Gracie. She's been asking for you.

DOLLY
I'm happy for her to come.

ELI
She won't. She's scared tae come in
here.

Eli looks at Nu's ghost-like appearance and starts a fit of coughing. He puts the tray down.

ELI (CONT'D)
You could try tae feed her.

Eli, still coughing, leaves the room. Dolly turns back to Nu.

TIME CUT TO:

Dolly feeding Nu. Or attempting to. She tilts Nu's head up and spoons the soup to her mouth. The food goes everywhere but down Nu's throat. And Nu is unresponsive, oblivious to Dolly's attentions. Dolly lays Nu's head back onto the pillow. Outside she hears the LAUGHTER.

100 INT. KITCHEN. THE HOGG'S FARM -- MOMENTS LATER 100

A small, functional, warm room. Eli stands over an open range and stirs a large pot. Eli's 18 year old grandson, LEWIS, sets the table. The door opens. The men look up to see Dolly.

ELI
Lewis, lay another setting.

Lewis stares at Dolly, flushes scarlet and looks away.

LEWIS
Yes grandpa.

Eli smiles at Dolly to share the humour of his grandson's adolescent embarrassment.

ELI
Please, Dolly, take a seat.

He gestures to a chair.

DOLLY
Can I help with anything?

ELI

Tonight you're our guest. Tomorrow
you can be family.

Dolly uncomfortably takes the offered chair.

CUT TO:

Dolly watching Eli and Lewis finishing the preparations for supper. They both appear to take pride in the meal.

ELI (CONT'D)

I hope you don't mind but we've
been making use of the horse you
slaughtered. Nae point letting good
meat go tae waste.

DOLLY

You're welcome to it.

ELI

I hate to lay criticism on the
provider but you've still a lot tae
learn if you want tae earn a living
as a butcher.

The door opens and Angus enters closely followed by Grace, who carries logs. The two of them stop dead at the sight of Dolly. They stare at her, open-mouthed.

ELI (CONT'D)

Dolly, my son Angus. And I've told
you all about Gracie.

Angus nods an awkward greeting. This is obviously a family not used to company.

Gracie looks shy and runs over to the fire. She disposes of the logs and then hangs around Eli's legs. She peers out at Dolly from behind his protective frame.

Dolly is just as interested in her as she is in Dolly - her likeness to Nu is subtle, but it's there.

Eli serves up a bowl of stew. He hands it to Gracie.

ELI (CONT'D)

Here, Gracie, why don't you take
this tae our guest?

Gracie stares at the proffered bowl and then carefully takes it. She keeps her eyes on its steaming contents as she slowly walks to Dolly. She places it down in front of her. She looks up and gazes at Dolly full in the face. Dolly's transfixed. And apparently so is Gracie.

DOLLY

Thank you.

Gracie grins, a wide, open smile. The innocent pleasure of this expression rids her of any shadow of her mother. She settles herself in the seat next to Dolly. Angus approaches with his own supper.

ANGUS

Gracie, that's my seat.

Gracie looks up at him - stubborn and unmoving. And it's like a child version of Nu has appeared at Dolly's side.

Dolly watches her with wonder.

Angus moves away, unwilling to battle her. Gracie turns back to Dolly and there's that smile again.

101 INT. NU'S BEDROOM. THE HOGG FARM -- NIGHT 101

Dolly falling asleep at Nu's side. She wakes again and rises from her chair. She leaves the room, taking a last look at Nu before she closes the door and heads back to her own bed.

102 INT. DOLLY'S BEDROOM. THE HOGG FARM -- MORNING 102

Dolly wakes up to find -

a pair of large eyes staring intently at her. Gracie lies at the end of her bed.

Dolly sits up, surprised.

GRACIE

You slept late.

DOLLY

I was tired.

GRACIE

Grandpa says you can help me with my work today.

Dolly nods, unable to refuse this child's expectant request.

CUT TO:

Dolly up, dressed and leaving the room. She opens the door to discover Gracie waiting outside.

DOLLY

I'm just goin' to look in on my friend.

Gracie's face falls. She reluctantly follows Dolly down the hall but as Dolly opens the door Gracie stalls.

DOLLY (CONT'D)
You can come in if you like?

Gracie shakes her head. Again her face has set into a stubborn expression. Dolly looks into the room to see

Nu, as she has been for days.

And then Dolly looks down -

a small hand has taken her own and is gently pulling at her.

GRACIE
Come on.

Dolly looks at Gracie's eager face. She closes the door on Nu and allows the child to lead her away.

103 EXT. FARM -- DAY

103

Dolly and Grace shovel snow away from the barn doors.

LEWIS (O.S.)
Hey! Stop!

Dolly looks up to see Lewis running towards them. He arrives out of breath and tries to take the shovel from Dolly.

GRACIE
She can manage.

LEWIS
(to Gracie)
She's not well.

DOLLY
I'm fine.

Lewis observes her.

DOLLY (CONT'D)
Honestly, I'm fine.

Lewis relents. He turns to Gracie and takes her shovel.

LEWIS
Let me help.
(to Gracie)
Grandpa needs you.

Gracie purses her lips but does not argue. She runs off towards the house. Dolly catches Lewis's eye. He flushes beet again and turns away to the digging.

104

EXT. HALLWAY. THE HOGG'S FARM -- NIGHT

104

Dolly makes her way to her room. Gracie's door is ajar and a light glows from within.

GRACIE (O.S.)
Dolly? Dolly, is that you?

Dolly turns hesitantly towards the door.

105

INT. GRACIE'S ROOM. THE HOGG'S FARM -- CONTINUOUS

105

Dolly puts her head around the door -

Gracie's room is almost bare except for a dresser and Gracie's single bed. Gracie is lying under the covers - she looks happily to Dolly.

GRACIE
Come in.

Dolly enters, cautious. She does not approach the bed.

GRACIE (CONT'D)
(on the edge of sleep)
Will you tell me a story?

DOLLY
I don't know any stories.

GRACIE
Grandpa knows hundreds.

Dolly looks embarrassed under the child's attention. She picks up a small doll from the dresser and mindlessly turns it in her hand.

GRACIE (CONT'D)
Where did you come from?

DOLLY
The south.

GRACIE
What's it like?

DOLLY
It's better here.

GRACIE
Why?

DOLLY
(shrugging)
It feels safe.

GRACIE
Are you going tae stay with us?

BEAT.

DOLLY
We'll see.

Gracie smiles and closes her eyes. Like that she's asleep.

Dolly moves to set down the wooden doll and for the first time looks at it -

It is hand-carved - lovingly made.

She quickly places it back and walks out.

106 INT. DOLLY'S ROOM. HOGG'S FARM -- MOMENTS LATER

106

Dolly enters her room and shuts the door behind her. She stands still for a moment, succumbing to her thoughts. She starts to undress. She draws her knife out from her belt and is about to place it under the pillow. She stops. Observes it. Then she stows it in the cupboard and shuts the door.

107 EXT. FARM -- DAY

107

Dolly and Gracie cross a snowy field in the direction of the barn.

108 INT. BARN -- MOMENTS LATER

108

Dolly and Gracie enter the barn and head for the hayloft. Dolly climbs up and hefts a couple of bales of hay over the edge. She climbs back down. As she shoulders the first she stops. She is looking at the far side of the barn.

DOLLY
Wot's that?

An old bath sits in the corner.

Gracie looks at Dolly - she's covered in so much dirt it seems to be what holds her together. Gracie smiles -

CUT TO:

Dolly laying neck deep in smoking hot water. It's already black with the grime that's come off her but she's oblivious as she bathes in its warmth. Her eyes are open - she gazes above herself and watches the clouds of steam spiral themselves up and away.

Gracie appears with a pail of hot water. She tips it into the bath so that it's brimming.

She hands Dolly a bar of soap and Dolly starts to wash. She fights with the mess that is her hair but Gracie steps in. She takes the soap and lathers it into Dolly's head.

Dolly sits up, closes her eyes and allows the child to wash her. And before she knows it Gracie strips off her own clothes and clambers into the bath behind her. Dolly doesn't stop her as the child continues to comb out the woman's hair.

CUT TO:

Dolly wrapped in a blanket beside the bath as she lifts Gracie out. Dolly dries her off with another blanket and then helps to dress her. Gracie picks up a folded garment and hands it to Dolly.

GRACIE

I thought you might like this.

Dolly opens it up to discover an old dress. She frowns.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

It belonged tae grandpa's daughter.
Lewis's mother.

DOLLY

(shaking her head)
It's not a good idea.

She tries to hand the dress back to Gracie but the child does not take it.

DOLLY (CONT'D)

Gracie, I don't know that I can
give you wot you want. Do you
understand?

Gracie just stares at her, uncomprehending.

Dolly attempts a smile. She holds up the dress again.

CUT TO:

Dolly buttoning up the dress when -

Lewis dashes into the barn. He's too out of breath to speak. But we can read his face.

Dolly turns and runs past Lewis out of the barn.

CUT TO:

Dolly races up the stairs and into Nu's room.

CUT TO:

110 INT. NU'S BEDROOM. THE HOGG FARM -- CONTINUOUS 110

Dolly enters and abruptly comes to a stop.

Eli stands over Nu who lies propped up in bed - her eyes open.

Nu looks to Dolly.

Dolly is on the verge of tears.

Nu takes in -

Dolly's new dress, washed hair and flushed, healthy cheeks -

Nu's eyes are cold.

ELI

Is Gracie coming?

Nu's features darken.

Dolly does not answer.

Nu's stare penetrates Dolly.

Dolly steps towards Nu but as she reaches the bed Nu's eyes close - shut to the world and to her.

111 INT. KITCHEN. THE HOGG'S FARM -- MORNING 111

Angus and Gracie sit at the table. Dolly and Lewis bustle around the kitchen, working together.

The door opens and Eli enters - only he's not alone. He supports a frail Nu on his arm.

ELI

We have a new guest joining us.

ANGUS

Good morning.

Nu does not respond to the greeting.

A shadow settles over the breakfast table.

Dolly watches fearfully as Nu takes her seat -

Nu is observing the members of the family. Her body's weak but her mind is at work.

NU

This is your whole family?

ELI

And my granddaughter. Gracie.

Nu's face betrays nothing.

Lewis stops what he's doing - as if something has been left unsaid. Dolly and Nu both see this.

Eli, coughing, takes the seat across from Nu. Then -

ELI (CONT'D)
There was my daughter, she died
when Lewis was born.
(BEAT)
And Will.

Nu picks up her table knife.

Dolly catches her breath.

NU
Will?

ELI
My son.
(PAUSE)
He died last winter.

Dolly has avoided anything to do with this up until now. She glances furtively at Nu but -

Nu's face is unreadable, set against any expression.

When Dolly speaks it could be to either Eli or Nu -

DOLLY
I'm sorry.

She lays a plate of food in front of each of them and sits next to Nu.

Nu doesn't look at her. And then her attention snaps to the door. As Gracie walks in.

Nu stares at her child. Her focus is absolute. Her knuckles are white as she grips her knife.

Gracie's eyes fall on the stranger. She looks away, instantly disliking this new arrival.

Nu reads this reaction. Her eyes blacken.

ELI
Angus, cut the bread.

Angus does as bid.

Gracie takes her seat between Eli and Dolly. She immediately grabs a piece of bread and puts it on Dolly's plate.

Nu's mouth compresses.

Eli ruffles Gracie's hair.

ELI (CONT'D)
 It's no like you tae be a mother
 hen -
 (to Nu)
 I suppose it's being around all us
 men. But she's taken a real shine
 tae Dolly.

NU
 Has she?

ELI
 It's been good for her. I doubt she
 has any memory of seeing another
 lass before.

Dolly's face clouds and her eyes again dart to -

Nu's grim features -

NU
 (ice-cold)
 What about her mother?

ELI
 Gracie disnae remember her. She
 lost her a long time ago.

Eli starts to softly cough again.

Nu looks at

Dolly, who cannot hold her gaze.

Without another glance at Gracie, Nu turns to her plate and mechanically sets into her breakfast.

112 INT. NU'S BEDROOM. THE HOGG'S FARM -- MORNING

112

Nu is dressing. She crosses to the window and picks up her bandana. Something catches her attention from outside. She stops mid-movement as she looks out of the window.

In the farm yard Gracie and Angus play around in the snow.

Nu is still, her eyes for once expressive, troubled.

Outside Gracie charges at Angus and he mock falls into a drift as the girl bundles on top of him.

In this moment a flicker of light appears in Nu's face. But she shifts slightly and becomes aware of

her own movement in the window. The shadow-reflection of her scar glares out at her from the pane.

There is a KNOCK at the door. Nu turns away from herself as Dolly enters - and for a second Dolly catches a glimpse of dark conflict. Then Nu's mask is back on.

DOLLY
How are you feelin'?

NU
I am getting better.

DOLLY
Good. I was worried.

NU
I can see.

DOLLY
Look --

NU
-- Do not get comfortable.

DOLLY
Wot does that mean?

NU
Nothing has changed. As soon as I am strong we will leave.

DOLLY
With Gracie?

NU
With Grace.

DOLLY
We can't just take her. Gracie has a family. She loves these people.

NU
She is my child.

DOLLY
But she don't know you. Wot you're talkin' about would be wrong.

NU
Was what they did right?

DOLLY
I'm not sayin' that. You're justified --

NU

-- I do not need justification.
This is what I am going to do.

DOLLY

You didn't expect to find her like this. Aren't there some things that can be left alone?

NU

Is that what you want?

DOLLY

I'm just tryin' to help. This is a good home.

NU

Whose side are you on, Doll?

Dolly hesitates in her answer.

Nu turns and walks out of the room.

Dolly stares at the shut door. Then she walks over to the window and looks out to see -

Angus messing around with Gracie in the snow.

And now Dolly's face betrays her own conflict.

113 INT. KITCHEN. HOGG'S FARM -- NIGHT

113

Nu sits by the open range.

Eli comes in from outside. He pulls up a chair across from Nu. He falls into a fit of coughing. He holds an old handkerchief to his mouth as he wheezes away.

Nu watches him, her eyes forbidding.

Snow is falling outside.

Soon Dolly enters with a stack of logs. She takes a seat between Nu and Eli. Nu doesn't acknowledge her.

DOLLY

You'll be needin' some more wood.

Nu looks at Dolly with barely-disguised contempt. To avoid this accusatory glare Dolly turns to watch -

the snow through the window.

Eli looks out the window thoughtfully.

ELI

We knew it was coming. Gets to be the ground becomes a part of you, working it for so long. We could sense the change. You can't keep nature trussed up.

DOLLY

How do you manage?

ELI

My family has been on this land for longer than I could tell you --

The door opens and Gracie pads in in her night dress. She makes straight to Eli and curls up onto his lap. He cradles her as she gazes out at Dolly with big, dark, sleepy eyes.

ELI (CONT'D)

-- It's been a life of change, the weather the least of it. We survive because we adapt. Find another way of doing things. A new order.

They sit together, all thinking their separate thoughts. Then Eli turns his focus to Dolly.

ELI (CONT'D)

What about you? What do you want now?

Nu snaps her eyes from Gracie to Dolly.

Dolly sits trapped between the interrogatory and the hopeful gaze. She looks away from the flanking adults down at her hands. There is a silence. Then -

ELI (CONT'D)

(to Gracie)

It's time you were in bed, lassie.

Gracie cups Eli's ear and whispers something to him. He looks across at Dolly and smiles.

ELI (CONT'D)

(to Gracie)

Well she's only just sat down tae get warm. Maybe if you go up right now she'll follow you in a wee while tae tuck you in?

Gracie jumps up smiling and makes to leave.

ELI (CONT'D)

(to Gracie)

Say good night tae everyone.

GRACIE

Good night, grandpa.

She kisses him. Then, to Dolly -

GRACIE (CONT'D)

Good night, Dolly.

She runs up to her and kisses her affectionately. Then she turns to Nu. This is the first time we've seen her interact with this other stranger. Gracie looks dubious, even a little frightened. She keeps her distance -

GRACIE (CONT'D)

(quickly)

Good night.

And then she's gone.

The atmosphere is thick. Dolly tries not to look at Nu.

NU

(to Eli)

There is little family resemblance
between the girl and you.

Eli falls into another heavy coughing fit. As he recovers -

ELI

Her parents were neighbours - we
took her in when they died. She's
been with us around four years now.

NU

(stone-faced)

That was good of you.

ELI

When my daughter died everything
seemed tae fall apart. That was
nearly 20 years ago. But with
Gracie it's all come back together.
That's a new order. A better one.

He turns to Dolly.

ELI (CONT'D)

She'll be waiting for you. She's a
headstrong young thing - never lets
you back out on a deal.

Dolly gets up quickly and leaves, as if glad to escape.

Nu stares hard at Eli, who watches the fire, and coughs
quietly into his handkerchief. Then -

NU

Why did you take her?

ELI
(between fits of coughing)
Gracie? What else could we have done?

NU
Left her where she was.

Eli looks up at Nu. The coughing stops.

NU (CONT'D)
You must have had a reason.

Eli assesses Nu. Then -

ELI
It gives me peace that I took her.
You see, I'm not well myself.

He opens the handkerchief - it is spotted with blood.

ELI (CONT'D)
We had no more women. I couldnae
let my family disappear like that,
could I? I couldnae let us fail.

NU
No. Of course not.

114 INT. DOLLY'S BEDROOM. THE HOGG'S FARM -- MOMENTS LATER 114

Dolly sits on her bed - head in hands. The snow CRUNCHES outside - she goes to the window. She sees -

Nu's tall, dark form making its way towards the stable. She's carrying her saddle roll.

Dolly looks panicked.

CUT TO:

115 INT. STABLES -- CONTINUOUS 115

Nu entering the stable. She puts her hand on Beau's nose. The horse nuzzles her. She stands there for a moment, allowing the affection. Then she throws down her roll in the straw and lays out next to her horse.

CUT TO:

116 INT. DOLLY'S BEDROOM. THE HOGG FARM -- CONTINUOUS 116

Dolly looking out the window. She SIGHS - whether from relief or worry we can't be sure.

117 EXT. FARMYARD -- DAY

117

Dolly and Gracie stand over the woodpile behind the stables. Gracie is watching as Dolly splits logs. Her swing is accurate and powerful.

GRACIE

You're like me - you're a hard worker. That's good.

CUT TO:

118 INT. STABLES -- CONTINUOUS

118

Nu has her pack out and is cleaning off what looks like an oversized metal nutcracker. From outside she hears the conversation of Dolly and Gracie. She listens as she works.

GRACIE (O.S.)

Grandpa always says that's the only way tae be.

CUT TO:

Dolly and Gracie.

DOLLY

Well he's right.

GRACIE

He'd be happy if you wanted tae stay with us here.

DOLLY

I told you - we'll have to see.

CUT TO:

Nu. She pauses in her work. She frowns. She puts the instrument away and makes for the yard.

CUT TO:

Dolly and Gracie.

GRACIE

I don't see why you can't say yes?

DOLLY

It's not up to me.

GRACIE

But I know grandpa wouldnae mind.

DOLLY

It's not just your grandpa.

GRACIE

Well who then?

Nu appears in the stable doorway.

Dolly and Gracie simultaneously look over.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

Oh.

DOLLY

(to Gracie)

Why don't you ask?

Gracie drops her eyes and shakes her head. Everyone is embarrassed. Dolly plays matchmaker -

DOLLY (CONT'D)

(to Gracie)

Didn't Eli send you for something?

GRACIE

I'm waiting for you to help me. I
can't carry the sack on my own.

DOLLY

I've got to finish up here.

(to Nu)

Why don't you help her?

GRACIE

What about her arm?

Nu draws her arm out and demonstrates that she can use it. Then she replaces it in the sling.

Gracie shrugs, disappointed.

Nu shifts uncomfortably.

Gracie runs off in the direction of the barn.

Nu hesitates -

DOLLY

Please. Try.

Nu looks to her daughter's departing figure. And then she follows.

Dolly watches after them.

Nu and Gracie stand in the store at the back of the barn. Gracie climbs onto a pile of sacks and tries to lift one. Nu intercedes and in the process

- their hands meet -

Gracie pulls back sharply. She eyes Nu with distrust. Then she jumps down and runs out of the barn.

One-handed, Nu hefts the sack onto her shoulder and follows.

120 EXT. FIELD -- MOMENTS LATER

120

Nu walks through the fields, following Gracie back to the farm. Nu watches the child intently as -

Gracie, unaware of her audience, plays about in the snow. After a while Gracie turns back and looks at Nu - as if she has just remembered her own chore.

GRACIE

Do you need help with the sack?

Nu shakes her head.

Gracie shrugs.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

You're strong.

Nu's mouth turns up at the compliment.

NU

I am getting strong again.

Then -

GRACIE

Are you a woman?

Nu slows.

NU

Yes.

GRACIE

(matter of fact)

You don't look like a woman.

NU

...

GRACIE

You don't have any hair, and you've got marks all over you. And your hands are -

Gracie wrinkles up her face, as if she's thinking about something that revolts her.

Nu stoically takes this in. Then -

NU
And what does a woman look like?

Gracie considers the question. Then -

GRACIE
(simply)
Like Dolly.

The girl breaks into a smile and turns around and runs away from Nu back towards Dolly and the farm.

Nu watches Gracie retreat. And then her grip disappears and the sack falls to the ground.

CUT TO:

Dolly chopping wood. Gracie comes racing over to her and starts to stack the logs. Dolly looks down towards the barn -

At first she can't see Nu. Then, just beyond the fenced boundary of the farmyard, her eyes fall on a dark figure.

Dolly's face shadows.

From where she stands it looks as if Nu is sitting down in the snow.

CUT TO:

Dolly running down towards the barn. She rounds a corner in the path and sees

Nu making her way up the hill towards her.

Dolly slows to a walk as she approaches Nu. She reaches for the sack.

DOLLY
Here. Let me help you.

NU
I do not need help.

Dolly takes the sack anyway. But Nu does not let go and the women end up carrying it between them.

There is a deep silence.

Dolly looks out at the distant mountains.

DOLLY
It's beautiful here.

NU
You will not convince me to stay.

DOLLY

She'll come round.

Nu stops and turns to face Dolly.

NU

But I will not.

Dolly looks at Nu's face, into her eyes. They are black.

NU (CONT'D)

That part of me is lost. I am what
you see. Nothing more.

Nu drops her hold on the sack and walks away from Dolly.

121 INT. DOLLY'S BEDROOM. THE HOGG FARM -- NIGHT

121

Dolly anxiously looks out of her window at -

A light glowing at the back of the stables.

CUT TO:

122 INT. STABLES -- CONTINUOUS

122

Nu crouching with her back to us over a small, hot fire. On
the ground beside her is the 'nutcracker', its wooden handles
splayed open. She has a pan over the white heat. She takes
something and drops it into the pan with a small CLANG -

The lead weights from the mine.

CUT TO:

Nu scooping black slag from the top of a silver liquid.

CUT TO:

The liquid pouring from the pan -

CUT TO:

Outside. A HISSING SOUND. Nu grasps the wooden handle
protruding from the snow and draws out the 'nutcracker'. She
opens it up and knocks it against her boot -Two bullets fall from the mould. They CLINK down next to two
other casts on a square of material laid waiting in the snow.

CUT TO:

The stables. Nu picks up her rifle and draws the bolt. The
casing ejects. Nu catches it, inspects it and lies it next to
the other three waiting casings.

Beside them lies Nu's reloading tin.

123 INT. KITCHEN. HOGG'S FARM -- NIGHT

123

Eli is kneading dough when Nu enters.

ELI

You're up late. Everyone else's fed
and gone tae bed.

NU

I want provisions.

ELI

You're leaving?

NU

At first light.

ELI

You're no fit tae travel. Why don't
you wait a week or two?

NU

There is no more time.

Eli nods. Then -

ELI

And Dolly?

Nu doesn't respond.

Eli puts the dough aside to rise. He offers his hand to Nu.
Her face gives nothing away as she shakes it.

ELI (CONT'D)

Take whatever you want.

NU

Thank you. I will.

124 INT. THE STABLES. THE HOGG'S FARM -- LATER

124

Nu silently enters the shadows of the stables. She carries a
pack. She moves to Beau and begins to lash on the provisions.
Without stopping or turning -

NU

Are you coming?

From behind Nu a figure steps forward out of the shadows -

DOLLY

Not like this.

Nu turns on Dolly.

NU

You think that you will stay here?
You will be mother to Grace? Breed
for one or more of these men?

DOLLY

It wouldn't be like that.

Nu gives her a scathing look. Then -

NU

There is something in your way. I
do not fit into your family.

DOLLY

You could.

Nu turns back to Beau.

NU

Go and get packed.

Dolly stays where she is.

DOLLY

Maybe it's not that you don't know
how to stay. Maybe it's that you
won't let yourself remember.

NU

There is nothing left to remember.

Dolly steps to Nu and takes hold of her.

DOLLY

I don't believe you.

Dolly turns Nu to face her. As Nu speaks she raises her eyes
to Dolly - they are emotionless.

NU

The family you are looking for, it
does not exist. Not here, not
anywhere.

DOLLY

If you believe that then wot are we
doin' here?

Nu turns away from Dolly and finishes tying off the
provisions. For the first time Dolly's eyes fall on the
horses - both Beau and the farm horse are saddled.

DOLLY (CONT'D)

Why are you taking their horse?

But Dolly already knows the answer. Nu turns back to Dolly and looks her straight in the eye. Nu draws her rifle from Beau's scabbard.

DOLLY (CONT'D)
This is not what we came here for.

NU
It's what I came here for.

DOLLY
I don't believe this is just about winning for you.

NU
You can come, or you can stay. But do not get in my way.

Nu makes to leave but Dolly places herself between Nu and the stable door.

DOLLY
I'm already in your way.

Nu takes a step towards the exit. Dolly shadows her movement. But Nu is having none of it and viciously sweeps her aside.

Dolly's face surges with anger and frustration.

DOLLY (CONT'D)
THIS COULD BE OUR HOME!

Nu stops, sizes up Dolly -

NU
There's no such thing.

Dolly looks down to find she is standing over the axe handle. She picks it up and turns on Nu.

Nu ignores her and walks towards the door.

Dolly swipes at her. But Nu is shockingly fast. The older woman discards the rifle and intercepts the blow with her good hand. She twists the instrument out of Dolly's grasp. Next thing she counter-swings back through the air and smashes Dolly across the jaw.

Dolly staggers to the ground.

Nu throws the stick down and collects her weapon.

DOLLY (O.S.)
We're not finished.

Nu turns back to see -

Dolly clambering over to the stick - a red stripe spreads across her face. She reaches it.

Nu strides to Beau, sheathes the rifle and draws out her own stick -

Dolly stands and approaches. She goes for a hit but Nu expertly deflects the blow and again brings her weapon ruthlessly down across the same spot on Dolly's jaw -

Dolly collapses to the ground.

Nu walks to Beau but is stopped by the SOUND of DOLLY CRAWLING after her. She turns to see -

Dolly dragging herself to her feet.

NU

Do not get up.

Dolly uses the stick to push herself to standing. She straightens up. Her body shudders as she turns to face Nu.

DOLLY

Wot do you want?

Nu's eyes fix - out for a kill. She steps in to attack -

Dolly swings out - Nu moves to disarm her -

But at the last second Dolly flicks her wrist and changes the stick's trajectory. She swoops it under Nu's attacking hand and her weapon flies 180 degrees back around on itself and towards Nu's exposed flank -

With frightening accuracy the stick CRUNCHES into Nu's healing arm -

Nu instinctively puts her hand to the point of impact and -

Dolly doubles back and CRACKS Nu across her fingers. Nu drops her weapon -

Dolly reverses her swing and SLAMS Nu in the opposite side - smack into her ribs -

And then she flies one more swing down -

cracking the side of Nu's head. Nu falls to the floor. Dazed, she looks up from under her defending arms. Her face is blood-streaked, her voice barely audible -

NU

What do you want, Doll?

- Dolly stalls - her weapon hangs mid-air -

And then the stick falls from her hand -

As the rage seeps from her eyes it is replaced by remorse - and fear.

DOLLY
(horrified)
I'm sorry.

Dolly drops to her knees and grabs hold of Nu as if she is trying to wrench the bruises off of her. Nu reaches up and draws Dolly into her. She pulls their foreheads together and stares deep into Dolly's eyes.

NU
(intensely)
No. I'm sorry.

Dolly grasps hold of Nu like she's hanging on for dear life.

NU (CONT'D)
If I've taught you anything it
should be - never let anyone get
too close.

Dolly flinches as she feels the cold knife edge at her throat.

NU (CONT'D)
Everything is competition.

Nu's eyes are again devoid of emotion. She draws a halter down from the wall behind them and ties Dolly's wrists. Dolly - aghast - succumbs to her binds.

Nu stands and limps out of the stables.

125 INT. GRACIE'S BEDROOM. THE HOGG'S FARM -- MOMENTS LATER 125

Gracie is asleep in her bed. The door opens and Nu's dark form looms over the child.

126 INT. THE STABLES. THE HOGG'S FARM -- MOMENTS LATER 126

Dolly fights her ties.

Nu appears carrying a struggling form over her shoulder. Gracie is bound and gagged. Nu places her on the second horse and starts to strap her to the saddle.

DOLLY
I won't let you do this.

Nu turns to Dolly - her cold demeanour cracking.

NU

You cannot stop me. No one can stop
me.

Dolly stares at the black figure - she makes a choice.

DOLLY

(shouting)

Help! Eli!

Nu looks across at

the house - enveloped in darkness. A light appears.

She turns back to Dolly. An eerie calm has descended on her.

NU

I was going to leave them out of
this. I was going to give you that.

Nu steps to Beau and unsheathes her rifle.

A look of dismay dawns on Dolly's face as she sees this and
realises what she's done.

DOLLY

Please. Don't.

CUT TO:

Eli, Angus and Lewis hurrying out of the house and into the
yard, carrying a lamp. Its light is overpowered by the glow
of the moon across the snow. All three stop in their tracks
as they see -

The black silhouette of a rider at the mouth of the stable
door - her rifle butt rests on one thigh as the gun points to
the heavens. Nu sits Beau with Gracie's horse reins grasped
in her hand.

ELI

What's going on here?

From the figure -

NU

Stand forward the man who stole
this child.

Eli and Angus look at one another, appalled. Lewis just looks
terrified. No one moves.

CUT TO:

Dolly working at the rope. It begins to loosen.

CUT TO:

Nu.

NU (CONT'D)
You have a choice. One of you. Or
all of you.

Angus steps forward. The snow under his feet dissolves from the heat of his urine. He is appealing to her and making confession all at once -

ANGUS
We'd went all the way tae London,
Will and me, looking for women. But
no one wanted tae leave the City
for what we offered. And there are
no free women left anywhere else.
I'd given up hope when we passed
the farm. And then we saw her -
alone. It was Will's idea. I knew
it was wrong. And I tried tae tell
him no. But we knew it was our only
chance. We told ourselves that she
was lost. And we took her.

Nu lowers the barrel of her rifle and trains it down at him.

Eli steps forward and blocks Angus from the gun.

ELI
No. They did it for me. I'm
responsible.

Nu alters her sights to Eli.

He sinks to his knees, his hands raised to her in futile supplication.

DOLLY (O.S.)
They're unarmed.

Dolly has managed to crawl out to the stable's mouth and lies propped in the snow.

Nu does not move or take her eyes from her prey. She levels her rifle at Eli.

DOLLY (CONT'D)
Your child is watchin' you.

At this Nu turns her face to Gracie -

The girl's eyes stare wildly from above her gag.

Nu looks to Eli, wheezing and choking in the freezing air.

Again she aims the rifle.

DOLLY (CONT'D)
You can't win. No one wins.

Dolly's words arrest Nu mid-movement. Her body slumps, as if someone has torn the breath out of her. For a moment it looks like she is about to let go of Gracie.

But then - as if by reflex - Nu spurs Beau into life and the two horses thunder out onto the snow-crossed highlands.

Dolly and the men watch them disappear into the night.

127 EXT. THE HIGHLANDS -- LATER

127

Nu and Gracie are riding fast up into the mountains.

Nu slows as the ground becomes rocky. She is bent over her horse's neck - her cracked ribs scream at her with every step. Gracie's reins are in Nu's good hand. Nu scouts the route ahead - she does not notice -

Gracie wriggling her small hands free of her ties. Gracie snatches her reins out of Nu's unexpecting hand and spins her horse back the way they've come. Nu leans forward to grab the animal's bridle but Gracie sees her coming and kicks out.

Nu, overwhelmed by a surge of pain, misses her grip.

Gracie seizes her chance and races back down the track.

Nu spurs Beau into pursuit.

CUT TO:

Gracie galloping down the mountainside with Nu following.

CUT TO:

Nu rounding a hill-side at speed. Ahead she sees

Gracie galloping away - still at a distance -

But now they're on level ground Nu pushes it up a notch. She grimaces as Beau pelts across the compact snow after the child. They move at thumping speed. And slowly, steadily Nu gains ground, until she noses up alongside her.

NU

Stop!

Gracie turns around to see Nu bearing down on her. She forces her horse on.

Nu can't get to Gracie's reins as Gracie swerves off course. Nu has no choice. She pulls her feet up to saddle level and propels herself away from Beau.

Nu meets Gracie in mid-air and tackles her into the snow. She rolls to take the main impact of the fall.

They both come up, choking.

Gracie's horse disappears off into the dark.

Nu's pain is consumed by a stronger force as she pulls herself up and hoists the child into the air.

-- Nu holds Grace high above her, as if she might break her in two --

And then Nu lowers her daughter.

Nu gets back on her horse and rides forward, Gracie catatonic in her arms.

128 INT. DOLLY'S BEDROOM. THE HOGG'S FARM -- DAWN

128

Dolly changing into her old clothes.

An angry, bloody welt runs from her cheek to her neck.

She puts the discarded dress into the cupboard. Inside she finds the T-shirt she loaned Nu. She puts it on over her vest, and sees, where it was lying -

the knife -

Dolly takes up her knife, grabs a coat and leaves the room.

129 INT. DOWNSTAIRS HALLWAY. THE HOGG'S FARM -- MOMENTS LATER 129

Dolly walks along the hall. The kitchen door is ajar -

Eli and Angus sit at the table, faces down, in a devastated, shamed silence.

She passes them by only to encounter -

Lewis waiting at the front door.

LEWIS

Will she hurt her?

DOLLY

I don't think so.

LEWIS

Will she bring her back?

PAUSE. Then -

DOLLY

Go and be with your grandpa.

LEWIS

Come with me.

DOLLY

(Sharply)

Not now.

LEWIS

You're angry.

DOLLY

I just need to be alone.

For the first time Lewis sees she is wearing her old clothes.

LEWIS

You've changed.

Silence as Dolly holds his gaze.

Lewis drops his head and walks away into the kitchen.

Dolly opens the front door and stands framed in the boundary of the home. Beyond her black silhouette the light grows on the horizon. And then, in the dark dawn, we see Gracie's horse appear in the distance. It heads for us at a trot. For a moment Dolly does not move. Then she steps out of the house and away towards the mountains.

As she passes out of the gate she breaks into a run -

CUT TO:

Dolly swinging up onto the horse and spurring it into a gallop, back in the direction from whence it came -

130

EXT. THE HIGHLANDS -- LATER

130

Nu and Gracie making their way up into the mountains in silence - a void between them.

They reach a summit and Nu looks backwards across the sweeping view of snowcaps. In the distance she sees -

a rider moving towards them -

Her eyes narrow.

Gracie, her vigilant child, observes this and looks out to the rider -

CUT TO:

Dolly riding fast along Nu and Gracie's tracks -

CUT TO:

Nu leading Gracie on foot up into the rock outcrops. She puts her in a hiding spot and positions herself with her rifle -

CUT TO:

Horse hooves stumbling up through the snow -

CUT TO:

Nu, waiting, rifle raised -

CUT TO:

Feet hitting the rocky ground -

CUT TO:

Nu waiting. Absolutely still. All that can be heard is her own RASPING BREATH. Until she becomes aware of -

Gracie staring at her. Nu glances sideways and takes in the wide-eyed expression on her child's face -

Nu looks back to the sights, tries not to be distracted -

GRACIE
(quietly)
Please don't kill anyone.

Nu's face cracks - she looks to

the desperate innocence in her daughter's eyes -

GRACIE (CONT'D)
I'll come with you. Just don't kill anyone.

Gracie puts her hand out for the gun -

And Nu is struck down. Her whole being is defeated.

Gracie takes the gun and pulls it out of her hands. Nu is unresisting. After a moment she looks up -

A figure appears on the mountainside - and Nu finds herself staring at Red.

Nu stands and steps back towards Gracie but the child scrambles away from her. Nu puts out her hand.

Red raises his gun.

NU
Give me the gun, Grace.

Mother stares at daughter. And Nu sees -

her own immovable face stare back.

CUT TO:

Dolly galloping across the snow. A GUN SHOT SOUNDS and echoes through the valley. Dolly pulls up her horse. Another SHOT RINGS OUT. Dolly drives on towards the noise -

CUT TO:

Dolly racing up the mountainside, her horse lathered in white foaming sweat -

CUT TO:

The steepening slope. Dolly's horse stumbles. It can't go on. She jumps down and continues to run after the tracks -

CUT TO:

Dolly appearing - as Red did - from the mountainside. Ahead of her she sees -

a dark form crumpled in the snow.

She rushes towards it and looks down to find -

Nu staring up at her. Nu is soaked with a wet, black stain and the snow underneath her is slowly melting red.

DOLLY

No.

Dolly falls to her knees. She reaches out to Nu but stops, unable to touch her - nowhere is unbroken.

DOLLY (CONT'D)

Wot happened?

NU

(gasping)

Red.

If the look of horror on Dolly's face could deepen - it does. She shakes her head, like she's trying to escape the truth.

DOLLY

No. No. No.

Nu moves her eyes to where Gracie was standing. Dolly looks across and sees -

Nu's rifle laying discarded on the ground.

The women look at each other.

NU
I need your help.

CUT TO:

Dolly scrambling back down the track carrying Nu's rifle. Her face flickers between fear and rage. She comes across the body of her horse - dead from exhaustion - laid out in the snow. But when she looks up she sees -

Beau, standing, waiting for her -

131 EXT. HIGHLANDS -- LATER

131

Red makes his way down from the mountain range. Gracie is tied over the back of his horse. He stops. We look with him -

The ghost of the woman he just shot is bearing down on him.

When she is within spitting distance Red's expression changes as he recognises -

Dolly. She pulls up Beau.

Dolly raises the rifle. She catches her breath.

Red observes her silently.

Nothing happens.

Red gets down from his horse and walks towards her. He stops. Pauses. Red holds out his hand to Dolly.

And Dolly starts to breathe.

A SHOT SOUNDS. Red's leg smashes out from under him and he falls to the ground. Dolly throws the bolt and dismounts. She keeps the rifle trained on her prey.

Red starts to move.

But Dolly is steady. She stalks towards him and her body seems to stretch and grow as her muscles ripple with a new kind of tension. Her whole being charges with a cold, detached energy. The deadly-calm focus that we have seen inhabit Nu in these situations has descended upon Dolly.

And Dolly's eyes are black.

Red tries to sit up and draw his gun.

Dolly shoots him in the head.

He falls back. He is dead.

She searches him and takes his gun and ammunition.

Dolly picks up her two spent cartridges out of the snow.
Only then does she turn to Gracie.

132 EXT. THE HIGHLANDS -- LATER

132

Dolly riding Beau across the mountain range. Gracie follows on Red's horse: her face speaks her trauma.

They reach the dead horse. Gracie observes it blankly. Dolly dismounts. So does Gracie.

Dolly looks back at the child - she's already seen it all. She turns and walks away. Gracie follows.

CUT TO:

Dolly and Gracie appearing from the mountainside. They walk slowly over to Nu's body in the snow.

One of Nu's hands lies palm to the sky. Cradled in its centre is Dolly's medal.

Dolly stares down at her friend, her dark expression unknowable. Then -

Nu's eyes flicker and open.

CUT TO:

Dolly racing Beau back down into the valley, Nu in her arms. Gracie follows behind on Red's horse.

133 EXT. THE HOGG'S FARM -- EVENING

133

Dolly and Gracie ride into the farm.

Gracie jumps down and helps Dolly with Nu. They try to carry her but she's haemorrhaging. Gracie runs home for help.

Dolly moves to follow but she's stalled. She looks down -
Nu's hand clasps her ankle.

Dolly turns back to Nu.

A RATTLESNAKE SOUNDS as Nu gasps for breath.

Dolly drops to her knees and gathers Nu up.

Nu looks to the farmhouse and then back to Dolly. Nu's expression is a plea.

Dolly clasps Nu's hand between her own as if in prayer. She stares into Nu's eyes -

- and in them we see all that has been lost, darting upwards, surfacing and breaking.

Dolly rocks back and forth, shakes her head. But this gentle rhythm will change nothing. Nu is resolved.

Dolly steadies her own breathing. Then she slips her hand under the back of Nu's head. Dolly holds Nu tight as she draws her knife and tenderly traces its edge along the length of Nu's scar. Nu bucks against the blade, the white mark splits red and Dolly crouches in the warmth of Nu's blood. Nu's form shudders against Dolly's grip. This final battle seems to go on forever - until we realise that it is Dolly who is shaking. Nu is now still in her arms.

Dolly cradles the body. She lifts her head to see - the family together on the porch. Watching.

Dolly looks back down to Nu - a wasted grey figure. Dolly lays her down in the snow and rises.

Dolly stands over the dead woman, covered in blood, the true hero shot, and sheathes her knife.

The family look on in silence.

Dolly walks to Beau and mounts. Without a backwards glance she spurs Beau out from the farm.

Gracie breaks away from Eli's hold. She escapes the porch and gives chase to Dolly. But the child flounders through the snow. She falls, and is devoid of the strength to get up.

Dolly does not stop or look back. She raises up Nu's old black hat and places it on her head as she rides away --

134

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE -- SUNRISE

134

A wide plain at sunrise - in the far distance a lone rider comes into view. The last of the winter snows are melting and the odd crocus and snow drop push through the cold earth. We look to the rider's face and see -

Dolly approaching - but she is almost unknowable from her former self. She looks older, taller, more powerful. Her hair is cropped, her face weathered. And even under the shadow of the black hat we can see the red scar that trails a path across her cheek.

Dolly keeps going, onwards, past us. And we watch as the lone rider moves slowly, surely away across the plain towards the distant grey mountains -

FADE OUT:

PART II

THE COMPETITORS: VIOLENT WOMEN PROTAGONISTS IN POPULAR CINEMA

A CRITICAL THESIS

Introduction: The Creative and the Critical

*I am in blood
Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.*

Macbeth, *The Tradegy of Macbeth*
(Shakespeare, [1623] 1998: 989, 3iv, Ins 135-7)

The Lords of Life are the Masters of Death.
The Plumed Serpent
(Lawrence, [1926] 1995: 343)

In this critical element of my thesis I analyse a number of the different films, plays and arguments that have impacted on my script *The Competitors*, as well as my wider work as a screenwriter. My main aim is to develop a deeper understanding of how women are represented as violent competitors and the cultural unease and fascination these depictions create. I believe that both violence and competition are subjects that are inherently conflicted, which goes some way to explain their appeal to me as a writer.

The first section of this introduction begins with a discussion of the “Creative/Critical Context” as a way of connecting my script to this critical thesis: I discuss the feminist versus postfeminist debate surrounding the violent woman in cinema; I provide a literature review of some of the key critical texts that form the context of this debate; I give some focused indication as to the

genesis of my script; and I outline the films that I have selected for analysis in this critical work. In the second section, “Subjects”, I set out the two central focuses of my work: competition and violence, with particular interest in how the two subjects are implicated in each other within this specific context. In the third section, “Lines of Enquiry”, I introduce my two central lines of discussion in relation to the subjects of this thesis: self versus other, and stylisation and realism. This introduction provides the critical parameters for the three chapters of this thesis as they analyse the competition represented by the violent woman protagonist in popular cinema.

Creative/Critical Context

Feminism versus Postfeminism

The central subject of *The Competitors*⁵ is competition and most of this is displayed through different forms of violence. In this accompanying critical thesis, I will investigate women as competitors in the specific context of the much debated violent woman in film. Feminist and postfeminist positions on this are certainly distinct from one another. However, both theoretical groupings are made up of many facets and approaches and as such they are not always in binary opposition. In this critical work I investigate the spectrum of the feminist and postfeminist debate surrounding the violent women as I attempt to define my own position as a feminist writer working in a postfeminist age.

In both the creative and critical work I am exploring questions raised more than 40 years ago by the feminist movement that are still unanswered today. In the 1960s the woman's movement brought the inequality of the sexes to centre stage. In the 1970s the anti-rape movement worked to expose an often hidden truth: women are subjected to violence as part of a system of oppression. What became known as the battered women's movement argued and continues to argue that “violence is a particular form of domination based on social relationships of unequal power” (Schechter, 1982: 34). However, this statement raises questions. The central danger is that this stance casts women in the role of victim. If

⁵ See Appendix C for a synopsis of the script.

victimhood becomes the dominant form of female subjectivity does this not reconfine women? Does it not simply feed into what Carol Clover describes (in terms of the cinematic horror stereotype) as “the feminine constitution of abject terror” (1992: 56)? Postfeminism has focused on this concern with the nature of female agency from a position that challenges the stereotype of ‘woman as victim’. If victimhood has become a female brand then the violent woman can be seen as “the subversion of that hallmark of femininity” (Andris and Frederick, 2007: 2).

However, I find postfeminist representations of women ultimately unsatisfactory, whether they are in the form of Bridget Jones and the women from *Sex in the City*, or in the representation of violent women such as Lara Croft. Although there are aspects of agency and dominance that I recognise as interesting in all of these characters, they are undermined by tendencies towards dependence on men, through personal relationships or the desire to appeal to men by presenting the postfeminist heroine in terms of extreme feminine stereotypes – respectively, ditsy behaviour, pretty dresses and big breasts. In terms of postfeminist action women, I am always happy to receive new examples of female power and agency, especially in the less explored realms of competition and violence, but I do not agree with the postfeminist stance that the hypersexuality of many of these characters is also a means to empowerment. Whether the sexualised action hero is an extension of the femme fatale (though a less revolutionary example), in that her violence demonstrates what we suspected all along – active women are just plain bad – or her extreme sexuality simply shows the violence she enacts in terms of fantasy and as an extension of the male gaze, I find the hypersexualised female action hero does the battle for equality more harm than good (this is an argument I develop in my second chapter on contemporary female action heroes).

