Mental Disorder in the Contemporary American Biopic: Representation and National Identity

Matthew Francis William Selway

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Abstract

This thesis considers the representation of mental disorder in the contemporary American biopic from 1999 onwards, focussing upon how such representations of the biographical subject's experience of mental illness can be read as interrogating many of the central features and ideologies of American national identity. Though long overlooked in academia, a recent surge in scholarly attention has repositioned and illuminated the biographical film (biopic) as a dynamic genre that warrants greater appreciation and investigation. This thesis contributes to current debates and understandings of the genre by critically interrogating the representational strategies and tropes present in depictions of mental disorder in the genre and contextualising these aspects in regards to wider cultural issues.

Much like many critiques of the biopic genre, the portrayal of mental disorder in film and media has often been criticised for lacking authenticity or accuracy. Where critics and filmgoers bemoan the biopic's over-celebratory nature and malleable relationship with history, so too psychiatric professionals and members of the public lament derogatory stereotypes and images of mental disorder that contribute to the perpetuation of stigma. However, this project realises a conscious move away from subjective debates concerning accuracy whilst still engaging with psychiatric research as a means of demonstrating the valuable interdisciplinary overlaps between psychiatry and film studies. Where critical considerations of mental illness representation largely focus upon the impact of film and media on cultural attitudes, the analyses in this thesis instead consider the influence of American culture on film representation. Whilst engaging with key ideas associated with the construction of national identity (primarily gender, race and class) this thesis also includes critical considerations of the portrayal of mental disorder and its intersections with many other socio-culturally significant aspects of American character and identity, including capitalism, sexuality, celebrity, religion and regionality.

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Introduction

In the BBC television comedy series *Extras*,[1] Kate Winslet (playing herself) stands on the set of an upcoming Holocaust movie with one of the extras, Andy Millman (Ricky Gervais). When Millman tells her how much he admires her for starring in a film to 'keep the message alive about the Holocaust', Winslet dismisses his praise by claiming the only reason she agreed to this film role is because she has noticed that 'if you do a film about the Holocaust you are guaranteed an Oscar.' As Millman looks on in stunned silence, she refers to *Schindler's List*[2] and *The Pianist*[3] as examples of Holocaust films that were successful at the Academy Awards to reinforce her point. Towards the end of the episode, Winslet and Millman are once again chatting when Winslet points to a woman with Cerebral Palsy and states, 'I keep seeing her around, what is up with her?' When Millman explains that the woman has Cerebral Palsy, Winslet responds, 'Oh, that is worth remembering. That is another way you win an Oscar. Seriously, think about it, Daniel Day Lewis in *My Left Foot*[4]…Oscar. Dustin Hoffman, *Rain Man*[5]…Oscar. Seriously, you are guaranteed an Oscar if you play a mental.'

Though (intentionally) callous in its nature, the joke does indeed point to an ongoing trend in contemporary film culture. In recent years there has been a noticeable upsurge in the amount of critically acclaimed and commercially successful feature films focussing upon mental health issues. Winslet's comments not only gesture to the increased presence of films about mental illness, but also the film examples that she draws upon to exemplify the critical appeal of these types of roles alludes to another prominent trend. *Schindler's List*, *The Pianist*, and *My Left Foot* are all films based on biographical accounts of real historical figures and, as Winslet said, were all hits at the Academy Awards. According to an online BBC article mapping the changing popularity of film genres nominated for best picture from the 1920s to the end of the noughties, the biopic has tended to fare

[1] *Extras*. "Kate Winslet". Series 1: Episode 3. Written and directed by Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant. BBC. October 2005.
[2] *Schindler's List*. (1993) Steven Spielberg (dir.) USA.
[3] *The Pianist*. (2002) Roman Polanski (dir.) France, Poland, Germany, UK.
[4] *My Left Foot*. (1989) Jim Sheridan (dir.) Ireland, UK.
[5] *Rain Man*. (1988) Barry Levinson (dir.) USA.