However, as I have already pointed out, postfeminism does embrace the violent woman. This is something that much traditional feminist discourse stands against. As noted, feminism regularly challenges male power structures by refusing to engage in violence. Feminists often situate themselves as pacifists and see any enactment of violence by a female as an investment in the male system.⁶ However, this leaves us in a disturbingly similar position to

⁶ A recent argument about the way violence supports male power structures comes from Claudia Herbst: “Definitions of power may be flexible, but they are invariably formalized by those in power. In the past, killing has been defined as the ultimate power, a power generally attributed to men. In the new images portraying women as tough, this formally exclusive power is quite suddenly generously attributed to the female. Ultimately, the meaning of power depends not so much on the act historically

what Jeffrey A. Brown criticises as “a heterosexual logic that dictates that any woman who behaves in a manner so heavily coded as masculine must be a man in drag” (1996: 54). Just like Brown, I cannot agree with this position. Firstly, I would argue that any enactment of what would traditionally be recognised as masculine behaviour by women is a destabilisation of traditional gender roles.⁷ As Barbara Creed states: “To argue that these warriors are pseudo men is to endorse an essentialist view of gender based on a binaristic logic which defines men and women not as different but as opposites” (2007: 27). Secondly, and as an extension of this first point, I believe feminism is about investing in equality. This statement could be seen as a contradiction; Claudia Herbst argues that “the potential for violence and equality should not be equated as violence undermines the structure necessary for equality to flourish” (2007: 41). However, for women to wash their hands of violence is to oversimplify the problem. It amounts to a refusal to recognise the issue of violence as something that goes beyond the gender debate. There is a certain compromise of values in this stand and my own discomfort at an engagement with violence is central to my script. However, there is a competition and a violence within me that I cannot deny. And my inclination to suppress it makes me all the more interested in interrogating it.

Within my own script the two main characters, Nu and Dolly, represent the competition between feminism and postfeminism. One of the reasons why they come into conflict so often is because each disapproves of the other. Nu is battle-worn; Dolly positions herself as someone repulsed by violence. This embodies the tension between the war horses of feminism and the “light” (Schubart, 2007: 312) postfeminist generation of women today. Yet this is a reversal of my argument about the feminist and postfeminist relationship to the violent woman; in this last instance I am describing feminism in terms of toughness and violence and postfeminism in terms of squeamish femininity. Young women often see themselves as choosing to be feminine and are disgusted by the militant ghosts of feminism: “the postfeminist heroine is vital, youthful, and playful while her opposite number, the “bad” female professional, is repressive, deceptive, and deadly” (Tasker and Negra, 2007: 9). This opposition in terms of the way postfeminism views feminism is again representative of a reverse logic in terms of depictions of violent women yet at the same time it can be seen as symbolic of the relationship between the postfeminist and the feminist generation, as

defined as empowering but on the interests of those in power who define the meaning of power” (2007: 40).

⁷ This argument is discussed further in my Literature Review; see *Gender Trouble* (Butler: 1990), or any number of feminist and postfeminist critics: Clover (1992); Tasker (1993, 1998, 2004); Brown (1996); McCaughey and King (2001); Inness (2004); etc.

represented in a number of postfeminist films.⁸ Yet which of these characters has more substance? Personally I am far more drawn to the “bad” female represented by Nu. And as Dolly experiences time and again, the feminine path will never allow for true freedom, but only a semblance of power that is determined by how well she plays by the rules of the men around her. However, beyond this interest it is important to address the inherent contradiction in my analogy. In my script Nu is the violent figure, and Dolly is apparently anti-violence, whereas as I have pointed out I posit the feminist woman as anti-violence and the postfeminist woman as pro-violence. Ultimately, this exposes the falseness of this binary opposition at the level of the politics, the generational question and the characters themselves.

Even in my own language I have defined feminism as militant, and in the history of the feminist movement there have been a number of notable proponents of direct action.⁹ Tasker and Negra describe the postfeminist heroine as “playful” whereas the feminist antagonist is “deadly”. Although these words are used in a metaphorical sense, they also carry implications of unthreatening and violent behaviour, respectively. Postfeminism may have embraced the female action hero, but I will argue in this critical thesis that her violence is consistently undermined as non-serious, deferring (passively) to the male gaze; whereas there is an aggressive power to the feminist activist (that reminds us of the single-mindedness of the violent Nu), representative of how feminism provides other versions of activism to break out of constraints of passivity. Yet, again in contradiction to this attempt to pin these women down, although Dolly may pose herself in opposition to Nu and her violent behaviour, one of her first acts is to kill and from this point onwards she shows a distinct and serious propensity for violence. This movement between apparently contradictory positions ultimately reveals that these characters do not represent different sides of the debate, or encapsulate a viewpoint, or answer the questions raised; they simply embody the unresolved competition of ideas. When discussing representations of women in popular media, Tasker and Negra argue that,

⁸ The characters played by Anne Hathaway and Meryl Streep respectively in *The Devil Wears Prada* (Frankel, 2006) present a fairly unique example of this as it is arguable that the feminist comes off well, mostly due to the powerful performance given by Streep. Unfortunately, this is not generally the case – it is more usual to see the character that represents the feminist generation portrayed as a two-dimensional monster.

⁹ From the early 20th Century campaigns for emancipation and suffrage to the infamous Second Wave attack on the Miss America Pageant in 1968, these examples of direct action are significantly some of the best remembered moments in feminist history.

Postfeminist culture does not allow us to make straightforward distinctions between progressive and regressive texts. Nevertheless, it urgently requires us to develop new reading strategies to counteract the popularized feminism, figurations of female agency, and canny neutralization of traditional feminist critiques in its texts. (2007: 22)

Throughout this thesis I look at violent women who have, in endless combinations of ways, inspired and appalled feminists and postfeminists as I attempt to define my own position in this contested space.

Literature Review

As a critical and creative work this PhD is based on a wide range of research. The bibliography gives a full account of the diversity of this literature. However, in this section I will focus on the direct critical context of the feminist debate surrounding the violent woman in film. None of the research I have found in this literature deals with the violent woman from a perspective of creative practice; my own thesis is representative of my position as both a feminist critic and a writer of film.

Nothing can bring up the discussion of proper womanly traits like a violent woman.

The Violent Woman (Neroni, 2005: 60)

We find no simple reading of women's violence in a complicated world.

Reel Knockouts (McCaughey and King, 2001: 10)

The representation of woman in film and its effects has been a topic of feminist film criticism since the 1970s and Molly Haskell's seminal work, *From Reverence to Rape* (1974) serves as a foundation to my study. Haskell investigated the way cinema split the female into fantasy categories of good and bad and argued that the active/ambitious/competitive woman is traditionally seen and portrayed as monstrous.

Published a year later, Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) interrogated the constant cinematic adoption of the male gaze and condemned its use to

sexually objectify women. This dichotomy of the active male versus the passive female makes woman the “bearer of meaning, not the maker of meaning” (6). Mulvey revisited the subject in an essay “Afterthoughts on “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” inspired by *Duel in the Sun*” (1981), where she gave a second option to that of female viewers identifying with the passive woman: that female viewers could alternatively transsexually identify with the active male. This is important in relation to my own interest in writing a traditionally ‘masculine’ genre of film as a way of finding a creative space for myself as a woman.

Carol Clover’s influential work, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992), developed on Mulvey’s afterthoughts as it argued that young men can identify at a surprisingly thoughtful level with the female leads of many horror films. Further, Clover’s exploration of the Final Girl in B-Movie slasher films, the character who survives, gives an example of a woman who takes on the role of active protagonist.

Clover’s work is written against the backdrop of Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990) where Butler argued for gender as something performative as opposed to natural: “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly trained rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, or of a natural sort of being” (1990: 33). The continued interest in exploding a binary structure of gender – especially in terms of expectations related to masculine and feminine behaviour – is at the centre of most of the critical theory surrounding the violent woman; as such it is vital to the context of my own work. If Butler was calling for gender trouble then the violent woman in film is a response.

Yvonne Tasker’s *Spectacular Bodies* (1993) discussed shifts in representations of gender, class and race within the action film. The focus on representations of women was continued by Tasker in *Working Girls* (1998) where she looked at working woman in popular cinema with attention to action women and how they interfere with binary gender codes: “cross-dressing [of the female action hero] within and across genders reinforces the ambiguous gender identity of the female action hero, or rather points to the instability of a gendered system, and the production of an alternative space through that instability” (68-9). Tasker also implicitly referred to these women as competitors, claiming attributes and powers traditionally classified as masculine: “The female action hero poses a challenge to gendered binaries through her very

existence: her qualities of strength and determination and, most particularly, her labour and the body that enacts it, mark her out as ‘unfeminine’” (69).

Tasker’s argument referred back to an essay by Jeffrey A. Brown, “‘Gender and the Action Heroine’” (1996), where he argued that the female “hardbody” of action cinema is a character type that demonstrates the arbitrariness of gender attributes. Brown posits that the disturbance cuts both ways; the violent woman is not just unsettling for men, but for women too: “drastically different possible readings contribute to the suspicions that leave feminist critics teetering between praising and condemning the emergence of the action heroine” (65). Brown continued the debate in a 2004 essay with a new focus – the hypersexualised action woman. As an extension of his argument about the hardbody he expressed the opinion that: “modern action heroines are transgressive characters not only because their toughness allows them to critique normative standards of femininity but because their co-existent sexuality (epitomized in *Barb Wire*) destabilizes the very concept of gender traits as mutually exclusive” (50). Brown followed with the argument that the hypersexualised woman is an overt representation of the figure at the heart of every action heroine, the dominatrix, and positioned this figure as the ultimate destabiliser of gender definitions.¹⁰

So far all these critics have argued in favour of the violent woman in film as a figure that interferes with traditional binary representations of gender but a debate exists between those who approve of her postfeminist representations and those who do not. Two major collections of essays on the subject have been edited by critics who support Brown’s side of the debate. Martha McCaughey and Neal King introduced *Reel Women* (2001) by stating their case for the violent woman in general: “Depiction of women’s violence seems more horrific to many people, perhaps because we find far fewer of them than we find scenes of male violence. Moreover, cultural standards still equate womanhood with kindness and nonviolence, manhood with strength and aggression” (2). They moved on to pose some of the central questions surrounding the figure: “Are the heroes in this book “phallic women”, and if so, do they reproduce male domination? Do they contribute to resistance or replication?”(2) Their response was: “Rebellion never runs free of oppression, and we should stop trying to get more mileage out of the oft-repeated argument that women in the movies bear marks of their patriarchal, heterocentrist, and white-supremacist origins...we need to stop asserting that nothing is what it seems, that all of women’s attempts at resistance in the movies lead to

¹⁰ See Deleuze (1989) for an analysis of Sascha Masoch in terms of the dominatrix and male fantasy.

failure" (2-3). This argument did not draw a line between the use of violence and extreme sexuality. This was furthered by a question that explicitly aligned the unreal representations of female sexuality with an argument that presupposed female violence as equally unreal: "Can't we find use for ... [violent women] despite their being unreal male fantasies?" (16) Sherrie A. Innes developed this approach in her collection of essays, *Action Chicks*, as she posited that "these figures can be rooted in stereotyped female roles but can simultaneously challenge such images" (6). She concluded that "the media's tough women are teaching real women dramatically different ideas about what it means to be female. For example, being aggressive is desirable" (15). This again spoke of the power of hypersexuality but there is a conflict to be noted in this position between the freedom of being active, and the arguable constraints of being desirable. Neither of these critical editions is one-sided as they include essays from critics who questioned the power of the postfeminist action woman, and even the violent woman herself.

In Innes collection Claudia Herbst wrote about the gaming figure of Lara Croft (not the film character): "Women are supposed to ignore that the image of Lara was created neither by them nor for them" (28). She argued that the figure verges on pornographic fun but that violence is not a matter of play, rather it is part of a male system that only assigns power to the user as long as it is in the interests of the system-makers. She continued that these figures misrepresented women as invulnerable and that positioning them as combatants justified and legitimized women as targets of violence (37-9). Herbst concluded that "Lara's international fame should also be read as an indication of how starved the digital era is for a strong female character. For now, Lara may look like a sexy and powerful messenger; nevertheless, the voice of the female remains suspiciously absent from her mission" (42).

There are a number of other key texts that criticise the hypersexualised action hero but, unlike Herbst, still embrace her violence. In her book *The Violent Woman* (2005), Hilary Neroni argued against the supposed power of the hypersexualised heroine: "If a woman is seen as overly sexy, so sexy that it is a "problem", then her violence can be seen as part of this excess. Her violence is then contained and is far less threatening because its ultimate purpose is for the pleasure of the viewer" (78). Neroni separated the tools of sex and violence as she pointed out that complaints against film violence in general "ignore the complex way in which violence exists in society at every level, but especially the way in which violence is an integral part of changing gender expectations" (ix). She continued that the violent woman can either reveal

the antagonisms underlying dominant ideology because of the way she undermines binary gender expectations, or cover up these antagonisms by falling into a system of justification that supports dominant views of masculine/feminine opposition: “the representation of violence – and specifically the representation of the violent woman – is either ideological or revolutionary on the basis it takes up to antagonism” (11). Neroni contended that “the extraordinary lengths to which the narrative must go to explain or situate the violent woman reveals the trauma caused by her violence” (11). In other words Neroni argued that society refuses to justify female violence in general but rather works to position the violent woman as exceptional (specifically through postfeminist representations of hypersexuality or, in opposition to this, as non-female), while Neroni concluded that the threat the violent woman holds for society comes from the fact that she is not exceptional.

Neroni’s argument was supported by Ann Wilson in her preface to Shelley Scott’s work on the violent woman in theatre (2007): “Women who commit acts of violence, particularly murder, generate discomfort in our society... By casting murders as the “other” this question is avoided: how different from the norm are those who murder?” (i). Wilson developed this question to ask, “how can the category of “violent woman” be mobilized on ethically sound terms that do not cast violent women as the “other” who is outside the margins of society?” (iv). Scott followed Neroni’s position in the body of her work by arguing female violence as traumatic: “Ultimately, and perhaps ironically, it is a feminist project to demand that women have the same capacity for violence as men – not, in these cases [wholly negative murders], to in anyway celebrate or condone their monstrous deeds, but to further our understanding of both genders as fully human” (6-7).

Silke Andris and Ursula Frederick continued the discussion in terms of the non-superhero/everywoman in the introduction to their collection of essays, *Women Willing to Fight* (2007), explaining that her “choice to fight is her own, even when it appears to be shaped by other characters, or a sense of manifest destiny. This depiction of agency has a powerful effect on the meanings one may attribute to the fight and the ways in which the parameters of the fight are circumscribed. It also raises the fundamental question of motivation – why does this woman fight? For whom or what is she fighting for?” (5) This again raises the issues of motivation and justification in relation to violence and the violent woman. The writers also referred to the complexity of the debate: “She (successfully and sometimes unsuccessfully) embodies paradoxical or contradictory extremes such that feminist, as well as post-feminist,

notions of femininity and empowerment are displayed within a single persona... She is therefore not only inherently marked by her willingness to fight but also by the way she herself spurs on a lively and at sometimes heated battle over her meanings, readings and interpretations" (12-13).

Within Andris and Frederick's collection Barbara Creed embraced the concerns raised by Wilson as she positioned the female action hero as inextricably linked to the female other: "It is the female hero's journey, her becoming "other", that clearly distinguishes her narrative from that of the male hero. This is why her portrayal is different from that of the male and why she should never be reduced to a "pseudo" male, even, or particularly when, she takes up arms" (25). Like Neroni, Wilson and Scott, she saw this as a threat to the dominant order: "In contrast to the male hero, the woman warrior sets out on a path that creates disunities and disjunctions within the symbolic order" (35).

In *Super Bitches and Action Babes* (2007), Rikke Schubart raised the relationship between realism and identification: "identification is the corner stone of a feminist film theory criticizing the stereotypical roles offered women and demanding more nuanced female characters" (313). Schubart's position on the postfeminist action hero is that the "light" (312) approach that represents the violent woman in terms of "ironic playfulness" (313) is dangerous because it does not deal with anything serious or real. She summed this up by stating: "In postfeminist culture, women walk this tightrope balancing between the illusion and the real, between imitation and identification, between being an angel and being no one at all... Today women...cannot be feminists and enjoy the female heroes of popular culture. That takes a postfeminist willing to enter into a world of ambivalence" (316).

Tasker returned to the debate in 2004 when she edited a collection of essays, *The Action and Adventure Cinema*, with a section specific to gender. Then, in 2007, she produced another collection co-edited with Diane Negra entitled *Interrogating Postfeminism*. Tasker and Negra argued that postfeminist representations position feminists as monstrous, while postfeminist protagonists (including the postfeminist violent woman) go through a process of "unlearning" (12) feminism. Seen in the context of the vitality of the postfeminist protagonist the authors posited this "unlearning" as problematic and as such something which demands attention.

Two essays of Tiina Vares (2001; 2002) are another interesting source on this subject as she conducted focus group studies on selected female audiences. Her first essay looked at responses to action films and her second essay specifically investigated genre as a way of setting up expectations in regards to violence and women (225). It also looked at motivation and justification as ways of lessening the transgressive nature of female violence (224).

Although there is little explicit focus on the subject of competition within this debate I see it as an implicit element underpinning the interest of most of the critical texts. In regards to the violent woman in film, Andris and Frederick noted, "Although fighting need not express violence, it is largely in the physical embodiment of challenge that the "fight" is construed" (2007: 10). In other words, the "fight" that these protagonists engage in refers to the competition of their violent combat.

Script Genesis

Feminism and postfeminism as represented in the above literature review outline part of the context of my script. In this following section I will provide a more personal set of influences. There are of course many but in the context of this critical discussion (and in the interests of brevity) I have chosen to focus on only a few key examples. And so I start with what came first.

Since childhood my two favourite film idols have been John Wayne and Marilyn Monroe. This is not unusual, given their status as icons. But considering I wanted to *be* both of them, perhaps, on reflection, there is something more complex here than first meets the eye. And for me Monroe was certainly about the eye. It would be a lie to say that I was not captivated by her appearance. Is that not the whole point? Or is there something more? My favourite Monroe film is *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Hawks, 1953), where she plays the character of Lorelei Lee (though it is arguable that the majority of both Monroe and Wayne's screen roles are simply extensions of their Hollywood Star personas). I know that from the first time I watched Lee I was wooed by her attitude. Apparently a symbol of everything that stands against feminist values, I would argue that Lee also goes beyond the hypersexualised postfeminist woman. Lee is a woman who is entirely motivated by getting ahead; a woman who can stand on a stage with the spotlight in her eye and still see a diamond inside a man's

pocket; a woman who has no real emotion for the men she preys upon. When referring to her millionaire fiancé, Gus Esmond, Lee says to her best friend Dorothy (played by Jane Russell), "I really do love Gus", she is only speaking in the terms of the world she ironically inhabits. It is a world where a man's love can be based on something as superficial as having a woman that looks like Monroe or Russell; it is also a world where a woman can find some semblance of power through marrying a man like Esmond, "He never wins an argument, always does anything I ask, and he's got the money to do it with. How can I help loving a man like that?"

In the penultimate scene of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, Esmond's father tracks Lee down and accuses her of being a gold digger:

Esmond Snr – Have you got the nerve to stand there and expect me to believe that you don't want to marry my son for his money?

Lee – It's true.

Esmond Snr – Then what do you want to marry him for?

Lee – I want to marry him for *your* money.

In her response Lee is not being naive, rather she displays her savvy depths – and her awareness of the rules of the game:

Esmond Snr – You admit that all you're after is money?

Lee – No I don't. Aren't you funny. Don't you know that a man being rich is like a girl being pretty? You might not marry a girl just because she's pretty, but my goodness doesn't it help? And if you had a daughter, wouldn't you rather she didn't marry a poor man?... You'd want her to have the most wonderful things in the world and be very happy. Well why is it wrong for me to want those things?

Father – ...Say, they told me you were stupid. You don't sound stupid to me.

Lee – I can be smart when it's important. But most men don't like it.

In a world where she does not have a father or husband to protect her, her own innate resourcefulness flourishes. In a world where she is cast as other in someone else's game, she can only come out on top by knowing their rules better than they do. To the men around her Lee should be a cheerleader on the sidelines, not a part of the competition, and never at the centre as a contender to win. But winning is what she is out to do. Behind her apparent lack

of brains, behind the peroxide and lipstick, there is a mind at work. Beneath her superficial appeal, Lee has substance; beneath the style there is something real. She may provide admirable comedy and entertainment but it is Lee as competitor who captures my imagination.

And John Wayne? Well I like the way he looks too. However, my first exposure to him was as the fat old Rooster Cockburn and again it is about the attitude, and the substance of what is hidden beneath that attitude. He is the ultimate contender. Tough, strong, and even when sodden with alcohol he is a master at what he does: the lone rider who always gets his man. Not so different from Monroe's character after all. As a child *True Grit* (Hathaway, 1969) was my other favourite film. Westerns are often described as a 'masculine' genre and in the sense that they tend to be populated with macho men it is hard to argue against this label. Yet I love westerns because I get a thrill out of horses and guns and violence and the strong, silent hero. I do not need to be a man to enjoy all of these things. And I am drawn to the character of the lone rider, who lives as an outsider, displaced from society – a position that traditionally has been dictated to be the domain of a different other, the woman. (I also argue that this can be the world of the writer. Further discussion of the lone rider character as a development from the heroic/anti-heroic literary figure of the wanderer and this character's relation to the writer as a Romantic/existentialist other can be found in my concluding chapter.) However, as a British female it can be hard to find a space to locate myself in the most traditional of American male-centred genres. So perhaps *True Grit* was my favourite because of the character of Maddy – the tom-boy girl who, just like Cockburn, has true grit. Throughout the film Cockburn and this girl-child are partnered – sometimes as opposites, sometimes as an extension of one another. When Maddy pursues Cockburn by fighting off a boatman and driving her horse into a river, Cockburn watches in admiration and states, "By God, she reminds me of me." Maddy is my connection to Wayne, to wanting to be like him. And she is a formidable competitor. When she goes to collect water the Texas Ranger, Le Beouf asks Cockburn if she is safe on her own:

Cockburn – Well safer for her than whatever she meets – man or beast.

Maddy is a girl who can hold her own. She fights for what she wants and refuses to be confined by conventions. In the final scene when Cockburn comes to the farm she shows him the family plot and explains she wants him to take the place next to her. He points out that it

should be for her family. She dismisses this – the implication is that she does not foresee having one. Maddy demonstrates time and again that she is a girl who will not play by the rules as they have been determined for her. In this she is not just a character that meets with Cockburn's approval, she is someone for women to constructively identify with and as such she meets with my approval too.

The characters represented by Monroe and Wayne are different types of competitors. But not that different. The key similarity between Wayne and Monroe is that they both have power, albeit through different means. And they both understand how things work, even if they make different choices. Surprisingly, the thing that separates them most is that Wayne somehow feels softer. He usually plays the big man with a heart of gold. Physically he can be gruff, at times dangerous. If we were going to compare his style to any woman it would seem more accurate to stand him next to the deep-voiced, wide-shouldered, worldly play girl Russell. But like Russell's character Dorothy in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, he is all softness inside. Dorothy falls in love; Cockburn is loyal to the teenage girl, the woman in need, or whoever is deserving. Although he is a man who lives by the gun, I would argue that Wayne's characters are by no means more imbued with violence than those played by Monroe. Lee's allegiance is to the person who can help her most. We know that if Lee lost her millionaire, she would pick up another on the next corner. Under all that warm flesh there is something necessarily cool and calculating about her, a woman far removed from the traditional ideals of feminine kindness. But this goes further. I was surprised when reading back over my own opening description of Lee to notice how much she sounds like a formidable action hero. The description of her as "the only girl in the world who can stand on a stage with a spotlight in her eye and still see a diamond inside a man's pocket" is spoken by Dorothy in the film. And in these terms Lee sounds like my own lone rider, Nu. Ultimately, Monroe's characters do not enact violence in the way of Wayne or Nu, but her own body – from the peroxide, to the corsets and stiletto heels – is a site of self-inflicted violence. Her lack of real emotion when it comes to the men she 'loves' is, like Nu, reflective of a personality formed out of detachment – she has experienced firsthand how this game works. And as such she is unafraid of competing for the things she needs to win. Lady Beekman, the wife of a diamond mine owner, shows her tiara off to Lee and Dorothy:

Lady Beekman – You might be interested in my tiara. I always carry it with me – afraid to leave it in the stateroom.

Dorothy – And you're not afraid to show it to Lorelei?

Dorothy's response reminds us of Cockburn's insight into Maddy – that nobody is safe when there is something Lee or Maddy wants. However, after Lee's first reaction of setting her eyes on this new prize, her second reaction is to try to force the tiara around her own throat –

Lee – How do you put it around your neck?

Dorothy – You don't, lovey, it goes on your head.

Lee – You must think I was born yesterday.

Again this appears another example of an air-headed remark, but Lee recognises the binds of the jewels she seeks. Diamonds are a girl's best friend in this world, but only because, like her, they represent a commodity that, unlike her, has a long shelf-life. Human relationships have little value in a world where the rule makers are not your friends. The idea of a tiara as a crown – a symbol of power – is ridiculous to her. Instead she automatically expects it to inhabit its true form – a collar designed for the domesticated or tamed woman. This raises the other difference between the characters of Wayne and Monroe: Wayne may be player of the sad and lonely; Monroe is often a player of the tragic. And just like the characters she played, Monroe herself appears to have been a winner of moment to moment battles. In the character of Lee, Monroe plays a woman who knows her own strengths – her ability to come out on top in certain competitions – as shown by the way she muses over the apparently unobtainable tiara she has only just encountered:

Lee – I wonder what I'll wear it with when I... How does it look?

Dorothy – Exactly like trouble.

But, ultimately, Monroe was not a winner. She tried to compete but she lost because she was involved in a game that was not of her making. There is a sense in many of Monroe's films that she recognised this. Just like Nu, as Monroe let this competition take her over in order to come out on top we understand that her victory meant nothing. She could never really win. She knew, as we know, that the world she was conquering would also be the very thing that destroyed her.

All of my scripts are about women who are trapped – by society and by themselves – in the position of other. This state of entrapment limits their ability and inclination to compete. There is an obvious relation here to Monroe and this reflects the massive impact her persona, and the illusive person underneath, has had on my work. However, beyond film stars, and even film itself, there are a number of other creative influences that have contributed to this specific project. With limited space I choose to look at one that is particularly central – Ibsen's women. *The Competitors* is my sixth completed screenplay and my work immediately prior to it was a script called *The Gilded Cage*. This was my rewriting of *A Doll's House*. It presents a central protagonist, Ella, who feels trapped by her job, her husband and her father, until she is mistakenly kidnapped. The result is a discovery that her kidnapping is far less imprisoning than the life she has previously been living. At the end of the story she is freed from captivity and returns home, only to leave again. The final scene is of her husband speaking to her from another room and the sound of the door closing. At the start of my script there is a Virginia Wolf quotation (2002: 25-6):

INSERT QUOTATION: "...and I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out..."

The door SLAMS SHUT.

In this introduction the door slams as Ella walks into the house. The film ends with the door slamming shut again as she leaves for good. This first quotation then appears on the screen followed by its second part:

INSERT QUOTATION 2: "...and I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in."

FADE OUT:

Being locked out at least, as with the lone rider, provides the potential to wander and to explore. But to be locked in is to be trapped and confined. By escaping her locked cage Ella enters into the competition of society, a position from which she has the freedom to determine her own self.

When Ella walks out she knows she is pregnant. As I was writing *The Gilded Cage* I had in mind my next project as a form of removed sequel. Set in the past, what happens to Ella (my Nora) after she leaves? In other words, what happens to Ella once she has won the battle with her family and has gained the courage to enter into competition with the outside world? Nu

would be the answer to that question. I even thought about the fact that my original plan for the 1890s US setting of *The Competitors* as a western would actually have made Nu a contemporary of Ibsen's Nora. However, I later decided that relocating the story to a future Britain would move it into an imaginative space that, as a British writer, I could occupy more fully.

The other Ibsen play that influenced my writing was *Hedda Gabler*. If my question, what happens to Nora after she leaves her doll's house, can be seen as having an influence on Nu's backstory at the start of *The Competitors* then Hedda, far more than Nora, is my influence in terms of Nu's character. Counter to the less forgiving readings of Hedda Gabler's character I believe that she is a hero whose potential is destroyed by the time that entraps her. This is the argument made by Joan Templeton in her book *Ibsen's Women* (2001). And one image from the play comes to mind – the description of Hedda on horseback:

You can understand that, can't you, with General Gabler's daughter? Think what she was accustomed to in the General's day. Do you remember her riding along the road with her father? In that long black habit? And feathers in her hat?
([1890] 1961: 265)

In this description Hedda is not forced into the role of other. With feathers in her hat Hedda is as close as she could be to a General herself – a fighter, a leader, a winner of wars. However, even in this glimpse of possibility she is still only allowed the status because of her father. In her black attire we can see a shadow of another hero whose tragedy was written in the death of his father – Hamlet. Hedda is a true tragic hero – what makes her great is what causes her downfall. Her fate (perhaps like Monroe's) is to meet her end at the hands of her own perverted violent act – something carried out in frustration and despair. The determined hero, irrevocably damaged by her own inheritance, appears. A further nod to this kind of hero is maintained in my script by the insertion of *Madame Bovary* – another horse riding woman fired and destroyed by the time into which she is born. Out of all these women comes Nu.

And out of Nu comes Dolly. In the end it is Dolly who is the greatest survivor. Nu is Monroe, Hedda Gabler, Emma Bovary – a fierce competitor, a winner, and a tragic hero. Dolly is Wayne – the one who rides away, the one who survives. However, this is only because she has learned from Nu. Dolly is called Dolores Lochlain because it means sorrowful stranger and I

felt this embodied the character of the lone rider, the thing she was destined to become. But Nora – as the initial doll of the doll’s house – is also Dolly’s namesake. In the play’s final act Nora says she is – “Taking off this fancy dress... Yes... I’ve changed” (Ibsen, [1879] 2008: 78...79). This relates to Dolly’s acceptance of the dress – another item, like the diamonds, that can be read as symbolic of female suppression – in the final act of my script, only to discard it for her own clothes. Then, in the final scene, she puts on Nu’s androgynous habit as she takes on the mantle of the lone rider. In Nu I have not just written what comes after Nora leaves, but, yet again, in Dolly, I have rewritten the play itself. When Dolly rides off into the wilderness it is not as someone like Wayne, who is returning to the unknown, but rather someone departing on their first lone journey – Dolly as Nora. Does that mean that Dolly must become Nu just as Ella did? Apparently she is already on that trail as she rides away. This seems to represent a vicious circle, where any woman who leaves is destined to become a tragic hero. However, in Aristotelian terms, tragedy can be elevating; from the very start, (and now at the very end) I believed there was something uplifting in Dolly’s final ride away from the homestead, even if (or perhaps because) her destination is undecided. The inspiration of the final departure is there at the end of *A Doll’s House*, as described in *A Study of Six Plays by Ibsen*,

if the end of the play is to be taken seriously, then clearly the greatest battle of Nora’s life has already been decided and... nothing thereafter is likely to deter her from doing what she is determined to do: and that is to think out, in independence and solitude, her position in a world whose general laws she has begun to apprehend and means to fathom. (Downs, 1950: 118)

Dolly is a competitor. She has won a battle against her own victimhood. Now she plans to continue competing in the world. But in rewriting this same story over and over what am I trying to achieve? Again this relates to the way that as a writer, an outsider, I can identify with the same dilemmas as the protagonists of my screenplay (a focus of the conclusion of this thesis). I am uplifted by the endings that show a woman gaining courage to go out into the unknown – to learn the laws and hopefully to change them. But, even more, to turn away from a safe (restrictive) order and face the potential for catastrophe and opportunity to be found in chaos. This is something I fear doing every day. By coming to my desk and writing I am stepping out of a world of order and facing the brink of chaos. I stand at the edge of an unfathomable competition. I stare down into a creative abyss – a world of possibilities that

often feels like a void. And one of the things that bothers me most about my own relation to my work and even to the film industry is how unknowable it seems to me. And yet in the stories that I write my characters are ineluctably drawn to this space. Which means I am as well.

The Films

At the core of this thesis is the discussion of a number of films. McRobbie makes the argument, "The media have become the key site for defining codes of sexual conduct. They cast judgement and establish the rules of play" (2004:31). This point of view provides one reason why I want to critically investigate the specific examples I have chosen from mainstream cinema. In this thesis I discuss films with an ambition to be popular. All of the examples I take engaged with significant audiences which is of interest to me because I want my own film to have a wide reach due to my feminist ambitions for influence. I am also interested in the way media and cinema reflect our cultural beliefs about gender and sexuality. However, I am primarily engaging with the mainstream tradition because I am writing about the films that created the context out of which my own script was born. And my experiences (and influences) in terms of film are decidedly mainstream. Obviously, there are an ever increasing number of examples of violent women in popular cinema that could be of interest. As a result of this the films I engage with are by no means meant to be an exhaustive line-up but rather represent a select few of the many films that have influenced me and this script.

In Chapter One of this critical thesis I discuss some of the iconic action women of mainstream cinema – Ripley (the *Alien* series [Scott, 1979; Cameron, 1986; Fincher, 1992; Jeunet, 1997]), Sarah Connor (*Terminator 2* [Cameron, 1991]), and Thelma and Louise (*Thelma & Louise* [Scott, 1991]). I first watched each of these films or series during my teen years and as such the female protagonists had a large influence on my developing understanding of female agency. As I revisit them now I have discovered that they all work around the subjects of competition and violence, in particular in their representations of self versus other. Although with hindsight I am critical of certain aspects of the characterisation of these women, I also believe all of these action icons still present powerful female role models for women today.

In Chapter Two I investigate some contemporary action women who have influenced my writing – Alice (the *Resident Evil* series [Anderson, 2002 and 2010; Witt, 2004; Mulcahy, 2007]), Beatrix Kiddo (*Kill Bill I/II* [Tarantino, 2003 and 2004]), and Jen and Shu Lien (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* [Lee, 2000]). I discuss the postfeminist phenomenon of the hypersexualised action woman (I use the example of Lara Croft from the *Tomb Raider* films [West, 2001; de Bont, 2003]) and compare her with the above protagonists. I look at the representations of self versus other, surrounding the competitive subject, and see each of these women as potential alternatives to the fantasy hyperstylisation of women and their bodies in contemporary action films. I find that the focus on style over substance in the first two sets of films makes them ultimately disappointing but that *Crouching Tiger* merges stylisation and the real in a way that presents new possibilities in terms of the action woman.

In Chapter Three I move from the influence of stylised action women to the realist portraits of violent women in popular cinema. Lee from *Monster* (Jenkins, 2003) and Nina from *Black Swan* (Aronofsky, 2010) both represent violent, competitive women who struggle in their designated roles as other to male dominated society. Further, it is in the bringing together of realist and expressionist styles that I find two original and thought-provoking portraits that have had huge influence over my work.

In my Conclusion I return to the practice of writing my own script. At the end of a thesis that analyses some of the key films that have influenced my writing of *The Competitors* I look at how the central ideas discussed have informed my creative work. This enquiry is at the centre of this project and my final chapter will provide a conclusion through the analysis of my own creative practice as I attempt to finally situate my script within the context of all of the above influences.

Creative/Critical Subjects

Competition

The Competitors is a working out of, and an attempt to come to terms with, certain constitutive features of western society. I have written a script about women and violence;

this has carried in its train a way of imagining competition and antagonism. In each of the 13 drafts of *The Competitors* I have furthered my understanding of the motivation of my characters, a subject that I will return to in my Conclusion. The work of my script is a thinking through of competition, not just in terms of analysis but also invention. I have learnt that competition is equivocal and (in western society) ubiquitous. As such it is a subject with immense ramifications and it is not the purpose of this thesis to develop a theory of competition. Rather, I am interested in investigating the subject of competition in specific relation to the violent woman protagonist in popular cinema.

My interest in competition is immediately apparent in the title of my script, *The Competitors*. Just as competition holds many meanings, my script involves competition in many different forms. The narrative of my script engages with the concept of a 'battle of the sexes'; it is built upon the competition between humans and nature, civilisation and wilderness, and this is reflected in the central theme: order versus chaos. The primary plot follows a developing competition between the two female characters who take on the roles of protagonist and antagonist to one another; a secondary plot shows a competition between father and son in the characters of Paw and Red; the motivation for many of the characters is survival through competition. On the levels of structure, theme, subject and character, competition is central. None of this is more apparent than in the character of Nu. She stands outside of the patriarchal society of this dystopian future as an antagonist to its proponents. She is other to the violent male and the social structure he represents. However, she is also entirely invested in violence and, as such, is engaged in the game of this world – she is a competitor. But as someone who represents both protagonist and antagonist, Nu is not simply a competitor, she is also a site of competition. It is within her that many of the competing concepts that inform the script collide. This is most obviously illustrated in her androgynous appearance – a space in-between traditionally determined ideas of masculinity and femininity; and it is most subtly illustrated in her elusive motivation: it is only in her final acts that we see Nu is completely fuelled not by love or revenge or anger, but by competition.¹¹ My script is built upon the contested space formed by the tension between apparently opposing positions, and as such Nu is the microcosm to the macrocosm of the whole narrative of competition. And her competition, as well as the competition for most of the other characters in the script, is represented through her use of violence.

¹¹ See Appendix B for examples of how this motivation developed through the drafting of the script.

In the activity of contextualising my creative work I notice that the films I have chosen to investigate in this thesis all have a heightened awareness of competition of one kind or another. For example there is the competition of character versus character; the competition of character versus the system; the competition of character versus a monster; the internal competition within characters. The idea of competition is often used in western societies (in particular those influenced by American ideology) as something to be positively encouraged. As with Emerson's quotation in the first epigraph to this research doctorate, it is a means to being your best self: "like an Olympian, to the great games, where the first-born of the world are the competitors" ([1841] 1979: 119). But competition is also innately linked to conflict, a wish to succeed at all costs, as voiced by Daniel in *There Will be Blood* in the second epigraph: "I have a competition in me. I want no one else to succeed. I hate most people" (Anderson, 2007). This is a fantasy that has haunted the philosophy of western civilisation. It is best summarised by Thomas Hobbes' in his chapter of *Leviathan* where he wrote of the natural condition of mankind outside of a civil state as "a war...of everyman, against everyman" ([1651] 1997: 100). In terms of our society's beliefs about human evolution Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* introduced the world to the idea of natural selection in 1859. In a later edition Darwin took up the more pointed coined phrase, the survival of the fittest. And our understanding of human psychology is fundamentally underpinned by Freudian concepts of the struggle between the conscious and unconscious mind, the unconscious being the seat of our primitive drives: sex, rivalry and violence. These ideas all represent the understanding of civilisation as an edifice that covers the chaos of human nature. It is out of the context of this widespread societal anxiety that I am writing.

Freud's Oedipus complex, in which a son wishes to kill his father and possess his mother, takes its name from Sophocle's classic Greek tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*. So these concepts of competition predate the modern era but they continue on throughout English drama. Returning to the symbolism of the crown, think of what happens to the world when King Lear gives up the power to rule. When order is removed, the civilised world crumbles into chaos. The tragic drama explodes our ideas of justice (as imposed by a civilised order) and forces its heroes to play within the chaos of chance, hazard and fate. However hard Oedipus tries to compete with the Gods we know that his fate to kill his father and sleep with his mother is already written. This is his tragedy. Just as Monroe's tragedy was the end determined for her by the Gods (the rule makers) of her world; and as Nu's ability to be a mother is destroyed by the competition for her child. However, it is noticeable that the stories and theories which

underpin our modern conception of society and humanity are predominantly written by men and tend to deal explicitly with male competition for survival and power (*King Lear* stands as an arguable exception to this). In these writings women were never determined to be part of this competition – rather they were positioned at the sidelines – a classic example of the centralised male self and the displaced female as other. And the rewards of competition propagated this positioning. However, in *The Competitors* and in all of the films I discuss in this thesis I perceive the violent woman to be entering into the competition. This puts her in a position of conflict with the system, purely because she has decided to play. The use of violence by women – something traditionally determined as the ultimate symbol of male power – further antagonises and destabilises this system. Once women become competitors they are rivals. In other words the competitive, violent woman is a threat to the male system of power. It is at this level that the subject of competition underpins my discussion of all of the films I analyse in this thesis.

Violence

The competition in my script, as with much popular cinema, is represented through the enactment of violence. However, it is important to be explicit that within the parameters of this critical work I am only investigating violence of a physical form. In my opinion women are not generally expected to be, or accepted as being, physically violent unless there is a careful balancing of motivation and justification surrounding their violent act. This is an argument I develop in the following section and throughout this thesis. However, I also believe that women have a far less taboo relationship with other forms of violence. In fact, I would state that women have a long history of being viewed as perpetrators of emotional, psychological and verbal violence. In the case of the last of these, the metaphor of the sharp tongue presents an example of the form of violence that society expects and accepts from women. Violence is complex and it is not always possible to separate its forms: often when it is enacted it is done so in more than one way and this is something that I have attempted to engage with in my script. But although words can wound and any form of violence is serious, the threat of physical violence is the ultimate means to power and control. In this thesis I will argue why I believe society tries to deny women as agents of physical violence. As such I reiterate that when I write about violence and women in this thesis I am discussing it in its physical form.

Competition and violence are implicated in one another. However, they are also the subject of a seemingly endless effort to set them apart. Is this possible? There is an inherent competition in violence. But is there also an inherent violence in competition? My script and this thesis are both attempts to interrogate these questions. Violence is an ideal extension of competition as it is also equivocal and ubiquitous. But beyond this similarity lies a far more integral connection. Western cultures generally have a conceptual understanding of competition through a number of metaphors, as will be reinforced by my own use of language when writing on the subject. There is the metaphor of the game: for example we play by the rules and we look for a level playing field. A second metaphor often interrelated to that of the game is war: competition in terms of strategy, gaining ground, fighting a battle on different fronts, etc. But most significant to this context, and often bound to ideas of competition as both a game and a war, is the conception of competition through the metaphor of the violent act. When we speak of competition we often speak of a *battle*. We *attack* with the purpose of *beating* the opposition. Competition can be *life and death*; we look to *wipe out* our opponents, or to *bring them down*, at least to *kick some ass*; we *demolish* or *annihilate* our competition; and when we *defend* in competition we *struggle* and put up *resistance*.

In their work *Metaphors we Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson describe an argument as something conceptually understood through the metaphor of a war. In the following excerpt from their work I replace “argument” and “war”, and any examples relevant to these, with “competition” and “the violent act” respectively:

... [COMPETITION] is partially structured, understood, performed, and talked about in terms of ... [THE VIOLENT ACT]. The concept is metaphorically structured, the activity is metaphorically structured, and, consequently, the language is metaphorically structured.
Moreover, this is the *ordinary* way of having ... [a competition] and talking about one. The normal way for us to talk about ... [beating someone] is to use the words, ... [“beat someone”]. Our conventional ways of talking about ... [competitions] presuppose a metaphor we are hardly ever conscious of. The metaphor is not merely in the words we use – it is in our very concept of ... [competition]. The language of ... [competition] is not poetic, fanciful, or rhetorical, it is literal. We talk about ... [competitions] that way because we

conceive of them that way – and we act according to the way we conceive of things. (1980: 5)

Lakoff and Johnson point out that for each of us this metaphorical understanding of a concept is “tied to our culture” (9). As such I can only make this statement about the conceptual relationship between competition and violence in reference to the English-speaking world. Certainly, my understanding of competition in terms of this thesis is founded on its portrayal in mainstream (U.S.) film and it is true that different western and global cultures have a different relationship to competition, with some advocating co-operation as the alternative to the ideals of competition.

Just as competition needs opposition, violence is reliant on both a violent subject and an object to enact violence upon. Further, violence, like competition, can be seen as something built on the pretext of exchange. This is an ethic of capitalism (the belief that the individual can succeed if they work hard and compete) and capitalism (via the American Dream) is built on society’s justification of certain forms of violence (Neroni, 2005). However, this model of the capitalist exchange foresees the potentially negative cycle of both competition and violence. Competition breeds competition; violence breeds violence – as is seen throughout human history, and is represented in the history of drama, from the pre-capitalist dramas of the Greek Tragedies to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* – “Blood will have blood” (Shakespeare, [1623] 1998: 989, 3iv, ln 121) – to contemporary action cinema. And just as Nu is immersed in violence, she is addicted to competition – she defines herself by winning. This is why she cannot stop competing; and she cannot stop killing, until she herself is dead. This questions the rewards of hard work. Whether we call it fate or an unlevel playing field, some people can never achieve what they want, however hard they work. And when the chaos of violence is brought into play, the order of hard work means nothing.

There is an inherent competition in violence which mainstream cinema taps into. Hollywood films are often sites of competing ideas and as such are successful at representing the anxieties of their audience. Audiences are fascinated and fearful of the oft-told story that revolves around violence because it is capable of undermining dominant ideology, as well as reinforcing it. Violence is only part of the structure of society when carried out by certain people in certain ways. In other words, violence can be justified under certain conditions; under others it is perceived as a threat. This is why headlines like, “Woman looter among 12

most wanted rioters" (Davenport, 2011: 1), still make for front page news. To us, a woman being violent is the news of the day because it disturbs a belief system that posits women as non-violent in opposition to men as violent. The riots took over the news because they made us confront our fears of chaos through their revelation of how fragile our sense of order is. The images of rampaging hoards of (what were assumed to be) disenfranchised working class youths from predominantly ethnic minorities tapped into society's greatest fears about class and race antagonism. Interestingly, when it was discovered that some of these rioters were employed or university students this elicited a huge amount of coverage and debate as it represented a further destabilising of our sense of order. And a single woman looter (actively involved in rioting) must pose an exponentially greater threat, as demonstrated by the fact that out of all the rioters, she was awarded her own front page headline.

As with competition, the socially acceptable forms of violence are never truly equal in terms of opportunity, fairness and responsibility; there is a crucial distinction to be made between what society determines as legitimate and illegitimate violence. Further, supposedly legitimate forms of violence tend to have an imbalance that disallows equal competition and creates the opposition of abuser (dominant) versus victim (submissive). However, violence also exposes the antagonisms at play against this system when wielded by those (others) who society positions on the submissive side of this binary opposition. Mainstream cinema (often a benchmark of socially accepted standards in terms of *how* it represents characters and their actions) allows a man to be violent in certain circumstances – for instance, to protect/avenge himself or another. This kind of violence is justifiable. It is less acceptable for a woman to be violent in such circumstances; rather we would expect a female character (or a woman in real life) to look to a man to physically protect/avenge her. However, there are again levels of justification that society allows. For instance, we do allow for women to become violent in order to protect and sometimes to avenge their children. One reason for this is because it shows a maternal instinct that situates the woman firmly in the domestic sphere. It reinforces her as a 'good' mother. As a result, the figure of the violent woman that stands outside of these kinds of socially acceptable justifications poses a threat to us as it undermines our beliefs about what it means to be a woman (and consequently what it means to be a man [Neroni, 2005]). The system of justification works hard to maintain the status quo by collating justification with certain acceptable motivations. It is when violent women are motivated by things other than the desire to protect their offspring that the threat they pose to the social

order is not diffused. This is the kind of violent female protagonist that interests me the most as she stands in competition with the currently imbalanced system.

In this critical work I take the position that in the hands of women competitive violence represents a threat to the male hierarchical order. If we look at the traditional binary construct of masculine versus feminine I have already argued that masculinity is often defined by violence. What makes it more interesting is that this binary categorisation system also extends to competition. Traditionally described masculine traits such as aggressiveness, single-mindedness, arrogance, dominance are all definitions of the competitor. The opposing traditionally feminine traits of gentleness, empathy, lack of confidence, submissiveness are definitions of those who sit out of competition. The competitive, violent woman in film stands as an antagonist to this reactionary viewpoint because as a competitor, and through violence, she is an active threat. It takes all of the aforementioned masculine traits to make a successful action protagonist. In order for women to be represented fully in popular cinema we must accept women's innate potential to act in ways that have been conventionally defined as masculine. This brings us to the space of possibility where these binary opposites come together. The woman protagonist who occupies this space is engaging in the game and she is doing so in a way that will allow her to become a leader, a rule-maker. This is a true threat because it is a path to change. It is how a system structured to re-produce male dominance can be rebalanced. This may be an idealised theory (like the American Dream) but by interrogating it we move a step closer to enabling women to compete.

But what about violence? It is perhaps strange that up until this point I have not fully confronted the ethics of violence in film. For example, the most successfully violent person is the most powerful, and as such violence has been the most successful means of subjection throughout history. Therefore, to glorify it, and perhaps even to engage with it – as argued by the battered women's movement – is to condone abuse and cruelty. My interest in viewing violent films, or even writing violent films, is not representative of my own approval of violence. But then what does it represent? Part of the journey of this combined research project has been to discover what fascinates me about violence. I do not support vigilantism and yet this behaviour is at the centre of my script. I can argue that the characters are justified in their actions because of the context in which their violence is carried out – but is this not just another level of justification, and does it not simply present these women (Nu included) as victims acting in righteous self-defence? I have come to the conclusion that my interest in

violence is not simply as a tool for revenge or survival. Just like competition, I believe that there is potential for violence in all of us. Nu is not a superhero but an everywoman. In this script I am simply looking at the idea of violence as a very real part of our lives. This is not purely a gender issue. Neither is it an issue that is going away. As such it is vital to engage with it and so in the following chapters I interrogate this question of the violent woman.

Lines of Enquiry

Stylisation versus Realism

In this thesis I use the terms stylisation and realism again and again, in particular in relation to depictions of violence. However, it is important to define the exact meaning I invest in them within the context of this discussion. When I refer to stylised films, characters or violence the term is open to criticism as, by its nature, all film is stylised. As such, when I speak of the realism of certain films, it is arguable I am misrepresenting works that rely a great amount on spectacle. So to make it clear, when I speak of stylisation I am referring to a representation that is ultimately superficial – to do with appearance over content. When I speak of realism I am talking about representations that take us into complex motivations and deeper psychological explorations.¹² As an example of this I can take the setting of my script. The dystopian future could easily be argued as stylised (in that it is not representing something real), as could the often expressionist use of weather and landscape. However, in this imaginative space I am able to lay bare what I perceive to be the truth of power and violence in our real world. By removing the social structures of law and order I can reveal what lies underneath the coverings of our own society – I can acknowledge the violence that men commit against women. It is all too easy to forget that most women in the world are subjected to male domination and violence and that even in the ‘civilised west’ there is a covert justification of male violence taking place.

This is not to counter the argument that women are just as capable of violence as men, but rather to expose the fact that male violence is more accepted and therefore more prevalent than female violence, which results in the imbalance of a gendered opposition between abuser

¹² This is not the same as Realism, but possibly closer to Naturalism, in technical film terms.

and abused. One of the problems with the anti-violent stance of many feminists is it interferes with the possibilities of female agency. “In the name of realism, feminists have neglected images of women as potentially active, violent, or vengeful” (McCaughey and King, 2001: 15). Here McCaughey and King, who argue for the value of the violent woman, also reinforce the point of view that she is a fictional construct, part of a collection of images that represent “white male fantasies” (11). By exposing and interrogating this tendency towards a gendered categorisation of violence that is often supported by advocates of equality between the sexes I am not only lessening the constructed gap between men and women, I am also exploring the complexities of the space in-between. In other words I am asking the question: does the violent woman have to be fully stylised, or can she also be a realist representation? If so, where can we find successful examples of this and what do they tell us about the meanings of violence? So when I speak of stylisation I am talking about a tendency to gloss over, and when I speak of realism I am not talking about the technical style of a film but rather stating my belief in its substance, in particular in terms of its portrait of the truths of human violence and competition. This is of most interest when societal justifications of female violence do not align with realist character motivations because it is in this form of realist representation that we discover something at stake. However, to reiterate, as all film is inherently stylised I am not dealing with realism and stylisation as opposites, but as forms that are often implicated in one another.

Self versus Other

The primary theme to *The Competitors* is order versus chaos. Time and again this displays itself in my script through the competition of self versus other and as such this is a central line of interrogation in my thesis. In many cultures these two sides are integral and complimentary to one another but, in mainstream western cinematic tradition, they are often represented in opposition. This is most apparent in the binary competition between protagonist and antagonist. However, my script is again reflective of my own interest in the overlapping of these apparently binary opposites. The idea of the other is conjured up from a position of selfhood. It is often thought of as the dark side to what the self perceives to be light. However, it can also be what is longed for, as in Adam in paradise, or what is actually a part of the self, as in Freud’s explanation of the uncanny.

In Freud's work "The Uncanny", an essay about concepts of self and other that has been hugely influential to our social understanding of the idea of the alter ego, Freud looked at the uncanny as doppelganger – a figure that can represent both the dark other and the perfected self. To begin with Freud analysed different meanings of the German word *heimlich* (*unheimlich* being the word for uncanny, so *heimlich* in some senses representing the self). One interesting definition he gave was "of animals: tame, associating familiarly with humans; antonym:wild" ([1919] 2003: 126). Here we can see a direct connection with the idea of *heimlich* as something sub-human but domesticated. Later, a development of this definition was given, "A careful housewife, who knows how to create a pleasant homeliness (domesticity) with the meagrest of means" (127). Here *heimlich* is overtly defined as homeliness, in terms of the domesticated woman. Now we begin to see an association with the warrior woman, as the *unheimlich*, the uncanny, the dark other is something wild, at odds to the tamed/enslaved domestic figure. For the male self the fear comes from the recognition that these monstrous others are not domestic animals, but rather wild beings resistant to being tamed. As a step further from this Freud went on to highlight a transformation in the meaning of the word *heimlich*: "Starting from the homely and the domestic, there is a further development towards the notion of something removed from the eyes of strangers, hidden, secret" (133). This is a description of the unconscious, the dark other. Then Freud posited, "among the various shades of meaning that are recorded for the word *heimlich* there is one in which it merges with its formal antonym, *unheimlich*, so that what is called *heimlich* becomes *unheimlich*" (132). This final point represents a social anxiety that these domesticated women are one and the same as their *unheimlich*: their hidden, wild other is merged with their domesticated self and as a result the very concept of a "tame" female is false.

The understanding of self and other is again about context and interpretation. The violent woman is certainly other to, or outside of, our society. But just because we position her as monstrous that does not mean she is; it only means she is determined as such by social standards. It is always important to question this kind of assumption. In my critical writing about violent women in film, as I have done in my script, I look at the different representations of this monstrous other as I investigate her power and potential. I use Freudian reasoning that the other is simply the thing that we most fear in our self – an essential part of our own identity that we have hidden away. As women have historically occupied the position of other for so long it has arguably become a home to us (something "canny"), a part of our self. Further, in certain depictions of female action heroes violence can be seen as therapeutic –

accepting something previously denied. In Aristotelian terms violence is a form of catharsis and through Freud's analysis of the physical violence in *Oedipus Rex* he forms the argument that the self originates in violence in terms of a psychic, unconscious, non-physical struggle (Freud, [1905] 1949). There is a tension then between the therapeutic and the destructive and a problem in drawing a line between the two. I find that it is through the dynamic caused by both the rejection and the acceptance of this position of other, and therefore again through the bringing together of the oppositions of self and other to create a new conceptual space of possibilities, that a character finds great potential.

Summary

This introduction sets out the parameters of my critical discussion. I have outlined the context, subject and lines of argument of the following thesis. In particular I have addressed the issue of competition within the context of my critical and creative work. I have argued that implicit (and sometimes explicit) in the films I will address is a conflict with a male power system. In other words these films are about women who enter into a competition to which they are not invited. All of the women I discuss are to some degree forcing their way onto the field of play through an engagement with violence. They are the competitors and by entering the competition they represent a threat to these male power structures. The films I look at are successful in my opinion in direct relation to the way in which they encourage/represent this female threat, and in particular in the way in which they handle the complex subject of violence. It is through the focus on two lines of enquiry – self versus other, and stylised and realist representations of violence – that I wish to investigate the competitors: violent women protagonists in popular cinema.

A Final Note on Competition

Inevitably, the word competition will arise throughout my thesis, as it has in this introduction. I wish to restate my awareness that it is a problematic term and that my own specific interest in competition is defined by the parameters set out above.

Chapter 1: Female Action Icons

Never seen a woman who was more like a man; she thinks like one, acts like one, and sometimes makes me feel like I'm not.

Sam, *Johnny Guitar*
(Ray, 1954)

A survivor. Unclouded by conscience, remorse or delusions of morality.

Ash, *Alien*
(Scott, 1979)

Introduction

In this chapter I look at the violent women icons that introduced the female action hero to popular cinema audiences: Ripley (the *Alien* series), Sarah Connor (*Terminator 2*), and Thelma and Louise. I discuss these women in the context of competition and violence and specifically in terms of representations of self versus other. This leads to an investigation of the tensions between stylisation and realism in representing the violent woman. In subsequent chapters I discuss the legacy of these iconic women.¹³

¹³ See Appendix D for synopses of the above films.

Ripley

Alien (Scott, 1979) was not the first film to portray an active, violent female protagonist¹⁴ but the character of Ripley does represent the beginning of a new age of women in mainstream cinema. Over 30 years after her entrance into the popular imagination, if you ask anyone about action women, Ripley is invariably the first example they give. It has been more than a quarter of a century since the series' second film, *Aliens* (Cameron, 1986), advanced Ripley to the status of the first global female action hero; why has she lasted so well? I argue that she embodies the anxiety that society has about women presenting themselves as competitors through an engagement with violence. Further, that this is exactly the kind of anxiety that mainstream audiences enjoy seeing articulated within cinematic narratives. Although the films ultimately go some way to contain Ripley's threat through the death of the Alien and the reinstating of the status quo, we are also fascinated by the subtext that it is Ripley herself who is the monster. This reading develops through the representation of Ripley and the Alien as, respectively, self and other – two parts of the same being. There are four *Alien* films, each with a different director and writer. Across the series the character of Ripley changes, as in each film she appears to take on a new form. However, there is cohesion to her development as her reinvention in each instalment forms a convincing character arc across the series as a whole. Although Ripley apparently defeats the monster in each film of the series, over and over she is inevitably linked with it, until by *Alien*³ (Fincher, 1992) it is inside her and in *Alien Resurrection* (Jeunet, 1997) she is a hybrid alien/human clone. This represents a merging of self and other as over the series Ripley and the Alien reveal themselves as one and the same.

Beyond the theme of self versus other, the competition of this narrative world is present as a basic assumption from the start of the series as the first film, *Alien*, is set up in the terms of a game. This is expressed in aspects of the film's visual style: the initial typed screen information, the emptiness of the setting, the maze-like tunnels of the ship all look forward to the competition of the video games of the future. And what is most interesting about the introduction of the first and greatest female icon of action cinema is that she is a player from the very start:

The often noted strength of Ripley owes its existence to the *possibility* of imagining a woman in a man's place without her first being drawn in stereotypical

¹⁴ See Sherrie A. Inness's essay in her collection, *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture*, 2004.

fashion as femme fatale, dominatrix, or rape victim. Ripley does not *enter* a man's place; she is in it from the outset. (Schubart, 2007: 176)

The interest that I have in Ripley as a character is summarised in this word "*possibility*". What she is not ("femme fatale, dominatrix, or rape victim") contributes to defining what she is: Ripley was the first development of a female protagonist in mainstream cinema that was able to act effectively in a world characterised by competition and violence. Perhaps counter-intuitively, one way this is accentuated is by the fact that she is not the only player – from the beginning we are introduced to an ensemble cast (Ripley is not even in the first awakening shot) because we are meeting her as a middle member of a team. It is only as the game is played out that she rises as the others fall, proving herself the key competitor. This structure is reflective of the horror genre of *Alien*: Ripley gives us a mainstream representation of what Carol Clover argues was already a stock character in B-Movie slasher films – "The Final Girl" (Clover, 1992). But this does not undermine the revolutionary nature of her appearance in Clover's "dominant forms" of the mainstream film market: a representation of how the B-Movie's "bizarre and brilliant themes...can bubble up from the bottom" (236).

From the beginning, above all the other players, Ripley is the character most overtly associated with the logic of the game. The first half of the film takes on the guise of playing a game of mystery solving. Mysteries, like games, can involve puzzles and enigma, and the pleasure we take in being drawn into them. Practically every line is a question without an answer. And in terms of the film's suspense, we are intrigued because we, along with the characters, are trying to work out what exactly this mystery/game is. Ripley's approach is to stick to the rule book. She is trained to think that this is the best way of countering whatever threat might lie in the mystery. She is constantly talking about "system", "law" and "procedures" but in sticking to the rules she is thinking as a team-player, not an individual competitor within the narrative game. However, as her team members get picked off she becomes less and less interested in regulations because this competition does not abide by her rules. Put simply – and as a mirroring of the patriarchal structures of the real world contemporary to the film – this is not her game, it is someone else's. She is fighting as an unwelcome outsider and the only way to survive is to adapt. As order collapses in the face of violence, turning her back on the rules is the only way she can win.

At the midpoint of the first film the Alien is unearthed. This first mystery is solved and the next one begins – how do humans contain the alien threat? The following scene is of the crew tooling up. So now it is the team versus the Alien. And soon it will be Ripley versus the Alien. Or at least, that is the narrative that we are delivered. But if we move underneath the narrative competition and look at the film as metaphor then really we can say that it has always been about Ripley versus the Alien: in this fight the Alien is representative of Ripley's own dark other/self. Schubart introduces the theory that in the second film in the series the Queen Alien is Ripley's “monstrous double” (2007: 181). I would argue that the Alien is Ripley's “monstrous double” throughout all the films. Schubart describes the doppelganger in these terms: “A double represents those qualities we internalize to become psychologically “complete.” An identity needs balance” (181). But a double is also about splitting and disavowal, not completeness. And for the course of the film(s) Ripley struggles against her own alienated dark self. In the first film it is only in her final transformation, as she comes face to face (merges) with her alter ego, that we get a sense of Ripley as “complete”. From the start Ripley is a strong, active character. She invests in the team and is obsessed with telling people to “stick together” and with making game plans. But it is only when she is stripped of the others that she undergoes a transformation into the Ripley that audiences pay to see. Powerful, aggressive, intelligent and determined, she is unhampered by rules or by the need to cooperate with a team. She becomes the ultimate lone competitor: something that creates pathos with the audience (just as her loneliness is emphasised by her relationship with the cat). And it is the Alien monster that brings this out in her. When she believes she has killed it there is the one moment of female stereotyping in the film as she strips down to her underwear in a traditional representation of sexualised heroine. But when the Alien returns she suits up to fight.

Schubart argues that “Ripley is not a hero in *Alien*. The horror genre has victims and survivors, not heroes” (174). This looks back to Clover's positioning of the Final Girl as a survivor. But from my perspective it is obvious that this kind of survivor is by definition someone who competes. The Alien represents Ripley's competitive, violent self – and she is at her best when she engages with it, at her most predictable when she has vanquished it. Although it seems that Ripley does kill her doppelganger and in doing so kills a part of herself, in the final image of Ripley inside the smooth, egg-like sleep chamber with its breathing tubes, we see Ripley as a white version of the black Alien. Throughout the *Alien* series the representations of violence are metaphorically tied into the act of birth (mother aliens/aliens penetrating human

hosts/aliens bursting forth from stomachs). If killing is the ultimate form of violence then in this world giving birth is its bloody companion. In her return to the womb of the sleep chamber we can see Ripley not denying the Alien but merging with it. It is this final image of Ripley inside her own egg that we can read as an indication of the continuation of her violent acts in the films to come as Ripley makes her transformation into the action hero.

This metaphor of the Alien as representative of Ripley's doppelganger reaches across the *Alien* series of films and every time she engages with her monstrous alter ego she is at her most formidable. In the second film, *Aliens*, we see Ripley as the action hero as opposed to the horror lead. But, again, if we see the series as a whole it is perfectly acceptable to see the new Ripley of *Aliens* as being the product of her character development in *Alien*. She is simply a woman more in touch with her competitive, violent side. However, in this second film she still undergoes the same process. She begins the competition protected by a team, and in the final scenes ends up alone and at her best in one on one battle. Only this time the suspense does not come from not knowing what is going to happen. It comes from anticipation. Because we know exactly what to expect from her. Across the films the Alien continues as alter ego to Ripley as an overreaching structure. At the start of the sequel the discovery of Ripley in her pod is just like the discovery of the Alien in the original film (and a direct continuation from the final image of the first film). She begins the film with nightmares that the Alien is inside her, ready to explode out in a violent and destructive birth. When Burke tells her, "I think it would be the best thing for you to get back out there and face this thing" he is voicing what we all feel. In the next scene she awakes from the same dream and then goes into the bathroom and stares at herself in the mirror, trying to determine if she is what she appears to be. This use of the mirror to develop the metaphor of self versus other is again repeated in *Alien*³. In this third instalment, just as the Alien is being born, Ripley stands at a sink, drying her hands on her T-Shirt (at the site of her own womb), and stares in the mirror at her newly shaven head – her haircut making her an even closer physical embodiment of the Alien she hunts. It is also in this film that we are given one of the images that came to represent the franchise: Ripley's face next to the Alien's as it encroaches on her, insisting she engages, Ripley turned away; they both drip, Ripley with sweat, the Alien with ooze; they are both glistening, hairless, smooth, all teeth and mouths – the Alien black and Ripley white in another classic image of self versus other. Every time Ripley goes into hypersleep in the series (inside the symbolic womb), the Alien is reborn – its indestructibility something we also associate with her. In the third film the prisoner Dillon could be speaking about both Ripley and the Alien when he tells us, "Within

each death, no matter how small, there is the promise of a new life. A new beginning.” And at the end, after killing the adult Alien, Ripley is left with the greatest battle – the foetal Alien inside herself. As she jumps into the furnace her competitive spirit is revealed – the Alien bursts out of her and she cradles it to her chest. For Ripley this is no longer about survival, it is about defeating the system – the corporation that wishes to capture the Alien inside of her. And in the final instalment, *Alien Resurrection*, Ripley is a hybrid human/alien and there is little need to dig for symbolism of the merging of self and other in that. Furthermore, being part alien only makes her more of a competitor:

Annalee – I can’t believe... you killed one of them. It’s like killing your own kind.

Ripley – It was in my way.

I have argued that Ripley is in constant competition with her dark self/other in the form of the Alien. It is therefore competition that brings her into relation with the Alien, and into a discovery of both the Alien and her own nature. However, in my reading of the films it is not the Alien that represents the true threat. The real monster of the film (as alluded to in my analysis of the ending of *Alien*³) is The Company. This is represented by the antithesis to Ripley once she has done away with her rule book – men in suits. This antagonism is hinted at from early on in the first film with the controlling, and undermining, figure of Mother – the domestic matriarch reinforcing the patriarchal system. It is referred to again during the altercation between Ripley and Dallas, when she remonstrates with Ash’s decision to keep the Alien on board the ship. When Ripley tells Dallas to pull rank over Ash he informs her that Ash has final say:

Ripley – Since when is that standard procedure?

Dallas – Standard procedure is to do whatever the hell they tell you to do.

They are The Company. And this is where we first learn who the true game-makers are. Later, when we have discovered all about the Alien, there is one more revelation to be made. Ripley reads the message from The Company that the crew is expendable. And here we see the greatest battle that she faces. The Alien has suddenly lost its slot as enemy number one. And throughout the *Alien* series this continues to be the case. Because it is The Company’s wish to capture the Alien and investigate it as potential weapon material that poses the biggest threat to Ripley, not the Alien itself. And throughout the series the competition is made clear by the

fact that Ripley is not only expendable, but that The Company representatives are prepared to kill her to obtain their goal.

If the Alien symbolises Ripley's propensity for violent competition, then The Company represents the patriarchal structures of the real world that want to deny women an engagement in their competition. If we accept Dee L. R. Graham's argument that male dominance in society is maintained by a very real threat of violence against women (1994), this explains why the hierarchy is threatened by the prospect of a violent woman. In *Alien*³ there is a constant sense of the danger the male inmates pose to the female Ripley. But she counters this by ignoring it:

Dillon – You don't want to know me lady. I'm a murderer and rapist of women.

Ripley – Really? Well I guess I must make you nervous.

Ripley enacts a desire not to be threatened; to be composed in the face of murder and rape. And she is also able to brush off the threat because she is a threat herself. However, there is more to her lack of response – she recognises, and we learn, not only that everyone is capable of violence, but that the characterisation of the male inmates through their violence is also superficial – underneath they are all as human and humane as the next person. As such the violent threat they present is something that has been set up by a system that maintains power through its determination of men as aggressors and women as victims. But for The Company, as representative of the patriarchal system, the Alien represents something so powerful and antagonistic in Ripley that they do not simply want to kill it, they want to own it, even if that means killing her in the process. In the revelations of The Company's vested interest in Ripley's mission, the battle with the Alien is stepped up a notch. Because Ripley is now battling The Company. In *Aliens*, when she discovers Burke's betrayal, she accuses him: "You know Burke, I don't know which species is worse – you don't see them fucking each other over for a goddam percentage." If the Alien is Ripley's competition, The Company is humanity's greed for power. Which means that when Ripley kills the Alien it could be interpreted, not as her turning her back on her own competitive monster but rather, as her protecting that monster from being captured by the game-makers. And if she merges with her demon, as opposed to allowing it to fall into the hands of the powers that be, then the popularity of these films signifies the audience's enjoyment of this turn of events. Ripley's killing of the monster can be read as a dispersal of the threat of this violent, competitive

woman – the world has been put back to rights and Ripley will now be returned to her lower management position as a part of maintaining the status quo. However, the success of the series from my point of view comes from the fact that it is open to another reading: Ripley has merged with her uncanny alien self and now represents a formidable hero who stands in competition to the powers that be.

In the first film of the *Alien* series the company representative, Ash, describes the Alien. And in doing so he describes Ripley's alter ego:

Ash – Perfect organism. Its structural perfection is matched only by its hostility.

Lambert – You admire it.

Ash – I admire its purity. A survivor. Unclouded by conscience, remorse or delusions of morality.

He is certainly drawing a picture of something horrifying; a creature I would argue the audience wants to believe is inhuman. But in my reading the true threat comes from the fear that all humans have the capacity to be this monster. With this idea of all humans as competitors Ash is also describing an entity that could destabilise the patriarchal game as it is set. If this is Ripley's alter ego and this “perfect organism”, this “survivor...Unclouded by conscience, remorse or delusions of morality” is the ultimate competitor, then when Ripley merges with her doppelganger later in the series she becomes a perfect threat.

Sarah Connor

The violent, competitive woman may unsettle mainstream audiences but the iconic status of Ripley shows that we also seek out and enjoy this type of character. As a result Ripley proved to be the start of a trend of action women in popular culture. After James Cameron's depiction of Ripley in *Aliens* as the first 'hardbody' of Hollywood cinema he offered up the quintessential woman of that type. And this was another transformation. From the initially helpless heroine of *The Terminator* (Cameron, 1984), Sarah Connor arrives in *Terminator 2* (Cameron, 1991) a true action hero.

In *Terminator 2* the name of the competition is “the war against the machines” but at the start Connor is the only one fighting the battle. When we meet Sarah Connor she is already at one with her inner monster – the image of a sweaty animal – caged in an asylum for the insane. Her son describes her as “a complete psycho... She’s a total loser.” But what we already understand about this woman is that she is by no means a loser – she is a competitor. In *Terminator 2*, as with the *Alien* series, there are constant references to competition through the language of war and strategy. The Terminator tells of his “mission”, and Connor explains hers. She speaks of her “goal” when she is trying to play her psychiatrist at his own game. In fact the competitive tactic of playing someone at their own game is something that structures the whole narrative. In *The Terminator*, the machines plan to wipe out the leader of the resistance before he is born; in *Terminator 2* they aim to kill him before he becomes a soldier; and in this second film Connor drives the narrative by playing the machines at their own game as she attempts to kill their creator, thereby wiping out the machines before they even exist. The film is littered with game/competitor references: Connor has hooked up with different men in order to train as a competitor; she tells her son John, “Alright, we’ll play it your way”, when he rationalises why she should not destroy the Terminator; John alludes to moves and manoeuvres as he tells the Terminator – “One thing about my mom – she always plans ahead”; and in the message – “no fate but what we make” – there is a distorted echo of the American Dream in the idea of fighting to achieve what you want through hard work. This offers the possibility of rewriting the game, which means the winning spot is open for anyone who competes.

However, the narrative tells us that these machines were created by man. And in this film it is the man who is responsible for their development that Connor has to find. The metaphor here is that of man facing his own monster: Mary Shelley’s “hideous progeny” ([1818] 1992: 10); Stevenson’s *Jeckyll and Hyde*. And again these are all narratives of the doppelganger. The T1000 morphs into anyone he touches. And when the Terminator tells John – “My mission is to protect you” – we recognise it as the same goal as Connor’s: an explicit representation of the Terminator in the terms of her dark other. When she first comes face to face with her monstrous other she has been proving herself as a competitor. After escaping her cell she is shown bare-foot, moving soundlessly down the empty (video-game) corridors. Her clothes create a camouflage to the grey walls – she is completely at one with her environment. She adeptly overpowers a number of men, displaying physical prowess and mental alertness. But she has begun to encounter difficulty, when the Terminator appears. It exits the lift and

Connor falls to the floor. Her son, the focus of her mission, is there in front of her but she only spares him a blank glance as she stares in horror at her doppelganger. And then she runs. Even this woman, apparently so in touch with her violent, competitive side, cannot at first bear to look upon it. All of her other assailants are nothing in comparison to what it represents. But in its first words to her, “Come with me if you want to live”, its essential relationship to her is acknowledged. And Connor accepts.

From the moment Connor makes this pact with the Terminator they become an unbeatable extension of one another. It is only when they are separated that they become vulnerable to defeat. In *The Terminator*, as unstoppable as it appears, Connor manages to kill the monster. When they meet in this second film her escape plan has begun to fall apart but once united they act together, driving, shooting, alternating in roles to escape the T1000. Later, she considers killing the Terminator again but is persuaded that the machine is necessary if she wants to succeed in her mission. Their connection is further established by Connor’s own character development. She is portrayed as being as emotionally detached as this robot. After stating that she has no sense of humour, John tries to teach the Terminator to smile – the result is an unsettling grimace. Some critics have likened Connor to a father figure, with the Terminator adopting the maternal role (most recently Willis, 2008). However, we can read this as “an indication of how overdetermined our cultural notions of appropriate gender are” (Brown, 1996: 60). As an extension of this, I would argue that the two characters merge into the single role of protector. When John asks the Terminator how it is not afraid of death, it replies, “I have to stay functional until my mission is complete. Then it doesn’t matter.” This is the exact attitude of Connor – when Connor finally comes face to face with the T1000 and she is on the verge of dying she will not call out to John and put him in danger. It is only when she separates from the Terminator, in her attempt to kill Dyson, that she fails in fulfilling her objectives. Her emotional side takes over and she is made weak by it. And in the last show down, when she has the T1000 on the brink of the fire pit, as she runs out of ammunition, it is the Terminator that fires the final shot. This could be read as Arnold Schwarzenegger, the action hero, taking the final heroic stance but there is an alternative interpretation: the Terminator and Connor have separated and both have been defeated, but when they move back into each other’s presence they reform into the ultimate competitor and kill the T1000 together, as an extension of one another.

The fact that the Terminator is played by a man opens up the idea that this violent, competitive side is represented only in the form of manhood. However, early on in the film Connor reprimands her son for describing the robot as male: "It, John, not him. It." Her insistence on the use of non-gendered terms reinforces the argument that this dark half is not simply a man. It could also be argued that referring to the machine as "it" is a denial of this monster's relation to humanity. The Terminator defines himself as separate from humans when it states, "It's in your nature to destroy yourselves" and later says, "I cannot self-terminate". But this line between humans and the Terminator is blurred by the playing out of events. The mission that the Terminator is on is a direct form of self-termination: if it succeeds in destroying the work of Dyson it will never be created. And in the final scene it is the human Connor who lowers her monstrous other to its end – a form of self-termination. This completeness created in the coming together of Connor and the Terminator is played out symbolically in the later films of the series. Connor does not reappear as a character because in killing the machine she has killed a part of herself. The decision to design a machine that cannot self-terminate was made by humans to try to remove a human flaw – self-destructiveness. But the narrative of *Terminator 2* tells us that we have found a way to override this competitive safety catch to our system. And because of this, we will time and time again kill our monstrous other.

The position of these films as members of a series reinforces the argument that killing the monster within is not so simple, nor even so desirable for an audience. This monster, when appraised, also represents something good that comes from competition. In the middle of the film Connor looks on as John teaches the Terminator human tricks. She narrates as she observes:

Watching John with the machine, it was suddenly so clear. The Terminator would never stop, it would never leave him. And it would never hurt him, never shout at him or get drunk and say it was too busy to spend time with him. It would always be there. And it would die to protect him. Of all the would-be fathers who came and went over the years this one, this machine, was the only one who measured up. In an insane world, it was the sanest choice.

In this description of the Terminator, Connor is also describing herself. But the final line undermines the acceptance of this focused competition within herself. It is only in an insane

world that this kind of approach can be excused. This taps into a stereotype that runs through the development of violent, competitive female characters. At some point each woman in this chapter either refers to herself as, or is called, crazy. Whether this comes in the form of an off-the-cuff comment, in Ripley's referral for psychometric testing, or Connor as an asylum inmate, it tells us that society believes if a woman is violent or competitive there must be something wrong with her. It is Connor's fixation on her doppelganger that classifies her as insane but Connor is proved to be sane – a vindication of her competitive nature. There are times when even after she is free from the asylum there is a strong sense that she is unhinged – she regularly and quickly switches between anger, distress and detachment. She certainly behaves like someone suffering from post-traumatic stress because she is damaged, and therefore not in her right mind. This could mean that her engagement in the competition through violence is born out of madness. But I would argue that she is at her most stable when she is acting in unison with her monstrous other and that she stumbles when they are separated. In other words, the repression of her competitive nature is what makes her unstable; the engagement with it is when she is at her best. Again, the true monster in this film is not the machine that threatens mankind, it is mankind itself, as represented by a society that denies Connor's sanity as a way of distancing itself from the violent monster that it has created. So what are the psychic and social conditions for female freedom conceived of as an unembarrassed and violent competitive agency? The character of Sarah Connor raises this question and perhaps in part because of this the audience deems this woman to be an icon, just like Ripley. Although Connor's killing of her other effectively writes her out of the later films, the audience's appreciation of her when she is at one with her dark side is reflected in the initial success of the spin off TV series, *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* (2008/2009).

Thelma and Louise

In 1991 *Terminator 2* was a huge box office hit while in the same year *Thelma & Louise* (Scott) was a relatively small release in terms of takings.¹⁵ However, the characters of Thelma and

¹⁵ *Terminator 2*'s lifetime gross is nearly \$205 million domestic (U.S.) and \$315 million foreign; *Thelma & Louise*'s lifetime gross is \$45 million domestic with no figure available for foreign takings. (Figures from boxofficemojo.com).

Louise have maintained an iconic status as great as that of Sarah Connor. I would argue that Thelma and Louise represent doppelgangers to one another – each taking it in turns to push the other to transgress the boundaries that are set around them in a way that had not been seen before, and possibly has not been seen since, in the depiction of violent women in mainstream cinema.

Throughout the film the two women fluctuate in a dynamic movement between the roles of domesticated/tame self and disruptive/wild other to one another. At the start of the film it is Louise who encourages Thelma to come away with her. Then Thelma persuades Louise to stop at a bar. When Thelma gets into trouble with Harlan, Louise saves her and shoots him. When Louise's money is stolen, Thelma takes over and robs a store. At the start of the film Thelma is described as being "sedate" and Louise is "uptight". As the narrative progresses Louise relaxes: beyond the robberies and shoot ups this is best symbolised in the fact that in a late scene Louise does not reprimand Thelma for putting her feet on the dash, as she does at the start of the trip. Just prior to this display of the new Louise, Thelma overtly refers to her own transformation from sedateness as she states, "I feel awake, wide awake. I don't remember ever feeling this awake. Everything looks different." As these women push each other across the line, they undergo a physical transformation. Slowly, over the course of the film, they become more and more similar. From the start of their road trip we are given images that indicate their connection (think of the iconic Polaroid they take as they begin their holiday). This linking imagery is developed further in the scene where Louise shoots Harlan. Louise protectively places Thelma behind her as she takes on the assertive role. And from here, the gasps, expressions and exclamations that come from Thelma could be the inner voice of Louise as she carries out the killing. When the two women look down at his body on the ground Thelma appears as Louise's second head. This physical joining of the two characters is developed so that by the end of the film they have the same hair, the same dirty faces, they are wearing the same jeans and Thelma wears Louise's coat. We often see them looking at things together, smiling together. And this merging of their identity is furthered in their dialogue. When they speak they generally refer to themselves as the collective "we" instead of the individual "I". Throughout the film there are a number of conversations between them, whether representative of supportiveness or conflict, which could be a single internal monologue as opposed to a dialogue between two separate people. As these two characters merge into a whole they become more powerful. After Thelma robs the store she does not revert to her weaker self. And at the same time Louise throws away her lipstick, symbolising

she has given up trying to wear a mask. At this point the women stop taking it in turns to be violent and start working as a single unit. Neither is the weaker part, they are one complete identity. And from here they become truly threatening.¹⁶

But what is it that they have joined together to compete against? There is certainly a game taking place in this film and the rules are represented by the social conventions of the narrative world. But from the start, because of these conventions/rules, neither Thelma nor Louise is allowed to play. It is the game of living – something that only men are invited to join. Thelma has to stay at home while her husband goes out. Louise works her life away while her boyfriend does not answer her calls. When Harlan slaps Thelma and starts to assault her, she slaps him back. He hits her hard in the face and commands, “Don’t you fuckin hit me, you bitch”. In this game the men lay down the law, but it is one rule for them, and one for the women. Later, when Louise asks Thelma if she is coming to Mexico with her she states, “I gotta know. This isn’t a game.” This reminds us again of the assault scene when Harlan tells Louise, “Calm down, we were just havin a little fun”, and Louise retorts, “When a woman’s crying like that she ain’t havin any fun.” Louise is wrong, this is a game, it is just not her game, and because she is not meant to take an active role in playing it, but rather passively accept the actions of the men who are at its centre, she will never find it fun. And this is why, when they kill Harlan, Thelma and Louise become outlaws, because they have decided to ignore the rules that have been put in place by the men around them and have gone out to do some living of their own.

Critics of the film often point out that Louise’s killing of Harlan is gratuitous as she has already rescued Thelma. Her attack is not self defence but simply a response to Harlan’s statements:

Harlan – Bitch. I should have gone ahead and fucked her.

Louise – What did you say?

Harlan – I said suck my cock.

The ethics of the killing are later discussed by the two women in the film, although they both agree that what they did was fair. Willis argues that Louise “kills him, then, not for what he does, but for what he says, a far thinner pretext” (2008: 61). However, I believe it is more complicated than this. Even if we accept that Louise is not killing Harlan for “what he does”

¹⁶ There is a powerful arthouse precedent for this in *Persona* (Bergman, 1966) as demonstrated in the film’s poster.

(we know he has a reputation and will probably behave this way again), to dismiss “what he says” is to ignore the seriousness of abuse and violence when it appears in verbal form. And furthermore, his aggressive and threatening statement shows Harlan’s desire to put these women in the place he has assigned to them. In other words, Louise is not just killing him for “what he does” or “what he says”, she is killing him for what he represents. It is documented that at the film’s first showings audiences all over the U.S. cheered when Louise pulled the trigger. This could be seen either as a safety valve effect or an explanation as to why the film is so much more threatening than anything made before or contemporaneously. The police officers and Daryl, watching the film footage of Thelma holding up the store, mutter, “Jesus Christ”, “Good God” and “My Lord”, as a reflection of the fascination and disbelief some viewers have for the very real violence demonstrated by these women. But at the same time they are deeply threatened by them because their acts represent a destabilisation of the order that has been set in place by these kinds of patriarchal figures (the husband and the law), who in turn represent the implicit threat of violence (imprisonment and, in the context of this film, execution) that society uses against anyone who transgresses the rules. This is an order that exists in our world. It is so much a part of our dominant ideology that we accept ideas of violent or competitive women as being somehow crazy – as previously discussed. Throughout the film Thelma and Louise are so used to this world view that they continue to refer to each other in this way even when they have shaken off most of the other trappings of male oppression. It is only at the very end that the meaning of insanity is interrogated:

Thelma – I guess I went a little crazy, huh?

Louise – No, you’ve always been crazy. This is just the first chance you’ve had to really express yourself.

When Thelma calls herself “crazy” she is using the word in a way that represents the loaded meaning of a patriarchal system, the male order. In Louise’s response, however, it is arguable that the word loses its negative connotations because it is not representative of malfunction, but rather engagement with the inner self – a self that stands as other to the system. Alternatively it could be argued that Louise posits the crazy Thelma as someone of the past and the present Thelma as a sane self getting away from craziness. Either reading recognises that Thelma is coming to know her own self and so Thelma and Louise represent a far too real depiction of rebellion against the rules of modern, patriarchal society. And as the women rebel against the rules they fall into competition with the rule-makers. When Louise has been

talking to Hal, the cop who wants to give them “a chance”, Thelma asks, “You’re not gonna give up on me, are you?...You’re not gonna make a deal with that guy?” Deals are all part of game plans, but Louise cannot give up on Thelma because she would be giving up on herself. The single car being pursued by a sea of faceless law men tells these women that they are outnumbered; there is no way of winning this game. But as they look over the cliff edge they refuse to accept defeat:

Louise – I’m not giving up.

Thelma – Let’s not get caught... Let’s keep going.

In their merging with one another, they have transformed into a competitor. And to exist in a world where they are not allowed freedom to live is simply not an option. In the penultimate scene this is voiced by both Thelma and Louise:

Thelma - Something’s crossed over in me. I can’t go back. I just couldn’t live.

Louise – I know. I know what you mean.

We have seen in these films that competition is more acceptable when it is not just about winning but part of survival (literally – staying alive) and as action films that is the bottom line. Making the competition life or death makes it plausible and justifiable. However, what happens when winning is not about surviving but about refusing to be dominated by the powers that be (as with Ripley in her own suicide leap)? To a mainstream audience this could be threatening as it shows a new realm of possibilities for female agency. And it is why Thelma and Louise have lived on as violent female icons. The film was not horror or science fiction but a form of realism; there were no mutants, no monsters, no machines, but just two women tired of life in someone else’s order. And for them, refusing to live by someone else’s rules was more important than staying alive. The battle for freedom could not be won in the world they inhabit; it could only be won by the decision to leave that world. Thelma and Louise find their freedom in a death leap just as a year later Ripley makes her decision to throw herself and her foetal Alien into the furnace at the end of *Alien*³. In the movement we see in these films’ protagonists from non-violence to violence we can recognise woman’s assumption of violence as part of an exploration of what it would mean for a woman to be free. *Thelma & Louise* gave us a new and destabilising representation of the potential of the violent woman – an iconic portrait society has never been able to forget.

Terminator 2 and *Thelma & Louise* were released in the same year. As previously stated, *Terminator 2* smashed the box office (so had a much wider audience than the still successful *Thelma & Louise*) with representations of a woman far more aggressive and violent than the heroes of *Thelma & Louise*. And yet the year's papers were filled with articles debating the way Scott's road movie represented violent women. In June 1991 *Time* magazine ran the cover headline: "Why *Thelma & Louise* Strikes a Nerve". It contained an article "Gender Bender" by Richard Schickel that summed up the situation in its subtitle: "A white-hot debate rages over whether *Thelma & Louise* celebrates liberated females, male-bashers – or outlaws" (52). The same edition of the magazine had an article by Margaret Carlson asking "Is This What Feminism Is All About?" (57). This seemed to follow the line of critics such as Julie Salomon of the *Wall St Journal* who described the film's protagonists as "bullies" (1991: A12). It also looked forward to the likes of John Leo whose article "Toxic Feminism on the Big Screen" described the film as a "paean to transformative violence" with "an explicit fascist theme, wedded to the bleakest form of feminism and buried (shallowly) in a genuinely funny buddy movie" (1991: 20). But on the other side of the debate critics and reviewers such as Peter Travers of *Rolling Stone* magazine saw the film and its two central women from a different angle: "They're flesh-and-blood women out to expose the blight of sexism. Khouri's script isn't about rage or revenge; it's about waste...This...movie means to get under your skin, and it does" (1991: 98). This final statement, and the cover story of *Time*, sums up why a relatively small film caused so much interest: *Thelma & Louise* got under society's skin; *Thelma & Louise* struck a nerve. One big reason for this was because Scott was offering something too real.

Stylisation and Realism

Thelma & Louise is in many ways a fantasy, but it is led by two highly recognisable everywomen – a waitress and a housewife – which puts it into the realms of reality. When it comes to audience expectations, genre is a decisive factor (Vares, 2002). But as an extension of this the audience is also influenced by how lifelike (real) a film is expected to be. Audiences can cope with a woman trying to save the world from an alien species or nuclear destruction, but two female buddies letting go on a road trip creates a whole new level of threat purely

because it is a far more plausible eventuality. When the violent woman or her setting is highly stylised (unreal) then it is safe (unthreatening). However, as soon as a character or the world they inhabit comes close to someone or something we recognise as real, then the violent woman becomes a threat. In *Thelma & Louise*, and with a woman writer on board, Scott seems to have overstepped a line in the eyes of the much of the mainstream media. This is in part because of the realism of the film in its portrait of the potential for violent and competitive women: it is firmly seated in the two deeply drawn psychologies of its female heroes. But it is also in part because this is the only film in the series I have discussed where the competition is so explicitly drawn as being against the system of violence put in place by men as a means of controlling women, a system in which women are not supposed to compete. Together these are the key reasons why it caused such a backlash. It was a film that should have broken the mould; instead, it became the exception to the rule. Without any reliance on stylised justification for these women's violent acts it antagonised the social order and as such it became the outlaw. As Brian D. Johnson put it in his article "Thelma & Louise at 20", *Thelma & Louise* is, "the classic female outlaw road movie. In fact, it seems like the *only* female outlaw road movie" (2011: 79).

My conception of realism depends upon the way in which a film presents character motivations. An interesting character to investigate in the context of this argument is the violent mother. Often the violent woman is set up as someone who is defending or even avenging her child. It is of course not unrealistic to assume that a woman might use violence to protect her child. The question is whether this motivation is used as a screen to prevent an audience from thinking about other motivations or causes for a woman's violence. Furthermore, the very idea of maternal instinct bridges the gap between motivation and justification; it is both at once in a way that other motives might not be. In other words a mother's instinct to protect her child is one of the few motivations that society deems an acceptable justification for female violence.

A common feature of the female action hero is her motherhood. In her essay "Tough Love: Mamas, Molls, and Mob Wives", Marilyn Yaqinto argues that these action women are normally characterised as being childless; but that those who do have children are shown to be motivated in their toughness by their maternal instinct to protect (2004). I want to address these two points separately. Firstly, of the four heroes I have included in this chapter on action icons just two are childless, Thelma and Louise, and they both occupy the same film. In

Aliens, Ripley is revealed to have a daughter. This is only made a narrative point in Cameron's director's cut but even without her own child, the protective role she takes on over the orphaned girl, Newt, and her twinning with the Alien mother is enough to represent her as a maternal figure. The second part of Yaquinto's argument appears to me to be more straightforward. It is a stereotype in action mothers that their protective instinct is the motivation for their competition and violence. "The extraordinary lengths to which some films go to explain (away) the actions of the fighting woman reveals the unease, horror and threat caused by her physical actions and violence" (Andris and Frederick, 2007: 10). I argue that the role of mother is hardly ever introduced to develop a realistic portrait of a violent woman but rather to justify her violence in the eyes of society, and thereby cancel out the threat that she poses. Yvonne Tasker points out the "evident links between Cameron's sequel [*Aliens*] and his later *Terminator 2* in terms of the place assigned to motherhood as a motivating factor for the female hero" (1998: 70; also see Neroni, 2005: 11 for support of this argument). I believe that this form of justificatory character development is stylised/superficial.

There is a scene in *Terminator 2* where Connor threatens to inject her psychiatrist with poison in order to escape and protect her son. When he tells her, "You're no killer", her response is "You're already dead." Here she is explaining her actions by stating that if she does not get to her son (the future saviour of mankind) then the whole world will die. The strange temporality of her statement gives a sense that for Connor her violent actions are not a choice but a duty. What is perhaps even more striking about this interaction, however, is the fact that anyone, especially a psychiatrist, would assume Connor, the ultimate human weapon, is not capable of killing, son or no son. Yet this assertion by the psychiatrist, and Connor's own response, however unfitting to her character, provides an excuse – a social justification – a tenuous explaining away of her violence that under interrogation does not stand up. In terms of motherhood, the use of the child as a tool to provide justifiable motivation for an action mother is something that is the terrain of the stylised action film. In films like *Terminator 2*, motherhood is a superficial development device for a script that relies more on action and spectacle than character, a script where we are so far removed from the real world that explanations of transgressive behaviour do not need to hold up to scrutiny because they are rarely given much thought. This world ultimately maintains the status quo by keeping the female protagonist attached to the safe realm of the domestic sphere.

The example of Ripley helps us raise questions about the validity of the argument that finds justifications for female violence in a protective maternal instinct. The *Alien* series may be action packed but its strongest element comes in the iconic and full characterisation of Ripley. However, it is Scott's first film of the series that does most of the heavy lifting in terms of her character development. In the second film Cameron wrote a script that already had a backstory provided by the first film that he could rely on. His addition of the daughter represents his style – an interest in action and sentimentality. As a writer I would describe sentimentality as anything that evokes a superficial emotional reaction. And as an example I would give the quick fix mother/child relationships that are introduced into his films. Scott, on the other hand, takes a little more time with his characters. It is the fact that Ripley was not born an icon, but was rather an ordinary woman who battled to survive and to succeed that makes her so powerful. And if we look at the first film as its own entity (as it was for seven years) then really we have three non-mothers in the group, all of whom are housed in films directed by Scott. These films do not subvert the character of the violent mother but neither do they rely on it. Scott's violent women do not have to be mothers to create motivation because he develops their characters in more satisfying ways. Violent women have now become a type but in Scott's films he offers possibilities beyond the stereotype through the development of psychological depth. This results in a less-stylised, more real representation of women and violence. However, these more thoughtful representations of the violent, competitive woman come at a price – the alienation of a mainstream market that is distinctly uncomfortable with the lack of social justification behind the violent behaviour of these female characters. Ripley is a well developed character but her violence exists in a fantasy world in outer space. However, *Thelma and Louise* represent a far greater threat because they inhabit a world that we recognise as our own.