well throughout, with over a dozen best picture winners to date, and scores of other nominations in all major categories. The chart shows that Academy Award nominations for biopics peaked in the 1980s (ten nominated films including four winners) and has also been experiencing a fruitful period since the turn of the millennium (over thirty nominations including four winners in 15 years).[6] This is a trend that shows no signs of receding, with the announcement of the 2016 Oscar nominees including three biopics in the eight shortlisted pictures.[7] If one were to also consider the awards won by performers for playing real historical characters then an even greater sense of the biopic's allure in contemporary film culture becomes apparent. Since 1999 nine of the last sixteen winners in the Best Actor category won for performances of real life figures, as did eight of the Best Actress winners (ironically, following her *Extras* performance, one of the non-biographical winners was Kate Winslet for her role in the Holocaust movie *The Reader*[8]). In the Best Supporting Actor/Actress categories male performers add another three wins, and female performers another six. Even without detailing the unsuccessful nominations for real-life roles in these categories (of which there are many) one begins to see the genre's current ubiquity. The continued critical successes of biographical performances are likely because, as Dennis Bingham states, 'there is no film genre to which performance is as crucial as it is to the biopic.'[9] This is because, in the majority of cases where a performer plays a well-known public individual, there is/was a real-life referent with which audiences may be familiar, and to which that performance can be compared and judged.

Of course, more than just tallies of Academy Award wins and nominations evidence the biopic's current prevalence. To put into context the unprecedented popularity of the genre with studios, producers and filmmakers, an advanced data search through the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) for

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[6] Author unknown. (2012) *What Films does Oscar Like Best?* Internet: Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-17074585#comedy> [Accessed 14/01/16]

[7] It is worth noting that since 2009 The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences expanded the list of Best Picture nominees from five to a potential ten titles, and so this must be taken in to account when considering the increasing number of biopics receiving nominations in recent years.

[8] *The Reader*. (2008) Stephen Daldry (dir.) USA/Germany.

[9] Bingham, D. (2010) Living Stories: Performance in the Contemporary Biopic. In: Cornea, C. (ed.) *Genre and Performance: Film and Television*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p. 77.

titles of American feature films, strictly limited to those listed as 'biographical',[10] released between 1999 and 2016 returned some 526 titles. In comparison, a search of the preceding period (1981-1998) with the same criteria returned just 175 titles; almost three times fewer. It is therefore an inescapable conclusion that contemporary American cinema has embraced the biopic at an unparalleled level.

The biopic's increased presence appears to have been concurrent with the rise of mental health narratives in film and television production. This is another area, particularly in regards to performance, which has proved to be heavily rewarded at the Academy Awards. Performers such as Julianne Moore (*Still Alice*[11]), Jennifer Lawrence (*Silver Linings Playbook*[12]), Natalie Portman (*Black Swan*[13]), Jeff Bridges (*Crazy Heart*[14]) and Jack Nicholson (*As Good As it Gets*[15]) all received the top prize for their roles as characters suffering from mental disorders. Given the undoubtable popularity of both biopics and films focussing on mental health issues, it is perhaps unsurprising that a significant crossover is noticeable between these, with a number of critically acclaimed biopics in recent years focussing upon historical figures who have been afflicted with mental disorder. This thesis aims to explore the representation of mental disorder in the contemporary American biopic, with a specific focus on how such narratives can be read in terms of their relationship to wider notions of American national identity.

At first glance, the combination of the biopic, mental illness, and American national identity as the objects of focus may seem somewhat tenuous in their connection. However, there are a number of reasons as to why the consideration of these elements is significant and appropriate for academic inquiry. In the first instance, this thesis's study is limited to American biopics (that is, films that have been funded, or partially-funded, by studios or corporations based in America). Though other international film industries, such as the United Kingdom (*Sid and Nancy*,[16] *Control*,[17] *Bronson*[18]),

[10] The majority of the titles returned in the search had numerous genres listed, so the criteria here was that one of those listed had to be 'biography' in order to be included.
[11] *Still Alice*. (2014) Richard Glatzer and Wash Westmoreland (dirs.) USA/France.
[12] *Silver Linings Playbook*. (2012) David O. Russell (dir.) USA.
[13] *Black Swan*. (2010) Darren Aronofsky (dir.) USA.
[14] *Crazy Heart*. (2009) Scott Cooper (dir.) USA.
[15] *As Good As it Gets*. (1997) James L. Brooks (dir.) USA.
[16] *Sid and Nancy*. (1986) Alex Cox (dir.) UK.