Conclusion

What begins to become clear at this stage of my critical analysis is that there is an association to be made between my readings of the narratives of self versus other and the way popular cinema uses stylisation and realism in its depiction of the violent woman. The concept of the female self as non-violent is an example of stylised (superficial) representation and the violent female other is actually a realist (substantial) representation of a fundamental part of the

female self. This is an association I will continue to investigate throughout the rest of this thesis. My conclusion at this point is that all of the women in this chapter undergo transformations when they engage with their ‘monstrous other’. And it is the transformations of these violent, competitive women that tell us they were not born superheroes. They are everywoman. But the more obviously this is stated within a film, the more of a threat the characters pose because they offer the potential of competitive violence from any woman. In the context of all of these films I would also argue that the true monster in the story is not the violent female, but the society that attempts to suppress woman’s competitive drive in order to maintain the status quo.

The iconic women in this chapter leave a legacy of new potentials for agency in the female protagonist. As such they are in part responsible for the increase in the number of high profile, active female protagonists we see on our screens today. However, Ripley and Sarah Connor are to some extent still “spectacular (and much debated) exceptions” (Tasker, 1998: 67), as the amount of discussion there is surrounding the violent women is disproportionate to the relatively small number of representations we have of violent women in cinema. Society continues to struggle with the violent woman and this is especially true when she is depicted in realist terms. As a result of this, a further part of the legacy of the more stylised of these iconic action heroes is the development of the hyperstylised action woman in postfeminist culture. In the next chapter I look at the problematic hypersexualised (hyperstylised) postfeminist female action hero. I then focus on a number of contemporary female action heroes who have the potential to offer something beyond the hypersexualised stereotype. I continue to carry out this discussion through an investigation of the narrative of self versus other, in particular in its relation to stylisation and realism.

Chapter 2: Contemporary Female Action Heroes

Because, in a patriarchy, a woman must remain vigilant to men's needs and wants, and because this requires that she look at the world from the male perspective, a woman intent on surviving is at high risk of losing her sense of self.

Loving to Survive

(Graham: 1994: 173)

The first betrayal is irreparable. It calls forth a chain reaction of further betrayals, each of which takes us farther and farther away from the point of our original betrayal.

The Unbearable Lightness of Being

(Kundera: 1984: 92)

Introduction

In this chapter I continue my investigation of stylised representations of violent women by focusing on contemporary female action heroes. I discuss the hypersexualised female action hero and then look at four contemporary film protagonists that show the potential to offer something more than the postfeminist representation of hypersexualised violence: Alice (the *Resident Evil* series), Beatrix Kiddo (*Kill Bill I/II*), Jen and Shu Lien (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*).¹⁷ This leads into my third chapter where I move from the creative influences of the stylised action film to a discussion of the competitive, violent woman and realism.

¹⁷ See Appendix D for synopses of these films.

Hyperstylisation: The Hypersexualised Female Action Hero

Since the advent of the archetype in the 1980s, the female action hero has become an accepted part of the action genre. Although this character-type continues to exist in many different forms, the contemporary female action hero is accompanied by certain audience expectations in terms of sexuality and hypersexuality. I am interested in looking at some of these more recent representations of the competitive, violent woman in popular cinema to see how she has moved on from (or lives up to) her iconic predecessors and in particular to assess whether any of these women make headway in confronting or even exploding some of the anti-feminist expectations of her type. The texts I look at in this chapter fall under the expansive category of the action film. Although they are not “reducible to the economic formulae that give rise to them”(Tasker, 1998: 11) the films I choose to look at in this context offer violence as the key form of agency, as well as the primary means to forward the narrative. They often display a tendency to embrace a highly stylised form of violence where action is predominantly spectacle rather than character driven, although they are not definitively determined by this. This turning away from more realist representations is also present in their generally superficial interest in the physical and psychological effects of the violence they portray. Again, I am particularly interested in how stylisation affects the interpretation of female action heroes (as well as engendering future audience expectations) and the subsequent impact this has on the possibilities these protagonists present for furthering representations of female agency.

One reason why stylised violence is so popular when it comes to any action hero is because it allows the audience to invest in the fantasy element of film – the opportunity to go beyond the realms of what is possible in the real world, while still metaphorically facing central anxieties and tensions of real life. One anxiety concerns the possibility that the ‘gentle sex’ might have the potential for violence. However, by stylising these female action heroes it makes them into superheroes, unreal and perhaps superficial. The anxiety that the violent woman can raise is engaged and then dispelled by the assurance that these characters are not ‘real’. Further, the representation of stylised violence often does away with the repercussions that violence raises in the real world – injury, trauma, death – and this can create a “light” (Schubart, 2007: 312) approach to what is in reality a serious issue. The stylisation of violence

is regularly tied into the stylisation of other narrative elements such as plot and character and, at the centre of feminist debate, the stylisation of the female body. This leads us to question how often style appears to exist at the cost of substance in popular action cinema. However, cinema by definition deals in narrative stylisation, and the stylisation of the violent woman has allowed female protagonists a new form of agency in popular culture. It is this tension between stylish fantasy and the possibility of new kinds of female agency in the real world that I wish to investigate in this chapter.

When it comes to franchises led by female action heroes there is one new genre of film that has taken up Ripley's mantle of success: the video game adaptation. In contemporary cinema, icons continue to be born. The world of gaming – which plays off of *Aliens* and *Terminator 2* hardbody representations of women and stylised violence as seen in martial arts films – has moved into the action film and in recent years has created a number of dynasties. Probably the most famous of these franchises, and certainly the most critically interrogated, is the Lara Croft series, *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (West, 2001) and *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life* (du Bont, 2003). Lara Croft is a hardbody archaeologist, notorious amongst fans and critics alike for her excessively large breasts. Angelina Jolie's portrayal of Croft has left feminist critics at war over whether this made-by-men to be played-with-by-boys character is anything more than a straightforward sexual fantasy figure designed to exploit the most basic misogynist stereotypes of women.¹⁸ A number of key arguments stand against this reading. Firstly, although Croft's avatar was designed by a man, and the video game is predominantly played by teenage males, and the films are popular with a male audience, there are still a large number of females who pay to see Croft at work. And as Carol Clover has convincingly argued in relation to 70s B-Movie slasher films, the significant female minority cannot be explained away as simply a demographic of women content to passively accept a film that does nothing more than promote the sexual objectification of a female subject (1991). In other words, some of the women who enjoy Croft must be getting something out of the experience beyond titillation. Secondly, and widely argued in the academic literature on the subject, like the femme fatale before her, the fighting woman's sexuality is part of her disruption of a binary system of gender: she is not simply a man in drag, but rather a woman whose identity is formed by both feminine and masculine attributes. Barbara Creed writes,

¹⁸ See Literature Review in my introductory chapter for a more detailed outline of this critical debate.

Some feminist writers have criticised narratives that focus on woman's sexuality as "reducing" woman to her body, but I believe that woman's physicality and sexuality, like man's, plays an essential part of her journey... [and as such make her] an even more formidable opponent. (2007: 19...33)

However, in this argument Creed is not referring to the hypersexuality of virtual female action figures such as Croft. And here the feminist versus postfeminist battle lines become far more defined. Jeffrey Brown takes a postfeminist stance when he discusses the comic-book-to-film character Barb Wire, played by Pamela Anderson in the 1996 film of the same name. He posits, "The highly sexualized female body is as capable of being coded as a weapon as it is a passive plaything" (2004: 65). Brown is an example of a critic who argues that the strength of this kind of action hero's agency in terms of sex and violence means that she attacks a binary approach to masculinity/femininity. In particular he makes the point that recognising her in the role of dominatrix, as opposed to man in drag, is the key to understanding her strength, not least because (although her historical sources lie within an analysis of male fantasy [see Deleuze on Masoch, 1989]) the character of the dominatrix can be interpreted as ridiculing the constructs of both masculinity and femininity. He theorises that characters like Barb Wire and Lara Croft are no different to Ripley and Sarah Connor in that both types represent a combination of masculinity and femininity, and states: "excessive gender images (long legs, large breasts, and sexy hair) exist only as a compensatory surface to the underlying theme that toughness does not need to be conceived as a gender trait" (63). However, this "compensatory surface" seems nothing more than the old idea that the hard to swallow truth of toughness is sugared by the sweet coating of sex.

More tempered versions of Brown's opinions are presented by other critics whose praise of the hypersexualised female action hero has an ambivalent approach. In many writers' opinions, although Lara is only perfect in the eyes of the teenage boys who play with her, and is by no means perfect to all of the women and men who view her with a more critical eye, she is still a strong, active woman who represents a strong, active female hero. At the end of her essay on Croft the "archaeologist and iconic female fighter", Ursula Frederick advises, "not to mistake her for any particular treasure – but to imagine her as a key and guide that may eventually lead us to it" (2007: 72). In other words, Croft may not be ideal but perhaps she will be a stepping stone to something more inspiring. From my own creative and critical point of view I am not sure that this is enough. There are certainly elements to Croft that are powerful,

but fundamentally I find there are too many glaring issues in terms of her representation that stand in the way of finding her creatively inspiring. Tasker and Negra write of the “playful” postfeminist female protagonist (2007: 9) and Rikke Shubart describes the “ironic playfulness” of postfeminist female action women, giving *Charlie’s Angels* (McG, 2000) and the Bride from *Kill Bill I/II* (2003/4) as examples of this (2007: 313). She calls this group “High-Trash Heroines” and explains that the films that house them,

marked a stunted phase of decadence and self-conscious playfulness. Pathological “depth” disappeared from characters and narrative along with social consciousness, politics and morale. Left are style and bodies. Female bodies. (298)

I would argue that Croft falls into this category of action heroes. Like many of her male counterparts, what Croft lacks in depth of character, she makes up in breadth of chest and there is a danger to this style over substance as it continues the portrait of women as vacuous, sexual objects. However, it is her playfulness that compounds her membership to the high-trash club as the disturbing step into extreme fantasy is in itself something of a joke. As Claudia Herbst writes of Lara the gaming avatar,

Virtual female characters, such as Lara, have become hyper-real versions of a female persona. The virtual body is entirely synthesized, an exaggerated version of flesh and blood, and delivers what the real cannot: It omits all human imperfection. Lara combines extreme sexiness and aggression with virtuality; she has surpassed the real and is hyper-real. (2004: 27)

Even in the recasting of the avatar into human form as represented by Jolie, the hyper-real is very much the point. And when something is such a step beyond reality, so unauthentic, surpassing belief, it stops being serious. However, the consequences of this are decidedly sobering.

Alice

At this stage I want to continue my discussion of hypersexuality in contemporary action films by looking at a second, more slow-burning female action hero, who set fire to the games-to-movies market in 2010: Alice from the *Resident Evil* series. Played by supermodel-turned-actress Milla Jovovich, Alice at a glance may not appear to represent anything more than Croft for feminist studies. However, creatively I find her far more interesting, and because of this I wish to explore what it is about Alice that makes her stand out from her virtual peers. The characters of Alice and Lara are both superstars, both are international sex symbols, both star in series that are spin-offs from the gaming world and both are played by women famous for their beauty. Furthermore, Angelina Jolie has serious, respected acting talent, whereas Milla Jovovich does not. So why is Alice of interest to me as a writer when Croft is not? To be honest I am sure that much of my preference is personal. In an attempt to view this critically I would argue that the first difference between the two characters is to do with excess, or, in Alice's case, lack of excess. For me, Jovovich's body (central to all her films) is without excess. To explain this I turn to the earlier essay of Brown's that addresses the hardbodies of Ripley in *Aliens* and Sarah Connor in *Terminator 2* in the same terms that relate the female body to a weapon. He states,

this new hardbody is not offered up as a mere sexual commodity. While the well-toned muscular female body is obviously an ideal in this age of physical fitness, it is presented in these films as first and foremost a functional body, a weapon...Hers is not a body that exists solely to please men, it is a body designed to be functional. (1996: 56)

If we speak in Brown's terms of the body as a weapon, there is little in Jovovich to limit her capacity for physical agency through violence. Lean and powerful, she has no more than she needs. In other words, Lara's infamous 36D bust would simply interfere with her ability to fight (think of the mastectomy myths about Amazon warriors). But then I am aware of my own sophistry. Jovovich is a super model. She may not have a pin-up body in the traditional sense of possessing large breasts, round hips and a small waist, but she is undeniably still a sex symbol. And as a model her thinness could be read as frail in comparison to the signature large breasted but hardbodied Croft. However, in terms of my own interests, I still find her far

more appealing than Croft. If I think of the cinema as a fantasy space, where I can find a role model to admire and emulate, then Alice appeals to my own aesthetics. Just as, when I watch the *Alien* films, I am not only admiring Ripley for her actions but also for the way she looks. I believe in her strength and although I recognise her strong sex appeal, I find this somewhat alien-looking star avoids the most overt hypersexualisation that is represented in Croft. In the end Ripley's sexuality is not super human but real. Schubart writes of her "High Trash Heroines":

the female heroes are not "real" persons or "real" women. One could argue that popular cinema always deals with fantasy and pleasure. However, popular cinema also strives at creating characters the audience can identify with, and identification is the corner stone of a feminist film theory criticizing the stereotypical roles offered women and demanding nuanced female characters. In high trash heroines cinema, however, we never enter the Real World. (2007: 313)

Even if we take this quotation purely on a level of physical appearance, both Ripley and Alice are beautiful women, but they are not padded up action figures. This not only represents a version of the hybrid of feminine and masculine strengths that Croft offers, but also gives an example of a somewhat more realistic role model, a potential inspiration. However, Schubart is not simply referring to looks, rather she is talking about something that runs deeper within the narrative.

The second instance of my own taste also runs deeper as, like Schubart, it goes beyond the style of the body to the style and tone of the film. The violence in the *Resident Evil* series is highly stylised and reliant on spectacle. Yet the tone of the films is predominantly serious. Again, like the *Alien* films and *Terminator 2*, the odd joke line does not undermine the audience's engagement with a deadly situation. The *Tomb Raider* films, on the other hand, carry the tone of Schubart's "ironic playfulness" (2007: 313). This is one of the factors that contribute to the low-grade feel of this A-movie. In contrast to this, *Resident Evil* is a film born from and reared on the B-movie zombie horrors, but with its bigger budget it takes itself a little more seriously.

This discussion of seriousness brings us back to sexuality. In his later essay Brown goes on to argue of the hypersexualised action hero: "Being able to fight and shoot may make them

tough, but it is this toughness combined with overt sexuality that makes them dangerous in a way that male characters can never be" (2004: 65). To counter this statement I would raise the example of representations of James Bond (arguably prior to 2006 when Daniel Craig took on the role). He is an action hero defined by his exaggerated sexuality; a man that no woman can resist. I would posit that this is a source of gentle humour in many of the Bond films – he represents the fact that male action heroes can be overtly sexual, but that does not make them more dangerous. His playboy antics might help him get the job done but they also often get in the way of his missions and introduce a light approach to his work. And as with male action heroes, I do not accept that being hypersexualised makes a woman more dangerous, but rather it is a trick that serves to make unreal/fantasy the sexuality that society finds threatening within the female. Representations of sexuality that tie in to tough female characters are one thing, but hypersexuality makes it that much harder to take these women seriously. Creed states, "The female hero's dress and appearance does not function as a fixed signifier of either masculinity or femininity. The important thing is to analyse the *way* the film represents the heroine in relation to appearance, dress, actions, motivations and beliefs" (2007: 34). As far as I am concerned, even beyond the appearance of her breasts, *Tomb Raider* sets Croft up as soft entertainment, while *Resident Evil* presents itself and Alice on more serious terms.

That is not to say that the *Resident Evil* series is a model of feminist values. I accept that the line I am drawing between these two gaming franchises is tenuous to say the least. If anything, in looking at my own interest in the character of Alice I am trying to find whether such a line even exists. One of the most obvious arguments against the distinction between Croft and Alice is the fact that although Alice shows the potential to move away from the hypersexualised action hero, she often stands in contradiction to this potential. To begin with it is important to recognise how much the *Resident Evil* series, as with any game-to-film adaptation, is dictated by its origins in a video game. This has a number of immediate and obvious effects, for example the formulaic, uninspired plots and the underdeveloped characters. In terms of my interests it also has a big impact on the representation of women and sexuality. The essay, "Keeping Abreast of Hypersexuality: A Video Game Character Content Analysis", discusses the top selling 60 games of 2003:

Female characters...were underrepresented in comparison to their male counterparts... In comparison to male characters, females were significantly more

likely to be shown partially nude, featured with unrealistic body image, and depicted wearing sexually revealing clothing and inappropriate attire. (Downs and Smith, 2010: 721)

The first time we meet Alice she is naked and at the end of the first film she displays full frontal nudity. In fact, throughout the series her naked body is something of a trade mark. Her wardrobe is no less notable. In the first film she wears a cutaway mini dress, she is always braless and in the most recent instalment, *Afterlife*, she is dressed in a black catsuit and wears obvious makeup, something that has not been the case previously. However, when we meet her first catsuit wearing clone in *Afterlife* we have an example of her contradictions in play. In the close-up action sequences of her running up walls, Alice is wearing trademark boots. In contrast to this in the long shots of her legs and her whole body the boots have six inch heels. To interpret this as an ironic statement is to give too much credit to the films. Rather it is a lack of continuity that summarises her as a character. I do not take issue with women who wear high heels, but when they are on a ninja mission it is a pure example of excess, along the lines of Lara Croft's bust – something that is about style over function. However, for the rest of the film, and for most of the preceding series of films, Alice is in flat boots. In *Apocalypse* and *Extinction* (films two and three) her dress is decidedly more androgynous. In *Apocalypse* she wears vest and trousers, with one leg cutaway, her head is part shaven and she is without any discernible makeup. In *Extinction* she is in full length oilskin coat, vest and shorts with a set of stockings which at times look like trousers and at others look like punk-lingerie. Again, her hair is messily styled, she is without makeup and her short fingernails are dirty. It is partly because of all these representations that Alice is a forever fluctuating character. It is as if each film signifies a rebirth: from adolescent, to punk, to woman ranger, to gaming-style martial artist. Perhaps this is in the nature of these kinds of female action heroes. Andris and Frederick write of the female action hero's "fluidity and ambiguity" (2007: 12); Creed argues that films starring female action heroes are, "about women in the process of becoming "other", that is, a female hero whose heroism is defined in relation to her "difference" as a woman. This difference does not constitute qualities that are fixed but fluid, transgressive and transformative" (2007: 34). It is certainly the "transgressive" nature of the action woman that makes her interesting to feminism. But I only recognise her "difference" in terms of the gap between what we expect from her and what we expect from the imposed self of the tame woman. The difference between the action woman and the action man is a constructed concept that can come uncomfortably close to the idea of opposing categories of gender.

However, this transformation again explodes the construct of binary gender, just as it destabilises the positioning of violent female other in opposition to the female self. As such Alice's "fluid" qualities may go some way to explain why Alice is such a contradictory character. But it does not answer the question: what, if anything, makes her different from Croft? Perhaps the answer to this is to be found elsewhere. One important fact that distinguishes Alice from Croft is that she has never been an avatar in the games that inspired the *Resident Evil* series. Instead she is a character written specifically to lead the film and, as such, is not as predetermined as Croft. In some ways she is obviously an amalgamation of stereotype female video game heroes, but in other, significant ways she is defined differently by the "process of becoming "other"" in that she is a "fluid" violent hero that represents alternatives. With these comes a sudden breadth of possibility.

Alice as other is not only differentiated from the imposed female self of the tame woman, or even the male self of the game creators, she is also other to the selves of the women that video game manufacturers create. When it comes to Alice's signature nude scenes we could borrow another argument from Clover's discussion of the Final Girl. Clover states (with footnoted reference to Ripley), "Whatever its other functions, the scene that reveals the Final Girl in a degree of undress serves to underscore her femaleness" (1992: 58). Further to this, these scenes not only identify Alice as a *woman* warrior, they also reveal her difference to Croft. Jovovich may have a desirable body, but as I have stated it is by no means the norm for Hollywood pinups. Her constant lack of bra does not simply display her nipples, it also reveals the flatness of her chest. She is a woman and a sex symbol, but she is a distinctly androgynous one, and not the usual all-American girl. In a magazine interview that took place after the release of the first *Resident Evil* film Jovovich was asked about stepping into the shoes of Brook Shields in *Return to the Blue Lagoon* (Graham, 1991) when she took on the lead role in the sequel to Shield's hit, *The Blue Lagoon* (Kleiser, 1980): "Brooke and I have completely different images, she's always been very much America's sweetheart, and I am not. I'm an alien" (cited in Schubart, 2007: 272). Jolie may have made efforts to overturn any misconception that she has the nice as pie persona of an actress like Shields but as the biggest A-List star in Hollywood she can certainly lay claims to the title America's Sweetheart. If we look at the takings of the first of the *Tomb Raider* films in relation to those of the first *Resident Evil* film (released a year later) there are further interesting comparisons. *Tomb Raider* had a budget of \$115million, whereas *Resident Evil* was made on \$33million. Both films nearly tripled their initial investment, grossing \$274million and \$102million respectively. But while

Tomb Raider's takings were almost 50/50 between foreign and domestic (U.S.) takings, *Resident Evil* had a 60/40 split. Considering the international sensation that Lara Croft represented at the time, these figures show us the star power that Jolie wielded in the U.S. The second *Tomb Raider* film was not as successful and had a larger foreign to U.S. ratio (\$90m/\$65) but this can be explained by the panning the first and second instalments got by critics, which meant that the sequel only drew in the gaming faithful – predominantly based in Asia. *Resident Evil*, on the other hand went on to new heights with each new film and by the fourth in the series the takings had outstripped the first *Tomb Raider* on half the budget. With each film the gap between foreign and US box office takings grew, until *Afterlife* grossed \$296million with the foreign to U.S. ratio at 80/20.¹⁹

When Jovovich describes herself as “alien” she is making overt reference to her immigrant status, born in the Ukraine to a Serbian father and a Russian mother. It is in countries like Russia, and the game-crazy market of Japan that she finds her biggest followings, but her status as alien other is not purely about her nationality. I would argue that it is also Jovovich’s appearance, compounded by the characterisation of Alice, that defines her as an alternative to the American Sweetheart or the stereotype gaming heroine, as represented by Jolie. In the first film she was cast as the more feminine of the women fighters, in contrast to the butch hardbody Rain (a reborn Vasquez of *Aliens* fame). However, in *Apocalypse* Alice’s androgynous style was accentuated next to Jill Valentine, a police officer who is a stereotype gaming babe complete with guns, short skirt and boob tube. This could be read as recognition of Alice/Jovovich’s androgyny, with Valentine bringing in something for the boys. Valentine’s introductory scenes move from close-up of high heels, thighs (with gun strap), bottom, breasts, gun and finally, in the third setting a close-up of a heavily made-up face. Valentine’s outfits are not far removed from Alice’s dress of the first film, but Valentine is decidedly more Croft than Alice. However, although Valentine brings ‘femininity’ to the film, her inclusion seems something of a safety net to back up the decision to further accentuate Alice’s masculine tendencies. Valentine is a tough fighter but Alice takes on a lone rider role, appearing just in time to save the day when things get out of hand. Like the video games, these films are ensemble pieces, but Alice is very much the lead, which implies the producers brought in Valentine for generic eye candy but recognised and embraced the fact that the major appeal was still in the androgynous Alice. This tells us the producers have understood that the growing number of people who pay to see these films enjoy watching active women

¹⁹ All figures from boxofficemojo.com.

protagonists who are not all “big breasts and sexy hair”. Alice’s hair may be sexy to some, but not in the Barbie Doll style of Pamela Anderson’s perfectly coiffed peroxide curls. Rather, in *Apocalypse* and *Extinction* she has an unkempt punk style more in taking with a woman whose work is to get her hands dirty. Alice (in these two films at least) represents women whose bodies are realistically depicted as trained for violence. It is in this sense that we can see her as a follower of the iconic alien women, Ripley and Connor.

There are a number of other ways in which Alice can be seen as a successor of Ripley. On a plot level she is fighting against a monster (zombies) and her employer, a massive corporation that wants to use the monster for its own gain. As with the *Alien* series, each *Resident Evil* film shows Alice reborn, stronger and more closely linked to the monster she battles. Alice reflects Ripley’s own fear of the monstrous other, but at the same time she, just like Ripley, is closely connected to the aliens/zombies by image and plot. In *Apocalypse*, just as Ripley must fight her Alien, Alice is forced to fight Nemesis: an experimental soldier developed from bonding the zombie producing T-Virus with human DNA. However, we are told by one of the series’ ever present evil scientists that Alice’s own increasingly superhuman powers are a result of the same process: just like Ripley in *Alien*³ and *Alien: Resurrection*, the monster is part of her biological self. For Alice, her nemesis is also her twin. As Major Cain tells her, “You’re like brother and sister. Heightened speed, strength, agility. The same killer instincts. Parallel strands of research.” This is also reminiscent of the relationship between Connor and the Terminator (the thin, toned form of Alice reminiscent of Connor, the huge bulk of Nemesis compounding the association with the Terminator). Furthermore, perhaps it is arguable that Alice does not simply represent Ripley, but takes a step on from her character because from the start of the first film Alice is singled out as a soldier – a fighting woman. This in itself shows how (in part, because of characters like Ripley) times have changed and that male (most of her audience) and female viewers can identify with this figure without an evolved explanation of how she became so tough. Alice’s violent prowess does not need setting up in the way of the original Final Girls.

Alice’s situation as competitor is most explicit through the context of her being in a game. The films constantly (and annoyingly) remind us of their source material and give us the rules of the competition. But beyond this, Alice’s competition is shown in her spirit to keep everyone alive. The first film ends with Alice devastated by the death of all of the team except Matt. She laments, “I failed all of them. I failed...I’m not losing you.” She presents her situation in

terms of her own internal competition: winning and losing. This is developed when, in the second film, it is Matt who is reborn as her other, Nemesis. After referring to the relationship between Alice and Nemesis, Cain states “now we discover which is superior. Fight him.” Here we see an externalisation of the battle Alice fights in her self. In refusing to fight Nemesis she is not “losing” but rather coming to terms with the superior strength the T-Virus provides. Furthermore, it is when Nemesis dies (not at Alice’s hands) that she dies. In an echo of Dillon’s words from *Alien*³, Creed writes,

death should not be seen as signifying failure – rather death in many films represents a symbolic act that reinforces the extreme action needed to fight the corruption at the heart of the symbolic order. Death ushers in rebirth. (2007: 25)

Creed uses *Thelma & Louise* as an example of this but terms Ripley’s resurrection as a clone perverse. I disagree with this second point; I see Ripley in the fourth film as a reborn character literally at one with the monster inside. Creed continues,

the heroine’s death and rebirth form a symbolic function as she metamorphoses into a new being with a new identity. Having successfully embarked on the journey, she emerges at the end transformed by her experiences. (26)

Alice’s choice not to fight Nemesis represents her fight against “the corruption at the heart of the symbolic order”. Here the symbolic order is the Umbrella Corporation – the patriarchal group that wishes to force Alice into opposition against her dark other. Again, the real monster is not the zombie, the zombie virus, her monstrous twin, or the monstrosity of her own violence. It is the symbolic order which attempts to contain and exploit her violent power. But Alice’s refusal to accept Nemesis as her nemesis represents her merging of self and other on a transformative path to freedom. Alice dies and is taken back into the arms of the scientists but when she is reborn it is with the renewed powers that will enable her to fight against the corrupt order that attempts to control and exploit her potential.

Up to this point I have pursued the idea that these action women are at their most formidable when they are at one with their violent and competitive selves, represented by the dark other. It is clear that Alice is at her most powerful when she has been infected by the T-Virus, a biological weapon that turns humans into zombies. We understand that the most successful

horror movies bring audiences face to face with their greatest fears, so what could zombies represent in these films in terms of the monstrous other? Horror writer Mira Grant argues, “Zombies are our fear of contagion and infection... Zombies are...about losing your identity... You can’t see it coming, but once it’s there it’s everywhere all at once...and your loved ones aren’t themselves anymore” (Bradley, 2010). If we interpret the collective terms “our” and “your” in Grant’s quotation as representing the dominant communal male voice we can recognise the loss of identity as referring to the mask that men have imposed on women as domesticated creatures. The progression of this is to ask the question: what is the untame woman “infected” with? In this context I would argue that zombies represent an anxiety about the contamination of the domestic woman (passive) with wildness (active). Here, activity comes in the form of violence and competition. As an action hero Alice is infected with the T-Virus/active behaviour and, just as the zombie is tirelessly driven to feed in order to compete, she is driven to fight. For men who find comfort in the image of the domestic, submissive woman it might be pleasurable to witness a stylised (unreal) representation of a violent, competitive female hero. It is only when these representations are too real that they become unsettling as they allow for the potential of an age-old fear: that any man could go home to discover their own “loved ones aren’t themselves anymore.” In this reading the infection causes the loss of normative social identities which results in a rebellion against the status quo.

In the most recent *Resident Evil* film Alice is injected with an anti-virus and loses her supernatural powers at the very start but she continues to fight and win. Both the loss of supernatural powers and the determination to continue fighting can be seen more as narrative devices (the first to up the challenge, the second to maintain her status as contemporary action icon) than a destabilisation of the argument that she is at her best when she is at one with her monster or even a forwarding of the argument that Alice is as much an everywoman as a superhero. However, the accumulating contradictions that begin with plot devices and continuity and escalate into character seem in the final instance too great to overlook. Alice plays the hero and yet rejects her power, so it is left to Cain to explain her true potential:

Major Cain – Somehow you bonded with the T-Virus on a cellular level. You adapted it, changed it. You became magnificent.

Alice – I’m a freak.

Major Cain – No, you’re not mutation. You’re evolution.

This reminds us of Ash's "Perfect organism" speech from *Alien*. For Ripley it takes a full series to respect the monster for better and for worse and embrace it as part of her self. But Alice is supposed to be one of the next generation of female action heroes and yet she never seems happy with her strength until it is taken from her. Alice may in some senses be an interesting version of a female action hero but ultimately I would say she is a failure. The interview in which she describes herself as "alien" was given to *Playboy* magazine – the first post for the American (and world-wide) validation of mainstream pornography. And in the final film, lapped up by so many foreign (alien) viewers, Alice is closer to Croft than she has ever been: not only does she look more like a traditional gaming heroine, she also has started to spout one-liners that introduce a sense of "ironic playfulness". In the end Alice does not seem to give us much that is new, and beyond this it is debatable whether she even lives up to her iconic ancestors.

In this postfeminist age Alice reminds us that an action woman can still have massive appeal without silicone enhancement, and she provides another example of a financially viable competitive, violent woman, but all of this was achieved decades ago (and in better style) by Ripley. Alice's biggest achievement seems simply to be that she has increased the numbers of active female protagonists gaining world-wide success in the mainstream. I am intrigued by the images of her in tank top and trousers, her braless flat chest, her half-shaved head, her Texas Ranger Oil Slick coat, her unmade up face, her short and dirty fingernails, as they seem to offer something different from the usual representations of action women encountered in contemporary mainstream cinema – but these are always contradicted by the sexually stylised stockings, heels, flashes of makeup, full-frontal nudity shots, black catsuits or close-ups of her perfectly glossy lips. I want to believe in Alice, but I fear she came of age in *Extinction*, and though in this incarnation she showed potential to move on to bigger and better things, she has never quite become the force I want her to be. We must wait and see what the next instalment has to offer as she is a character who is constantly transforming, and perhaps she will move away from the catsuit and eyeliner of *Afterlife*, back (or forward) to something a little more gritty. But if I go by my instinct I think the formula that secured \$300 million in box office takings is not going to be interfered with: the style is working without the need for true substance. After all, these films are not built in Schubart's "Real World", but in the virtual space that Herbst terms "Hyper-Real" – a world where the monster of the male symbolic order is still firmly in power and demands the violent woman to be anything but real. A critic writing

about Lara Croft after the release of the first *Tomb Raider* film stated that, “The price of developing a movie character from an existing franchise, it turns out, is that it can’t be developed at all” (Stables, 2001: 20). The difference with Alice was supposed to be that although she was developed out of a franchise, she was never tied to a pre-existing character, and this leant her an air of possibility. We can wait until September 2012 to see what happens next but personally I am not going to hold my breath. Given what we have been shown to date I have to agree with Major Cain’s judgement of Alice: “You’re such a disappointment to me. All that strength, but no will to use it. What a waste.”

Beatrix Kiddo

Between the releases of the first and second *Resident Evil* films the mainstream cinema audience was introduced to an original female action hero that many, in this age of violent postfeminist protagonists, deemed to be a new feminist icon. In *Kill Bill I/II* (2003/2004) Quentin Tarantino gave us an action film that really does seem to bring something new to the debate. This is not purely down to the portrait of Uma Thurman’s central character, Beatrix Kiddo/The Bride, but also because the majority of the main players in the film are action women (four out of the five members of the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad, and a number of secondary characters). At the end of the film Bill compares Beatrix to his favourite superhero, Superman – a character that differs from the likes of Batman or Spider-Man because he is built around the unique mythology that it is his alter ego who is human, whereas his true self is the superhero:

Bill – it is in this characteristic Superman stands alone. Superman didn’t become Superman. Superman was born Superman... His alter ego is Clarke Kent... And what are the characteristics of Clarke Kent? He’s weak, he’s unsure of himself, he’s a coward. Clarke Kent is Superman’s critique on the whole of the human race.

Bill goes on to explain his story as an analogy of Beatrix as Superman and The Bride as Clarke Kent. Taken from a feminist perspective this is a voicing of the argument I have been moving towards throughout this thesis: women take on the roles of the “weak”, “unsure” female when

in reality they have the capacity to be active and heroic in the most masculine senses of the words. It is the white Bride versus the black-uniformed member of the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad. The “coward” Bride, according to society, is the self but in Bill’s reading this is a guise: it is the Deadly Viper Assassin that is the true self to this protagonist. When Beatrix asks, “Are you calling me a superhero?” Bill replies, “I’m calling you a killer, a natural born killer.” From almost the start of the film Beatrix is shown to be at home in what society determines as her dark other role as killer. This creates the appearance that *Kill Bill I/II* are films that attempt to show the potential agency in women through the form of the violent female hero in terms of selfhood and one way in which this attitude is developed is through the representation of competition.

“I’m the deadliest woman alive” is a statement that sums up not just Beatrix’s self-belief, but her insistence on being acknowledged as the best. In the terminology of martial arts a fight is a “match”, and in this sense every time Beatrix enters into combat she is also explicitly entering into a competition. Her reputation precedes her and each of the other female gang members are keen to be the one to kill her (Bud, the only male member, shows far less personal interest in defeating her – although he is the member who comes closest to succeeding). In her first match against Vernita Green the competition between the two women is vocalised:

Beatrix – Bill always said you were one of the best ladies he ever saw with an edged weapon.

Vernita – Fuck you, Bitch, I know you did not just qualify that shit.

Beatrix is acting out of this spoken competition when she then goes on to kill Vernita with an edged weapon. When Elle believes that Beatrix has been killed by Bud she tells him that her predominant emotion is regret: “Regret that maybe the greatest warrior I ever met, met her end at the hands of a bush whackin’, scrub, alchy piece of shit like you. That woman deserved better.” Elle also qualifies her statement, reluctant to admit Beatrix as the best, and there is a sense that her regret truly lies in the fact that she believes a “better” fate would have been for Beatrix to meet her end at Elle’s hands in a competition that would have proven Elle as the best. However, in this reading of competition between the female characters of the two films there is a further point to be made. When Beatrix refers to herself as “the deadliest woman alive” she is also qualifying her abilities – she is only the best of her sex (just as her praise of

Vernita qualifies her status not just by the phrase “one of”, but also by reference to her sex). It is in moments like this that close analysis reveals these films as something more (or less) than the feminist narratives they might superficially appear to be. This is most obviously represented in the fact that all these action women are not simply competing to be the best warrior, they are, more importantly, competing over the character of Bill.

If these women are “Deadly Vipers” then Bill is the “Snake Charmer”. After a show of his infinite abilities at martial arts, Bill’s former master, Pai Mei, asks Beatrix, “is it your wish to possess this kind of power?” He makes it clear that if she desires to be taught by him she must submit to him and his wish to humiliate her. Only under these terms will he be her master. Beatrix begs for Pai Mei to be her master; in another show of a dominant/submissive dynamic, Bill is also master to her and all of these women. In his own ironic words: “I’m the man”. When the women fight one another they do so at his behest. Each female character seems to represent a basic fetish (the demure geisha, the sassy black woman, the leggy blonde) and all of these strikingly attractive women battle with each other because they are submitting to the will of an old man that some, if not all, are in love with. There is an undeniable association to a series like *Charlie’s Angels* (Lucy Lui plays an Angel in the film as well as the Geisha in *Kill Bill*; Uma Thurman’s character is described as looking like an angel more than once), which posits Bill as Charlie. And to take this a step further, the man that directs their actions, Bill, is the ultimate representative of the ‘cool’ male, something that any audience can recognise as the trademark of the director-geek Tarantino himself. When Bill makes statements like “I’m quite keen on comic books” and “I’m all about Old Skool”, as we watch a film that is a series of scenes remade from (Old Skool) martial arts’ classics, and includes a long Japanese animation sequence, it is hard to miss the association that Tarantino is constructing between himself and the character of Bill. But the explicitness, and arguable irony, of this setup does not detract from the serious ambivalence it raises for the feminist viewer.

Even in the apparently feminist superhero speech that Bill delivers we can see, as is all too often the case within these two films, the reality is an inversion of the message that is superficially presented by the narrative. Firstly, if the Bride is Beatrix’s alter ego then, as I have argued in relation to the dynamic between self and other throughout this thesis, this weak and cowardly woman is also a secret yet integral/desired part of the warrior self. Secondly, but just as importantly, Tarantino, as the script writer, may be self-consciously evoking the mythology of Superman in these films, but in reality they tell the story of the heroes he

dismisses – Batman and Spider-Man. Tarantino is the auteur, the true self, and Bill is the character, the alter ego. As with Spider-Man it is clear that the alter ego in this scenario is the superhero, while Tarantino as the director is Peter Parker. This sense of Bill as the dark other/fantasy self of Tarantino is especially apparent in the three key scenes between Beatrix and Bill (the opening shooting of Beatrix, the fire-side scene, the final discussion before the showdown). Beatrix is always positioned at a low angle to Bill so that she looks up at him (he occupies the hero shot). In the first of these we do not see Bill, as he is literally shooting her from behind the camera; in the second two scenes Beatrix looks up at him with adoration. Again, this idolisation of “Bill” is an inversion of the reality of the situation. Tarantino is widely known to refer to Thurman as his muse, and the films are littered with references to her beauty (every key male character comments on her in this way). I recognise that Hollywood deals in fantasy and part of this includes the casting of beautiful women in lead roles. However, in this highly stylised homage to the martial arts film, the choice of physical attractiveness comes at the expense of combative skill. Thurman (and the rest of the Deadly Viper Squad) are not martial artists, they are actors. It may be true that in most martial arts films that use trained fighters, “theatrical fights are highly stylised and although they look authentic they are not necessarily closer to “real” fights than those produced in post production” (Andris and Frederick, 2007: 11). But in many of the key fight sequences in Tarantino’s films it is either apparent that a double is being used for Thurman, or her own attempts at mimicking kung fu or swordplay are jarring to the action sequences – in other words they do not always appear “authentic”. I accept that some martial arts films choose actresses over fighters but it is vital to their success that the casting does not compromise the suspension of disbelief – Zhang Ziyi from *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Lee, 2000) was originally a ballet dancer and as such her body control and movement are flawless. The same cannot be said of the *Kill Bill* films and considering they are predominantly action films that exist as an exercise in style, it is interesting that the style of action seems less important than the style of the central woman, Thurman.

The idolisation of Thurman is not the end of the problem. It is rather Tarantino’s continual wish to see her as a “blood-spattered angel” that causes positive readings of this character to be drawn into question. In *True Romance* (Scott, 1993), written by Tarantino, there is a drawn out scene where Patricia Arquette’s character is graphically beaten before she manages to dispatch her attacker; in *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994), Uma Thurman’s character is followed through the throws of a violent heroin overdose; in *Death Proof* (Tarantino, 2007) the film uses

the premise of a rape-revenge narrative to re-enact the kind of misogynistic violence against women that was the signature of so many of its 70s horror ancestors. I am not denying the fact that Tarantino's films thrive on active women or even on the detailed depiction of violence carried out on men as well as women, but there is an undeniable sense that his camera has a tendency to stray to the body of the abused female – often the more powerful she is, the worse her punishment. We are shown the gory death of Bud in *Kill Bill II* but when Bill dies it is a goreless end away from the camera, and even when the rapist Buck is killed by having his head repeatedly slammed in a door - in a style that shows Tarantino's interest in evoking an uncomfortable realism at the depth of the violent acts he portrays - we never actually see any damage or blood. Many male fighters in the film lose limbs, blood and their lives, but this generally happens at great speed, and with a number of cuts, as with the defeat of the Crazy 88. However, prior to this fight, Sophie Fatale's arm is cut off with savour and GoGo's bleeding eyes are given an extreme close-up. O'Ren has her brain revealed and Elle is left writhing and screaming, eyeless (symbolic of castration) on the floor. Tarantino himself has described the hard-hitting fist fight between Vernita and Beatrix as "hot" and "naughty" (cited in Schubart, 2007: 290).

Above all of the other characters, it is Beatrix who undergoes the most systematic abuse. From the first image of her bloody face, just as we witness her being shot in the head, we spend as much time watching Beatrix being beaten and tortured as we watch her fighting and winning. All action heroes tend to have a nadir, where they fall into the hands of the enemy and receive harsh treatment, some are beaten more than once within a single narrative, but none seem to undergo such a continual barrage of abuse as Beatrix. It is arguable that Tarantino is representing a realist imagining of the effects that such a life would have on an assassin and in this reading I cannot position myself as a writer who is uninterested in the close-up representation of the abused woman. However, I have struggled with writing depictions of violence because I am aware that in attempting to create a situation that speaks of the experience of the woman underdog, I do not wish to sensationalise her abuse, or reinforce her position as victim. I am not sure if I succeed, or if anyone can really succeed in this instance, but I feel that Tarantino's offering is a particular failure on this point. Schubart writes, "All the fights are iconographically planned in minute detail to impress us. Some... are rough, realistic, and very visceral... Other fights are highly stylised in the Hong Kong tradition" (2007: 308). I would argue that the visceral violence is generally only present when we are focused on Beatrix. This is because the blood on Beatrix is the start and end of Tarantino's

interest in realism. Beyond this Tarantino creates a beautiful, engaging cinematic narrative that revels in hyperstylisation of image, violence, characters and dialogue. Schubart defines the *Kill Bill* films as part of the High Trash Heroine category and explains that in this type of film,

We are in Lara's world, Angel World, and in Tarantino's Movie World. *Not* in the Real World. Whether the actress remains clean or covered in dirt, is untouched or raped and beaten, it boils down to fantasy either way. (313)

Bill tells Beatrix that killing her is not sadism but masochism, but I would argue that it is both: an enactment of a sado-masochist fantasy that puts on display the repeated raising up and beating down of a woman character thought by many to be a feminist icon. As much as Thurman/Beatrix is the subject of the film, she is also the object of an extreme male fantasy. Bill's brother, Bud sums up this fantasy at its most perverse after shooting her in the chest: "No one's a badass with a double dose of rock salt in the tits. Not having tits as big and as fine as yours I can't imagine how bad that shit must sting."

While Tarantino takes time to raise Beatrix as a "badass hero" and then depict her repeated abuse, he also works to undermine her power by introducing a comic tone to the narrative at pivotal moments. This is another instance of Schubart's "ironic playfulness": she points out the moment when Beatrix steps on Elle's eye as "gross, not scary", an interesting distinction between the options of a comic or a serious treatment of Beatrix's violent act (2007: 313). Two other examples of this kind of manipulation of tone are when Vernita's daughter arrives home in the midst of her mother and Beatrix's bloody battle and when Beatrix negotiates with another female assassin to walk away because she has just discovered she is pregnant. The humour derives from the extremity of contrast between the violent and the domestic and the comedy in both scenes hinges on two women innately understanding where a line must be drawn between work and home – a reinforcement of the binary opposition of self and other. This again could be seen as an introduction of realism into the narrative, a way of rounding out these otherwise entirely stylised characters, but this argument is countered by the fact that it is only with the women fighters that this occurs. When realism is introduced into the story of Bud – his humiliation at the hands of his boss in the non-domestic setting of a strip bar – it is represented at the other end of the spectrum from comedy as it takes on a sense of the tragic.

In contrast to Bud's treatment, just as Beatrix is physically abused throughout the film, she is also humiliated and ridiculed. In the final scene when Bill speaks of her as a killer he tells her she is "not a working bee but a renegade killer bee". The bee in this analogy relates to her name, but it also describes her in a strikingly belittling fashion. Furthermore, the description positions her strength not as an everywoman character but as exceptional. This, alongside likening Beatrix to a superhero (as previously discussed), is another instance of a tendency for the film to undermine the strength of Beatrix as an alter ego for all women (and as such a representative of womankind). Yet, almost in contradiction to this, containment of her potential threat as a violent woman is further developed through the portrait of her relationship to motherhood. Schubart argues that Beatrix is not driven by maternal instinct as she is unaware her daughter is alive until the very end of her mission (2007: 311). Firstly, I would argue against this by saying that maternal vengeance may be less palatable than maternal protectiveness but it still falls within the realms of a socially acceptable justification for female violence. Secondly I believe that the final scene stands against Shubart's reading, when Beatrix describes her reaction to taking a positive pregnancy test to Bill: "I was a woman, your woman. I was a killer who killed for you...But once that strip turned blue I could no longer do any of those things... because I was going to be a mother." In this explanation Beatrix never has an identity that is rooted in her own self, rather she is defined by those around her. Being a killer is not a part of her, but what she does to please her man. And being a mother must take up the whole of her. In her essay on the gaming figure of Lara Croft, Herbst argues that the introduction of reproductive technology has made women expendable and hence more acceptable inhabitants of violent spheres (Herbst: 2004). I would argue that the desire to keep a (potential) childbearer away from violence is a further way of limiting women's agency. However, I do agree with Herbst's statement,

Amidst the rhetoric of empowerment, it is often overlooked that damage done and hurt inflicted on this side of the screen is real. Women's onscreen ability to survive serious physical assault largely unscathed inadvertently implies tolerance to violence against women. (39)

To qualify this point I would state that this is also true of much of the violence we see portrayed against men. But beyond this I believe that Herbst's statement sums up one of the central tensions in my own work in terms of the cinematic depiction of violence. Furthermore, it brings us closer to pinning down the argument about Tarantino's own representation of

violence against the Bride as “light” and “fantasy” because, as realistic as her beatings are, she is as unscathed and perfect as ever by the end of the film and we have no sense that either her mind or her “big and fine tits” carry any permanent scars of abuse. If I continue in my argument about the association of realism to the uncanny/canny violent woman and with stylisation to the tame supposed self of woman then it is clear that Tarantino is only allowing his protagonist to play at being violent, just as the style of his films play with the fantasy of realist violence inflicted on his muse before returning her to her pedestal of stylised perfection.

However, beyond Tarantino’s play with the violent woman and realist violence, his films relay an even more disturbing message: mothers or not, these violent women deserve violent punishment. This comes back to the image of the snake – the deadly viper – symbol of the deceptive female. The key to the final climax is the fact that Beatrix has not told Bill that Pai Mei taught her the Five Point Exploding Heart trick. When Bill questions her choice to keep this from him she explains, “I don’t know. Because I’m a bad person.” This is typical of the internalisation of blame that women are traditionally expected to undertake; Bill shows no guilt or remorse at keeping the far bigger secret that her child is alive. The most obvious reason that Beatrix did not tell him is because it made her capable of defeating him. That makes her a competitor in the realm of men. Bill’s response seems, as with *Resident Evil* and *Alien*, to give the role of acceptance of the strength of the warrior woman’s dark other to the male character: “No, you’re not a bad person, you’re a terrific person. You’re my favourite person.” However, even this male-led affirmation of my reading of the violent woman warrior as a positive character is turned on its head as the love/hate relationship that Bill/Tarantino has with this woman is put into the most aggressive, sexualised language: “But every once in a while you can be a real cunt.”

Beatrix is “a real cunt” when she competes because it is then that she becomes a threat. It is what Bill sees as her deceptiveness that betrays the fear of the canny/uncanny in terms of the tame woman – that she is not what she pretends to be. In other words, there is an anxiety in this film that even when Beatrix/Thurman has been instated on her pedestal she has violence within her that is beyond the control of Bill/Tarantino. And at the heart of this anxiety (in the image of the snake as the deceptive female) is the fact that this is not a potential that is limited to the superhero Beatrix/Thurman, or to the violent women in the film, but rather the

potential for violence in every woman. This is where I find the source of influence for my own script. When Beatrix is given truth serum Bill gets to the heart of her:

Bill – Don't get me wrong – I think you'd have been a wonderful mother. But you *are* a killer. All those people you killed to get to me – felt damn good, didn't they?

Beatrix – Yes.

Bill – Every single one of them?

Beatrix – Yes.

One reading of this interaction is that Beatrix's short answers represent the fact that she is lying – even under truth serum she is still able to play roles because of her status as deceptive female. However, a second reading provides more of an explanation to Beatrix's interest for me as a writer. Ignoring Bill's egotism and the fetishisation of Beatrix as a killer, this interaction represents the idea of competition in the form of violence as being a motivation in itself. And under truth serum we believe that in this moment we are seeing into the true alter ego of the character. When we first see her in action Beatrix is organising to kill Vernita, having just encountered Vernita's four year old daughter. She explains her reasons for not killing Vernita while her daughter is in the house as being purely practical, "It's mercy, compassion and forgiveness I lack, not rationality." This statement is backed up by the fact that she goes on to kill Vernita while the daughter is still at home because the practical need to do so outweighs the practical disadvantages. Here we see where she is moving beyond Alice, as instead of being repulsed by her monstrous side Beatrix embraces her identity as Ash from *Alien's*, "Perfect organism....structural perfection...matched only by its hostility....A survivor. Unclouded by conscience, remorse or delusions of morality." This is a woman whose position as mother, and whose feminine role as emotional and irrational being, is blown away by her will to compete. Unfortunately, this intriguing centre to Beatrix, though present in some of the details, is never allowed off Tarantino's leash and the end of the film works hard to undermine such a reading.

From the moment Bill strokes his sword while making a decision on whether Beatrix will live or die, it is defined as a penetrating phallic object. Tarantino creates a narrative that revolves around beautiful women competing with different versions of this "priceless" weapon but when Beatrix is shown to be too "badass" she is beaten back into her place. Of course there is irony to this symbolism but it does not interfere with its intent and only serves to further the

“playful” and anti-serious tone that undermines the power of the violent woman. The film ends with Beatrix reentering the role of the mother, but just before we see her united with her child we are shown Beatrix lying on the floor, as she does when she is beaten, buried and shot in the chest, crying the same tears she cried for Bill, and yet again looking adoringly upwards and smiling as she repeats the words “thank you”. We do not know who she is addressing – Bill, Tarantino, God? In Tarantino's world they appear to be one and the same. Within the films there is an anxiety that the duplicity, the competition and the violence of Beatrix is representative of the potential for these things in everywoman and this is the monster that Tarantino hints at. Yet if there is duplicity at play here it is not coming from the violent woman but rather from the man who raises her up just to bring her to her knees. The true monster of these films is not the hidden alter ego of all women but the ego of one man: Tarantino. And from a feminist reading this ego is again providing us with the inverse of the kind of Superman story the *Kill Bill* films profess to be:

Bill – Take my favourite comic hero, Superman. Not a great comic book, not particularly well drawn. But the mythology! The mythology of Superman is not only great – it's unique.

In direct opposition to this *Kill Bill I/II* in their stylisation of image, character, dialogue and violence are beautifully drawn. The mythology, however, is ultimately neither great nor unique.

Jen and Shu Lien

Violent female action heroes were a mainstay of Asian martial arts cinema long before Ripley and her B-Movie big sisters took the western world by storm and the *Kill Bill* films were not the first to reinvent this cinematic form for an international audience. I am not going to attempt to delve into a discussion of the woman warrior in Asian cinema, because it not only requires an entirely different field of academic knowledge, but also demands understanding of the culture and history of a part of the world with which I am unfamiliar. However, the film that I do wish to focus on was a U.S./Chinese/Hong Kong/Taiwanese co-production that proved to be a transnational hit after being specifically developed to appeal to a global audience. It had a

huge impact on me as a viewer, and subsequently as a writer. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Lee, 2000) was by no means the first martial arts film I had ever seen, but it was the first one I encountered that depicted the particular style of fantasy violence that enthralled international cinema goers. I have a strong recollection of the overwhelming spectacle of Ang Lee's fight scenes as this film gave me an awe-inspiring cinematic experience. As I revisit the film now as a critic I am aware that much of the enlightenment that I felt was due to the women fighters who lead the narrative.

The martial arts film or *wuxia pian* is a complex genre with many subgenres that brim with symbolism, historical and cultural references, and nuances of plot and style that I cannot interpret here. However, I do recognise that the genre in the widest sense of the word has a history of women warriors. Although for a very long time a significant number of Asian films have centred on the fighting woman, it should not be assumed that these offerings are predominantly feminist in their values. Wendy Arons, in her essay on violent women in the subgenre of the Hong Kong kung fu film describes the many ways in which the different subgenres "invoke and undermine stereotypes" (2001: 27). Some set up a binary system that casts women as either beautiful victims or boyish fighters, some allow women both sexuality and martial prowess, and many films from the fantasy-action subgenre "redefine gender expectations and embrace a definition of gender as fluid and unfixed" (38). According to Leon Hunt, the wider genre of the martial arts film presents the audience with the *jianghu*, the world inhabited by the martial artist, which features "comparative gender egalitarianism, which is partly a legacy of Daoism" (2007: 146). In his footnotes Hunt explains that "In Daoist cosmology, the "feminine", passive *yin* complements the "masculine", dominating *yang*" (159). Arons speaks of "the yang of [the heroine's] violent fighting skills" (2007: 32). Here we see a direct link to the concept of self and other as something that shifts between cultures to the point that in some societies it represents completeness rather than opposition. And if taken in the context of a single warrior this concept embraces the 'masculine' or, rather, violent part of the individual as essential to the balance of the whole, whether male or female. Hunt explains how the martial arts film's depiction of women warriors has become more progressive in recent years, with *Crouching Tiger*'s Jen representing a new generation of young women who interrogate and challenge the rules of patriarchal order (in China/in martial arts). In this analysis I am particularly interested in investigating whether it was this first representation of the warrior woman as a merged self/other – a complete being – that created the initial impact on my creative imagination. Further, if I argue for an association between stylisation and

realism and the oppositions of self and other how does the unification of the latter pairing impact on the dynamic between the former?

Jen's Mandarin name is the dragon of the title. Her strength lies not just in her skill but her ability to surprise her opponents with her "hidden" status as warrior. To Jen her dragon is as integral and recognised a part of her self as her name. This is displayed by her wild disrespect for the rules of the systems set up around her and her wilful refusal to be guided or taught. Her hidden dragon is by no means a subconscious monster but a carefully nurtured, and pointedly concealed, centre. However, this chosen life of secrecy leads to distrust of all others. It is her fierce self-interest that makes her reject not only the offer of help from the noble Mu Bai but also the comradeship of the two other women in the film – Jade Fox and Shu Lien. She is metaphorically rejecting not just tradition but also sisterhood. We can read this sought independence in many ways, but there is certainly a strong element of competition in Jen as she rejects Jade Fox in order to excel ("Jen, my only family, my only enemy"), and fights Shu Lien to assert herself as a superior warrior. Although the film represents the underlying competition between the two women as being akin to that of the Viper Squad women fighting over Bill, in this case in respect to Mu Bai, I would argue that this is not simply a thinly disguised battle over a man, but truly and fundamentally a competition to see who is the best warrior.

From the first moment Shu Lien sees Jen her eyes betray her concern. The subsequent fight between them, with Jen masked but recognisable, is an expression of the competition that underpins their relationship. When Mu Bai first meets the younger woman Shu Lien is present and alert to their interaction. Later she says to him, "I knew she would intrigue you", but although Mu Bai is interested in Jen it is Shu Lien who pursues her. Even during their short friendship their words to each other are another form of sword-play and when their relationship finally explodes into unrestrained contest Jen threatens, "You're not a real friend. But I wonder how long you would last as an enemy?" During the ensuing battle over Mu Bai's sword we see a spectacular enactment of a martial arts' match. In the final scenes of the film Jen accuses Mu Bai of wanting her, not the sword, and this is the climax of their sexually tense story line. However, even though all of these elements are put in place to create a traditional love triangle, there is no great sense that Mu Bai is sexually interested in Jen. His character is exemplary in his dedication to his art and to Shu Lien and in his final death scene we are absolute in our belief of the spiritual and unfaltering nature of his love for her. The other side

to this is that Shu Lien is not only a martial artist, she is also a body guard – someone whose livelihood is based on her fighting prowess. She may be jealous of Jen but this is as much because of the younger woman's unrivalled potential as a fighter as anything else. Shu Lien understands Mu Bai and knows that he is not predatory. When he tells her that Jen could enter Wudan, where women are not allowed, this is not an attack on Shu Lien's sexuality, but her warrior ego. In both scenes where the women fight they are dressed in androgynous attire – although Jen starts in traditional aristocratic feminine dress she is in ninja clothes in her first battle and has borrowed some of Shu Lien's bodyguard clothes in the second – which allows them to display their competitive relationship without sexually objectifying them. And so, although there is certainly a backdrop of sexual competition between these female protagonists it is finally martial arts that are situated as both the literal and the symbolic heart of their conflict. As such, there is no monstrous other in this narrative of competition and violence – the women fight one another (and others) as equals. The story of Jade Fox hints at the misogyny of the Wudan hierarchy and Shu Lien is also apparently excluded from this level of training. Further, it is the dictates of wider standards of social propriety that do not allow for Jen as the daughter of an aristocrat to be a warrior. However, these factors do not stop both women being accomplished martial artists in their own rights and Jen is even invited to join Wudan because of her skill. In other words, the monster of society that we have located in all of the previous films is a far less threatening beast against these complete warrior women.

As well as being at the centre of the competition between Shu Lien and Jen, martial arts are at the centre of the narrative as a whole. Lee does not just offer us a film that regurgitates the best-bits of other great kung fu films, but rather takes time to situate his own narrative in a history and a culture that give a sense of depth to the action as well as the drama. The new term coined at the release of *Crouching Tiger* by the December 2000 issue of *Sight and Sound* magazine was “Martial arthouse” (cited in Hunt: 2004: 281; 2007: 145). Perhaps these extraordinary depictions of the fighting woman, so far beyond the later offerings of *Kill Bill* or the video-game-films, are born of the fact that this is an art movie. However stylised it is, it takes a serious approach to the narrative and this produces a content that has true depth – that is situated in the real. *Crouching Tiger*'s drama has substance, but the style has substance too. In fact the two are an inextricable part of one another as the expressionism of the film, at its most meaningful during the fight sequences, is integral to the furthering of the dramatic narrative. *Crouching Tiger*'s initial intrigue for me was not just an aesthetic flight of

fancy but rather an awakening to the potential of the stylised art of the martial film. Lee was known for his drama prior to making this film and here we see the merging of drama and martial arts into a single form. Just as the film's cultural roots marry the *yin* and *yang* of self and other, so they bring together stylisation and realism.

Subsequent to *Crouching Tiger*, a number of martial arts films designed to appeal to western audiences went into production but in these Hunt identifies a shift back to a more traditional understanding of binary gender roles. He argues that *House of the Flying Daggers* (Zhang, 2004) "concern with shedding duplicitous surfaces can be seen as a desire to see its characters' authentic selves. When all guises are dropped, its central love triangle comprises two violent male rivals (but former friends) and a self-sacrificing girl who dies for a fantasy of romantic love" (2007: 152). Again, there is a love triangle, but this time it is not even left to the women to enact the action. Rather the female protagonist has been sent back to the stylised world of the passive heroine. My reaction to *House of the Flying Daggers* was one of disappointment. I was looking for a repeat of the thrill I experienced when I first saw *Crouching Tiger* but in the end felt a little bored by this second example of the film type. At the time I interpreted this as a mixture of "nothing beats the first time" and sensory overload (as with my experience of computer-generated imagery in cinema, the spectacular visuals of the film eventually became repetitive). However, again with hindsight, I can now see that it was also the story that lost me. I recognise that my exultant reception of *Crouching Tiger* was not just about experiencing a new form but about the substance I discovered in the conceptual space created through the combining of content and form and its association to the completeness of the female self and her competitive, violent other. Here I found the merging of cinematic fantasy and identification.

Conclusion

The postfeminist generation of female action heroes is for the most part a disappointment to me. The focus on "style and bodies" moves away from the feminist potential of their iconic forerunners and puts little in its place to make up for this. To some extent this seems an inevitable path for a generation of women who may (or may not) have moved on from the idea of gender as something natural but still believe that it is not only their (as opposed to

society's) choice to be feminine but that this choice is somehow empowering. The films that I have looked at do make attempts to go beyond the idea of the tame woman as self by interrogating the violent woman as alter ego. But in the instances of the *Resident Evil* series and the *Kill Bill* films, the final message has been reactionary. Realist images of the woman hero in all her competitive glory are given moments of selfhood but they are ultimately consumed by the stylised and "playful" angel of postfeminist action cinema as their realist counterparts are forced back to the realms of the monstrous. As with the films of the previous chapter, I argue that the true monsters in these narratives are the social ideologies that exile active women from a position of selfhood. However, there is hope to be found in the huge success of *Crouching Tiger*. We can read this international box office hit as a reflection of the fact that, though audiences may want to see violent female protagonists at work, they do not necessarily need to see them in the style-over-substance format that houses so many contemporary action women. Further we can see that when the violent woman is at her most competitive, she does not always have to be in conflict with her society.

The postfeminist action woman has certainly increased the numbers of active women we see in the role of protagonist on our screen and for this we must give her credit. The action film may even have led the way in representing new, transgressive and transformative kinds of female agency in its women heroes, but to find a true meeting of the *yin* and *yang*, these women have to be more than just style. This is why I believe Ripley is still the female action icon after 30 years (even to a generation who were not there to experience the power of her impact as the first mainstream character of this type) – because Scott took the time to create an engaging and dynamic dramatic protagonist, not just an action hero. In this Ripley was never to be confused with a superhero but represented everywoman. Unfortunately, most postfeminist action women have not managed to follow even the original influence of Ripley, never-mind *Thelma and Louise*, or postfeminist contemporaries, Jen and Shu Lien, as they have moved further and further into the bonds of hyperstyle and the status of the exceptional. To attempt to locate women who have learnt from their revolutionary big sisters my discussion is moving to an interest in the violent, competitive woman outside of the action film, in the realist world of drama. However, just as with *Crouching Tiger*, drama does not have to be confined to the real: it can still be spectacle, can be expressionist, because in cinema, style and substance are at their best when they are a part of one another, something I continue to discuss in my next chapter.

Chapter 3: Competition, Violence and Realism

In attempting to determine whether girls are engaging in “nontraditional” delinquency, one must first recognize that girls’ capacity for aggression and violence has historically been ignored, trivialized or denied.

Handbook of Violence
(Chesney-Lind, Artz and Nicholson: 2002: 191)

Wild nature is not so wild as we think, or we are wilder – it is not so far from us, and we are nearer.

The Gentle Art of Tramping
(Graham: 1926: 80)

Introduction

In this chapter I investigate the movement of my focus from action film and stylised violence to drama and realism. I continue to discuss some of the theories surrounding the threat of the violent woman to society and look at the protagonists Lee (*Monster*) and Nina (*Black Swan*) within the specific context of these films as works of realist drama.²⁰ I investigate the potentials and difficulties raised by these realist portraits of the competitive, violent woman as I look forward to my final chapter – a concluding discussion of how my own script is situated within the context of the influences that make up the focus of this critical thesis.

²⁰ See Appendix D for synopses of these films.

From Stylisation to Realism

One of the key positive things that stylised action women and their narratives have the potential to bring to the audience (something I have alluded to but not explicitly discussed until now) is the ability to create a world in which a woman can behave competitively and violently without those around her drawing attention to the fact that she is female. In other words, the stylised films that have engaged me are often the ones in which there is little surprise that the female action hero is good at being violent.²¹ A very recent example is *Haywire* (Soderbergh, 2011), where the protagonist is a female spy yet the only direct reference to her sex is in a late (non-ironic) exchange between her supervisor and a male assassin who is hired to kill her –

Assassin – I've never done a woman.

Supervisor – You shouldn't think of her as being a woman. That would be a mistake.

The film goes to great lengths to make us believe in the central character's physical prowess. The casting of the role went to a martial artist who is absolutely convincing as a physical match for the men who attempt to kill her. And although the surrounding film is disappointing, her character is still representative of a new breed of female action hero who does not need to explain her ability to be competitively violent. However, the fact that her sex was not alluded to in the film was also the focus of critical discussions at the film's UK release, underlining how unusual it is for an action woman's gender not to be noteworthy within the narrative that houses her. This may be a cultural matter – in *Crouching Tiger*, when those around Jen discover her "hidden dragon" they are not surprised because she is a woman, but because of her social status. In fact Shu Lien immediately recognises her as a warrior despite the fact that she is both a woman and an aristocrat, and Shu Lien's own status as warrior never seems noteworthy to those around her. But in the English-speaking realist world of violent women in film, the opposite is true, as represented by the critical reaction to *Haywire*. We may be starting to make films that deliver a more forward-thinking message but our society still does

²¹ See Chapter Two for a discussion of how *Kill Bill I/II* undermines itself as an example of this.

not allow a violent woman to be part of the status quo. Although this may be understandable on the grounds of violence, it is unacceptable on the grounds of equality. It is true that the legitimacy of men's violence is endlessly explored in different film narratives, for example *Licence to Kill* (Glen, 1989) – this license of the title is something that can be revoked. However, it is far more commonly the case that a woman's violence puts her on the outside of society. It is the films that both represent and interrogate this social outcasting that interest me the most.

In her book *The Violent Woman*, Hilary Neroni argues that society is traumatised by the violent woman because she fundamentally attacks what we believe women to be, and as an extension of this, what we believe men to be (2005). The disruption of this binary gender system uncovers the antagonism the violent woman represents to society. According to Neroni the disturbance of traditional beliefs about feminine passivity and masculine activeness results in a hysterical questioning: what do these women want? She explains that to calm ourselves we create fantasies that either reinstate these women into the traditional social order by representing them as incapable of violence because of their femininity, or depict them as "non-female" (e.g. lesbian, sexually promiscuous, non-maternal, etc.) (67). Neroni argues that the reason for trauma and the hysterical response is that the violent woman poses a fundamental threat to the ideology on which our society is based. I believe that this not only explains society's fear of the violent woman, but also its fascination with her. In cinema we love to encounter our deepest fears, but we also like these fears to be ultimately dispelled through a satisfactory resolution – the fantasy endings of many films are akin to the fantasies we create to escape the trauma of the real, reinstating a stylised order and reaffirming ideology. Neroni argues the huge reaction to *Thelma & Louise* mirrored the reactions of society when real women murder – representative of the trauma caused by both as they upset the supposedly neatly cooperative balance of society by exposing a fundamental flaw in the system. *Thelma & Louise* does not give us a resolution that ties up the fears it raises, and women who kill, however much we explain them away, still chip away at our belief system. This supports my own argument that the problem with *Thelma & Louise* was that it was just too close to the bone. Neroni posits that the release and reception of this film was a turning point that led to the subsequent acceptance of the violent woman as part of main stream cinema. However, I would state that the lack of public outcry over later depictions of violent women is not simply because *Thelma & Louise* broke the back of the problem, but also because few films since have come as close to representing the real violent woman in

mainstream cinema. We accept the violent woman as existing in the stylised form of later films just because of the form in which she exists: she is not real; and in many ways this distance from the real makes her a safe embodiment of sexual fantasy, a non-serious female, or the tame woman. My critical work is now moving on from the stylised films that have been influential to me, into the world of women, competition and violence in contemporary realist popular cinema. Here I will look at two films that I believe continue the journey started with *Thelma & Louise*: *Monster* (Jenkins, 2003) and *Black Swan* (Aronofsky, 2010).

Aileen Wuornos and Lee

An issue that silently underlies all of the above is justification. Neroni's "fantasies" are another word for the justifications that society puts in place for behaviour that it deems to be 'unnatural'. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, this is a sliding scale – men have more justification for violence than women, women protecting their children or themselves have more justification than women acting out of anger (revenge), women acting out of anger have more justification than women acting out of competition. I have stated that I struggle with justification when it comes to writing violent acts. On one hand realism is a way of interrogating violence seriously (not purely for entertainment or to sell vigilante values) but part of this means exploding the ideological acceptance that only men are violent. This argument is fraught with its own conflicts – again, a reason why it is so intriguing for me as a writer. When investigating these questions of justification, what better place to start than a film that takes the story of a real life female serial killer, initially judged by society to be unjustified in her actions and, therefore, a monster. The fundamental competition here is society versus Aileen Wuornos.²² Society attempts to justify its condemnation of her as a killer by portraying her as monstrous. To counter this, the film is to some degree presenting a justification of her actions. However, the extent to which it succeeds as a story is founded on the realist depiction of her character. The film does not attempt to feminise her and therefore make her incapable of violence. In fact it indulges in what Neroni would term her "non-female" status. She is not beautiful or girly, she is a lesbian and she is a prostitute. Further, we are not made to feel that her killings were entirely justified – she is still represented as a

²² In this chapter I will refer to the real life Aileen Wuornos as "Wuornos", and to her fictional characterisation in the film *Monster* as "Lee".

murderer. Just like Macbeth, she gets drawn into the downward spiral of violence and bloodshed, but unlike Macbeth, her search for power has its beginnings at the bottom of the food chain, a place it is nigh impossible to escape. In this the film displays how society has failed her. In the end *Monster* is not a justification of Wuornos's killings, but rather an attempt to understand how she came to make the choices that led her to violence and murder, and as such it is an interrogation of the very justifications society demands. It presents a woman determined by society to be a monstrous other but in the telling of her tale the film asks us to consider whether the real monster in this story is society itself.

The obvious thing that sets *Monster* apart from the other films I have discussed so far is the fact that it is based on a true story. From the outset the film demonstrates a strong interest in authenticity. The director, Patty Jenkins was in contact with Wuornos prior to her execution and was given access to all of the personal letters she wrote from prison. In the documentary about the making of the film, *Monster: The Vision and Journey* (Spicer & Moore, 2003), Jenkins often refers to the "truth" that she was trying to represent within an artistic space. The character of Lee (Wuornos) is played by Charlize Theron, who underwent a much reported physical transformation (weight gain, hours of makeup, dark contact lenses) and studied photos and video footage of Wuornos in order to play the role (for which she won an Oscar). As with all films based on real life, the end product can only be a fictional reimagining and Jenkins openly concedes that a number of artistic decisions were made that moved away from the script's biographical source. One of these was to not cast someone who looked like Wuornos's lover Tyria in the role because it might be hard to get the audience on side (Jenkins describes Tyria as overweight with missing teeth). Instead the role was given to the pretty, girlish Christina Ricci. Jenkins explains: "It was more relevant for me for her to appear the way she did in Aileen's eyes – as a cute, attractive woman, which is what she was to Aileen" (*The Making of a Monster*, Spicer & Moore, 2003). This emphasises the importance of empathy within the film: it is not just the director's challenge to make an audience sympathise with Wuornos, it is her job to make us identify with her – we must see through Wuornos's eyes.

Although the film tackles a very difficult subject head-on there is a tendency for it to avoid inundating the audience with the worst details of Wuornos's existence. The opening sequence is stylised in "Wonder Years" home-video footage that puts a sheen over Wuornos's childhood experiences. This is in part done as a parody of the concept of the American Dream, with Lee's voiceover discussing her childhood dreams, but it also avoids throwing the audience in at the

deep end. It is not until much later in the film, after Lee has been brutally raped and has started on her killing spree, that we are explicitly told Lee was abused as a child by her father's friend. In this instance the information is used to offset her violent acts. However, the film does not introduce many of the real-life allegations surrounding Wuornos's upbringing: her mother leaving when she was born, her grandfather being her father, her grandfather and her brother sexually abusing her from a young age, her own experience of prostitution beginning from as young as nine. It alludes to her living in the snow but does not give details of the length of time (many months) that she was doing so after being thrown out of her house for getting pregnant at 13 (possibly by the local paedophile). Later, when it comes to the depiction of the rape that leads to Lee's first murder, the scene is strikingly short in comparison to Wuornos's description of the event on the witness stand at her own trial (*Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer*, Broomfield, 1993). It is also nowhere near as graphic. One obvious explanation for all of this could be that most viewers faced with the extent of the abuse acted out on Wuornos would simply switch off. As the film stands it is hard enough to watch. A second, alternate, explanation could be that to dwell on the worst acts of violence could also be seen as a gratuitous indulgence in violence as spectacle. However, there is a third explanation that stands alongside either of these. Jenkins tells us that she is not denying the accusations society has thrown at Wuornos, she is simply asking us to take a closer look at her story. In doing so she is encouraging the audience to understand Lee/Wuornos's actions, even if we ultimately disagree with them. She is asking the audience not to define this woman as a monster, but rather to see her as someone who fundamentally has been let down by society. In order for us to recognise this, we also have to recognise something of ourselves in her. Just as she cast an attractive love interest for Lee, by underplaying the extremity of Wuornos's experiences and by focusing on the everyday aspects of her character (it is after all a moving love story), Jenkins is bringing Lee/Wuornos out of the exile of otherness and back into our own world of selfhood. However, in doing this Jenkins is also lessening the case against the society that shaped Wuornos, one in which she was assaulted from an early age.

The problem with Jenkin's choice is that as it brings the character of Lee into the fold, it pushes out the real person, Wuornos. Wuornos's life was certainly stranger than fiction but that is true of many people. Even though she was the first woman reported to react to her circumstances by becoming a serial killer, it would be disingenuous to state that she is the only child and woman to suffer this extremity of abuse or to react violently to her situation. The subtle down-playing of Wuornos's experience creates a knock on effect in terms of the film's

balance. If the abuse of Wuornos is made more palatable in the film then so is her behaviour. A scene in the film that represents an amalgamation of Wuornos's court appearances for sentencing has Lee shouting at the judge: "Thank you Judge. May you rot in hell for sending a raped woman to jail." There is one particular instance that this scene is based upon, but in the real life case Wuornos shouted at the judge: "I hope your wife and kids get raped in the arse. I know I was raped and you're a bunch of scum. Putting someone who was raped to death you fucking mother fucker" (*Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer*, Broomfield, 1991). Given Wuornos's treatment we can understand her outburst, but in the world of the film this kind of reaction would not only have interfered with the film getting a general release, it could have feasibly turned the audience against Lee. This is in itself evidence of a form of stylisation of the character of Lee through the toning down of her language.

Showing Lee as the uncensored Wuornos would have risked an interpretation that she was deranged. Ann Wilson writes in her preface to Shelley Scott's book, *The Violent Woman as a New Theatrical Character Type*:

Ascribing murder as a symptom of pathology allows society to label these individuals as "sick," and the rest of us – those who don't murder – by default under the more comfortable category of "healthy." By casting murderers as the "other" this question is avoided: how different from the norm are those who murder? This question has no easy answers. (2007: i)

One of *Monster*'s greatest successes is the extent to which it forces the audience to confront this very question. However, even though at its release it did not provide the audience with a no-holds barred representation of Wuornos's story, it did give us a narrative that shows how someone society determines as other can be made to seem monstrous. Neroni argues that real life women killers traumatise society, we become hysterical and then soothe ourselves with fantasy that positions these women as either too feminine to be killers or "non-female" (2005). This pattern of behaviour can be seen in the reaction to the real Wuornos, but it is also apparent in the popular reaction to her fictionalised portrait in the character of Lee. Society's capacity to cover over ideological cracks was instantly demonstrated in the most widely reported reaction to the film – amazement at Theron's make-under. Theron's 'uglification' caused such widespread commentary in the popular media that it overshadowed any reaction to the film's content or to the discussion of Wuornos's treatment by society and at the hands

of the justice system. The general consensus of opinion was that it was incredible how convincingly Theron played the part of Wuornos. A further meaning that can be read into this is that it was incredible that such a beautiful woman could so successfully pretend to be a monster. Here, the media performed the function that most mainstream Hollywood films incorporate into their own narratives: the films spend 115 minutes thrilling us with our biggest fears, and then in the final five minutes put the world back to rights.

From the introduction of the violent woman in film's history she has been a character we all love to watch, but only under certain terms. Neroni gives the 1940s film noir femme fatale as an example of this:

The distancing of the femme fatale from the average woman blurs the antagonism that the femme fatale's violence engenders. In other words, if we can dissociate her from other women, then we can protect ourselves from the trauma that she represents. (2005: 24)

In other words it is vital that we never fully identify with the character in order that we can make her into a scapegoat. This allows us to dispel the threat that the femme fatale poses by killing her off at the end of every film and to justify this by labelling her as bad (active/violent) and deserving of death in opposition to the good (passive/non-violent) woman. In *Monster*, society has not moved on – Lee is still sentenced to death – but we are not left feeling that justice has been done. Our fear that anyone could be capable of such acts given the right environment is not dispelled. So in this instance the popular media took up the job of tying the loose ideological ends. Neroni's argument that the way to move on from the trauma and hysteria caused by real-life women killers through the creation of a fantasy that reintegrates these women into the social order is played out in the case of Theron. There is something threatening, and traumatic, about the fact that a woman who represents a positive ideal of femininity and beauty can so seamlessly transform into a "non-female". To counter this threat the media focused on the fact that she was 'acting' this monstrous part. By separating Theron from Wuornos/Lee, the good woman from the bad, the lady from the whore, we see what Neroni would describe as "an attempt, through ideological fantasy, to mold her back into what a woman should be." (62)

Theron's performance was certainly noteworthy but, culminating in the acclamation of winning an Oscar (often described as a particularly populist award), Theron's difference to Wuornos/Lee is brought to the foreground and this eclipses any deeper interrogation of the connections between the women who stand behind this portrait. Shelley Scott writes:

Implicit in this praise [of Theron's dedication to her craft as displayed by her physical transformation], however, is the understanding that Wuornos' appearance was integral to her criminality and that Theron had to be made to look like a "monster" in order to portray her monstrous character. (2007: 12)

This is certainly the spin that the media put on the transformation, but, in terms of the artists involved in making the film, the make-under is also about realism, which directly counters the films of the previous chapter that present a stylised and/or hypersexualised version of female violence. Further, Theron did not simply change her physical appearance, she displayed a convincing depth of psychological realism. In interviews with Theron on the subject it is clear that she went deep into Lee's character. Outtake footage of her performing the execution of her final victim shows her bowed over sobbing after the shot has finished. Jenkins states, "It's literally like she's channelling Aileen at moments, where suddenly this other, entirely different human being shows up on set. It rips a piece of her soul out to go to these places. It's not just tears and smiles. It's living"; Theron also speaks in the same terms of Jenkins' experience of writing the script (*Monster: The Vision and the Journey*, Spicer & Moore, 2003). I believe that part of this film's ability to embody Wuornos so effectively is that both of these artists did not simply "channel" someone else: they tapped into a part of their own selves. Theron's engaging quality seems to come in part from a sense of control. This is especially apparent at the start of the film as she builds her relationship with her girlfriend – the tangible sense of the power that the character has over this smaller, younger girl is electric for the audience. And the fact that Lee/Theron does not have to look like a Hollywood bombshell to be attractive shows that this film is presenting the possibilities of an everywoman in terms of sexuality, as well as competition and violence.

Theron gets to the heart of the matter when she describes the lack of interesting acting roles available to women in film:

I find it very rare that women get to play really conflicted, flawed characters – those are usually the parts that de Niro gets to do or Dustin Hoffman, and when they do it it's accepted and it's almost cool and for some reason when women do that it's not encouraged because it's not comfortable to watch. (*The Making of a Monster*, Spicer & Moore, 2003)

Perhaps a character is something that can be put on and discarded like a mask. But there is nothing mask-like in Theron's performance. In fact, it is an incredible display of discipline. And to try to separate the blonde Hollywood starlet who trades on her looks from Wuornos/Lee is to deny the fundamental similarities between the two women. As Lee states in voiceover:

The thing that people never realised about me was that I could learn. I could train myself into anything. People always look down their noses at hookers – never give you a chance because they think you took the easy way out. But no one could imagine the will power it took to do what we do. Walking the streets, night after night – taking the hits and still getting back up. But I did, and they'd all miss out – because they had no idea what I could discipline myself to when I believed in something – and I believed in her.

As a result of this connection between Theron and Lee's discipline, Hollywood and the popular press, as sellers of the American Dream, saw a threat in Theron's portrait of Lee/Wuornos and so acted quickly to reintegrate Theron back into their system.

The competition in *Monster* is, as I have stated, between Lee and society. This is more specifically played out within the context of the American Dream: the belief that anyone can find happiness if they work hard enough to achieve love, property and wealth. The film takes great pains to explode this idea. The introduction of Lee as the child who believes she can be discovered like Marilyn Monroe is fitting. As I have noted in my introduction, Monroe, as the quintessential blonde Hollywood starlet, is representative of a contender and of someone who wields a certain amount of power. However, underneath this, I believe that Monroe's existence exposes everything that is insidious about the American Dream. For me she is the epitome of the exploited, powerless woman – someone who as a child and an adult was abused and taken advantage of, while being sold as an object, and who ended up penniless and isolated before her untimely death. The irony, and ultimately the tragedy, of the

character of Lee is that just as she battles a system that positions her on the outside, she is also a product of that system. As she struggles against what she instinctively recognises as unfair treatment she is still only able to fight her case within the constraints of the binary categorisations she has been taught by the society that rejects her. This is even represented at the level of her language as she asks Selby to reaffirm her sense of identity: "I'm not a bad person, I'm a real good person, right?" When she tries to get a job it is because she wants to earn money, but also because she recognises that her current position as a prostitute is devoid of power. The American Dream is a capitalist model that relies on the dynamic of exchange as a means to progression. Lee, as a woman, is on the sidelines of the game, and, as a prostitute, is not even allowed into the arena. Because of the way that those around her have abused her, and society has failed her, she has become a player with no value – she has nothing to exchange beyond her body. In other words she is powerless. Her motivation throughout the film is to obtain everything that capitalist society tells us we should want and we can have if we just put in the work – a loving partner, a home, a car, and money to spend on enjoying a good lifestyle. Lee's obsession with money and the gaining of material possessions is, unknown to her, a struggle to obtain some of the symbols of the power that have always been denied her, while being wielded by those around her. In other words, part of the realism of Lee's character comes from the fact that it is her struggle to move out of the exile of other, onto the playing field of selfhood that brings about her first act of violence.

When Lee's attempts to get money fail, and she is subjected to an extreme act of abuse, she resorts to violence. Here, for the first time, she has a taste of power. Neroni writes:

a violent act always holds a kind of value, and one can always expect to have that value returned in one form or another. One might even say that the exchange of violence is capitalism *avant la lettre*. Thus, those who engage in violence engage in an accepted exchange that both mirrors and sustains capitalist society. (2005: 55)

It is certainly arguable that violence does not always conform to this pattern (there is not always a return for a violent act) but in the context of this film it is an apt model. Through violence Lee has found a way to get into the game – as well as exacting revenge, she discovers an opportunity in killing: the opportunity to take money from her victims. However, she fails to understand two things. Firstly, in this system of exchange, violence breeds violence.

Whether it is the downward spiral of her actions or the societal repercussions that she inevitably faces, from the first killing, Lee has bought into a relentless system. Secondly, in society there may be instances when violence is empowering for men, but it is not so easy to justify for women, and for Lee/Wuornos as a non-female (a prostitute) it becomes a death sentence. This is a further part of the tragedy of her character, as Lee does not understand that what she is striving to obtain will never be accessible to her. Neroni writes, "violence does not necessarily erupt spontaneously or as an irrational response to a situation, but rather ... violence plays a very specific role in creating individual and social identities" (41). For Lee her violent acts go beyond revenge but are also part of her wish to create a more competitive social identity; her macho demeanour, her desire for an at-home-wife and her posturing beer drinking are all symbolic of the status of manhood, and in her world it is men who hold power and have control. These are the weapons she chooses to enter the competition of the capitalist market. What she fails to recognise is that because of her status as a woman (and, even worse, as a prostitute) this kind of behaviour will always be unacceptable in the eyes of society. In other words, in this world Lee is not allowed to compete and her naivety makes her both vulnerable and heroic.

Dawn Heinecken, in her book *The Woman Warrior of Television*, argues: "While male heroes frequently function as boundary-crossing figures existing in a borderland, the body of the female hero *is* the borderland; positioned as both vulnerable to penetration by and reactive to her external environment" (2003: 134). For Lee, as a prostitute, battles are acted out on her body from the time of her first experience of physical abuse to the moment of her execution. From the beginning her struggle to escape from victimhood is doomed to failure. At the end of the film Lee's voiceover tells us that she has finally worked this all out. For the real life Wuornos, once she realised that society would always position her as other and that she would be executed, the only control she had left was to try to make this happen as quickly as possible. Just like the fictional characters of Thelma and Louise, Wuornos attempted to gain freedom by choosing to leave the sidelines of a competition that she was not allowed to take part in, never mind win:

I flatly don't want to be here... I don't care what the sentence is. I'm already on death row. I'm gonna see the chair... all I want to do is go back to prison, wait for the chair and get the hell off this planet that's full of evil and your corruption in

these courtrooms. (*Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer*, Broomfield, 1993)

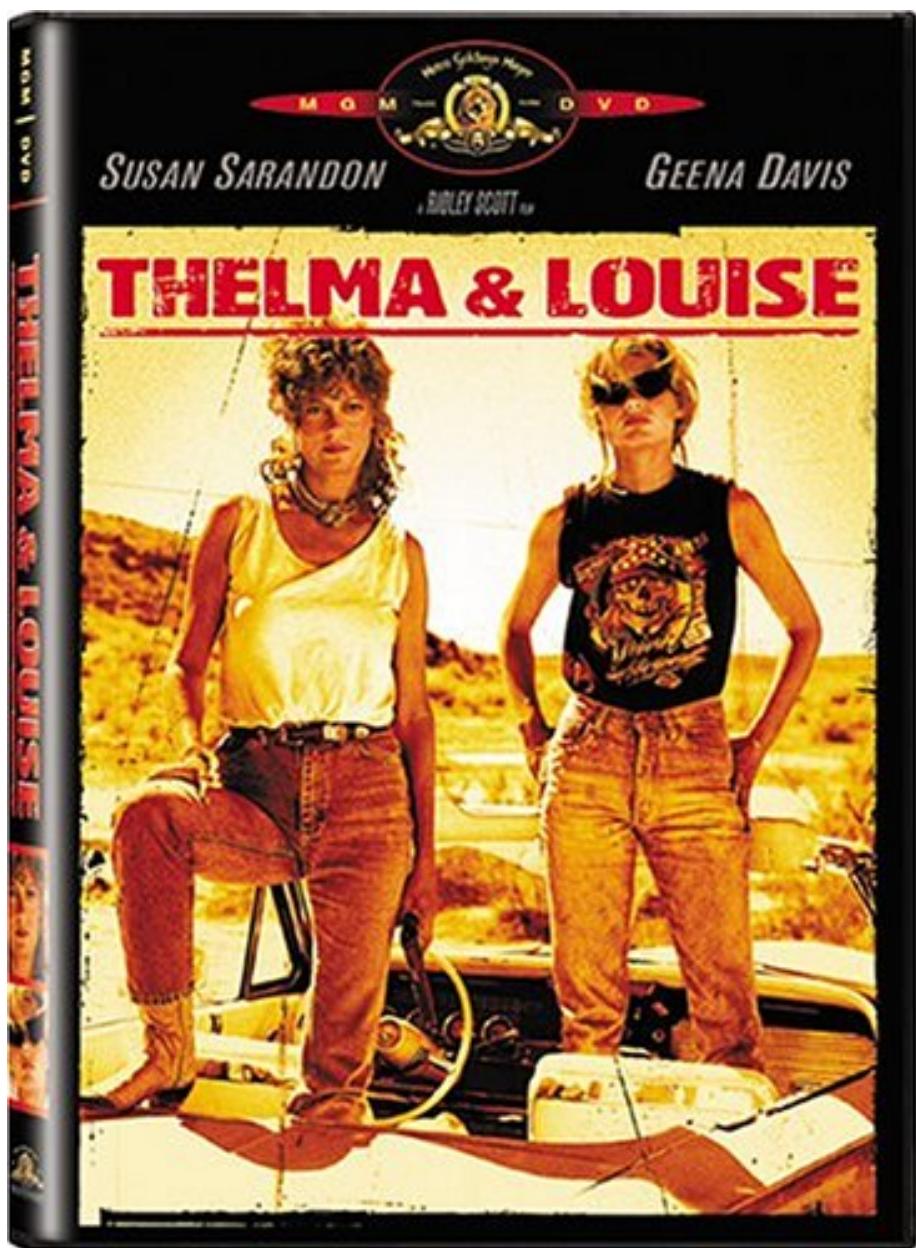
However, she was still forced to spend 12 years on death row, as the society that incarcerated her reinforced the fact that even in her own death Wuornos would never be allowed to have any power. In the end, mentally broken, she resorted to impotent threats of violence – the only thing that had ever given her any semblance of power – from her maximum security prison, as over a decade later she attempted to assert some kind of control over her self:

I'm so burning fuckin mad... I'm so mad I can't see straight. And they're just daring me to kill again... Hey, United States Supreme Court, you fuckin, I'm tellin you man, you mother fuckers, keep fuckin with my execution there's gonna be blood shed. I'm sick of this. Get that fuckin warrant signed. (*Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer*, Broomfield, 2003)

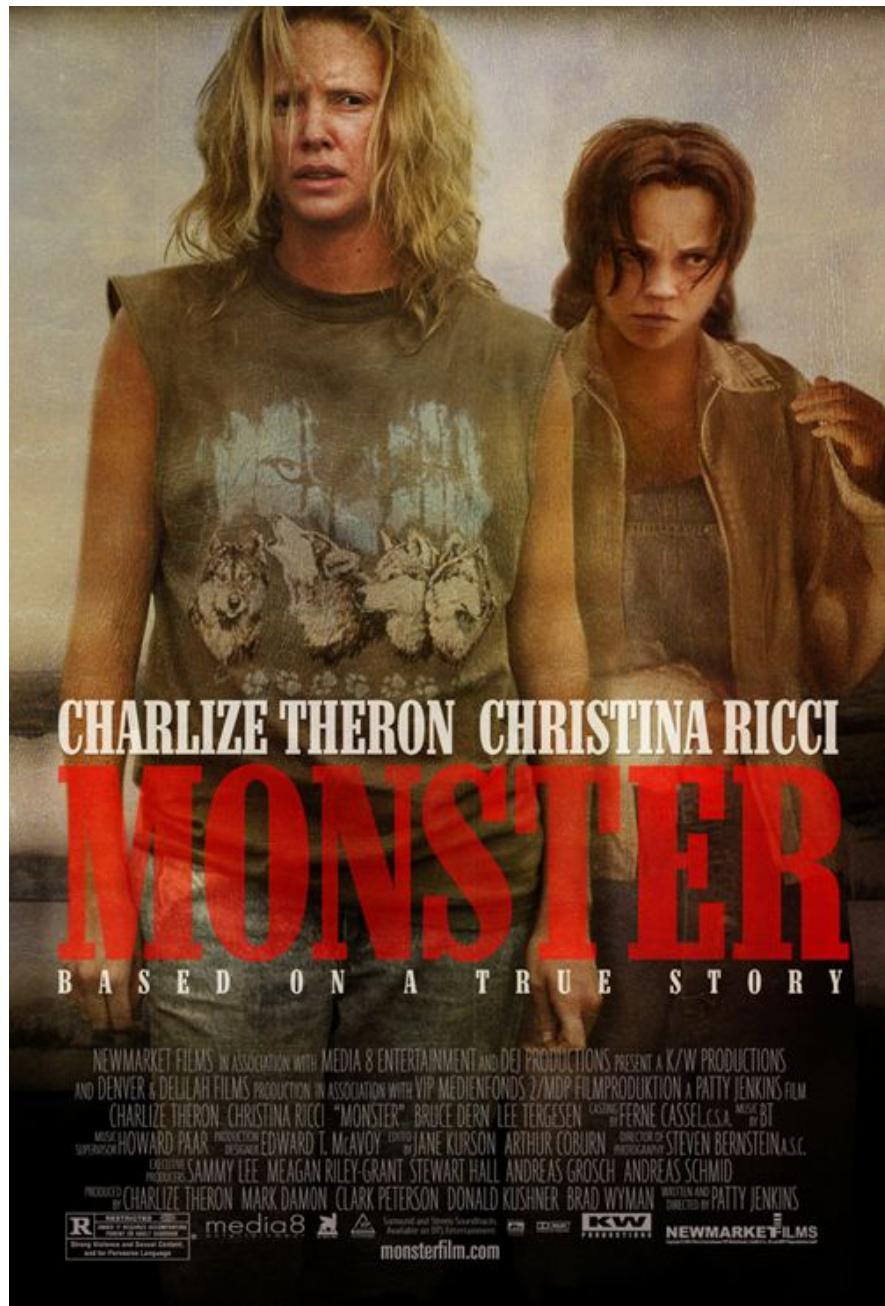
However, this self-parodying (stylisation) of her own violence only served to reinforce her image as monstrous other in the eyes of society. In the end Wuornos died as she lived, without control over her self, without any freedom. As the fictional Lee expresses to her Vietnam war-vet drinking buddy while they discuss the power of a person's circumstances: "It's like I feel like I never had a fucking choice."