France (*La Vie En Rose*[19]), Australia (*Shine*,[20] *Chopper*[21]) and New Zealand (*An Angel At My Table*[22]), have shown interest in native historical figures and their affliction with mental disorder, in terms of frequency and sheer ubiquity Hollywood's output of films in this vein is unparalleled. It is for this reason that my thesis considers the American biopic exclusively. The majority of case studies in this research are Hollywood productions, though where possible American films from outside of this system have also been included to give a greater impression of the genre's multifarious forms in American cinema. Additionally, in every case study, the biographical subject(s) is an American historical figure.

In an article for *The New York Times Magazine* supplement, Ethan Watters claims that the effects of American-led globalisation have resulted in what he terms 'the Americanization of mental illness'.[23] Watters contends that:

> Mental health professionals in the West, and in the United States in particular, create official categories of mental diseases and promote them in a diagnostic manual that has become the worldwide standard. American researchers and institutions run most of the premier scholarly journals and host top conferences in the fields of psychology and psychiatry. Western drug companies dole out large sums for research and spend billions marketing medications for mental illnesses.[24]

The result of this process suggests a homogenisation of cultural understandings and definitions of mental illness. *The Diagnostical and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders* (DSM), written and published by the American Psychiatric Association, categorises a large number of mental disorders and lists known symptoms in order to aid diagnoses. The proliferation of this document, in tandem with large-scale monopolies on research and

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[17] *Control*. (2007) Anton Corbijn (dir.) UK/USA/Australia/Japan.
[18] *Bronson*. (2008) Nicholas Winding Refn (dir.) UK.
[19] *La Vie En Rose*. (2007) Olivier Dahan (dir.) France/UK/Czech Republic.
[20] *Shine*. (1996) Scott Hicks (dir.) Australia.
[21] *Chopper*. (2000) Andrew Dominik (dir.) Australia.
[22] *An Angel At My Table*. (1990) Jane Campion (dir.) New Zealand/Australia/UK/USA.
[23] Watters, E. (2010) The Americanization of Mental Illness. *New York Times Magazine*. Internet: Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/10/magazine/10psyche-t.html?pagewanted=1&_r=0> [Accessed 20/01/16]
[24] ibid.

scholarship of mental illness, attests to the fact that American understandings of mental disorder extend beyond the nation's borders, expanding to many corners of the globe and influencing understanding, diagnosis and treatment practices on an international scale. This has led to criticisms that the medicalised approach to diagnosis and treatment does not acknowledge or account for cultural diversity,[25] and thus international attitudes and knowledge of mental illness are becoming increasingly 'Americanised'.

Indeed the debates about globalised mental health discourse on understandings of mental disorder in other cultures have been diverse, and provide a number of interesting arguments for resistance to a worldwide homogeneity in mental disorder definition and diagnosis. For instance, critics have noted that until recently the DSM gave no mention to the widely established and accepted existence of 'culture-bound syndromes'.[26] Culture-bound syndromes, sometimes referred to as 'folk illnesses', are pathological phenomena that are specifically isolated within particular communities. Whilst many of these syndromes are 'local ways of explaining any of a wide assortment of misfortunes',[27] there are also actually established syndromes, such as *Latah*, a condition found in Malaysia and Indonesia in which individuals who startle easily can become flustered when startled, to the point where they may say things that are obscene, imitate the mannerisms and actions of others around them, or even obey forcibly communicated commands. Ronald Simons explains that 'this condition of being latah is a well-defined role in Malay and Indonesian society with its own set of rules and understandings.'[28] Arthur Kleinman contends that when the fourth edition of the DSM did acknowledge culture-bound syndromes (the first edition to do so), this didn't represent a great victory, but rather revealed the cultural bias inherent in Western psychiatry by labelling non-Western disorders as 'culture-bound', thus placing it in opposition to the universal status attributed to

[25] Vendantam, S. (2005) Psychiatry's Missing Diagnosis: Patients' Diversity is Often Discounted. *The Washington Post*. Internet: Available at < http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/06/25/AR2005062500982.html> [Accessed 21/01/16]
[26] Simons, R, C. (2001) Introduction to Culture-Bound Syndromes. *Psychiatric Times*. Internet: Available at < http://www.psychiatrictimes.com/cultural-psychiatry/introduction-culture-bound-syndromes-0> [Accessed 29/01/16]
[27] ibid.
[28] ibid.

Western psychiatry.[29] William Bento also explains how American psychiatry has affected change in perceptions of mental phenomena within its own borders, explaining that indigenous rites of passage in Native American culture, predominantly understood in the form of the Vision Quest, have been subsumed and undermined by modern notions of pathology and mental disorder.[30]

Finally, even for universal conditions recognised by the DSM, research has found that cultural factors have an implication for how symptoms and experiences manifest in particular cases. For instance, research from Stanford University has found that schizophrenic experiences of auditory hallucinations can vary drastically depending on cultural context. The research showed that schizophrenics interviewed in India and Ghana interpreted the voices that they heard in rather benign terms, articulating a rich relationship with the voices and in some cases relating to the voices as spirits. By contrast American patients more frequently deployed clinical terminology to express the hearing of their voices as a sign of an unsound mind, also expressing that the voices they heard were aggressive and threatening.[31] The authors thus concluded that 'the American cultural emphasis on individual autonomy shapes not only a clinical culture in which patients have the right to know, and should know, their diagnosis, but a more general cognitive bias that unusual auditory events are symptoms, rather than people or spirits.'[32] Thus, though debates about the impact of American-led Western understandings of psychiatry on other cultures are still ongoing and at times contentious, the accusations that the Americanisation of mental illness is a form of cultural imperialism,[33] as well as research that has found cultural factors to be significant in the manifestation and experience of mental disorder, all validate the national focus that I undertake in this thesis. I therefore focus on American films and subjects' experiences with mental

[29] Kleinman, A. (1997) Triumph of Pyrrhic Victory? The Inclusion of Culture in DSM-IV. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*. Vol. 4(6), p. 343-344.
[30] Bento, W. (2004) *Lifting the Veil of Mental Illness: An Approach to Anthroposophical Psychology.* Massachusetts: SteinerBooks. p. 86-87.
[31] Luhrmann, T, M., Padmavati, R., Tharoor, H., & Osei, A. (2015) Differences in Voice-Hearing Experiences of People with Psychosis in the USA, India and Ghana: Interview-Based Study. *British Journal of Psychiatry*. Vol. 206(1), pp. 41-44.
[32] ibid. p. 44.
[33] Miller, G. (2014) Is the Agenda for Global Mental Health a Form of Cultural Imperialism? *Medical Humanities*. Vol. 40(2), pp. 131-134.

disorder because of the influence and global presence of American-led psychiatric discourse and to remain focussed and aware of the cultural specificities that can influence mental health and its representation.

The ubiquity and international reach of psychiatry is in many ways analogous to the international reach of Hollywood cinema, and therefore concretises the justification for focussing upon American cinema and its representation of mental disorder. Not only is the expansive reach of American-based psychiatry important to note, but also the manner in which discourses of psychiatry have permeated society and popular culture. No longer is psychiatry just the realm of the psychiatrist's office. Popular culture and media have contributed to the evolving epistemologies by which ideas about mental health are formed and appropriated. Frank Furedi argues that Anglo-American societies have become influenced by the power of emotions to the point where 'the new language of therapy [is not] confined to describing the state of emotion of the individual…the atmosphere during the aftermath of 11 September was often represented as a "time of national trauma". It was claimed that the US was "a nation in distress".'[34] The evolution of what Furedi terms 'therapy culture' is a result of 'the phenomenal expansion of psychological labels and therapeutic terms.'[35] The frequency and uses of these terms have evolved beyond the confines of psychiatric medical expertise and have begun to pervade wider socio-cultural domains, and nowhere is this more evident than in popular media culture. Television talk shows such as *Dr. Phil* (2002-), countless self-help books that advise readers in how to heal their own emotional issues, and cinema's recent fascination with 'true stories' of famous and notable historical figures who have suffered with various mental disorders exemplify some of the many ways that discourses around mental health have permeated social consciousness to constitute a 'therapy culture'.