Barbara L Miller in her essay, "The Gun-in-the-Handbag", responds to writers who at the release of the 1991 Ridley Scott film drew an association between the characters of Thelma and Louise and the real-life Aileen Wuornos and Tyria Moore: "the films do not allude to the actions of a real-life figure. Their portrayals of empowered women evoke no actual personae, but mythical manifestations, more threatening than any incarcerated individuals" (2001: 207). I have certainly been interested in the concept of the mythical but I would argue that it is Thelma and Louise's roots in the real that made the film so much of a threat. The dearth of realist films that deal with violent women is not because we are not threatened by real violent women or because women do not behave like this in real life. In fact, it is the complete opposite: violent women terrify us and as such we find it hard to consume realist representations of women behaving violently that do not end in a resolution that re-establishes the traditional status quo. In other words, the realist representation of the violent woman not as monstrous other but as an integral part of the self of everywoman is just too

great and serious a threat. Brian D. Johnson describes Scott's film as one of a kind: "The suicide leap of Thelma and Louise didn't just end the movie, but also the promise that it represented" (2011: 80). Up until this chapter I have agreed with this argument. But with the recent company in mind I believe that although *Thelma & Louise* may or may not have been influenced by the real story of Wuornos, *Monster* is influenced by *Thelma & Louise*. I certainly believe that both films are tapping the same inflamed vein. I would go so far as to say that *Monster* is *Thelma & Louise*'s darker offspring – a generational step forward from Scott's beautiful violent women.



Thelma & Louise Special Edition DVD cover from 2003, the same year as *Monster*'s theatrical release.



Monster theatrical release poster from 2003.

It is self-evident that the less superficial the psychological development of characters, the more complex, more conflicted and more interesting they become. It also means that they need less simplified justifications such as donning the role of protective mother. If we see justification as something required by society, we must also, as I have reiterated, recognise the imbalanced judgement that society applies to different forms of violence carried out by different categories of people. Louise would have been justified in killing Thelma's would-be rapist in self defence, but is not justified in shooting him afterwards in anger or revenge. Would such an action have caused the same backlash if it had been carried out by a man in a

film of this kind? In *Monster*, Lee is justified in her first killing as it is self-defence, but the real-life rape (far more violent and gruesome than its fictional representation) did not prevent Wuornos from being found guilty of her rapist's murder. In this sense, to spend time justifying a woman's violence is to buy into a system that is stacked against women, especially those of a lower class. As stated in my introduction, many feminist critics argue that by being violent a woman is simply buying into and, therefore, reinforcing a male system of power. However, in a violent world this argument confines women to the role of victim. The ideal of a world where no one has to resort to violence is as far removed as a world where anyone can be anything they want to be if they work hard enough. In the reality of Wuornos's existence, and in the fictional worlds of Lee and Thelma and Louise, these ideals bring small comfort – would these women really have been better off to refuse to be violent and continue to passively resist the onslaught on the lives they were living? Buying into this belief system is only possible for women who already hold a certain amount of power. In the wider world circumstance cannot be overlooked as a determining factor for violence but that does not mean circumstance as it is judged by society's standards.

As with *Thelma & Louise* in the 1990s, *Monster* does not simply represent the threat of the woman in search of equality or even freedom who is prepared to use the battle gear of the violent antagonist to win; it also provides the simple recognition that, beyond the legitimising boundaries that society has put in place, any woman is still capable of real violence. At the end of *Monster*, Lee's voiceover sees through to the true monstrosity of society as she shreds some of the myths that go towards making up the American Dream:

Love conquers all. Every cloud has a silver lining. Faith can move mountains. Love will always find a way. Everything happens for a reason. Where there's life, there's hope. They gotta tell you something.

As the film smashes through the gaps in ideology it makes us question where all of the many ideas we take for granted come from, such as the fact that the violent woman is a monstrous other, as opposed to a real part of our own selves. Further, it makes us ask what the effects are of blindly following these belief systems. And in a pivotal interaction between Shelby and Lee it poses one of the most terrifying questions as it exposes society's hypocrisy when it comes to the vilification of certain 'unjustified' forms of violence:

Shelby – You can't kill people.

Lee – Says who?!

Nina

The final film I want to discuss in regards to realism and the female protagonist's relationship to competition and violence is *Black Swan*. This film is a mixture of realism and stylised expressionism – both of which come together to draw a convincing portrait of psychological distress. The protagonist, Nina, is depicted as a girl at battle with her self as she responds to the personal and professional pressures of her life as a ballet dancer. When her company director, Thomas, tells the dancers what their next ballet will be he explains: “*Swan Lake*, done to death I know, but not like this. We strip it down. Make it visceral and real.” This is a description of Aronofsky's own approach to the story – a film that picks at the real antagonisms underlying the beautiful world of ballet. Within Thomas's statement there is also a joke being made against him – that he will find a new way to do *Swan Lake* to death. But this is dark humour that foreshadows the fate of the soon to be prima ballerina Nina – another woman “done to death... but not like this”. Nina's story offers a new telling from those of Thelma, Louise and Lee; but she does not offer a different story – she is still a woman done to death by the society she inhabits. However, of all the films I have written about this is the one where the narrative most explicitly builds itself around the subject of competition: the story of a dancer vying with her peers to become her company's prima ballerina through a competition for the lead in *Swan Lake*. In apparent contrast, the violence in the film might appear rather minimal in relation to the other films we have discussed, perhaps due to the realist approach. Yet it certainly exists and, I will argue, beyond the most obvious moments of violence in Nina's self-mutilation and attacks on others, it is something that underpins the subject of competition from start to finish as shown through the demands of ballet itself.

The first scene where Nina dreams she is dancing the White Swan is a fantasy. She wakes up. From this moment her existence as a dancer is defined by the reality of the violence she enacts on her own body. She cracks her toes and joints as she sits in her child's bedroom full of toys. The next scene shows her sitting in front of a three-way mirror in her home as she watches herself stretching. Her body is so thin it is painful to behold. When her mother serves her a

dancer's breakfast of a half grapefruit and a poached egg, Nina becomes visibly stressed. "Pretty", she says of the pink fruit and, as with every scene where she eats, she begins to force feed herself. The film is peppered with these kinds of images of the violent side of dance. Nina may start as a superficially passive character, submissive to the wants and desires of those around her, but it is not only her underlying drive to be prima ballerina that shows her to be an active protagonist. In her dancing we see a physical agency as extreme as any we have witnessed in the action films discussed in this thesis. The dances in *Black Swan* are certainly as much choreographed spectacle as any of the martial arts scenes from *Crouching Tiger*. The ballet of *Black Swan* and the kung fu of *Crouching Tiger* are both highly skilled art forms that rely on technique, style and strength, and both work on an expressionist level in terms of character and narrative.²³ The physicality and violence that inhabit dance are further emphasised in *Black Swan* by their juxtaposition with Nina's jarringly childlike appearance and personality as she represses the adult in her through finding everything nice and pretty in a world that is aggressive and cutthroat. The repeated motif of her as a "sweet girl" stands against the hacking, cutting, burning and beating of ballet shoes, the split toe nails, the bad joints and painful falls, all of which take place at the site of Nina's stunted, child-like body. Her mother describes her as, "the most dedicated dancer in the company", and she, along with Thomas, is always talking of the pressure that Nina is under. However, these are the two characters that create much of the pressure – the mother by concurrently pushing and undermining her; Thomas by playing with her insecurities to exploit the best in her dancing. She is further surrounded by a fleet of bitchy, competitive women who are snapping at her heels – as Thomas tells her, "Every dancer in the world wants your role." And then there is the societal pressure she faces to conform to an anorexic ideal. An example of this from outside the film comes from a *Vogue* supplement article published after the release of *Black Swan*: "Get the look: the ballet body. If you'd love a taut ballerina-style body like Natalie's, try..." (Forrester, 2011: 13). No wonder the highly-strung Nina is always striving for perfection – and

²³ Ang Lee makes explicit the connection between martial arts, realism, expressionism and dance in this quotation about the making of *Crouching Tiger*: "Another conflict was how to maintain a balance between the drama and the martial arts in the film. The film is not crafted in the realistic style, as my earlier films have been, but the emotions it conveys are real. So you will see that the drama is itself choreographed as a kind of martial art, while the fighting is never just kicking and punching, but is also a way for the characters to express their unique situation and feelings. At the same time, working with martial arts master Yuen Wo-Ping and his team allowed me to learn an abstract form of filmmaking, where the images and editing are like dance and music." (CSC, n.d.)

no wonder she has a history of self-harm. This is a realist depiction of psychological and physical violence that many readers of fashion magazines will recognise all too well.

The hierarchy of Nina's world is in many ways a microcosm of a traditional, patriarchal society as a counter-statement to the usual Hollywood fantasy of the dance academy or theatre school. In *Black Swan* the women are at the lower end of the power scale, and their beauty and the potential of their bodies are all they have to exchange. This is made clear in the treatment of the prima ballerina, Beth. She is ousted from the company, despite the fact that she is "a beautiful dancer" for being too old. Her skill is not enough to save her when her looks and her body fail. The decision is made by Thomas, the male creative director. He is blatant in his encouragement of the competitive bitchiness between the young female dancers. As they fight each other for roles they lose sight of the fact that at some stage Beth's fate will be their own. This is further signified by the older woman figure of Nina's mother, Erica, who lives vicariously through her daughter and yet is still envious of Nina's success; she tries to recreate Nina in her own image, while also constantly competing with her. Erica and Thomas never share a scene, symbolic of the fact that Erica has been excluded from this world (she is not allowed to come to the party where Nina is presented as the new prima ballerina), yet Erica speaks about Thomas as if she knows him as she desperately clings to a memory of her own time as a dancer. The competition and in-fighting between all of these different women forces them into the role of the monstrous female but this is simply a way to distract them from recognising the greater antagonist, as represented by the male self who holds sway over their existence.

I argue that although competitiveness is not traditionally seen as a feminine trait, it is socially acceptable for women to compete with other women, in particular within the domestic realm, or in terms of physical beauty and especially over men. In *Black Swan*, the character of Thomas is something like Bill from the *Kill Bill* films: he encourages the women around him to fight one another for his attention and affection as he trains them to explore their dark, competitive selves. But, as with Bill, he only wants them to do this on his terms, never as a way of finding a power that exists independently of him – though the serious tone Aranofsky uses to make this explicit allows for an interpretation of a criticism of the character that is decidedly absent from Tarantino's film. For Thomas the dark, seductive woman is a fantasy and when she steps into the realms of reality she becomes "destructive". It is then, when she is no longer a little princess who will play the whore for him alone – when she begins to display

a deeper sense of power and in doing so becomes a threat – that he discards her. Just like Lee in *Monster*, these dancers hold little clout in the exchange market. The film shows us a system that is set up by Thomas so that there are too many of them and their commodity has too short a shelf life for them to have any real value. The women vying for prima ballerina do so in the way that Lee fights for a “better life”, not understanding that it is all an illusion designed to keep them in their place at the bottom of the hierarchy. But Thomas is not at the top of the food chain. Above him are the men who finance the ballet – the capitalists. When he “retires” Beth and introduces Nina, it is to these masters. He asks her if she is ready to be “fed to the wolves”, because this is exactly what he is doing. They will eat her alive, suck every bit of flesh from her, and then throw her away once she has nothing left. Thomas is a realist in a film whose central theme is romantic – the cost of art, the sacrifices it requires. When women become too dark, too impulsive, too dangerous and too knowing they move beyond fantasy and become a threat. They are told that their behaviour is destructive, and as they try to repress what is determined as their monstrous other by the men above them, they internalise all this force and end up destroying themselves. Again, like the patriarchal systems that have exploited women such as Monroe and Wuornos, these wolves represent the men who are not afraid of their ability to be destructive, violent and competitive. These are the men who win; they are the true monster.

It is Nina’s competitiveness that fuels her violence. Desperately striving to be a “sweet girl”, and to remain a child, Nina cannot admit to either her competitive or sexual urges. She is anxious and distracted on the train when she sees Lily, a dancer she does not know; she stops on her entry into the theatre to look enviously at the photo of the current prima ballerina, Beth. However, in the following scene, when the other dancers talk about Beth being too old, Nina jumps to her defence. But then, later, when Beth is retired, Nina sneaks into her changing room and steals her lipstick. Nina tries to repress her competitiveness, but she cannot escape the competition that Thomas forces her to engage in with her fellow women: “which of you can embody both swans? The White and the Black.” When Nina has to try out for the role she is made to do so in front of the other contenders, again reinforcing the competitive nature of this world. But when she spoils her Black Swan dance and it is the next girl’s turn, Nina does not stay to watch. It is at this moment we realise, just as with her violence, Nina’s competition is internalised. She is not interested in the other girls, only in her own ability. Nina goes to Thomas, wearing Beth’s lipstick, in an attempt to fight for her role. But the lipstick is a mask that Thomas sees through as he tells her she does not have it in her

to dance the Black Swan, “the lustful twin.” He tells Nina: “when I look at you all I see is the White Swan. Yes, you’re beautiful, fearful, fragile – ideal casting. But the Black Swan?” Here we see a description of what society asks a woman to be – a submissive beauty who needs and desires protection by her male counterpart. Thomas positions the Black Swan as other to this and goads Nina into discovering this dark side, representing the patriarchal nature of the dichotomy of a woman as either pure or wild. However, like the femme fatale, the Dark Swan’s seductiveness has the potential to be dangerous – her lust for life is the embodiment of a competitive, violent threat. Thomas continues:

Thomas – Every time you dance I see you obsess, getting each and every move perfectly right but I never see you lose yourself. Ever. All that discipline and for what?

Nina – I just want to be perfect.

Thomas – Perfection is not just about control – it’s about letting go.

This interaction voices the battle that is being fought by Nina between self and other, sweet girl and monster, White Swan and Black Swan. Within the context of the narrative it is played out around a coming of age theme where “frigid” Nina is struggling with her emerging sexuality and desire, and trying to escape the suffocating hold of the mother who wants to keep her a child. However, it is also about her internal competition to become complete. When she speaks of being “perfect” she is talking in terms of the “sweet girl” or Thomas’s “little princess”, but what the audience understand is what Thomas has stated – perfection is not about precision, but about wholeness. The coming together of light and dark is the only way to what Thomas describes as “Transcendence”. It is when he then tries to kiss her and she bites him that he and the audience recognise Nina has the potential to dance the Black Swan. It is in this externalisation of her competition through an act of violence carried out on someone else that we understand what her disciplined self could obtain if she only could learn to let go.

This is the start of the journey for Nina. Thomas may have seen a flash of the “evil twin” but Nina has built up strong barriers to keep her inside. She is terrified of giving up control to this dark other because she does not trust herself. This is why Nina is horrified when Thomas tells her that he believes Beth stepped out in front of a car on purpose:

Nina – How do you know?

Thomas – Because everything Beth does comes from within, from some dark impulse. I guess that's what makes her so thrilling to watch. So dangerous. Even perfect at times. But also so damn destructive.

Again, we could be hearing a description of the femme fatale, or listening to Ash discussing the alien in his “Perfect organism” speech. And as with the character of Lee, Nina sees that the dark monster is thrilling because of the power it offers, yet horrifying because of its capacity to become all-consuming. Nina visits Beth in the hospital where she sees the former dancers macerated legs. This is Nina’s greatest fear – her own self-harm is often carried out without her remembering, and she is terrified that if she lets the monster out it will take over and destroy her. But what she does not recognise is that her suppression of this inner force is literally and metaphorically harming her. She does not understand that it is her competition that is the key to her untapped potential and a whole new source of strength:

Thomas – You could be brilliant – but you’re a coward.

Nina – Sorry.

Thomas – Stop saying that. That’s what I’m fucking talking about. Stop being so weak.

Apart from Beth, the only dancer who Nina pays attention to is Lily. This is because Lily is set up in no uncertain terms as Nina’s alter ego or doppelganger. Beyond the obvious symbolism of Lily wearing black and Nina wearing white, Lily is everything Thomas tells Nina she needs to be: free spirited, alive, sexy, at ease with herself. It is through their developing competition and relationship that the Black Swan emerges in Nina. Lily represents an escape from Nina’s overbearing mother and when they go out dancing she gets Nina to drink and take drugs. During the evening Nina changes out of her white vest into Lily’s black top. Then Nina and Lily go home together and have sex. Throughout the film Nina has struggled with her repressed desire and repeatedly failed to masturbate. In this scene her skin ripples with the submerged Black Swan and Lily’s own wing tattoos seem to come to life as Nina comes to climax. Lily then transforms into Nina and smothers her. Here we see a deliberate stylisation of the film, along the lines of the theatre of ballet, just as Ang Lee used expressionism to develop the dramatic substance of his narrative. In the morning Nina finds that this was all a fantasy, a bewildering discovery that makes her doubt her own sanity (in a sense this is a film about someone going

mad). However, one thing this means is that Nina was able to bring herself to orgasm – a key to her coming of age. In that moment the Black and the White co-exist in a whole. However, the fantasised smothering shows Nina's ongoing anxiety that the destructive other will turn on her self in an attempt to take over. Once she lets the monster lose she is fearful that she will not be able to control it. If we return to look at the pressures on Nina we can recognise her fear of the other as being something put on her from the outside. Her mother does not want her to grow up, Thomas labels the “dark impulse” as “destructive”, and society tells her that a woman’s role is to be “sweet”, “perfect” and “fragile”. Later, when she apparently stabs Beth in the face with a nail file, or smashes her mother’s hand repeatedly in the door, or murders Lily, Nina is simply turning outwards to others the violence that she has been enacting on herself under the demands of their ideology. And again as an audience we see these acts in terms of madness, or rather, as moments of Nina’s fantasy.

In another comparison to *Monster*, it is interesting that much of the focus surrounding the release of the film was on Portman’s weight loss and dancing. She, like Theron, won an Oscar for this role. Although, as the *Vogue* article demonstrates, being thin is quite the reverse of being monstrous, the devastating portrait of Nina is a biting revelation of the antagonisms that underlie our society. This film is even more threatening because of its wide-reaching appeal – internationally it was the second highest grossing of all the films I have discussed (only outranked by *Terminator 2*) and at the UK box office it was the highest grossing of any of the films in this thesis. Enter damage control. To applaud the acting of the beautiful woman who plays the “sick” Nina is again a way of separating the two into opposed types. The fact that Portman was pregnant when she received the award furthered her as an ideal of healthy womanhood. And her status as a good woman was crowned when she managed to undermine her own work and talent in her acceptance speech, as she referred to her upcoming motherhood as the most important “role” of her life (Oscars, 2011).

It is after the first two of Nina’s external violent acts carried out against others that she literally (at least in her own fantasy) transforms into the Black Swan. The next day she separately stands up to her mother, Lily and Thomas as she defies everyone to dance on the opening night. And she does so calmly, with great presence and strength. In the conversation with her mother:

Nina – Let go of me.

Mother – You can't handle this.

Nina – I can't?! I'm the Swan Queen.

It is in this figure of the Swan Queen that the White and Black Swan come together and Nina is able to escape the grip of those around her. However, this is undermined by Thomas's parting words before she goes on stage:

Thomas – The only person standing in your way is you. It's time to let her go – lose yourself.

In all of Thomas's speeches to Nina his equivocal positioning as a character is defined through an intoxicating and deceptive mix of truth and ideology. It is true that she needs to let go. But it is not about losing herself – this is what the outside pressures have been forcing her to do all along – rather it is about letting go of societal constraints so that she can find herself. It is about recognising that the dark in her is not an opposing other but an integral part of her true self. In her fight with Lily, Nina shouts "it's my turn" before stabbing her. Nina watches as Lily the doppelganger turns into Nina before her eyes. Again, the bringing together of expressionism and a realist psychological portrait is symbolically linked into the merging of self and other. This is not Nina killing her self, rather it is her shedding the restrictive shell that society has determined her self to be. This is the moment when she fully embodies the Black Swan. She then goes out and dances a dark, aggressive, dangerous dance that the audience are thrilled to watch. For this instant the Black Swan has complete power and we, like Thomas and the audience, are seduced by her. Here is the fascination and the fear of the dark other. None of us realised quite how incredible she could be. But in this world she is not allowed to be dark or dangerous without being told she is destructive. The film shows us that we demand her return to the White Swan before the final curtain. On reentering her dressing room Nina realises that she has not killed Lily but instead stabbed herself. The competition that has always been internal, ends as it began – enacted on her body. She goes out for her finalé as the White Swan and dances her *piece de resistance*. As society, in the form of the audience, watches, along with her mother and Thomas in the wings, Nina understands that she can never be allowed to inhabit the White and the Black Swan on her own terms. However, in killing her self and in killing her dark other she has set both free. Now, in this one moment alone on stage the two can exist together within her. In her last act she has to jump from a cliff – something that she was fearful of in rehearsals. But as the Swan Queen, Nina throws

herself from the height with a sense of abandon. Here we see the final moments of *Thelma and Louise*, the end that Wuornos desired and was denied, and the echo of Creed's words about death, transformation and rebirth as "the White Swan leaps off a cliff, killing herself, and in death finds freedom." In this act of stylised and realist drama she is escaping from the world of the "sweet girl", she is refusing herself as Thomas's "little princess". She has found the thing that she was searching for – not to *be* perfect but to experience a moment of perfection. To transcend. For the dark and light to merge. To be complete. To be free. Nina – "I felt it. Perfect... It was perfect."

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that realism has the capability to present the audience with a fuller and more conflicted exploration of the violent woman. In *Monster* the complexities of violence are given exposure as the audience is asked to watch the spectacle of Lee's actions, yet also recognise the realist source of her violence. Her killings are not simply portrayed as acts of revenge for years of abuse; they also represent a woman desperate to obtain status and power in a society that refuses her any sense of selfhood. This is by no means a superficial stylisation but rather a real interrogation into questions of social abuse, neglect and responsibility. To avoid culpability for Lee's actions society casts her out as monstrous other, when in actuality it is the actions of society towards the abused woman that are monstrous. In this we are asked to question the rules that society dictates, and in particular how we understand the loaded concept of justification.

In *Black Swan* violence is also treated as the destructive result of thwarted competition. When Nina suppresses her competitive urges she inflicts violence on herself. Her fear of what she is told is her destructive other forces her to stifle the alter ego that is her black swan, but eventually as this competitive side bursts forth her violence is externalised. It is only when the two sides, black and white, are allowed to co-exist, that she realises her true potential. This psychological portrait is constructed through a mixture of realist and expressionist stylisation and, as in *Crouching Tiger*, these forms are implicated in the narrative of the coming together of self and other. However, as in the other realist narratives I have discussed, *Thelma & Louise* and *Monster*, the monster of society denies this woman the role of competitor. As a result her

apparent externalisation of violence is in reality carried out on herself and although she has her moment of perfection, her only real freedom comes in her own death.

Black Swan ends with Nina describing the merging of her two selves as perfect. But in dealing with realism we know that there is no such thing as perfection. This coming together of self and other into a complete whole that embraces the agency of woman as represented through violence is a romantic ideal. Further, the power of the woman who competes through violence as depicted throughout this thesis in the terms of Ash from *Alien's* "Perfect organism. Its structural perfection...matched only by its hostility... A survivor. Unclouded by conscience, remorse or delusions of morality" is not in reality a positive one. In both these films the final message is that violence erupts when a woman's desire to be a part of the competition is denied. The great influence of these narratives comes from the fact that although both films show women as having the potential for violence, both also tell of the destructiveness of this violence and the destructiveness of the society that uses violence as part of its power structure. Where then does that leave us in terms of the competition of the violent woman? In my conclusion I explore my position in relation to the questions raised by the creative influences I have investigated in this critical thesis through an analysis of the practice of writing my own screenplay, *The Competitors*.

Conclusion: The Lone Rider and the Lone Writer

What makes a man to wander?

What makes a man to roam?

What makes a man leave bed and board

And turn his back on home?

Ride away

Ride away

Ride away...

Song from *The Searchers*

(Ford, 1956)

A wanderer on earth, remembering hardships, the violent assaults of enemies, the extinction of loving family, spoke thus:

“The Wanderer”

(Anon, c.900s: 332, lines 6-7)

As a conclusion to this thesis I am going to look at the practice of writing my own screenplay. All of the depictions of violent women discussed in this critical element have influenced my creative work. They are the context for my own characters, Dolly and Nu. Further, my protagonists would not exist (and certainly not as the characters they are) if it were not for the contested space out of which all of these women emerge. The critical exploration that came from the research and writing of this thesis has helped me to assess my position on ideas of women, competition and violence. However, the body of my research has been carried out in the practice of writing my own screenplay. From draft to draft I have explored the

complexities of women, action and violence; in this critical thesis I have simply made explicit influences, arguments and ideas that implicitly inform my creative work. And now, at the final stages of this process, I bring these two strands together as I return to my screenplay in an attempt to find some conclusion to my own position on competition and violent women protagonists in popular cinema.

To address the ideas pursued in this thesis I am going to invert the structure of my Introduction, so that this ending will lead me back to the questions raised at the beginning. As such I will first look at the lines of argument I have pursued: self versus other, and then stylisation and realism. This will lead to a discussion of violence and then competition. Finally I will return to the critical context of this PhD as I attempt to position my work in the spectrum created between feminist and postfeminist studies surrounding the debate of the violent woman in film. All of this will be done through a discussion of the practice of writing my own screenplay, *The Competitors*, as well as analysis of my script at final draft.

Self versus Other

Before I began writing *The Competitors* I imagined Nu as the protagonist and Dolly as a side kick. However, from the first draft Dolly became the main representative of the audience's point of view – we saw the world from her perspective and this made her appear the necessary protagonist. This was in part because it became clear that Nu's enigmatic character would and should never allow us to get close enough to see through her eyes. As a result of this, at the third draft of the outline, I had the choice of whether I should kill Nu off at the midway point and leave Dolly to fend for herself for the second half. The answer was clear to me – Nu had to stay until the end. She may not have been the character that guided the audience through the story but she was still at its centre. It was then I recognised the reason for this: Nu, not Red, was the true antagonist to Dolly. Nu may be teacher to Dolly but she is also her captor – someone who maintains her power through the threat of violence. Yet, simultaneously within this relationship, the reverse of this dynamic was true: as stated in the Introduction to this critical element, Nu and Dolly are both protagonist and antagonist to one another.

Nu and Dolly are each others' doppelgangers. They create a resistance to each other which forces them both to face their most feared and repressed parts. Dolly infiltrates Nu with an incapacitating remembrance of conscience, and Nu shows Dolly how to compete through violence; as such they both threaten and nurture one another. Furthermore, it is through Dolly's journey that we recognise Nu has not always been the competitive killer. In the script Dolly's final transformation comes at Nu's death: symbolic of Dolly's rebirth as Nu. This not only raises Dolly to a competitor, it also reveals the link between Nu's own backstory and the characterisation of Dolly. Tasker writes,

There is then a tension between the images of strength accruing to the female action hero and the narratives within which they are contained, narratives which frequently attempt to offer some explanation for her actions, to define her as exceptional. (1998: 69)

As my interests moved away from stylization towards realism I became aware that this "exceptional" protagonist was not what I wanted in my own script. Therefore, one of the essential parts of my writing was to play with this stereotype of the exceptional woman before, ultimately, exploding it. Nu's association with Dolly is a representation of the fact that Nu, just like Dolly, is an everywoman.

I argue that the figure of the lone rider in cinema can be seen as a continuation of the figure of the wanderer that dates back throughout literature to some of the earliest oral stories (the journey of the hero archetype is explored by Joseph Campbell in his seminal work of 1949 introducing the concept of the monomythic structure). In Anglo-Saxon poetry we have the example of "The Wanderer", or from Ancient Greece there is Homer's Odysseus. This heroic character is present in Medieval literature, for example in the form of Gawain in *Gawain and the Green Knight* and continues through the English literary tradition to the Romantic period where the wanderer can be found in works like Wordsworth's *Prelude* and Byron's *Don Juan*. The figure is a heroic outsider on a journey that can ultimately be interpreted as a search for selfhood. But in the Byronic hero we can see the wanderer shifting towards the anti-hero. This transformation can be found in a number of literary protagonists that predate Romanticism: perhaps the most famous depiction of the wanderer as anti-hero is seen in the figure of Satan from Milton's *Paradise Lost*. From this point onwards the anti-hero and the wanderer are often one and the same and in the 20th Century the anti-heroic ancestor of

Odysseus was explicitly revisited in the form of Leopold Bloom in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The earliest cinematic representations of the lone rider in the western film predate Joyce's work and depict this cinematic wanderer in heroic terms. But just as we saw in the literary tradition, there is a shift in the western during the 1940s and 1950s where in films such as *Shane* (Stevens, 1953) and *The Searchers* (Ford, 1956) we see the introduction again of this figure as an anti-heroic outsider – someone linked to but ultimately in tension with both the 'good' and the 'bad' characters in these films. The anti-heroic representation moves away from the original wanderer or lone rider archetype and this allows the space for something different. In terms of my own script the lone rider creates the opportunity for a character who is a real woman, not an exceptional hero. Nu, just like Lee in *Monster*, has had her capacity for violence nurtured by circumstance. All that she is lies within each of us. And just as both Nu and Dolly are alter egos to each other, in their strengths and weaknesses, they are both my own alter egos. Again, this looks to a Romantic and existential literary inheritance that decentralises the writer – positioning him/her as other to the self of society. Nu and Dolly are the lone riders, just as I am a lone writer. And just as I define them, they define me. The competition that exists between them and within them is a representation of the competition that lives within me. We are outsiders to and in tension with the social structures we encounter. And just like all the 'monstrous others' that I have discussed, this is why I find the character of Nu both frightening and fascinating. Nu represents the potential for competition and violence both in my self and in every woman.

Stylisation and Realism

Throughout this thesis I have investigated the dynamic relationship between stylisation and realism. A competition between these forms sits at the heart of my screenplay. At the final drafting of my own script I would situate it in the company of films like *Thelma & Louise*, *Monster* and *Black Swan*, works that rely on spectacle, fantasy and expressionism, while still striving to investigate a serious subject in a realist manner. However, in the earlier drafts of my script I took a much more stylised approach in terms of violence as well as character, story and dialogue. My interest in the stylised narratives of the *Alien* series, *Terminator 2*, the *Resident Evil* series, the *Kill Bill* films and *Crouching Tiger* derives from their influence on my

creative process, revealing how deeply embedded my creative roots are in the world of the stylised female action hero.

Looking back to my first draft of *The Competitors* it is clear that Nu's world of the future played by stylised rules: no one reacted to her in terms of her sex. It was in my upgrade interview that Val Taylor questioned whether this was my intention (Taylor and Womack, 2009: 2). At this stage the panel was unsure whether or not Nu was supposed to be a mythological character that was both man and woman. I answered that she was without doubt a woman, even if she behaved in a way that confused audience expectations. In this point Nu has always been influenced by Clover's Final Girl – the last person standing in 1970s B-Movie slasher films: "She is a physical female and a characterological androgynous: like her name, not masculine but either/or, both, ambiguous" (1992: 63). Nu's name does not signify her sex to an English speaking audience but it is fundamental to her character that the name is actually the Mandarin word for female (as in the *nuxia* – female warrior – of the *wuxia pian* – martial arts film). After discussing ways in which the script could clarify Nu as female, Taylor suggested that perhaps one of her strengths would come from the fact that, as a woman, the men she encountered would not expect her to be a competitor. When I reflected on this later I discovered an inconsistency in my narrative. I was writing about a dystopian future where things had changed, but for the worse. This came out in the regression to (or unveiling of) a world where violence rules: the most successfully violent are the most powerful. Within this dynamic, women had explicitly returned to the status of the enslaved. The lack of women in the landscape of my script depicts a society where women are forced to stay hidden from the outside world – those who venture away from the safety of a protective male/owner meet violence and often death. This setting was fundamental to my narrative, not just because I was intent on depicting a potential future, but also because I wanted to make a comment on the questionable equality of present western society as well as the lack of equality for women in many countries beyond the west. In other words, beyond the apparently stylised setting was a deeply important realism. Yet, in wanting to make my main competitor powerful, I had drawn her in stylised terms. Nu was perceived as dangerous when in reality, in the context of my script, a woman roaming the country side is a potential commodity – no one would expect Nu to be a threat because in her society, as an extension of our own, ideology does not allow for the violent woman. For this reason I followed Taylor's advice and rewrote Nu's reception by others. Just as Jen in *Crouching Tiger* manipulates society's expectations of her (though this

is more to do with class than sex) by hiding her dragon, so Nu takes advantage of her status as a non-threatening woman.

At this stage I realised that the way I handled stylisation and realism was key to the way I worked with audience expectations in relation to my development of Nu as a character. As I will go on to discuss in my section on violence in this conclusion, many mainstream action films use comic book style violence. In these cases it is less important to convince the audience that a female would/could behave in this way. Comic book heroes are legendary, they are not like us humans, and therefore they don't have to abide by our rules. In *Kick-Ass* (Vaughn, 2010) we see a young girl kicking ass, defeating scores of trained, armed men. There is no interest in realism here, although there is some concern with plausibility. Work has been done to convince us of her ability to be successfully violent: in particular her training and the sense that as a superhero there is something more than human in her. The rest is left to us to suspend our disbelief.

But what happens when you want to write about a protagonist who is convincingly violent in a realist style? Returning to Judith Butler's work we can read the idea of gender as "appearance" (1990: 33): gender is a performance where women 'play' at being feminine – a form of stylisation. Yet this goes further as it is a performance that over time is believed to be what someone really is, not just in appearance but in substance too. We can also take this understanding of style and look at the stereotyping of cinematic characters. Many of our audience expectations about the substance of characters are formed by their initial appearance/style. When these expectations become set in terms of ideas such as gender they become restrictive. Tasker defines Hollywood as "not ... simply a purveyor of stereotypes" (1998: 6), a description that in itself draws attention to how central stereotypes are to our understanding of popular American cinema. However, it is possible to make use of stereotypes. Cinema, as a source of many heroes and anti-heroes, is also a source of characters that overtime have become stereotyped in their representations. The lone rider is an example of this. However, as previously argued, rather than seeing this as problematic I have recognised it as fundamental to the development of Nu. From the moment she enters the frame I am aware of the expectations that the stereotypes of both the archetypal and anti-heroic lone rider bring and I exploit these. Part of our belief in Nu's agency and skill is due to her association with the lone riders that have gone before. Further, I am able to develop audience empathy and backstory for a decidedly intimidating character through the simple

revelation of a scar. In another character type this mark could indicate menace; on the lone rider the audience may recognise the brutal metaphor but they will also read it as representative of past psychological trauma – a form of anti-heroic character development of Odysseus's scar – and, therefore, a stylised justification for future violent behaviour. This presents an opportunity to the writer. It is my work not just to make use of audience expectations but to play with them; and the deeper these expectations are embedded, the more interesting it is to disrupt them.

In *The Competitors* this play is there from the start, in particular in terms of audience expectations about Nu's gender. Then later, once the audience are aware of Nu's sex, they become complicit in the game through the use of dramatic irony as we witness the men Nu encounters underestimate her as a threat because of her status as a woman. But it is necessary for my script to go beyond this initial play with the stereotype: the serious substance of Nu's character comes from the slowly developed gap between what we presume Nu to represent and what she actually reveals herself to be. As a lone rider we recognise her as a wanderer on the outside of society; however, we do not expect her motivation to be competition and bloodlust because our understanding is that the lone rider character fundamentally represents a force for good. And this in itself is an interrogation of what it really means when we speak of binary oppositions such as good and evil, masculine and feminine, or self and other. It makes us recognise that the very concept of something being good or justified is determined by the dominant ideology of society. In other words, by eventually undermining her standing as an archetype or a stereotype, Nu is attacking both the system of categorisation that serves to confine her potential as a character and the creators of that system. Furthermore, as I have argued in my second chapter, too many films use stylised violence to send a message that the female protagonist is simply being allowed to 'play' within the closely regulated categories of violence, competition or even masculinity. From my perspective the stereotype purveyed by Hollywood is of great interest when we interfere with the stylistic expectations it brings. This is where we encounter the real.

As the script moves on we see Nu in her training, which again plays on the audience's belief in honed skills – an explanatory device in both comic book and realist film narratives that provides a reason why she can be who she is. But my final bond with realism comes from the fact that Nu is ultimately physically defeated. The battle in the mines, which she wins, is also the start of her physical decline. And once she loses her physical strength, she is no longer

able to compete. In this environment, as with most action films, physical agency is how characters survive. A realist representation shows how a wound will hold someone back and finally cause them to fail. In the moment violence is bloody and unpleasant, and in the long view it is destructive. However, it is the key to survival. The tragedy of any realistically violent character in this kind of context is that violence is often the only means of survival, and yet it is also an inevitable path to destruction.

The script is set up using the clichés of the western to encourage the reader to expect a lone rider in Nu, and a hooker with a heart of gold in Dolly. As the deeper realism of the violence and competition in both their characters emerges it stands in contrast to, and makes a comment upon, these original stereotypes. It also draws an unflattering comparison between the ideology of Nu's misogynist world and the ideology of our own. The realist depiction of Nu's character was not how I had initially envisaged her and this pays testament to the empowerment I feel when I watch a stylised film that does not call a woman's potential for violence (or even for action) into question within the narrative itself. However, the closer my own script moves to realism the more I have to accept the actuality of the situation in terms of the violent woman (or, perhaps, the more I interrogate interpretations of the violent woman, the closer my script moves to realism). Furthermore, in the coming together of the realist and expressionist styles of the piece, the conflict of violence represents the psychological conflicts of the characters that enact violence as well as the contested space they inhabit. As discussed in my Preface and Introduction I made the decision at planning stage to move the action to a futuristic Britain in order to find a creative space for myself as a writer, as well as for these characters. Although there are many geographical, industrial and historical differences between the space of the American western and the space of my own narrative, this dystopian Britain is imagined as regressing to a frontier condition characteristic of the American west, where competition is not just between civilisation and wilderness, but between law and lawlessness.

Violence

One thing this thesis has clarified is that the subject of violence is complex. There is a power to the violence that Nu enacts; when Dolly becomes violent it is representative of her becoming

active as opposed to passive. And yet, as argued in the conclusion of my final chapter, and shown in Nu's death, violence is ultimately destructive, born out of, among other things, thwarted competition. As such, my own approach to the violence in my script has never been straightforward. In their first encounter Dolly reflects the audience's point of view – she expects Nu to be a man. But when Nu comes to fight, Dolly is no longer a vessel for the audience's view as we have begun to realise what to expect from this lone rider. In the first full revelation of Nu's violence in the killings at Scotch Corner there is a turning point for Dolly – she reunites with the audience's point of view as she is both in awe of Nu as a potential protector (and perhaps inspiration) and horrified by her as a newly determined threat. These two conflicting views of Nu also represent the conflict in the attitude towards violence itself. As the writer, I am indulging in Nu's act, but I am also repulsed by the violence. In my own screenplay the writing of Nu is an embodiment of this tension. On one hand I revelled in her strength and the way in which this shook the men that she encountered. And on the other hand I was constantly struggling with her violent methods because her actions also appalled me.

My own conflict with my subject played out for me in the scene at Scotch Corner. As I have stated, the earlier drafts of the script took a far more stylised approach and I would even go so far as to describe the action scenes as being in the form of comic book violence, as shown in the original rough draft of the work:

NU

I heard you the first time.

BAM! – Goodbye Jim – Hello Jim's brains all over the porridge – who needs jam?!

...

this time - SMACK – the skull - and then – SMOOSH - the brain... and then it's all over... except –

DOLLY

(horrified)

What did you do that for?!!!!

NU

(dead straight)

I didn't want to waste another bullet.

This is representative of the fact that I was enjoying the experience of writing the scene and indulging in the horror of what I was creating. There was something intoxicating and empowering in this kind of writing, as there is in the violent act. But at the same time I was constantly aware that in a rational sense I did not agree with Nu's approach to, or even use of, violence. As much as I attempted to create a scenario where Nu is justified in what she does, I was always aware of her role as a vigilante. This is something typical of heroes of the western, and it is something that on a political level I am opposed to. Yet, as a writer and a viewer it thrills me. And this last point was the key. It made me aware that my justification for her violence (the discovery of the mutilated woman) was initially superficial (stylised) – an excuse for myself, as much as the audience, that allowed me to indulge in writing her this way. And as an extension of this, it would make her a character that audiences found easier to watch. However, I do not believe that making life easy or comfortable is the job of drama and so I made the decision to explore a more realist depiction of violence. This did not mean tempering the violence but rather showing the personal and physical reality of the acts that Nu was undertaking. Here are the same passages in the final (thirteenth) draft:

The CRACK of the rifle drowns the CRACK of a man's cranium.

Bone, blood, brains and a complete human consciousness exit Jim's head –

...

This time -

the skull - and then -

the brain -

And then it's all over.

Along with removing the "Bam"s and "Smoosh"es as demonstrators of extreme spectacle I also tried to introduce a level of description that gave some indication of the human repercussions of Nu's violence. Next, I removed all speech in the scene, as any one-liners appeared like Clint Eastwoodisms and gave a sense of playful pastiche. What remains, however, is a passage of

writing that is dominated by dashes. This punctuation has been my approach to the action sequences from the start. It is in part reflective of the action as stream of consciousness, but also provides elliptical spaces that reflect the contested conceptual space that the violence creates. I made the decision to keep the caged woman as Nu's apparent motivation. However, I rewrote the scene so that the woman is still alive and that Nu cuts her throat. Beyond the woman showing us what Luke is capable of (a vindication of Nu's initial assessment of him as bad news rather than just a justification of her killing him) this decision had two reasons: firstly, it did not unequivocally show Nu as a saviour of women, but rather represented a potential second reading – that she is frighteningly practical in her violence as demonstrated by her lack of hesitation in killing not just the men but the injured woman as well; secondly, and as an extension of this, it set up Dolly's journey as it is only at the end of the script that she can slit Nu's throat in a mirrored recognition that by this stage it is better for Nu to die than live. Nu's death is something she seeks for and an important trajectory of my own treatment of violence over the drafts of the script is the final recognition that it can be compassionate to kill.

There was a further point that became accentuated in my writing at this stage. Nu's own kick in what she is doing began to show itself. When she follows Dolly into the hotel in the rough draft:

Nu dismounts and strides towards the building – rifle in hand –

...

Nu hesitates and then hands over the rifle. She continues inside, followed by the bulk of Jim.

In the final draft this changes to:

Nu dismounts and approaches the building - rifle in hand. And she's thumping with energy - like her body is winding up.

...

Jim drops his hand as if he's changed his mind but Nu, seemingly unbothered, throws him the gun and continues inside.

This latest draft tapped into something that was there from the start – Nu's own indulgence in her violent behaviour. This feeds straight into the central development of Nu as a character. She has become someone who is in it for the kill. For her it is all about the competition. And yet we see the bloody reality of where this leads for her and for others. However, as we witness Nu's competition and violence develop it makes us revisit this scene. By looking back we can recognise her motivation as after the fact. Consequently, through the space between our first impression of her motivation (saving a victim) and our final understanding of what drives her (competition and violence), we are asked to question our desire to justify her violent act.

It is only by accepting my own discomfort with the violence I am writing that I can recognise it as part of the competition within myself. However, the more I have looked at the different films that have influenced the writing of Nu, the more I see that an attraction to violence is representative of a desire for control, whether that be in the terms of power or freedom or both. This is why the denying of the freedom to compete (either by oneself or by others) is related to the eruption of violence. Further, I must question whether my deepest interest is in violence or chaos? Violence makes chaos out of order, yet it is also a way of feeling in control in chaos. It is not just Nu who represents this, so does the character of Red and at times Dolly. But although chaos, just like violence, may be temporary, it has the same potential to be catastrophic. I believe that this unresolved issue lies at the heart of my interest in violence.

Competition

Violence can result from oppression; it can also result from suppression. Either way, it certainly has as much potential to be displayed by women as by men. Just as women are not expected to be violent, they are also not expected to be competitive. Further, as discussed in the Introduction, it is arguable that all violence is competitive and that all competition is violent. And so the suppression of competition can lead to acts of violence because it is a way

the suppressed competitive instinct can manifest itself. The violent woman threatens the status quo not just because of her violence but because of the will to compete (to be active, not passive) that her violence reveals. As such we strive to find other justifications for her violence beyond this competition. Nu plays with our expectations when it comes to motivation, justification, competition and violence. Dolly represents the audience's viewpoint when she states that Nu is out to save her daughter. At first Dolly, and the audience, do not believe Nu when she denies this fact. But as the story unfolds it is left for all to see that Nu is not motivated by maternal instinct but by a desire to vanquish her rivals, to win – a competition in her that acts as a blind driving force. Dolly tries, along with the audience, to justify Nu's actions and her search. But even when those justifications fall away, we still look to what has happened to Nu in the past to make her into this. We ask Neroni's hysterical question: what does Nu want? Yet the answer we are finally forced to accept cannot pacify us: she wants to win. In terms of the acceptable motivations for violence that society attributes to women, Nu does not comply. For society competition is not a valid justification for a woman's violence. In other words, by society's standards her violence is motiveless, and that makes her monstrous. However, at the end of this thesis it is clear to me that she is no monster. Nu is simply a competitor.