Furedi's contention that the language of therapy has become a means by which national feeling and mood can be conveyed shows how discourses of mental health can be applied to a broader sense of identity than that of the individual. In this way one can see that the current landscape of psychiatric

[34] Furedi, F. (2004) *Therapy Culture: Cultivating Vulnerability in an Uncertain Age*. London: Routledge. p. 2.
[35] ibid.

discourse as it exists in contemporary culture is also relevant in terms of national identity. A major factor in this cultural phenomenon, Furedi claims, is through the rewriting of cultural history and mythology: 'the distinctive feature of today's therapeutic history is the way that it projects contemporary survivalist outlook back into the past.'[36] Here Furedi suggests that the forging of a common (i.e. national) identity is often achieved through the use of history, and that in contemporary therapy culture, national histories and mythologies are often rewritten or complicated by the shift away from hero driven historical narratives to those focussing upon the survivors of history (like Kate Winslet, Furedi also refers to the Holocaust to exemplify his point). As George Custen points out in his pioneering study of the biopic, the genre 'played a powerful part in creating and sustaining public history',[37] and thus in the modern age of therapy culture, my thesis investigates the way that the contemporary American biopic represents mental illness narratives, using close textual analysis to explore how these individual narratives can be read as wider narratives and, in several cases, counternarratives of American national identity and mythology.

The rewriting of history that Furedi points out concerns an intersection between contemporary cultural ideologies dominated by psychological and psychiatric discourses and the historiographic narratives that constitute modern conceptions of national identity. Thus, contemporary ideologies impact and shape the re-telling of national mythologies so as to realign prominent narratives of history with current developments and anxieties. Robert Burgoyne posits a similar idea, in which he claims that 'the contemporary historical film is…a privileged discursive site in which anxiety, ambivalence, and expectation about the nation, its history, and its future are played out in narrative form'[38] My thesis discusses the way in which this process can be seen to be occurring within the contemporary American biopic, in which individualised narratives of mental disorder can be seen as possessing subtextual undercurrents that scrutinise and examine constructions of identity on a national scale.

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[36] ibid. p. 149.
[37] Custen, G. (1992) *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press. p. 2.
[38] Burgoyne, R. (2010) *Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at U.S. History*. Revised Edition. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. p. 11.

Distinctions Between the Biopic and the 'Based on Real Events' Tradition

Before embarking on an extensive literature review of the genre, it may be beneficial here to briefly outline what defines the biopic genre as such. Broadly speaking, to borrow from George Custen, a biopic is a film that 'depicts the life of a historical person, past or present'.[39] However, as has been noted in more recent critical writing on the genre, this general definition is by no means all encompassing. In the first instance, there are a number of films that we may consider biographical despite the fact that they do not use the real names of their historical subjects. This may be for the purpose of avoiding litigation, as in the case of Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*,[40] widely accepted to be a retelling of the life of media tycoon William Randolph Hearst, or to suit a more creative agenda, like Todd Haynes's *I'm Not There*,[41] which, as discussed in the final chapter of this thesis, is a biopic loosely based on the music and various phases of Bob Dylan's life and career that features six different protagonists to embody Dylan. It should also be pointed out that even in biopics that do use the real name of the main protagonists, a common trope of the genre is to blend various minor associates of the historical subject into one or more 'composite character(s)', often with fictional names. Thus, one must come to the conclusion that real names are not an essential component of the biopic, even if they are expected by audiences and generally common.

This revelation also leads to questions concerning the wider implications of the 'based on a true story' or 'based on real events' tradition in cinema; namely, what is the difference between a biopic and these other forms of 'true' cinema narratives, or is there even a difference at all? For the purpose of this thesis I do contend that there is sufficient difference to count the biopic as a separate, though not unrelated or necessarily strictly demarcated, genre to these other types of films. Certainly we may consider all three of these film types under the wider rubric of the 'historical film', but perhaps what sets the biopic apart is, as Vidal, contends 'unlike in other film genres placed at the intersection of fiction and history, such as the epic, the cos-

[39] Custen, G. (1992) *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History.* New Jersey: Rutgers University Press. p. 5.
[40] *Citizen Kane* (1941) Orson Welles (dir.), USA.
[41] *I'm Not There*. (2007) Todd Haynes (dir.), USA/Germany/Canada.

tume film, or the docudrama – all of which may feature historical characters and biographical tropes – in the biopic an individual's story comes to the fore.'[42] To elucidate further, this thesis considers one of the most important defining characteristics of the biopic to be a central focus upon the life of the historical figure. For instance, in *Titanic*[43] we may note Bernard Hill's performance as Captain Edward Smith as that of a real-life character, and yet the film's central focus is upon Jack (Leonardo DiCaprio) and Rose's (Kate Winslet) fictionalised romantic narrative, set against the backdrop of the historical event of the ship's sinking. Thus, despite the presence of a real-life character, whose real name is used, situated within the context of a historical event that did take place, given that the film doesn't focus upon the life story of Captain Smith typifies the 'based on real events' philosophy. In most cases, it is the historical recreation of grand or significant incidents that take centre-stage in such films, with limited to no focus upon the life story of a central historical character. Inevitably there may be examples that appear to contravene or problematise such a definition, as is the fluid and increasingly intertextual nature of contemporary film genres, but for the purpose of this thesis, case studies here have been selected for their close attention to the life, and specifically the personal experience of mental disorder, of a central historical figure.

While the distinction between the biopic and films that are 'based on real events' can be addressed with a minimum of difficulty, the 'based on a true story' narrative mode presents a more complicated challenge, as often these films purport to be inspired by real lives. Part of the difficulty here is the varied ways and differing degrees to which real lives have inspired film narratives. For instance, Raymond Babbitt (Dustin Hoffman) in *Rain Man* is well documented as being a character inspired by the real life savant Kim Peek, who is even given special thanks in the film's credits. Beyond this inspiration for the character of Babbitt however, the film makes no sustained attempt to tell the story of Peek's life, but rather Babbitt's road movie saga with his brother is an entirely fictional story. However, a film such as Cameron Crowe's *Almost Famous*[44] is considered to be at least partially au-

[42] Vidal, B. (2014) Introduction: The Biopic and Its Critical Contexts. p. 3
[43] *Titanic*. (1997) James Cameron (dir.), USA.
[44] *Almost Famous*. (2000) Cameron Crowe (dir.), USA.

tobiographical, given that Crowe, like the film's protagonist, was a travelling writer for *Rolling Stone* magazine during his teenage years. Yet the film is, for the most part, not considered a biopic, as its central plot, which focuses upon the young reporter's infatuation and turbulent romance with a band groupie, is a work of fiction. Rather this might be described as a *film à clef*, that is, a film that describes aspects of a real life but is fronted by a totally fictional diegesis. Another similar example, albeit one that pushes the boundaries of the genre definition even further, is the 2002 film *8 Mile*,[45] in which rapper Eminem (real name Marshall Mathers), plays a fictional character in a story that largely reflects his own upbringing as an aspiring white rapper in the predominantly black working-class neighbourhoods of Detroit, Michigan. Although aspects of Eminem's life and memories influenced the film, once again the overriding essence of the film's narrative is heavily fictionalised. The rapper himself said in an interview on the film's 'making of':

> We took some things that happened in my life and put them in the movie, and maybe twisted them a little bit and added some things and took out some things. Put it this way, if it was based on my life then it would limit me to things I could do and there would be certain guidelines we had to follow. With this character…it's cool because I can do other things with him that aren't me.[46]

Although Eminem's description of inserting elements of his life into the story and manipulating and adjusting them appears to also typify common practices in the biopic, which is itself a genre that heavily relies on using fiction and altering chronologies and details of a life to better suit the story (however hard they may try to convince viewers otherwise), the key distinction here is that Eminem's experiences in the Detroit rapping scene appear to be embellishments to an already crafted fictional story, and thus the life story on display here is not sufficiently tethered to a real historical figure. The film's director, Curtis Hanson explains this by stating 'He [Eminem]