Feminism versus Postfeminism

As argued in my introduction, Dolly is the postfeminist hero at the start, just as Nu is the feminist warhorse. Dolly is again most representative of the position of the audience and perhaps even my own position as she is drawn into, fascinated by and fearful of, Nu's violence. As we take on Dolly's perspective of the lone rider we see what Tasker and Negra describe as a postfeminist process that "involves an "othering" of feminism" (2007: 4). Nu, however, cannot be so easily dismissed as she makes us identify the competition and violence within us all. Dolly is representative of this conflict as when she kills Nu and leaves the farm her departure is ambiguous – is she going out to compete or is she leaving the world of competition behind? Will she carry on in violence, or is this what she hopes to escape? These questions are open-ended as the conceptual space they inhabit allows the possibilities for each reader to write their own answers. Dolly wears both Nu's blood and her identity. She has become Nu and yet also is a fuller version of herself. Whatever the destination of this character, she has proven

herself a true competitor. However, if I have to give my personal view I see that by the end Dolly not only reconciles to Nu, she becomes her. This is my own final position. I am both of these women and in order to be complete I must bring them together. I am a product of the postfeminist age, but I am above all a feminist. I have used my script to negotiate the spectrum of possibilities between the two and it is this contested space that I continue to inhabit as a writer.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis I raised the possibility that the question of the violent woman was one without answers. Although I have drawn some conclusions, and clarified my understanding of many issues, I believe that there is no final end to this conversation. However, as a writer it is this contested space that makes for the most interesting and important subject matter. And, as a writer I must be prepared to hand over my work to the reader (as the new writer of the text) without dictating the adoption of my own interpretation and meaning, something I have stated in my Preface. One thing this thesis has clarified for me is that violence is a necessary subject of debate. And that beyond this it is essential to allow women full competition in society in order to minimise an abuse of power through the use of violence by either sex. Violence does not represent emancipation or freedom but rather a struggle to gain power. As far as I am concerned the best way to encourage and allow women to compete is to influence society's expectations of women. Although the scripts I have discussed in my thesis have been assigned varying value, all have helped to raise the active woman in our collective consciousness. If we can make an effort to take this figure away from the staple ground of hypersexualisation and towards realist depictions of women competitors (violent or not) then we are furthering the power of women in society as a whole. My script carries this aim but the key to success in this fight is numbers and so I urge screenwriters to continue to find new and inspiring ways to represent competitive (and possibly violent) women protagonists in cinema.

Indication to Further Research

The violent woman in popular cinema is a well covered area but there is also critical research to be carried out on the same subject matter in other media, or even other sectors of cinema. The more revolutionary depictions of the violent woman in television are a continuing source of material for researchers, and an under-explored area is the somewhat reactionary depiction of competitive, violent women in contemporary music videos. In terms of film it would be of interest to know more about non-mainstream productions and how their treatment of the violent woman varies. Also, as a continuation of my discussion of *Crouching Tiger*, there is bound to be much of interest in Asian cinema. As an extension of this, non-English speaking cinema in general would be a good source for research as varying cultural approaches to gender make for variety in representation – for example Sweden's *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* trilogy (Oplev, 2009; Alfredson, 2009). There are also a number of television series that widen this foreign-language body of work, for example the Danish series *The Killing* (2007/2009) and the 2011 Danish/Swedish co-production *The Bridge* (the American remakes of the first two of these three Scandinavian examples are also ripe for investigation in regards to the way mainstream cinema and television can be influenced to produce 'new' representations of female protagonists). Further to the example of *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* trilogy, non-original screenplays are an interesting area: as there is a far wider representation of women writers in the book industry than the film industry it is arguable there is also more potential for diverse female protagonists in book adaptations to film.

One interesting recent example of an adapted screenplay is *The Hunger Games* (Ross, 2012), a film entirely based around a competition to kill or be killed where the central female protagonist, Katniss Everdeen, is absolutely convincing in her status as the number one competitor. On *Woman's Hour* Jane Garvey called it "that once rare but quite beautiful thing: a female character driving, indeed dominating, the action" (2011). On the same programme Berdisha Bandyopadhyay described Katniss's "dimensionality", and continued, "adaptations of stories about and by women suddenly have all that complexity and realism". In an article co-authored with A.O. Scott in 2012, Manohla Dargis argues that,

Katniss doesn't shift between masculinity and femininity; she inhabits both, which may mean that neither really fits... there's something different about how Katniss un-self-consciously blends characteristics that, even today, tend to be identified in

mainstream cinema with either men or women. For me Katniss recalls Ripley in the first “Alien” in that they do the jobs they need to do and just happen to be female....She isn’t passive, she isn’t weak, and she isn’t some random girl. She’s active, she’s strong and she’s the girl who motivates the story.

A.O. Scott, developed this to posit that the female lead of ““The Hunger Games” allows — or maybe compels — a kind of universal identification that is rare, or maybe even taboo.”

We might read that as *The Hunger Games* emerges from the children’s market (Katniss is supposed to be 17) a new generation is growing up that will not find it so hard to believe in the concept of a violent, or more importantly a competitive, woman. But as a writer of original screenplays I do not want to rely on the publishing industry to lead the way. Also in 2012 we saw the release of *Snow White and the Huntsman* (Sanders), where the traditional heroine is rewritten as an original screen warrior of sorts and Pixar’s latest animated film, *Brave* (Andrews, Chapman) which follows the exploits of another girl warrior. Further, the release of *Prometheus* (Scott, 2012), a form of prequel to the *Alien* series, provides another convincingly portrayed violent female protagonist but this time for the adult market. However, I find it disconcerting that 33 years after Ripley, the well developed character of Elizabeth Shaw is still one of the few female action heroes with real substance. Further, the status she inherits in this prequel as a predecessor of Ripley is fitting as she is ultimately a lesser version of her iconic counterpart. Shaw never manages to move beyond the representations of female agency we first saw in *Alien* so many years back. One interpretation of the above quotation from Dargis is that the Ripley of all those decades ago still remains a revolutionary character in the context of today’s cinema as she is worryingly yet to be surpassed as an everywoman action woman. And just as films like *Alien*, *Thelma & Louise*, *Crouching Tiger* and *Monster* did not open the flood gates for realist representations of violent, competitive female protagonists, it is important not to see 2012’s respectively optimistic trend of active female protagonists as the end to the problem. With this in mind I reiterate my primary suggestion for further research into the topic of this thesis: in order to ensure that the examples of the violent female protagonist offered in 2012 do not simply end up as new exceptions to the rule it is vital to further her representation and to bring her fully and permanently into the public consciousness. To achieve this ambition screenwriters must continue to produce scripts that explore the diverse and active potential of the realist female cinematic protagonist as a true competitor.

Appendix A: The Creative Setting

The following pieces of writing are representative of the early stage development of the creative setting of *The Competitors*. They consist of a creative context for the narrative that was one of the first things I wrote in preparation for the project, a draft prologue that was also written prior to plotting the script outline, and two early drafts of the script. These writing samples are offered to provide a sense of the progression of the creative work in relation to the setting. In particular they display the pairing down of exposition in regards to the question of how the world of the narrative has reached this dystopian state. When juxtaposed with the final draft of the script, these early writings highlight the continuous movement towards a story that raises more questions than it answers.

The context for the narrative provides an explanation of the setting. It is interesting to note that most of the backstory provided here remains relevant to the final draft of *The Competitors*. The only obvious change is that the snow falling in the third act was originally meant to signify a shift towards colder weather. The decision for the snow to be something unsurprising was taken in a late draft of the script, in part because it made practical sense in terms of the story for Dolly to be used to the snow but also because of my own experience of the spate of cold winters over the time that I wrote the script. In other words, in the final draft the snow is expected because in the world of *The Competitors*, British winters have become bleak – a fact that resonates with a contemporary audience.

The prologue draft was written the day after the context for the narrative piece was submitted. As such it was a creative response to the developing setting. The focus on descriptions of wilderness came from a desire to expose the potential expansive landscapes in the UK, something that related directly to my decision to write a western set in Britain. The

language of the description and voice-over takes a lyrical tone and at times verges on the melodramatic. This stands in contrast to the terser descriptions of the first two drafts of the script. The same movement is reflected in the decision to discard the voice-over and present the information about the setting in captions in the first draft. These all display a progression towards a narrative that evokes the harshness of the environment the characters inhabit. The characters speak less because in this world words hold little value; the action lines are less descriptive because the brutality of the action speaks for itself. However, even in the draft prologue there is the line, “A vast landscape of open valley hemmed by grey mountains...”, which, along with the following description of the lone rider, has become the first line of the script by the third draft. This opening is still in place at final draft and represents how the screenplay has held on to something that was there from the very beginning: the expressionism of the landscape.

In the first draft of the script the language has become more perfunctory. This is combined with a different set of images that highlight an interest beyond nature: the tractor and the motorway. In this draft the focus has shifted to the crossover of wilderness and the remains of civilisation. In these descriptions the emptiness is not of the wild but the civilised world. At this stage I was beginning to introduce more and more images of the decay of man-made objects. This shows a development of the theme of order versus chaos, which underpins the narrative to final draft. However, the creative setting is still explicitly described from the start. It was not until the third draft that I made a decision to write a beginning that could be read as a straight American period western. This represents a shift in my writing as I began to experiment with the idea of withholding information about the setting from the audience. However, I still chose to give a basic explanation through the final captions (which are highly stylised).

After the early drafts presented in this appendix my writing of the script began to move from a stylised to a realist style (described in the Conclusion to the critical element). In relation to this my interest became about delaying, and then removing, exposition. So in the end we are left with the descriptions of things like “hand-forged bullets”, “blazing sunlight... just past dawn” or the car as a “super-modern hybrid model... aged and rusting”, alongside the expressionism of the landscape and scattered half-comments in the dialogue. At final draft these are the only clues that remain of the original writing as presented in the following excerpts. This is

representative of how the creative setting developed in these examples became the foundations of an overall sense of an unanswered question.

The Competitors

Context for the Narrative – 1.2 – 01.12.08

In 2011 global oil production reaches its peak. The estimated stocks of 'easy' oil have been oversold and it soon becomes apparent that there is simply not enough left of this finite resource to fuel global demand. The resulting panic leads the remaining oil rich nations of China and Russia, and those in the Middle East and North Africa, to close their borders to competitive trade. It is only in these regions that economies continue to grow and throughout the rest of the globe some of the oldest institutions of power begin to stagger.

The global oil crunch forces governments to hoard their resources for the most important of uses – food and war. This leads to the near-death of the car: petrol is no longer on the market and there have not been enough advances made in the fields of alternative fuels to counter this loss. Electricity would be the obvious option but the energy crisis means that the powering of electric transport systems is a luxury few can afford.

A new mass form of energy is required and investment in renewable technologies has drastically declined in recent years due to the foregrounding of the credit crunch at the end of the first decade of the 21st century. This means that many countries seek for a quick solution in nuclear regimes. But the creation of an entirely new energy infrastructure does not happen overnight and in the interim governments have to ignore the fear of climate change and double their use of coal. They justify this decision by preaching of the yet unproven Carbon Capture and Sequester technology (CCS). Though still in development, governments promise that CCS will soon provide a solution to the emissions produced by the use of fossil fuels. Billions of dollars are poured into the building of new national energy infrastructures to allow nuclear power to provide electricity and heat. All over the world people predict disaster and fear created by the idea of a nuclear legacy spreads. Governments, blinded by their desperation for an easy answer to their problems, neglect to diversify their energy portfolios and again advancements and investments in renewable energy are sidelined.

By the 2020s many of the new nuclear power stations are projected to soon be running at full capacity but emissions are going through the roof. Promises over carbon reduction and emission trading have disappeared faster than they were first dreamed up. The final touches are being put to the new nuclear generation of power. Then disaster strikes. The projected

supplies of uranium-235 are discovered to be vastly overestimated. This new nuclear world has nothing to fuel it and the resulting anxiety and anger means that any available uranium supplies soon become the fields for energy wars. Claimed uranium-235 and generated plutonium-239 are far too valuable in their weapon capacity given this volatile climate and the nuclear power plan falls to pieces.

By 2025 the scramble for nuclear power has left the development of renewable energy sources a generation behind. The consequences of this are that the UK has to resign itself to full blown coal production which will generate the vast majority of its energy for the next 20 years. The economy has suffered irreparable damage and Britain does not have enough coal supplies to be able to offer its only valuable resource in trade. Across the world countries are turning to coal, shale oil and tar sands as the only immediately available sources of energy. By this stage climate change has already reached a 3°C increase from pre-industrial levels - developing and developed countries all over the world are suffering from drought, flood and famine.

Over the next years, as governments struggle to catch up with renewable energy sources, the fossil fuels burn. Policy makers are completely reliant on CCS to provide a way to lessen the accelerating climate changes. However, after years of research scientists and engineers are still unable to develop a working model that can be used on a viable scale. As an attempt to counter the effects of fossil fuel emissions communities around the UK are encouraged to create their own decentralised sustainable energy systems by building small scale wind, water and solar schemes.

With the full blown commitment to fossil fuels average temperatures increase by 4°C, and then 5°C, and soon humanity is facing unknown territory. With this rise in heat the worst kind of effects are brought home to England. Diseases such as Malaria, previously the bane of developing nations with tropical climates, are rife. Traditional crops fail and long heat wave summers are followed by warm winters of torrential rain. Sea levels are rising and the Government can only protect so much of its shoreline. Investment is focused on building sea barricades around London and its surrounding coast as the country enters an advanced stage of managed retreat.

The effects of climate change force most of the population away from their homes and communities as their traditional ways of living collapse. Many come to London but the

overcrowding in this now underdeveloped capital has little to convince them to stay and there is mass emigration to the new world empires of China, Russia and the Middle East. These are the places where money has enabled investment in a sustainable future - even in the furnace heats of the UAE desert the developments in photovoltaics has allowed a quality of life far superior to the world left behind. However, over the years there has been a constant stream of refugees from the countries worst effected and least able to deal with climate change. This means that any new immigrants are at the bottom of a very long food chain.

And so some make a life for themselves in London. The collapse of the country at large means that the Government now focuses all resources on the South - London and its surrounds are reimagined in the form of a medieval walled city. Mass farming is the main focus for energy supplies to feed the hungry populace. Attempts are made to adapt the fallen metropolis to the sustainable systems of the future. The problem is that all the new Cities have been built from scratch. From their geographical placement to the type of aggregate used in their building blocks they are designed with the most advanced ideas in sustainability and carbon-neutrality at their core. The history of London stands in the way of efficiency and the best that can be done is to patch over the gaps of the centuries-old capital. Even with this effort the City is only as strong as its weakest parts and like the Victorian water mains, energy seeps from every seam. By the end of the 2040s national supplies of fossil fuels are drying up but a number of massive renewable projects such as the Severn Barrage have been completed and these effectively run life in the south. It is a life of sacrifice with load sharing, rationing, curfews and forced commitment to work for the City. There is a single focus - to keep this decrepit shadow of former British glory alive. One result of this is that the space beyond the City walls has been abandoned to its own fate.

The country beyond London is now a wilderness. Most of the decentralised communities created years before are long forgotten, relinquished by their inhabitants. Except for a few. There are those who would rather live in the wild than under the weight of a dying beast. The odd village, farm or individual exists beyond the frontier – surviving by their own means. They have no technology, communication, or power except for what they make for themselves and the same is true of their laws.

When the story starts it is 2053 and the end of the hottest summer on record. As the two women travel north they move from a summer heat wave to a 'monsoon' autumn. The

continued melting of glaciers and ice sheets and the mass rain fall that has risen over the years eventually reaches a forcing threshold - when snow falls for the first time in decades it becomes clear that the accumulation of the stresses on the planet have pushed the climate into a new cycle of weather. The Gulf Stream has finally switched off. The winter that the characters suffer as they journey into the Scottish highlands signals the beginnings of a long-term decline in temperature in the Northern hemisphere. Again, the world is facing a new era beyond the experiences of modern humanity.

FADE IN:

EXT. BRITAIN -- NIGHT

The complete blackness of a night without a breath of light.

DOLLY (V.O.)
(soft, rural Scottish
accent)

All I know is what I've been told.
But supposedly life was not always
like this.

As Dolly speaks a series of images of British wilderness come and go. First we see a field of wildflowers - a burning poppy beckons to us.

DOLLY (V.O.)
There was a time that some remember
when we ruled the world. That was
before it became apparent that our
power was based on nothing and, at
that realisation, it vanished.

An endless expanse of dunes.

DOLLY (V.O.)
First the oil ran out; the
politicians, the corporations, had
all been living on estimations,
selling something that didn't
exist. Increased demand couldn't
carry the burden of their deceit so
oil rich nations turned to
husbandry

A hiddenaway bluebell wood in spring light.

DOLLY (V.O.)
and we to nuclear. Everyone
predicted global disaster, but no
one foresaw comedy - of the
blackest sort. Billions of dollars
and tens of years were poured into
new infrastructures before we
discovered the uranium supply was
negligent. What was there was soon
snatched up for threatened weaponry
in the energy wars raging across
the planet.

A seascape stretching beyond white cliffs.?

DOLLY (V.O.)

Nature's bare cupboard seemed her own private joke, except this distinctly dark humour was a product of no single malignant personality but rather a mindless, relentless force.

A great oak sprawls its canopy across a blue and white sky.

DOLLY (V.O.)

When we reopened our coal mines, and began exploiting distant tar sands, we did it knowingly. Our country did not suffer the worst - it's always those least equipped who win that prize - but the changes in climate transformed our landscape in more than just a physical way.

A wide river-valley cradling the Reformation remains of a monastery.

DOLLY (V.O.)

People left this derailed island to find refuge in the future empires. Of the few million who stayed most tried to reform London in the image of the sustainable developments of the new world. But to fuel an old creaking vessel meant many sacrifices. And there were those who would not bow to this.

A vast landscape of open valley hemmed by grey mountains. The sun is in descent and the deepening blue of the sky signals the advent of a storm.

DOLLY (V.O.)

These were the ones who chose to live in the world beyond the City.

From the far distance a LONE RIDER approaches - black Stetson standing out against the diminishing light.

Stepping back from the scene we see DOLLY (22 but appears 16), watching the Rider's coming from her bedroom window. Dolly has a wild, pretty appearance and from this romanticised angle looks something like a grubby pre-Raphaelite.

PAW (O.S.)

Here comes the rain.

Dolly starts from her reverie and turns to see

PAW (60s), a rotting mess of a man, looming in her doorway.?

Dolly is unperturbed.

DOLLY

Get out.

PAW

With all this sweatin', ain't ya
lookin forward to a bit of cold?

DOLLY

You aren't allowed in here anymore.

PAW

This time I'll play nice.

He grins to reveal his brown, stumpy teeth, and then a
hunting knife.

FADE IN:

INSERT TITLE:

BRITAIN, 2053.

An empty meadow landscape. Moving closer we see green eclipsed by yellow, and brown - colours of burn and decay.

OVER IMAGE INSERT PROLOGUE PART 1:

The changes to our world took place rapidly. When the oil ran out energy wars raged. Plutonium was the next great hope but supplies proved to be negligent. And sustainable methods had been held back by the shadow of nuclear power. The world turned to coal and tar sands - and the planet burned. Now climate spins like an ever accelerating top.

Moving into the meadow, grazing over the singed growth, we discover the remnants of an old tractor - suffocated by weeds, rusting into the ground.

OVER IMAGE INSERT PROLOGUE PART 2:

Britain has run out of coal, and run out of time. Most have already abandoned the dying country for the new superpowers of the east. For those who remain London offers the only security - a place where energy and food are paid for at the price of freedom.

Now we are moving upwards, high away from the field where we look across a sweeping landscape dissected by a great snaking motorway - and to the very horizon there is not a soul in sight. As this is revealed the final lines appear:

INSERT PROLOGUE PART 3:

But there is a world beyond the walls of the City - a wilderness where chaos and violence reign. A place for the crude, and the brave.

FADE TO:

EXT. NORTH YORKSHIRE -- EVENING

A vast landscape of open valley hemmed by grey mountains. The sun is in descent and the deepening blue of the sky signals the advent of a storm.

From the far distance a LONE RIDER approaches - BLACK HAT standing out against the diminishing light.

FADE IN:

A vast landscape of open valley hemmed by grey mountains. In the far distance A LONE RIDER emerges from the deep range and moves slowly, surely towards us.

INT. THE BLACK HORSE. GRASSINGTON -- MORNING

A dark and low establishment. Early morning heat. Even the carpet sweats - decades of muck and stale booze.

Through the gloom we begin to make out men, filling the shadowed corners - maybe 15 of them. They're all peering out at a table in the middle of the bar - with 5 more men seated around it. A high stakes poker game.

CECIL SPRATT shows his cards - a flush. Like all the others he hasn't seen a bath or a razor in God knows how long and by the look of him this game has been going all night. But the gleam in his eye tells us he's just layed out the winning hand. Three of the other players push their pay-in to him - a belt, a knife, 3 hand-forged bullets. But Cecil's not interested in these prizes. He's only got eyes for the man seated opposite him. He looks. We all look.

Even in this glut of alpha-males RED stands out. Flaming-haired but cold-blooded, he is unbalanced by repression so deep it has no end - a classic example of the abused becoming the abuser.

Red's colourless eyes move from Cecil's cards to his face. Everyone's holding their breath. Cecil's victorious glint falters. And then Red smiles. And we can all breathe again. Except Red's eyes are dead.

Red stands. He's not tall, but he's compact - a powerful build. Cecil gets up and follows Red out of the bar.

CUT TO:

EXT. GRASSINGTON -- CONTINUOUS

The two men step out into blazing sunlight. It's just past dawn but they're both forced to shield their eyes from the glare. A couple of horses are tied up in front of the pub. And beyond them is the market square - full of nothing but dust.

Red reaches into his pocket and pulls out something we cannot see. Cecil's trying not to look too full of it as he moves to take his trophy. But as he reaches out Red snaps the object back up. Cecil is perturbed. Red casually flings it out into the middle of the square. Cecil watches it land in a puff of dust. He turns back to Red. Red's mouth smiles. He gestures to the prize with his head, encouraging Cecil to go after it. Cecil hesitates - but he sees no choice. He trots out into the middle of the square.

Two men, BEAN and KID, step out of the pub. They stand grinning behind Red - here to enjoy the show. A few less confident faces have congregated at the grubby windows of the bar.

Cecil makes his way to the landing spot. He stoops and - BANG - a shot thuds into the ground by his hand. He starts back and turns to see Red holding a smoking gun.

Again Red gestures with his head for Cecil to pick up the object.

Cecil starts to shake. All that empty space around him and he's cornered. Tentatively he goes in again and - BANG - this time blood splatters into dirt as his right hand is severed. He SCREAMS.

Red stands unmoved. Cecil looks to him, desperate. Red, again, gestures to the object in the dust at Cecil's feet.

Cecil - in shock - robotically obeys and - BAM - his left hand shatters. He slumps to the ground, staring at the bloody stumps at the ends of his arms. Red walks up and stands over him. Cecil looks up. Red's pale eyes glare down at Cecil - no trace of a smile now. He nods to Cecil's winnings - the final offer.

Cecil sits, unable to obey.

Red shrugs. He picks the object up out of the dust and turns to the horses. He looks down into his hand and we see - a set of keys. He looks in the direction of the horses and just beyond them we see -

a car -

INSERT TITLE OVER IMAGE:

BRITAIN, 2053.

- like some super-modern hybrid model. Except this car is aged and rusting. Red walks over to his ride -

INSERT TITLE OVER IMAGE:

POST-OIL

- and gets in.

INSERT TITLE OVER IMAGE:

POST-NUCLEAR

- Bean and Kid follow.

INSERT TITLE OVER IMAGE:

POST-COAL

- Red starts her up -

INSERT TITLE OVER IMAGE:

POST-'THE WEST'

- and roars off out of town.

The ensuing cloud of dust settles in a thick, sticky layer over the blood-soaked form of Cecil as he stares hopelessly after them.

INSERT TITLE OVER IMAGE:

POST-ANY KIND OF LIFE AS WE KNOW IT

Appendix B: Developing Character Motivation

This appendix contains examples of 10 drafts of a short section of the script. The scenes in question come at the end of the second act as the two protagonists, Dolly and Nu, reach the nadir of their journey. It is at this structural point that a screenplay often provides an exposition on a central character's backstory in the form of a monologue. The audience expectation is that this is the moment where the true motivation for this character's actions is revealed. In presenting my own rewriting of these key scenes I am providing an example of the development/uncovering of the motivation of my two central characters over the different drafts of my script. I am also making explicit how the writing out of these scenes enabled me to reach a shorter, less expositional final draft.

In the first drafts of this section the focus is on Dolly and her backstory. The writing circulates around ideas of fearfulness, home and victimhood. In the second draft we see that Dolly is the one who is injured, and is being cared for by Nu. However, by the third draft this dynamic has reversed. This reflects two things. Firstly, the overwriting of Dolly's monologue allowed me to explore her backstory to a point where I was happy with my understanding of her motivations. Dolly seeks a home but this is born out of a fear of being alone. In other words, she relies on others for survival and it is only in her development into the person that keeps Nu alive that she can begin to engage with her own potential to become the lone rider. Secondly, I had begun to realise the difficulty I was having in defining Nu as a character. As a result of this her story became the focus of this section and it was not until I reached the 10th draft (written after I had completed the critical thesis) that I was able to recognise her motivation as competition.

The problem I faced at the third draft was that I already knew that Nu was a woman of few words. This is shown in her limited monologue at this stage. However, I realised that in order

to develop (or uncover) Nu as a character, I had to write out her backstory within the space of the narrative. From the fourth draft onwards I worked on a number of varying stories that provide exposition on how Nu has reached her current situation. Although there are changes to the details of Nu's history there are some key phrases that continue to emerge. One statement Nu repeatedly makes across a number of drafts is, "Something keeps driving me". The undefined nature of this driving force is a direct product of the fact that, like Nu, I had not at this stage worked out what this "Something" was. Up until the eighth draft the key motivation (for both Dolly and Nu) is fear. And perhaps this is reflective of my own fear of what I was writing: although the subject of competition had not been unearthed the scene was still dealing with the subject of violence.

There are a number of instances where I introduce the complexities of violence in the rewriting of this section. In particular the old woman in the seventh draft represents someone who has carried out an act of violence on herself as a way of releasing herself from victimhood, the writing of which I found a very conflicted experience. There is also a development of symbolism relating to violence within the scenes. The description of failing to kill a horse in Dolly's monologue in draft two becomes the action of her slaying a horse in draft four. This killing scene was present in earlier drafts but it was at this point that I decided to relocate it to this section. As such it provides a backdrop of violence as the action takes place on a snow-covered plain infused with the butchered horse's blood. A second example of the developing symbolism relating to violence comes in the seventh draft where I first introduce the T-Shirt with the Barbara Kruger logo: "Buy me/ I'll change/ your life". There were a number of potential logos that I looked at but I decided on one that overtly related to consumerism as I did not want to be too explicit about what this T-Shirt symbolised. There were other options that I felt were too expositional, yet perhaps more fitting, for example, "we don't need another hero", "Your Body is your battleground", "In violence/ we forget/ who we are" or, perhaps most interesting in relation to my own battle that I was having with my subject matter, "All Violence is an illustration of Pathetic Stereotype". I introduced the name Barbara Kruger into the script as a way of bringing all of these statements into play. What is also interesting about the logo that I chose is that by flagging the subject of consumerism I had already started to engage with the concept of competition (in terms of modern consumer culture). However, from the very start there is a far more central symbol of competition present in my writing: the tea-diffuser.

From the rough draft the tea-diffuser is described as “a medal”. But at this early stage its symbolic relationship to competition is obscure. Rather, it is an object linked to ideas of the family, motherhood and home through its relationship to Dolly’s backstory. As the drafts move to a focus on Nu, the tea-diffuser becomes a cross-over object that creates a symbolic connection between Dolly and Nu’s backstories: both women are searching for a mother and a child, respectively. It is interesting to note that in these earlier drafts the relationship between Dolly and Nu is far more gentle and nurturing than at final draft. The picture of Nu holding Dolly, which changes to Dolly holding Nu, as they discuss the diffuser, is an image of maternal protection and care. However, by the eighth draft the description of the diffuser as a gift for doing “something good” has gone. This tracks the slow emergence of Nu’s motivation as being something far more conflicted than maternal instinct. In the same draft Nu’s speech is beginning to move away from reams of exposition towards the elliptical dialogue she uses at final draft, as the uncovering of violence and competition in her backstory allowed me to remove her evolved explanations of her motivations. At this stage I describe her speech as sounding “as if her language has been suffocated by her instinct”. This is a direct introduction of the idea that Nu is being driven by something she has uncovered in her nature: violence and competition. However, by ninth draft the motivation becomes about loss of self, “Something changed. Something was lost”, as Nu corrects Dolly in her misguided attempt to explain Nu’s actions. It was at this point that the conflict between these concepts of self and other necessitated a move over to the critical element as a way of interrogating what these ideas of competition and violence really meant to my writing.

In the 10th draft I had been through the process of critically investigating ideas of competition in relationship to violent women in film. The result in terms of my script is a language that is straight, brutal and unemotional. Competition is also the explicit subject: Nu states, “Life is competition. There is nothing else”; when Dolly says, “We’ll find her”, and Nu replies, “I know”, her response displays the fact that although Dolly’s words are enigmatic Nu is able to interpret them because the competitive drive in her is absolutely focused; and, finally, the tea-diffuser has now become an overt symbol of competition as it is a medal that Dolly was “proud to win”. From this writing out of competition I moved on to a 12th draft that also represents the section as it is at final draft. Through a process of creative and critical exploration I discovered Nu’s motivation. This means I was able to take the overt exposition of competition out of the script in order to create a narrative that does not openly provide answers to the

questions it raises. In other words, Nu's statement of competition is removed and what remains is the symbol of the tea-diffuser as a thing to be won.

The decisions I have made as represented through the following drafts of my script come as a result of defining Nu's character as a woman who will not reveal herself through language but rather through action. At the 12th draft the slaying of the horse is something that Dolly fails to enact prior to this motivational scene because it is through this pivotal interaction with Nu that Dolly finds the ability to kill. And her killing of the horse is a precursor to her killing of Red. However, this scene can be elliptical because, ultimately, it is the ending of *The Competitors* that makes exposition of Nu's backstory unnecessary. We are given an insight into Nu through Dolly's final transformation into the lone rider. As we follow the arc of Dolly's journey from someone apparently searching for a home to someone intent on finding freedom we can see an echo of Nu's own story. This reveals Nu not just as a competitor but as an everywoman. It is through the writing out of the following material that I was able to come to this understanding and, therefore, to reach my final draft.

CUT TO:

Dolly and Nu huddling together in another snow hole. But as tight as Nu holds her, Dolly will not stop shaking. In her shuddering hand she grasps her Diffuser.

DOLLY
(rasping)
Why did you hate me so much when we first met?

NU
I didn't hate you.

DOLLY
Yes you did.

Nu thinks it through - then -

NU
You've got a lot of spirit Dolly.
But you act like a child - there's no reason why you can't take care of yourself.

DOLLY
I don't know how to protect myself the way you do.

NU
I wasn't born like this.

DOLLY
And I wasn't born a whore. I've given it up just to get fed.
There's not always a choice.

NU
You don't give yourself a chance.

DOLLY
(rolling the diffuser in her hand)
When I was younger me and my little brother had an accident. It wrecked our cart and broke the horse's neck. I had to carry my brother home on my back - it took me two days. My dad beat the shit out of me. My mum, she'd never been soft with me, she let him do it. But that night, she came and gave me this. (She squeezes the Diffuser)
(MORE)

DOLLY (CONT'D)

She said it was a medal for bravery. It's the only time in my whole life anyone let me know that I'd done something good. And it never happened again.

(PAUSE)

About a year after this nice-looking man lodged a night with us - said he was heading for London. I ran off with him in the morning. I think I was about 13. I doubt we were two miles down the road before he raped me. Then he told me to go home. I just followed him. After a few weeks he got in trouble gambling and handed me over to pay the debt. That's when I learnt my true value - and then how to make use of it. (Pause) I think that time with my brother was the only thing I ever did right - and even then I got shit. This is a bad world, and it makes the people who live in it bad - there's nothing anyone can do about that.

NU

You've got to stop living in fear.

Dolly smiles.

DOLLY

Well, as we're both about to die - why not?

Nu begins to laugh quietly. Dolly joins in. Nu draws her closer but the shaking does not stop.

CUT TO:

Night. Dolly lying in a snow hole. Nu has a small fire lit. she's burning anything and everything - old rags, the rope, bits of leather and stuffing from the saddle. She pulls out Dolly's bundle and throws the shirt that holds it together over Dolly. All that's left inside is the rouge, book and tea-diffuser. She scoops out the rouge and smears it onto a piece of leather and puts it on the fire - the fat sizzles as it catches light. Then she starts to rip up the book and page by page she feeds it to the flames.

Dolly opens her eyes at the new source of light. She sees the tea-diffuser and reaches out a shuddering hand. Nu gives her the diffuser to hold and then draws Dolly into her arms as she tries to imbue some of her body heat into her. But as tight as Nu holds her, Dolly will not stop shaking. The women sit in this desperate embrace - watching the weak flames of the fire. Then -

DOLLY
(rasping)
Why did you hate me when we first
met?

NU
I've never hated you.

Nu thinks it through. Then -

NU (CONT'D)
You've got a lot of spirit Dolly.
But you act like a child. There's
no reason why you can't take care
of yourself.

DOLLY
I don't know how to protect myself
the way you do.

NU
I wasn't born like this.

DOLLY
I wasn't born a whore. There's not
always a choice.

Dolly clasps the diffuser in her hand. Nu looks down at it.

NU
What is that?

DOLLY
A medal.

NU
For what?

DOLLY
I don't know.
(PAUSE)
My mum gave it to me. Just before we left London. I'd been out on our mare - even though I wasn't supposed to I took her outside of the City. She fell and broke her leg. I had my dad's gun but I couldn't bring myself to shoot her. It took me til night to walk home. When my dad got back to her the next day she was still conscious. But something had attacked her - it ate her while she was alive. My dad beat the shit out of me. My mum, she'd never been soft with me, she let him do it. But afterwards she came and gave me this.
(she squeezes the Diffuser)
She called it a medal. Like I'd done something right.

NU
Do you ever think about finding her?

DOLLY
Every day.
(PAUSE)
You must think about finding your daughter all the time.

Nu looks down at Dolly. She's still. Her shaking has subsided. Nu keeps hold of her. Then -

NU
I did. At the start. But it's been four years.

DOLLY
What happened?

NU
She was taken - just like you, just like all the other girls.

DOLLY
By who?

NU
That's what I want to find out.

DOLLY

What are you going to do when you
find her?

NU

I don't know. But I can't stop. I
don't know how not to look for her.

She looks back down at Dolly, lying in her arms. Dolly has closed her eyes. Nu takes the tea-diffuser from her hand. She holds it so that the light from the dying fire filters through the holes punctured in the metal. Then she puts it away in her jacket pocket.

CUT TO:

Night. Nu lying in a snow hole. Dolly has a small fire lit. She's burning anything and everything - old rags, the rope, bits of leather and stuffing from the saddle. She pulls out her bundle and throws the shirt that holds it together over Nu. All that's left inside is the rouge, book and tea-diffuser. She scoops out the rouge and smears the grease onto Nu's exposed skin. Then she starts to rip up the book and page by page she feeds it to the flames.

Nu opens her eyes at the new source of light. She sees the tea-diffuser and reaches out a shuddering hand. Dolly gives her the diffuser to hold and then draws Nu into her arms as she tries to imbue some of her body heat into her. But as tight as Dolly holds her, Nu will not stop shaking. The women sit in this desperate embrace - watching the weak flames of the fire. Nu clasps the diffuser in her hand.

NU

What is this?

DOLLY

A tea-diffuser.

(PAUSE)

A medal.

NU

For what?

DOLLY

I don't know. My mum gave it to me. When I was little. She said it was a medal because I'd done something good.

NU

Do you ever think about finding her?

DOLLY

Every day.

(PAUSE)

You must think about finding your daughter all the time.

Dolly looks down at Nu. She's still. Her shaking has subsided. Dolly keeps hold of her. Then -

NU

I did. At the start. But it's been four years.

DOLLY

What happened?

NU

She was taken - just like you, just like all the other girls.

DOLLY

By who?

NU

Two men. Passing through. I never saw them.

DOLLY

What are you going to do when you find her?

NU

I don't know. But I can't stop. I don't know how not to look for her.

Nu closes her eyes. Dolly looks at the tea-diffuser in her hand. The light from the dying fire filters through the holes punctured in the metal. Dolly closes Nu's hand over it just as the flames burn out.

CUT TO:

Dolly sitting in the snow with Nu. Dolly wraps her half conscious companion up in the tarp and then stands. She walks over to the grey, away from Nu and Beau. She takes a firm hold of the bridle. Dolly draws out Paw's knife. Again, her hand is shaking. She turns and walks away, head lowered with her back to the animal. Then she takes a deep breath. But she does not move. Stalled, she looks up and sees the dark form of Nu in the snow. And in one single movement Dolly turns back, rushes forwards and thrusts the knife into her horse's heart -

CUT TO:

Dolly awash with blood as she sits amidst the mounds of flesh, hacking through the carcass of the grey -

Dolly stands up carrying a strip of red meat. She walks over to Nu and shakes her awake. Nu opens her eyes and Dolly feeds the bloody offering into her mouth. Nu sucks gratefully on the salty flesh. Dolly picks up another hunk of meat and sits beside her.

NU

Thank you.

Dolly stays silent but her face is full of emotion as she watches the older woman methodically eating the kill. Then -

DOLLY

I'm sorry I ran away from you in Newcastle. I was scared. But that's not an excuse. You came back for me. I didn't thank you. I'm trying to now.

Nu looks up at her and nods.

DOLLY (CONT'D)

Why did you come back?

Nu thinks about this -

NU

You needed my help.

DOLLY

There's more to it than that. I don't know anything about you. And I just don't understand you. I mean now, where are we going? Who is this child?

Nu stops eating. She sighs, as if making a decision.

NU
She's my daughter.

Dolly is shocked. All the clues have been there but there's nothing in Nu that betrays a maternal capability. Dolly stays silent, allowing Nu to continue -

NU (CONT'D)
I had a farm in the south. I got pregnant. Had a daughter. It was just the two of us.

DOLLY
What about her father?

NU
He was the first man I ever killed. He deserved it. I didn't see it that way at the time. But now I do. Same way you'll come round about Paw. Still, he gave me Grace so in a way I owe him thanks. You've never had a child, have you?

Dolly shakes her head.

NU (CONT'D)
I can't explain it, Dolly. She took over everything. Whatever had happened in the past, whatever was going on outside our farm - none of it mattered to me. It's like you disappear - all you can see when you look for yourself is them. And then, when she was nearly four, she disappeared. I found two sets of tracks through the farm, and I've been following them ever since. Except the tracks had gone in a couple of miles and I've been riding with scraps of information I picked up as I searched ever since. Sightings, descriptions, cold trails, dead ends. I rode for months, and one time for a whole year, with nothing to go on. It's been four years now. And then a couple of weeks ago I found a lead that they'd headed to Newcastle. Just like that. And now we're here. Before all of this began I wasn't all that different from you. I never relied on others the way you do, but I was scared, like you.

(MORE)

NU (CONT'D)

And when I had Grace the fear grew - I suppose because I relied on her in some way. Or maybe because she relied on me. And because it was my responsibility to protect her.

(LONG PAUSE)

When she was stolen the fear took over. Thankfully, most of the time it was like I was being driven by something beyond my control. But I was terrified - of never seeing her again - or of finding her - of knowing that I left her to die, or worse. And when that became consuming I stopped feeling driven. At those times I had to choose to keep looking. In the beginning it was every day. Every day I had to make that choice. Not knowing what the end would be. And then, one day, I got into a situation where I had to kill again - only my second time. Yet somehow that helped. Because that's when my anger came out. After a while I learned to channel that anger, to use it. And then the fear died. You know I'm not used to feeling anything anymore. You were the first person in a long time to really get to me. And do you know what it was? You annoyed the hell out of me. I suppose that's because I recognised something in you - something that used to be in me. I know that in killing my fear I've killed a part of myself. Sometimes weeks pass by and I realise that I haven't thought of her once. I don't even think about what I'll do to the men who took her anymore. Something keeps driving me - like it did that first day I realised she was gone. Like it drove me to help you. But I can't work out if the thing I'm bound to is the child, or the searching, or something else. I just know that I have to keep looking. And that I have to find her. And that I have to kill the men who took her, along with anyone who gets in my way.

Nu is staring out at something no one else can see in the empty space in front of her. But we can see her face, and her eyes - and they are terrifying. Dolly is fixed on this image of Nu - overwhelmed. Then -

DOLLY

There's something I need to tell
you.

Nu snaps out of her trance and looks at Dolly's pale face.
Her eyes darken.

NU

What?

At first Dolly doesn't answer.

NU (CONT'D)

What is it?

DOLLY

I'm sorry.

NU

Is he dead?

DOLLY

I don't know.

And everything changes.

Nu somehow manages to rise, her eyes flaming. Dolly looks appalled at her own revelation, and at what it's repercussions might be.

DOLLY (CONT'D)

I --

The look in Nu's eyes cuts Dolly dead.

NU

Don't follow me.

And with that Nu turns and walks away.

Dolly stands in her sea of bloody meat, incapacitated.

Nu takes Beau's reins and leads him away. They grow smaller as they move off across the white landscape. But then they stop. And Nu falls.

Dolly runs to Nu. As she reaches her she finds her gasping for breath. Dolly tries to raise her but Nu's spent. A dead weight.

CUT TO:

Night. Nu lying in a snow hole. Dolly has a small fire lit. She's burning anything and everything - old rags, the rope, bits of leather and stuffing from the saddle. She pulls out her bundle and throws the shirt that holds it together over Nu. All that's left inside is the rouge, book and tea-diffuser.

She scoops out the rouge and smears the grease onto Nu's exposed skin. Then she starts to rip up the book and page by page she feeds it to the flames.

Nu opens her eyes at the new source of light. She sees the tea-diffuser and reaches out a shuddering hand. Dolly gives her the diffuser to hold and then draws Nu into her arms as she tries to imbue some of her body heat into her. But as tight as Dolly holds her, Nu will not stop shaking. The women sit in this desperate embrace - watching the weak flames of the fire. Nu clasps the diffuser in her hand.

NU (CONT'D)
What is this?

DOLLY
A tea-diffuser.
(PAUSE)
My mum gave it to me. When I was little. She said it was a medal. I must have done something right.

Dolly looks down at Nu. She's still, eyes shut. Her shaking has subsided. Dolly keeps hold of her as she stares at the tea-diffuser in Nu's hand. The light from the dying fire filters through the holes punctured in the metal. Dolly closes Nu's hand over it just as the flames burn out.

CUT TO:

Dolly sitting in the snow with Nu. Dolly wraps her half conscious companion up in the tarp and then stands. She walks over to the grey, away from Nu and Beau. She takes a firm hold of the bridle. Dolly draws out Paw's knife. Again, her hand is shaking. She turns and walks away, head lowered with her back to the animal. Then she takes a deep breath. But she does not move. Stalled, she looks up and sees the dark form of Nu in the snow. And in one single movement Dolly turns back, rushes forwards and thrusts the knife into her horse's heart -

CUT TO:

Dolly awash with blood as she sits amidst the mounds of flesh, hacking through the carcass of the grey -

Dolly stands up carrying a strip of red meat. She walks over to Nu and shakes her awake. Nu opens her eyes and Dolly feeds the warm, bloody offering into her mouth. Nu sucks gratefully on the salty flesh. Dolly picks up another hunk of meat and sits beside her.

NU

Thank you.

Dolly stays silent but her face is full of emotion as she watches the older woman methodically eating the kill. Then -

DOLLY

I never thanked you.

NU

...?

DOLLY

Why did you come back?

NU

Why did you?

DOLLY

I don't know anything about you.
And I don't understand you.

NU

...

DOLLY

I mean now, where are we going? Who
is this child?

Nu stops eating.

NU
She's my daughter.

Dolly is shocked. All the clues have been there but there's nothing in Nu that betrays a maternal capability. Dolly stays silent, allowing Nu to continue -

NU (CONT'D)
I overheard you, at the mine, saying you and your family were going to join a community farm when you were kidnapped.

Dolly nods.

NU (CONT'D)
I lived on a farm like that in the south. Set up by people who wanted to escape the city. But couldn't hack the isolation of the countryside. One day five strangers turned up asking to stay. Only they wanted more than that. They were armed. We weren't. I managed to escape, almost intact - got as far away as I could. They weren't looking for me, they'd got the land, the animals, everything they wanted. I found an abandoned farmstead, and got things set up in time to have the baby. What used to haunt me, before Grace came, was that we could have fought back. Only two of them had guns. There were 32 of us not including the children. One gunman lined us up and the other took us one at a time into the kitchen where the rest of them were waiting. They kept bringing people in, but no one came out. When it was my turn they led me straight past the kitchen door and threw me into one of the bedrooms. I waited, and another woman was put in with me. Then a while later the men from their group came in. Even then I didn't do anything. I remember every moment that I had a chance. It wasn't until one of them brought out a knife and slit the other woman's throat that I started to fight.

Nu strokes the smiling scar on her throat.

NU (CONT'D)

They still got me, but not good enough. I pretended to be dead. They dragged me outside. And then they started to bring out the others. It was the middle of December, and cold. I stayed until nightfall, until there was no warmth left in the bodies around me and then I ran.

(PAUSE)

But I can't regret any of it because then there would be no Grace. When she came she took over everything. Whatever had happened in the past, whatever was going on outside our farm - none of it mattered to me. But life forces you to learn. You can't shut that out. She was nearly four when she disappeared. I found two sets of tracks through the farm, and I've been following them ever since. Except the tracks had gone in a couple of miles and I've been riding with scraps of information I picked up as I searched. Sightings, descriptions, cold trails, dead ends. I rode for months, and one time for a whole year, with nothing to go on. It's been four years now. And then a couple of weeks ago I found a lead that they'd headed to Newcastle. Just like that. And now we're here.

(LONG PAUSE)

I let them massacre the others and rape me because I was afraid of dying. That's why all those people were killed, because they chose what they saw as the safest path. But they were wrong. When Gracie was born, and then when she was taken, I knew there was no such thing as a safe path. So I just keep looking on straight ahead and every time I come across someone who stands in my way I know that I am resolved to physical pain, or death, as well as I am resolved with my own desire to kill them. That's the only thing I feel. You were the first person in a long time to make me think beyond those things. Even if it's just to hate the smell of fear on you. I know that in killing my fear I've killed a part of myself.

(MORE)

NU (CONT'D)

Sometimes weeks pass by and I realise that I haven't thought of her once. I don't even think about what I'll do to the men who took her anymore. Something keeps driving me - like it did the day she was born, or that first day I realised she was gone. Like it drove me to help you. But I can't work out if the thing I'm bound to is the child, or the searching, or something else. I just know that I will keep looking. And that I will find her. And that I will kill the men who took her, along with anyone who gets in my way.

Nu is staring out at something no one else can see in the empty space in front of her. But we can see her face, and her eyes - and they are terrifying. Dolly is fixed on this image of Nu - overwhelmed. Then -

DOLLY

Have you ever thought of giving up?

NU

Never.

DOLLY

There's something I need to tell you.

NU

What?

At first Dolly doesn't answer.

Nu snaps out of her trance and looks at Dolly's pale face. Her eyes darken.

NU (CONT'D)

What is it?

DOLLY

I'm sorry.

NU

Is he dead?

DOLLY

I don't know.

And everything changes.

Nu somehow manages to rise, her eyes flaming. Dolly looks appalled at her own revelation, and at what its repercussions might be.

DOLLY (CONT'D)

I --

The look in Nu's eyes cuts Dolly dead.

NU

Don't follow me.

And with that Nu turns and walks away.

Dolly stands in her sea of bloody meat, incapacitated.

Nu takes Beau's reins and leads him away. They grow smaller as they move off across the white landscape. And then they stop. And Nu falls.