[45] *8 Mile*. (2002) Curtis Hanson (dir.), USA.
[46] Author Unknown. (2013) *Eminem| The Making of 8 Mile – Eminem Talks about the 8 Mile in Detroit*. [Internet]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yj7b0Igq6A8> [Accessed 29/08/16]

early on expressed to me that he had no interest in being in an "Eminem movie". He wanted to be an actor in a really good movie.'[47] Thus, the 'based on a true life story' mode appears to take as its starting point a remarkable life from which to extrapolate largely fictional stories. Although the biopic often operates in a similar fashion, especially considering that a large proportion of biographical films are adapted from or inspired by (auto)biographical literature, it is the comprehensive attempt to narrate a life (or at least the crucial or defining period in a remarkable person's life) that quantifies such film's as a biopic. Even those biopics that focus upon a short period in a historical figure's life tend to use familiar tropes such as flashbacks, montage, and expositional dialogue as a means of bringing in other relevant historical episodes from the subject's life in order to shed greater light on the film's period and the character's life.

The final aspect to note in regards to the biopic and 'based on a true life story' debate is that to a great extent the biopic was historically reserved for representing the life of a well-known historical figure, usually one no longer living. On the contrary, 'based on a true life story' films more frequently sought to take an unknown or forgotten figure, either living or dead, and construe an appealing narrative out of an unfamiliar life story. However, the contemporary biopic, as noted by Dennis Bingham, has developed a particular penchant for a similar strategy, whereby figures that have been forgotten or were never considered deserving of being remembered in the first place are cast in to the public eye and made famous by the biography (either literary or cinematic) itself.[48] This corresponds to another noticeable trend in the contemporary biopic that Rebecca A. Sheehan has identified, an increased cultural instantaneity in which the biopic now finds contemporary living figures as its subject and 'takes broadly known events of this person's life and, through them, remark[s] upon an ongoing political or cultural event.'[49] This modern habit further blurs the distinctions between the biopic and the 'based on a true life story' by narrowing the gap between the creative and narrative strategies that underpin both types of film. Thus, as as-

[47] ibid.
[48] Bingham, D. (2010) *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?: The Biopic As Contemporary Film Genre*. London: Rutgers University Press. p. 148.
[49] Sheehan, R, A. (2014) Facebooking the Present: The Biopic and Cultural Instantaneity. In: Brown, T., & Vidal, B. (eds.) *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*. p. 36.

serted earlier in this section, attempts to define film genres always comes with difficulties and touching points where, through hybridisation or evolution, the boundaries between one form and another become particularly minute and unclear. However, the case studies in this thesis have all been identified as biopics because of their perceived attempt to comprehensively tell the story of a significant historical or public figure's life and any fictional embellishments included maintain or enhance an agenda in which the life story is the central narrative focus to the film.

Overview of Academic Literature: Film Studies, The Biopic, and Key Considerations of Mental Health Representation

Academic literature on the biopic genre has, until very recently, been thin on the ground. Whilst still sparse, more sustained critical attention of the genre has begun to develop in the wake of its popular re-emergence in cinemas. In the majority of texts devoted to the study of the genre, it appears almost mandatory to assert that the genre is under-theorised and has been stigmatised as having little artistic or critical value in popular discourse (see Vidal,[50] Burgoyne,[51] and Polaschek[52]). Robert Rosenstone and Belén Vidal have both noted the paradoxical nature of the genre, contrasting its sustained success at prestigious awards ceremonies and its 'star-making' credentials with its almost unanimously agreed upon reputation as a genre of ill repute.[53] Perhaps because of its unfavourable reputation the biopic has been notable for its absence in Film Studies scholarship. Thankfully, a small but important corpus of scholarship attempting to reposition the genre as one worthy of academic enquiry has arisen in recent years. It is at this point that I offer a brief summary of the important contributions to the field of these texts, before moving on to discuss the more difficult, and often problematic, terrain of mental illness portrayals in media and the existing scholarship in

[50] Vidal, B. (2014) Introduction: The Biopic and its Critical Contexts. In: Brown, T. & Vidal, B. (eds.) *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*. London: Routledge. p. 2.
[51] Burgoyne, R. (2008) *The Hollywood Historical Film*. Oxford: Blackwell. p. 102.
[52] Polaschek, B. (2013) *The Postfeminist Biopic: Narrating the Lives of Plath, Kahlo, Woolf and Austen*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 41.
[53] Rosenstone, R. (2006) *History on Film/Film on History*. Harlow: Longman/Pearson. p. 89; Vidal, B. (2014) Introduction. In, Brown, T. & Vidal, B. (eds.) *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*. p. 2.

this area. In doing so I also position my own work in relation to these texts, re-asserting my thesis's original contribution to both fields.