Dolly runs to Nu. As she reaches her she finds her gasping for breath. Dolly tries to raise her but Nu's spent. A dead weight.

CUT TO:

Night. Nu lying in a snow hole. Dolly has a small fire lit. She's burning anything and everything - old rags, the rope, bits of leather and stuffing from the saddle. She pulls out her bundle and throws the shirt that holds it together over Nu. All that's left inside is the rouge, book and tea-diffuser. She scoops out the rouge and smears the grease onto Nu's exposed skin. Then she starts to rip up the book and page by page she feeds it to the flames.

Nu opens her eyes at the new source of light. She sees the tea-diffuser and reaches out a shuddering hand. Dolly gives her the diffuser to hold and then draws Nu into her arms as she tries to imbue some of her body heat into her.

But as tight as Dolly holds her, Nu will not stop shaking. The women sit in this desperate embrace - watching the weak flames of the fire. Nu clasps the diffuser in her hand.

NU (CONT'D)

What is this?

DOLLY

A tea-diffuser.

(PAUSE)

My mum gave it to me. When I was little. She said it was a medal. I must have done something right.

On this final word Dolly's voice falters - as if she is seeing the hollowness of the idea as she speaks it. Dolly looks down at Nu. She's still, eyes shut. Her shaking has subsided. Dolly keeps hold of her as she stares at the tea-diffuser in Nu's hand. The light from the dying fire filters through the holes punctured in the metal. Dolly closes Nu's hand over it just as the flames burn out.

CUT TO:

Dolly sitting in the snow with Nu. Dolly wraps her half conscious companion up in the tarp and then stands. She walks over to the Grey, away from Nu and Beau. She takes a firm hold of the bridle. Dolly draws out Paw's knife. Again, her hand shakes. She turns and walks away, head lowered with her back to the animal. Then she takes a deep breath. But she does not move. Stalled, she looks up and sees the dark form of Nu in the snow. And in one single movement Dolly turns back, steps forwards and thrusts the knife into her horse's heart -

CUT TO:

Dolly awash with blood as she sits amidst the mounds of flesh, hacking through the carcass of the Grey -

Dolly stands up with a strip of red meat in her fist. She walks over to Nu and shakes her awake. Nu opens her eyes and Dolly feeds the warm, bloody offering into her mouth. Nu sucks on the salty flesh.

Dolly watches the older woman methodically eating the kill: coal-blacked eyes, bloody chin, grey face. Nu's tarp has fallen open and the horse blood trickles down onto her borrowed T-shirt. For the first time we can see, faded to near-invisibility, the Barbara Kruger logo -

- Buy me

I'll change

your life -

Dolly picks up another hunk of meat and sits beside Nu.

As Nu sucks on her meat she puts her freezing hands into the jacket pockets. She draws out the tea-diffuser and inspects it.

NU

What's this?

DOLLY

It's a tea-diffuser. My mum gave it to me. She told me it was a medal. I must have done something good.

They sit in silence for a moment - perhaps both pondering this last statement. Then -

DOLLY (CONT'D)

I never said thank you for coming
back for me.

Nu does not look at Dolly but instead gazes out over the horizon. She remains silent for a while. And then she speaks -

NU

I used to live on one of those community farms down in the South. There were about 30 of us adults, twice that in kids. And there was a woman there. Older... well, it was hard to tell. She... she was so badly disfigured, in her face and on her hands. Burns. I never really spoke to her, I found it difficult to look at her to be honest with you. One day a group of strangers turned up. They had guns. And they started killing all the men and children. No one fought back. We weren't really... equipped to. They put all of us women in a room, she was in there too. They went through the women, one after another, and when they'd finished with them, they slit their throats. I didn't fight them off, not... not until they brought out the knife. They still cut my throat --

(she exhales her dark humour)

-- they just didn't do a very good job of it. But, I pretended to be dead. I just lay there. When they got to this woman, none of them would touch her. I guess... there was nothing appealing. But it was weird, it was like that stopped them from wanting to do anything to her. They didn't even... kill her. They just sort of jeered and passed by. Then they started to carry all of us outside. We all got piled up in the snow. And they turned her out. I guess just to move her on. I think she must have gone through all the bodies looking for survivors - I couldn't really speak or move that well but she found me. She managed to pull me out and helped me away. We just kept going and going. And then we found a place - a empty farm - and we stayed there. She looked after me and got me better.

(MORE)

NU (CONT'D)

And then we realised I was pregnant and she took care of me until Grace was born.

(PAUSE)

I asked her once who had scarred her.

(BEAT)

And she told me she had done it to herself. That she had decided it was the best way to protect herself. That no one would want her if she looked like that. And I asked her how she could live with it. How she could have ever made the decision to destroy her face and her body. And she said that she wasn't the one who had to look at herself. That was up to other people.

(PAUSE)

She died right after Grace was born. I never understood it. I didn't see why Grace wasn't enough to keep her going - the way Grace made me want to keep going. But now... I think... I think perhaps Grace coming into the world was the way that she wanted to leave it. Something... good. I don't know.

(PAUSE)

I've always wished I had her strength. When Gracie was stolen I was so scared. And it was the fear that drove me. I didn't think I'd ever see her again. But I couldn't stop looking. Because if I did stop, what then? But the more I had to fight to stay alive - the more people I killed... It was like I was killing my fear too. But I think when you kill your fear... It became like I was searching for her because... Because that's what I do. I found there would be weeks go by and I wouldn't even think about her. I wouldn't even think about what I was going to do to the people who took her. I just kept my eyes on the road in front and if anyone got in my way I was resolved to kill them. And I was resolved to die. Rather than to stop. It's like my own death was so much closer than, than... And now suddenly I'm here. And... She's right there. I can, I'm almost... I never really thought...

Nu trails into silence. Her eyes are still fixed on some indeterminate point on the horizon. But somehow they look different from before. For once there seems to be light within them.

Dolly waits but Nu does not look back to her or speak. After a while Dolly stands, stiff and tired. She makes her way back to the butchery.

TIME CUT TO:

Dolly stacking the last pieces of butchered flesh together. She walks over to Nu. Her eyes are closed.

DOLLY

I need to use the tarp.

Nu does not respond.

Dolly shakes Nu to wake her.

Nothing.

CUT TO:

Dolly sitting in the snow with Nu. Dolly wraps her half conscious companion up in the tarp and then stands.

She walks over to the Grey, away from Nu and Beau. She takes a firm hold of the bridle. Dolly draws out her knife.

Again, her hand shakes.

She turns and walks away, head lowered with her back to the animal. Then she takes a deep breath. But she does not move. Stalled, she looks up and sees -

the dark form of Nu in the snow.

And in one single movement Dolly turns back, steps forwards and thrusts the knife into her horse's heart -

-- A SCREAM - like the world is being rendered in two --

CUT TO:

Dolly awash with blood as she sits amidst the mounds of flesh, hacking through the carcass of the Grey -

Dolly stands up with a strip of red meat in her fist. She walks over to Nu and shakes her awake. Nu opens her eyes and Dolly feeds the warm, bloody offering into her mouth. Nu sucks on the salty flesh.

Dolly takes in the sight of the older woman as she methodically eats the kill: coal-blacked eyes, bloody chin, grey face. Nu's tarp has fallen open and the horse blood trickles down onto her borrowed T-shirt. For the first time we can see, faded to near-invisibility, the Barbara Kruger logo -

- Buy me

I'll change

your life -

Dolly picks up another hunk of meat and sits. She observes Nu in this weakened state - and Dolly's expression is fearful -

Nu sniffs and glances at Dolly. Then she turns her focus back to her meal.

As she sucks on her meat she puts her freezing hands into the jacket pockets. She draws out the tea-diffuser -

NU
What is this?

DOLLY
My mum told me it was a medal.

Nu inspects it and then turns her gaze out over the horizon. Her dark and bloody form is framed in isolation against the relentless white of the moor. She remains silent for a while. Then she speaks - with a halting voice - as if her language has been suffocated by her instinct -

NU
I do not remember my mother. I remember someone dying. She was in a - hospital. She had a cancer. You do not know what those things are, do you?

Dolly - fixed on Nu - shakes her head.

NU (CONT'D)
I remember the names. And the sound of pain. Like the horse scream. I do not know why they did not kill her. They left her to die. And I remember fear. Other people's fear. It is like a --
(she instinctively sniffs the air)
a scent. That is how it came back for me. When I was scared. It reminded me of that long death.

DOLLY
When have you ever been afraid?

NU
The farm - like your parents. I lived on one. But people came. Killed the men, children. Used the women. And killed them. I fought. They cut me. But not well.
(She scratches her scar)
The others were warm in the snow. But they got cold. I ran. The only one. Then I do not remember fear. And soon I had Grace.

DOLLY
The child?

NU
My child. We were together for a time. But two men took her. And then I smelled the fear. My fear. I could not stop looking. I killed...again. And again.
(MORE)

NU (CONT'D)

And then I killed my fear. And I
lived. But when you kill your
fear... you kill something else.
Now I search. I search because...
because it is what I do. And now...
And now --

Nu trails into silence.

Her eyes are still fixed on some indeterminate point on the horizon. But somehow they look different from before. For once there seems to be light within them.

And with this light, in this stark open landscape, comes something else new - for the first time Nu appears vulnerable.

Dolly waits but Nu does not look back to her or speak again. Dolly stands, stiff and tired. The burden is heavy. She makes her way back to the butchery.

TIME CUT TO:

Dolly stacking the last pieces of butchered flesh together.
She walks over to Nu -

Her eyes are closed.

DOLLY

I need the tarp.

Nu does not respond.

Dolly shakes Nu to wake her.

Nothing.

CUT TO:

Dolly sitting in the snow with Nu. Dolly wraps her half conscious companion up in the tarp and then stands.

She walks over to the Grey, away from Nu and Beau. She takes a firm hold of the bridle. Dolly draws out her knife.

Again, her hand shakes.

She turns and walks away, head lowered with her back to the animal. Then she takes a deep breath. But she does not move. Stalled, she looks up and sees -

the dark form of Nu in the snow.

And in one single movement Dolly turns back, steps forwards and thrusts the knife into her horse's heart -

-- A SCREAM - like the world is being rendered in two --

CUT TO:

Dolly awash with blood as she sits amidst the mounds of flesh, hacking through the carcass of the Grey -

Dolly stands up with a strip of red meat in her fist. She walks over to Nu and shakes her awake. Nu opens her eyes and Dolly feeds the warm, bloody offering into her mouth.

Dolly takes in the sight of the older woman as she tries to suck the salty flesh: coal-blacked eyes, bloody chin, grey face. Nu's tarp has fallen open and the horse blood trickles down onto her borrowed T-shirt. For the first time we can see, faded to near-invisibility, the Barbara Kruger logo -

- Buy me

I'll change

your life -

Dolly picks up another hunk of meat and sits. She observes Nu in this weakened state - and Dolly's expression is fearful -

Nu glances at Dolly. She puts her freezing hands into the jacket pockets. She draws out the tea-diffuser -

NU

What is this?

DOLLY

My mum told me it was a medal.

Nu inspects it and then turns her gaze out over the horizon.

Nu's dark and bloody form is framed in isolation against the relentless white of the moor. Her eyes close.

But Dolly is on her feet. She wakes her and tries to get her to eat the meat. Nu shakes her head.

DOLLY (CONT'D)
You ain't gonna give up.

Dolly crouches down and starts to do up Nu's jacket. Nu looks up at Dolly, uncomprehending -

DOLLY (CONT'D)
This girl we've been chasing across
the country, she's your kid, right?
Those men stole her. And you've
spent all this time tryin' to get
her back.

Dolly is rearranging Nu's neckscarf - it slips to reveal her scar.

DOLLY (CONT'D)
Look at the state of you. Look at
wot you've been through. You spent
all this time searchin'. You ain't
gonna give up now. I know wot this
means to you.

NU
(as if Dolly has spoken in
tongues)
What this means to me?

DOLLY
Yes.

NU
The girl is my child. Perhaps that
meant something. I do not remember.
I do not think of her. Or of the
men who took her. I think of what I
have to do. And I kill anyone in my
way. I am resolved to kill and to
die rather than to stop.

DOLLY
I don't believe you. You came back
for me.

NU
I came back to finish things.

Dolly shakes her head - disbelieving.

NU (CONT'D)

(stroking her scar)

This was given to me by the man who fathered Grace. He killed everyone else but I fought and he did not finish me. I got away. Grace was born. And I was no different from you. Until she was taken. And I had to find her. I had to stay alive. And I had to kill. Something changed. Something was lost. The past is gone, over. All that matters is what is ahead. You know what we will find at this place, what they will have done to the girl. And you know what I will do. Your picture of the past is lost. Out here, in me, it is lost.

Nu has turned away as she speaks and her eyes are again fixed on some indeterminate point in this stark, open landscape.

Dolly waits but Nu does not look back to her or speak again. Dolly frowns - unconvinced. Stiff and tired she stands and makes her way back to the butchery.

TIME CUT TO:

Dolly stacking the last pieces of butchered flesh together. She walks over to Nu -

Her eyes are closed.

DOLLY

I need the tarp.

Nu does not respond.

Dolly shakes Nu to wake her.

Nothing.

CUT TO:

Dolly sitting in the snow with Nu. Dolly wraps her half conscious companion up in the tarp and then stands.

She walks over to the Grey, away from Nu and Beau. She takes a firm hold of the bridle. Dolly draws out her knife.

Again, her hand shakes.

She turns and walks away, head lowered with her back to the animal. Then she takes a deep breath. But she does not move. Stalled, she looks up and sees -

the dark form of Nu in the snow.

And in one single movement Dolly turns back, steps forwards and thrusts the knife into her horse's heart -

-- A SCREAM - like the world is being rendered in two --

CUT TO:

Dolly awash with blood as she sits amidst the mounds of flesh, hacking through the carcass of the Grey -

Dolly stands up with a strip of red meat in her fist. She walks over to Nu and shakes her awake. Nu opens her eyes and Dolly feeds the warm, bloody offering into her mouth.

Dolly takes in the sight of the older woman as she tries to suck the salty flesh: coal-blacked eyes, bloody chin, grey face. Nu's tarp has fallen open and the horse blood trickles over her scar onto her borrowed T-shirt. For the first time we can see, faded to near-invisibility, the Barbara Kruger logo -

- Buy me

I'll change

your life -

Dolly picks up another hunk of meat and sits. She observes Nu in this weakened state -

DOLLY
We'll find her.

NU
I know.

Dolly watches Nu - assessing the situation. Then -

DOLLY

Grace. She's your kid, right?

Nu puts her freezing hands into the jacket pockets. She draws out the tea-diffuser -

NU

What is this?

DOLLY

It's a tea diffuser. My mum gave it to me as a medal.

NU

For what?

DOLLY

I don't remember. I just remember feeling proud to win it.

Nu inspects it and then turns her gaze out over the horizon.

Nu's dark and bloody form is framed in isolation against the relentless white of the moor.

NU

Life is competition. There is nothing else.

DOLLY

I don't believe that. You came back for me.

NU

I came back to finish things.

DOLLY

And your daughter?

NU

This is not about her. Not anymore. I stopped thinking about her a long time ago.

DOLLY

Then what is this all about?

Nu turns to face Dolly.

NU

You know what we will find. And you know what I will do. Nothing will stop me. That is what this is all about.

Nu holds Dolly's gaze for a moment. Then she turns away and her eyes again fix on some indeterminate point in this stark, open landscape.

Dolly waits but Nu does not look back to her or speak again. Dolly frowns - unconvinced. Stiff and tired she stands and makes her way back to the butchery.

TIME CUT TO:

Dolly stacking the last pieces of butchered flesh together. She walks over to Nu -

Her eyes are closed.

DOLLY

I need the tarp.

Nu does not respond.

Dolly shakes Nu to wake her.

Nothing.

CUT TO:

PANTING BREATH. Dolly running through the snow. She reaches Nu and the horses and makes straight for the Grey. She grabs the bridle. Dolly drops the rifle and draws out her knife.

Again, her hand shakes.

She turns her back to the animal. She catches her breath. But she does not move. Then her face cracks. She lowers her head and walks away from the horse. She seats herself in the snow across from Nu and takes in the sight of the older woman:

Nu sits upright with her coal-blacked eyes shut. The tarp has fallen open to reveal her scar. We can also see her borrowed T-shirt and, faded to near-invisibility, the Barbara Kruger logo -

- Buy me

I'll change

your life -

Dolly observes Nu in this weakened state -

DOLLY
We'll find her.

NU
I know.

Dolly watches Nu - assessing the situation. Then -

DOLLY
She's your kid, right? Gracie.

Nu puts her freezing hands into the jacket pockets. She opens her eyes and draws out the tea-diffuser -

NU
What is this?

DOLLY
It's a tea diffuser. My mum gave it to me as a medal.

NU
For what?

DOLLY
I don't remember. I just remember feeling proud to win it.

Nu inspects the diffuser and then turns her gaze out over the horizon.

Nu's dark and bloody form is framed in isolation against the relentless white of the moor.

NU

You know what we will find. And you know what I will do. Nothing will stop me.

DOLLY

I don't believe this is about revenge.

NU

You are right.

DOLLY

I know. You came back to help me.

NU

No. I came back to finish things.

DOLLY

And your daughter?

NU

This is not about her. Not anymore. I stopped thinking about her a long time ago.

Nu holds Dolly's gaze for a moment. Then she turns away and her eyes again fix on some indeterminate point in this stark, open landscape.

DOLLY

Then what is this all about?

Dolly waits but Nu does not look back to her or speak again. Dolly frowns - unconvinced. Stiff and tired she allows herself to sit for awhile. Then -

DOLLY (CONT'D)

We need to keep moving. I think we're close.

Nu doesn't respond.

Dolly rises and puts her hand on Nu's shoulder. Nu slumps over onto her side. Dolly sinks to her knees and shakes Nu but she is unresponsive. She slaps her face, gently at first, then harder. Nu does not regain consciousness.

We can hear Dolly's HEART THUMPING as she stands. She turns to the Grey. Without hesitation she strides forward, draws her knife as she walks, grabs the bridle and thrusts the knife into her horse's heart -

-- A SCREAM - like the world is being rendered in two --

CUT TO:

Dolly awash with blood hacking through the carcass of the Grey -

CUT TO:

Dolly catching the warm, thick blood in a bottle.

CUT TO:

Dolly pouring the dark liquid onto Nu's lips. It gushes down her grey cheeks. Nu lies limp as Dolly tries to get some of the blood down her throat.

CUT TO:

Dolly sitting with Nu in her arms, both of them covered in blood. The snow around them a shocking red.

Appendix C: Synopsis of *The Competitors*

A Lone Rider in a black hat appears out of the mountains and approaches across an open range. In the town of Grassington, Red loses a poker game and shoots the hands off the man who attempts to claim his prize. We discover the winnings are a car and that this is a dystopian Britain of 2053. Red drives to a hamlet with his partner, Kid, to find the local prostitute, Dolly, is entertaining Paw. Red and Paw have a stand off and Red backs down. As Paw and Dolly argue we learn Red is Paw's son; Paw attacks Dolly but Red does not come to her assistance. Paw rapes Dolly and as they struggle she stabs him. She flees the scene only to fall into a swollen river. The Lone Rider appears and saves her. In the morning Red discovers his father's body. He also finds Dolly has disabled his car. Dolly awakes in the arms of the Lone Rider, a woman called Nu. Nu is uncommunicative but states she will take Dolly to the next settlement. As they travel they come into conflict. Nu attempts to leave Dolly in Grassington but Dolly begs to be taken further. Nu agrees as Red and Kid set out in pursuit of the two women. Dolly is tiring of Nu when her companion kills two men who plan to kidnap them. They discover a woman who the men held captive. She is on the verge of death and Nu cuts her throat. Dolly, frightened, is forced to commit to her protector.

Nu attempts to teach Dolly survival techniques but again the women clash. They arrive at Newcastle where they meet a collier family – Dolly discovers that Nu is searching for two men and a little girl, Gracie. The collier family know the location of the men's farm in Scotland. Dolly decides to stay with the family but when she finds Nu has left she changes her mind. While Dolly is out looking for Nu, Red arrives at the mine with a posse and tortures the father. Dolly returns to find Red waiting – but he does not want revenge, he wants her. Red distracts the other men from Dolly by offering the family. When Dolly tries to intercede Red turns on her. As he is about to rape her Nu appears and rescues Dolly. Nu stays in the mine to fight the men. She kills two of the posse before she is captured and assaulted but when Red and Kid

leave to look for Dolly she manages to kill the final captor. However, she is trapped in the mine. Dolly is found by Kid but she pushes him off a balcony. She rescues the half-conscious Nu from the mine and they escape. Red finds Kid – his body broken – and shoots him. Red goes after the women and Nu shoots Red; but she sends Dolly to finish him off. Dolly returns from her task and continues to journey north with the now unconscious Nu. The women run out of food and it starts to snow. Dolly fails to kill a deer with their final bullet. She talks to Nu about the child they are pursuing – believing her to be Nu's daughter. Nu confirms this but says she is not out to save or avenge the girl. Then she passes out. Dolly kills her horse for food but it is too late and the two women collapse in the snow.

Dolly awakes to find herself at the Hogg's farm – and Nu's daughter Gracie is the 'granddaughter' of the family. Nu is still unconscious. Despite herself, Dolly bonds with Gracie and the Hogg's. Nu awakes to find Dolly a part of the family – Nu tells her she still plans to take the child. Dolly tries to encourage her to engage with the family but Nu cannot even connect with Gracie. Dolly becomes confused as to Nu's motivation – she appears to have no maternal feelings for Gracie. When Dolly discovers Nu leaving with the intention of kidnapping her daughter Dolly stands in her way. The women fight and Nu eventually defeats Dolly. She explains that everything in life is a competition. The family discover Nu about to leave and at gunpoint they admit kidnapping Gracie four years earlier in order to raise a woman who could continue their bloodline. Dolly tells Nu she cannot win and Nu rides off with Gracie without harming the family. Dolly pursues Nu. Nu waits in ambush. Gracie promises she will do whatever Nu wants if she does not kill anyone. Nu relinquishes her rifle only to find herself face to face with Red – Dolly did not finish him off back at the mine. Dolly arrives to find Nu shot and Gracie gone. She pursues Red and when he offers her his hand she kills him. She returns with Gracie to find Nu alive. They take her back to the farm but Nu will not allow Dolly to bring her inside to try and save her. Dolly understands what Nu is asking and slits her throat. Under the gaze of the family Dolly rides away from the farm. Sometime later, Dolly, wearing Nu's black hat, rides across an open plain and away into a mountain range.

Appendix D: Synopses of the Central Films

Chapter One

Alien (Scott, 1979)

The film begins with the crew of the Nostromo waking from hypersleep to find they are not back at earth, as expected, but have been prematurely awoken to investigate a distress signal. The recon party discover a vast ship full of pods – one hatches and attaches itself to the crewmember Kane. He falls into a coma and the crew return with him to the Nostromo. The creature apparently cannot be removed and has acid for blood, so cannot be cut away. But it suddenly disappears and Kane appears unharmed. In a seminal movie scene the Alien explodes out of Kane's stomach – the creature that hatched from the egg needed a human host to implant the Alien foetus. Now the newborn Alien quickly grows to an eight foot monster and one by one the crew are killed off as they attempt to destroy it. One of the crew, Lieutenant Ellen Ripley, discovers that the science officer, Ash, is an android. He is under orders from The Company (the employer of the crew) to bring the Alien to earth so that it can be studied; the crew is expendable. Eventually everyone else is killed by the monster and Ripley is left on her own with the Alien. She manages to save the ship cat and set the self destruct on the ship before getting into an escape pod. As the ship explodes Ripley discovers the Alien has escaped in the pod with her. She tricks it towards an exit hatch and shoots it out into space. Ripley makes a final entry in the ships log as the "last survivor" of the Nostromo, before putting herself and the cat into hypersleep.

***Aliens* (Cameron, 1986)**

Ripley arrives on earth 57 years later. She hears The Company have built a plant on the planet where her team discovered the Alien but when she tries to warn the powers that be of the danger no one will listen. Until the settlement goes dark. Marines are sent out on a recon, along with a Company man, Burke, and Ripley as advisor. When they arrive they discover a sole survivor – a little girl, Newt – who lets Ripley know that aliens took everyone. The marines discover the Queen Alien giving birth to thousands of pods, which are being hatched in the bodies of the kidnapped settlers. The marines are picked off by the aliens, one by one. Ripley again discovers that Burke is trying to get an alien specimen back to earth inside a human. Eventually Ripley manages to rescue Newt and escape with a surviving marine, Hicks, and the android Bishop after a hand to hand battle with the Queen. Ripley nukes the alien nest from space and the survivors enter hypersleep.

***Alien³* (Fincher, 1992)**

The escape pod from Ripley's ship is activated after a fire and Ripley lands on a prison planet. Newt, Hicks and Bishop are dead. Unknown to Ripley there is an alien egg on the ship. It hatches and grows and the prisoners join her in a fight against the Alien. Again, most are wiped out in battle. Ripley becomes aware that she has a queen alien inside of her. She asks an inmate to kill her but he refuses – they need her help to kill the Alien. She eventually succeeds by luring it into a furnace and blasting it. A Company representative arrives to convince her not to kill herself – she can be saved along with the Alien she carries. Ripley throws herself into a huge smelter just as the new Queen Alien bursts out of her chest. She holds it to her as they disappear into the flames.

***Alien Resurrection* (Jeunet, 1997)**

The film is set 200 years after Ripley kills herself in the smelter. She has been recreated as a clone and used to bear a queen alien. Scientists are now breeding aliens from this mother. Ripley discovers in her reborn form she has alien genes, providing her with greater strength and empathy with the aliens. However, she still fights and kills them with the help of a team of

mercenaries. The Queen, now with human genes, gives birth through a womb, with no need for eggs or human hosts. Her offspring is a hybrid alien/human who recognises Ripley as its true mother and kills the Queen and head scientist. Finally Ripley kills her offspring: she uses her own acidic alien blood to burn a hole in the ship and the creature is sucked out into space. Ripley returns to earth with the surviving mercenaries.

***Terminator 2* (Cameron, 1991)**

The film starts with Sarah Connor incarcerated in a mental institute because of her belief that machines are going to take over, and eventually destroy, mankind. Her son, John Connor, is a resistance leader in this future. In the prequel film, *The Terminator* (Cameron, 1984), John sends a comrade back through time to protect his mother from a Terminator robot (played by Arnold Schwarzenegger) sent from the future to kill Sarah Connor before John is conceived. John's comrade ends up being his father, although he dies in saving Sarah Connor. In *Terminator 2*, the second film of the series, John is a teenage boy and is under threat as the machines are sending back a second, far more advanced Terminator – the T1000. The John of the future sends back an original Terminator robot to protect himself. The teenage John realises his mother was not crazy in her stories of the future when he faces these two terminators in a mall. After Schwarzenegger rescues him from the T1000 John orders him to help save his mother from the asylum. Sarah Connor has been shown current footage of the Terminator, who she believes is back to kill John. She attempts to escape. John and the Terminator arrive just in time to help her. They again escape the T1000 and John convinces her that the Terminator is now on their side. Sarah decides to kill the scientist, Dyson, responsible for the rise of the machines. However, in a moment of compassion she changes tactics and instead gets Dyson to help her destroy his lab and all his research. They are aided by John and the Terminator. Dyson is killed in a shootout with the police and the others escape, only to be pursued by the T1000. In an industrial plant, Sarah saves John from the T1000 and corners it. Just as she runs out of ammo, the Terminator fires the shot that tips the T1000 into a vat of molten metal. Against John's wishes Sarah lowers the Terminator into the same pool to destroy any trace of intelligent machines as a way of protecting the future of mankind.

Thelma & Louise (Scott, 1991)

Thelma (a bored housewife) and Louise (a waitress) take a weekend trip without the knowledge or consent of Thelma's domineering husband. They stop in a bar for a drink and Thelma meets a local man, Harlan. Thelma gets drunk and needs air but when Harlan takes her outside he starts to rape her. Louise finds them and threatens Harlan at gunpoint. He lets Thelma go but tells Louise to "suck my cock". Louise shoots him dead. The women go on the run. They are pursued by police across the country. Thelma begins to enjoy herself and picks up a cowboy who steals their money. To make up for this Thelma robs a store (using the cowboy's own lines). They are stopped by a policeman and at gunpoint they lock him in the boot of his patrol car. Then they blow up the tanker of an offensive trucker. Finally, as they are reaching the border, the police catch up with them. In the final scene the women choose to drive their car over a canyon edge rather than be caught.

Chapter 2

Resident Evil (Anderson, 2002)

An underground research facility owned by a bio-engineering pharmaceutical company, the Umbrella Corporation, is sabotaged and the T-Virus is stolen. Alice awakes naked in an empty house. She has no memory. An elite group of soldiers arrive and she discovers she is a security agent protecting the secret entrance to the facility. The team break into the facility to find out what has happened. They reach the mainframe after a number are killed by the Corporation's computer. They find the computer has sealed the building to prevent the escape of the T-Virus. The team shuts the computer down but discover all the Umbrella scientists have been contaminated and as a result are zombies. The group search for the anti-Virus and battle to escape the facility but are killed off one by one. Alice discovers another agent, her cover "husband", is responsible for the sabotage – an attempt to steal the T-Virus and sell it as a biological weapon on the open market. He is contaminated by a monster zombie (a Licker) and transforms. Alice manages to kill him but not before he scratches the

only other survivor, Matt. Alice and Matt escape. Back on the surface they are forcibly separated by more Umbrella scientists. Alice awakes in a lab – she goes outside into Raccoon City and discovers a zombie apocalypse. Alice arms herself with a shotgun from an abandoned police car and walks out into the devastation.

***Resident Evil: Apocalypse* (Witt, 2004)**

The sequel continues from the point Alice wakes in the lab. She discovers she has super-human strength and speed. Raccoon City is zombie land and Umbrella supervisor Major Cain has shut the road out. Jill Valentine is a cop trying to escape with her partner when Alice saves them from Lickers. They receive a message from Dr Ashford, creator of the T-Virus, promising them a helicopter out of the City if they save his daughter. They find and rescue her, and at the same time meet Carlos Olivera, a stranded Umbrella soldier. They reach the helicopter to find Cain waiting with Nemesis – a horrific product of genetically mixing the T-Virus. Cain wants Alice to fight this monster. She refuses and Cain kills Dr Ashford. Alice fights Nemesis until she realises it is Matt: they have both been genetically developed using the virus. They join forces but Nemesis is killed. Alice and the others escape by helicopter and Alice throws Cain to the zombies. Raccoon City is nuked but the impact causes the helicopter to crash. Alice awakes in another research lab run by Umbrella scientist Dr Isaacs. Alice escapes using her mind as a weapon. Jill and Carlos arrive to help her and Isaac's lets them leave. His computer reports, “project Alice activated” and as she drives away Alice's eye flashes the Umbrella logo.

***Resident Evil: Extinction* (Mulcahy, 2007)**

The U.S. has been overrun by zombies. Dr Isaacs repeatedly clones Alice in an attempt to create another super-warrior but none bond so successfully with the T-Virus. The new Umbrella chairman, Wesker, threatens Isaacs that he must continue trying to find a cure to the virus. Alice wanders the country searching for survivors. She uses her now god-like powers to save a convoy from infected crowds. The group is lead by Claire Redfield and Carlos is a member. They plan to head to Alaska, supposedly the site of a safe-haven called Arcadia, but in their search for supplies they are tracked down by Isaacs who lets loose the product of his experiments: a new breed of super-zombies. Most of the group are killed; Carlos and Dr Isaacs

are infected. The group track Isaacs back to the Umbrella facility where Carlos goes on a suicide mission to create a decoy and Claire steals a helicopter to escape to Alaska with the few survivors. Isaacs overdoses on anti-Virus and turns into a Tyrant. Alice discovers her blood is the cure to the T-Virus. She defeats Dr Isaacs with the aid of her own clone. Wesker, hiding in Tokyo, receives a threat from Alice that she is coming for him. Behind her are thousands of pods full of her clones.

Resident Evil: Afterlife (Anderson, 2010)

Alice attacks the Tokyo headquarters of Umbrella with her army of clones. Wesker self-destructs the building, killing all workers and clones. Alice follows him onto a helicopter where he injects her with an anti-virus that robs her of her super-human powers. The helicopter crashes and Alice escapes. She flies to Alaska only to find Claire Redfield under an Umbrella control device – Alice removes it but Claire's memory is wiped and there is no trace of other survivors or Arcadia. They fly to LA where they find a prison under siege by Zombies; one survivor is Claire's brother, Chris. The inmates inform them that Arcadia is a ship, sending out a roaming signal for survivors. Claire, Alice and Chris escape alive and find the ship, only to discover it is an Umbrella trap – survivors are being experimented on. Wesker now has super-human powers but is warring with his T-Virus. He wants to eat Alice as she is the only human who has successfully bonded with the contagion. Alice manages to defeat him – he escapes but Alice plants a bomb on his plane. However, unseen by the others, he evacuates before the explosion. Alice sends out a signal advertising the ship as a safe haven for all survivors. However, Jill Valentine – presumed dead after *Apocalypse* – reappears wearing another Umbrella control device. She leads an air troop of Umbrella fighters to attack the ship.

Kill Bill: Vol. 1 (Tarantino, 2003)

The film opens with a blood-splattered Beatrix Kiddo (aka The Bride) telling Bill, "It's your baby", before he shoots her. Four years later Kiddo arrives to take revenge on Vernita Green, a fellow member of Bill's Deadly Viper Assassination Squad. They fight and she kills her with a knife in the presence of Vernita's own daughter. In flashback, Beatrix is in hospital in a coma after being shot by Bill. Elle Driver, another Deadly Viper arrives to kill her but receives a

phone call from Bill who says revenge will only be his if she wakes up. After four years of being in a coma Beatrix awakes to discover she is no longer pregnant and her male nurse, Buck, has been selling her body for sex. She kills him and escapes. She goes to Japan where she commissions a Hattori Hanzo sword and then tracks down O-Ren Ishi – another fellow Deadly Viper assassin. She cuts off the arm of O-Ren’s second in command, Sofie Fatale, before massacring O-Ren’s body guards, the “Crazy 88”. Finally she battles O-Ren and kills her. She releases Sofie. Bill finds Sofie and asks if Kiddo knows that her daughter is still alive.

***Kill Bill: Vol. 2* (Tarantino, 2004)**

Bill arrives at the pregnant Beatrix’s wedding rehearsal where she explains that she left him to find a better life for her unborn daughter. He uses the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad to lay waste to the wedding party. In the present Beatrix seeks out revenge on Bud, Bill’s brother, but he is waiting and shoots her in the chest. He buries her alive and offers her Hanzo sword for sale to Elle for a million dollars. In flashback Beatrix trains with Bill’s master, Pai Mei. He teaches her the three inch punch. In the present she uses this technique to escape the grave. Elle arrives at Buck’s trailer and kills him. As she leaves with the sword Beatrix arrives – they fight and Beatrix triumphs. Beatrix goes on to find Bill, only to discover her daughter is alive. He injects her with truth serum and again asks why she left. She gives the same answer. They fight and Beatrix kills Bill with Pai Mei’s Five Point Palm Exploding Heart technique, something the shared master has taught to her alone. She leaves with her daughter.

***Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Lee, 2000)**

Li Mu Bai, a Wudan swordsman, wishes to give up his life as a warrior. He entreats his unspoken love, Yu Shu Lien, a female bodyguard, to transport his sword, the Green Destiny, to his friend Sir Te. At Sir Te’s, Shu Lien meets Jen, a governor’s daughter who is about to undergo an arranged marriage. That night the sword is stolen by a masked thief. Mu Bai arrives and with Shu Lien tracks the thief to the governor’s house. There he discovers Jen’s maid is Jade Fox, the woman who killed his master because he would not explain the secrets of the Wudan manual to a woman. They battle but as he out fights Jade Fox the thief arrives and displays great skill to help her escape. Back at the governor’s, Jen is revealed as the thief but

she quarrels with her master, Jade Fox; she explains that the older woman has missed all of the complexities of the training that Jen has learned herself. Later, Jen's love, Lo, arrives and tries to persuade her to escape with him. We hear of the legend of a man who made a wish and threw himself from a mountain, yet remained unharmed because his heart was pure. Jen refuses to run away but at the wedding procession Mu Bai and Shu Lien promise Lo they will send Jen to Wudan mountain if he will wait for her there. Jen absconds from the nuptials and eventually meets with Shu Lien. But Jen is angered by the older woman and battles her with Mu Bai's sword. Mu Bai chases Jen and regains his sword. He asks her to be his apprentice and when she refuses he throws the Green Destiny away. Jen dives after it into a waterfall but is saved by Jade Fox. Her former master drugs her. Mu Bai and Shu Lien attempt to rescue her but in the battle both Jade Fox and Mu Bai are mortally wounded by poison darts. As she dies Jade Fox admits wishing to kill Jen because she kept the secrets of Wudan from her. Mu Bai declares his love for Shu Lien as he dies in her arms. Jen goes to Wudan mountain and spends the night with Lo. She asks him to make a wish – he says he wants to be back in the desert with her where they met. Jen throws herself off the mountain.

Chapter 3

Monster (Jenkins, 2003)

The film begins with a flashback montage of Lee as a young girl – she speaks in voice over of her dreams as we see the reality of her bad home life and subsequent journey into underage prostitution. Her final statement, “then I woke up” transports us to Florida where the adult Lee works as a prostitute. One night she meets Selby at a bar and after initially rejecting her advances, Lee accepts Selby’s offer of a bed. They begin to date and Lee enjoys taking care of the dependent Selby. Lee continues hooking to get money for her girlfriend but she picks up a customer who brutally rapes her. She manages to escape being killed and shoots him dead. She confesses to Selby and decides she wants to get a respectable job so that she can provide for them safely. But with her lack of work experience nowhere will employ her. Selby encourages Lee to return to prostitution. On her first job Lee panics and shoots her customer. She robs him and this begins a new way of making money - robbing the men who pick her up

and then killing them. The two women spend the money on partying and eating out but when Lee starts to come under suspicion she confesses what she has been doing to Selby. Lee accuses Selby of knowing the truth all along. She puts Selby on a bus out of town and is later arrested by the police. Selby co-operates with the police and makes a phone call to Lee – Lee realises Selby is setting her up but chooses to take full responsibility for the killings to save the woman she loves. Later Lee is forced to listen to a recording of the phone conversation in court as Selby testifies against her. Lee's plea of self-defence is denied and she is sentenced to death.

***Black Swan* (Aronofsky, 2010)**

Nina is dancing *Swan Lake*. She awakes to find she was dreaming. She goes to work to discover her ballet company is staging *Swan Lake* and the company director, Thomas, is auditioning to replace the prima ballerina, Beth. Thomas wants one girl to dance both the White and the Black Swan. Nina is asked to try out but is distracted in her audition by the appearance of a new dancer, Lily. Nina goes to explain herself to Thomas. He tells her she is perfect for the White Swan but too perfect for the Black; she needs to let go and lose herself. He kisses her and, a surprise to them both, she bites him. Later Nina finds out she has been cast for both roles. Beth confronts Nina and accuses her of sleeping with Thomas. That evening Beth is hit by a car - Thomas tells Nina he believes she attempted suicide. Nina is starting to have possible paranoid fantasies about self harm. Her mother is constantly trying to control her and in a fit of rebellion Nina goes out with Lily, takes drugs and has sex with the rival dancer. She arrives late to rehearsals to find Lily dancing her role. When Nina confronts her, Lily denies sleeping with her. Nina visits Beth and sees the older woman stab herself in the face, but later Nina finds herself holding the bloody nail file. She has a violent fight with her mother, who tries to stop her going to opening night. Nina arrives to find Lily ready to dance for her. Nina asserts herself and goes on stage. In the interval Lily confronts Nina in her dressing room. But Lily turns into Nina and Nina stabs her double. The body turns back into Lily. Nina goes on stage and dances the Black Swan - as she dances she grows wings. In her dressing room the body has gone and Nina discovers she has stabbed herself. She dances her finale as the White Swan and fearlessly throws herself into the Swan's suicide leap. Nina lies bleeding on the floor to the audience's standing ovation.

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The Day after Tomorrow, 2004, directed by Roland EMMERICH, USA. Screenplay by Roland EMMERICH and Jeffrey NACKMANOFF from a story by Roland EMMERICH.

Day of the Outlaw, 1959, directed by André DE TOTH, USA. Screenplay by Philip YORDAN adapted from a novel by Lee E. WELLS.

The Dirty Dozen, 1967, directed by Robert ALDRICH, UK/USA. Screenplay by Nunnally JOHNSON and Lukas HELLER adapted from a novel by E. M. NATHANSON.

Doctor Zhivago, 1965, directed by David LEAN, USA. Screenplay by Robert BOLT adapted from a novel by Boris PASTERNAK.

Even Cowgirls get the Blues, 1993, directed by Gus VAN SANT, USA. Screenplay by Gus VAN SANT adapted from a novel by Tom ROBBINS.

Fishtank, 2009, directed by Andrea ARNOLD, UK/NETHERLANDS. Screenplay by Andrea ARNOLD.

For a Few Dollars More (Per qualche dollare in più), 1965, directed by Sergio LEONE, Italy/Spain/West Germany/Monaco. Screenplay by Sergio LEONE and Luciano VINCENZONI (English dialogue by Luciano VINCENZONI) from a scenario by Fulvio MORSELLA and Sergio LEONE.

Fort Apache, 1948, directed by John FORD, USA. Screenplay by Frank S. NUGENT adapted from a short story by James Warner BELLAH.

Gladiator, 2000, directed by Ridley SCOTT, UK/USA. Screenplay by David FRANZONI, John LOGAN and William NICHOLSON from a story by David FRANZONI.

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly (Il Buono, il Brutto, il Cattivo), 1966, directed by Sergio LEONE, Italy/Spain/West Germany. Screenplay by Agenore INCROCCI, Furio SCARPELLI, Luciano VINCENZONI and Sergio LEONE from a story by Luciano VINCENZONI and Sergio LEONE.

Gunfight at Dodge City, 1959, directed by Joseph M. NEWMAN, USA. Screenplay by Martin GOLDSMITH and Daniel B. ULLMAN.

Hanna, 2011, directed by Joe WRIGHT, USA/UK/GERMANY. Screenplay by Seth LOCHHEAD and David FARR from a story by Seth LOCHHEAD.

Into the Wild, 2007, directed by Sean PENN, USA. Screenplay by Sean PENN adapted from a novel by Jon KRAKAUER.

Jeremiah Johnson, 1972, directed by Sydney POLLACK, USA. Screenplay by John MILIUS and Edward ANHALT from a story by Raymond W. THORP and Robert BUNKER adapted from a novel by Vardis FISHER.

Kings of the Road (Im Lauf der Zeit), 1976, directed by Wim WENDERS, West Germany. Screenplay by Wim WENDERS.

Mad Max, 1979, directed by George MILLER, Australia. Screenplay by James MCCausland and George MILLER from a story by George MILLER and Byron KENNEDY.

Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior, 1981, directed by George MILLER, Australia. Screenplay by Terry HAYES, George MILLER and Brian HANNANT.

Mad Max Beyond Thunder Dome, 1985, directed by George MILLER and George OGILVIE, Australia/USA. Screenplay by Terry HAYES and George MILLER.

The Magnificent Seven, 1960, directed by John STURGES, USA. Screenplay by John STURGES adapted from the screenplay of *The Seven Samurai (Shichinin no samurai)* by Akira KUROSAWA, Shinobu HASHIMOTO and Hideo OGUNI.

McCabe & Mrs Miller, 1971, directed by Robert ALTMAN, USA. Screenplay by Robert ALTMAN and Brian MCKAY adapted from a novel by Edmund NAUGHTON.

The Missing, 2003, directed by Ron Howard, USA. Screenplay by Ken KAUFMAN adapted from a novel by Thomas EIDSON.

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Panorama: Comeback Coal, 2008, [TV programme] BBC, BBC1, 1st December 2008.

The Quick and the Dead, 1995, directed by Sam RAIMI, USA/Japan. Screenplay by Simon MOORE.

Radio On, 1980, directed by Christopher PETIT, UK/West Germany. Screenplay by Christopher PETIT.

Red River, 1948, directed by Howard HAWKES and co-directed by Arthur ROSSON, USA. Screenplay by Borden CHASE and Charles SCHNEE adapted from a short story by Borden CHASE.

Red Road, 2006, directed by Andrea ARNOLD, UK/Denmark. Screenplay by Andrea ARNOLD with characters by Lone SHERFIG and Anders Thomas JENSEN.

Ride with the Devil, 1999, directed by Ang Lee, USA. Screenplay by James SCHAMUS adapted from a novel by Daniel WOODRELL.

Rio Grande, 1950, directed by John FORD, USA. Screenplay by James Kevin MCGUINNESS adapted from a short story by James Warner BELLAH.

Rio Lobo, 1970, directed by Howard HAWKES, USA. Screenplay by Leigh BRACKETT and Burton WOHL from a story by Burton WOHL.

The River Wild, 1994, directed by Curtis HANSON, USA. Screenplay by Denis O'NEILL.

The Seven Samurai (Shichinin no samurai), 1954, directed by Akira KUROSAWA, Japan. Screenplay by Akira KUROSAWA, Shinobu HASHIMOTO and Hideo OGUNI.

The Sons of Katie Elder, 1965, directed by Henry HATHAWAY, USA. Screenplay by William H. WRIGHT, Allan WEISS and Harry ESSEX from a story by Talbot JENNINGS.

Stage Coach, 1939, directed by John FORD, USA. Screenplay by Dudley NICHOLS adapted from a short story by Ernest HAYCOX.

The Terminator, 1984, directed by James CAMERON, UK/USA. Screenplay by James CAMERON and Gale Anne HURD with additional dialogue by William WISHER Jr.

Underworld, 2003, directed by Len WISEMAN, USA, Germany, Hungary, UK. Screenplay by Danny MCBRIDE from a story by Kevin GREVIOUX, Len WISEMAN, Danny MCBRIDE.

Unforgiven, 1992, directed by Clint EASTWOOD, USA. Screenplay by David Webb PEOPLES.

The War Wagon, 1967, directed by Burt KENNEDY, USA. Screenplay by Clair HUFFAKER adapted from a novel by Clair HUFFAKER.

Waterworld, 1995, directed by Kevin REYNOLDS, USA. Screenplay by Peter RADER and David TWOHY.

The Wire, 2002-2008, [TV Series] directed by Joe CHAPPELLE et al., USA. Screenplays by David SIMON et al.

Wuthering Heights, 1939, directed by William WYLER, USA. Screenplay by Charles MACARTHUR and BEN HECHT adapted from a novel by Emily BRONTE.

Wuthering Heights, 2011, directed by Andrea ARNOLD, UK. Screenplay by Andrea ARNOLD and Olivia HETREED from a screen story by Olivia HETREED adapted from a novel by Emily BRONTE.