When summarising the landscape of biopic scholarship, George Custen's 1992 study, *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* is an important starting point.[54] Arguably the first in-depth exploration into the genre, Custen charts the development and industrial history of the genre up until the end of the studio era at the beginning of the 1960s. Primarily using archival production materials, Custen argues that during the studio era the Hollywood biopic was a producer-controlled genre, and the celebratory nature of these films often had little to do with the greatness of the historical subject, but rather echoed narcissistic ideas about what makes a Hollywood producer great and powerful.[55] Custen goes on to position the biopic as a constructor of public history, presenting viewers with a version of history that was congruent with the largely conservative values held by wealthy and influential movie producers (Custen identifies Darryl F. Zanuck as a chief culprit, and devotes a substantial focus to Zanuck in the book). Ultimately, Custen finds that Hollywood's studio era biographical films presented history in a monochromatic form, focussing upon great men and pioneers and largely neglecting ethnic or female subjects, in keeping with the creative agendas of the producers as uncovered through analysis of a number of production materials and surveying key data (such as subjects' age, gender, and profession) from the films. Custen's work is influential in that it outlined many of the key codes and conventions of the genre, charted the landscape for future considerations, and laid the foundations of critical understanding by challenging reductive critical discourses around the genre's often unfaithful relationship with history (something I will discuss later in this introduction), providing an extensive contextual framework of the genre's production history before its migration to television at the end of the studio era.

Despite its significance as the first detailed study of the genre, and the important advocacy of the genre as one worthy of academic consideration, *Bio/Pics* does have its limitations. The content of the films are often secondary to discussions of production history and the personalities behind Hollywood's myth making machine, and this production-based analysis fre-

[54] Custen, G. (1992) *Bio/Pics.*
[55] ibid p. 4.

quently overlooks or downplays the significance of wider cultural and contextual factors from outside of Hollywood. In a follow-up article, in which the breadth of his scope is extended to 1980, Custen contends that 'after 1960, altered attitudes towards fame in culture outside Hollywood, and changes in Hollywood's organization and personnel, meant that in the new Hollywood, biopics did not seem to carry the same weight, nor perform the same cultural work, they had formerly done.'[56] Custen contends in this article that the biopic's grandeur was diminished by the disruptive influence of television, which is where he believes that the genre's fascination with pathology arose.[57] Custen's belief that the biopic's cultural functions in America altered following the end of the studio era suggests that the over-celebratory vanity projects marshalled by egocentric producers, designed to reaffirm notions of American greatness through myths of the 'self-made man', had given way to a new form; a form that was viable for protagonists of diverse racial and gender identities. In the contemporary context, my thesis seeks to build on the key ideas laid out by Custen, exploring the contemporary biopic's representation of mental disorder in relation to the wider American socio-historical context, exploring how, in the wake of the genre's new cultural functions that Custen discusses, the genre has become a site for contention and revision of national histories and ideologies.

Although Custen's book is possibly the first sustained study of the biopic film genre, one of the key sources that influenced his work also warrants consideration here. Leo Lowenthal's article on biographical stories in popular American magazines uses content analysis to focus upon the changing nature of the stories, especially the changing nature of the subjects selected for biographies, through the early 20th century.[58] The influence of Lowenthal's comprehensive quantitative approach to charting the evolution of subjects' professions and synthesising this data in to table form can be clearly seen in Custen's work on cinema biography, as Custen himself includes numerous similar tables in his appendices. Lowenthal's article also makes an important contribution to the discourse that remains an integral

[56] Custen, G. (2000) The Mechanical Life In The Age of Human Reproduction: American Biopics 1961-1980. *Biography*. Vol. 23(1), p. 130.
[57] ibid. p. 148.
[58] Lowenthal, L. (1944). Biographies in Popular Magazines. *Radio Research: 1942-43*. Lazarsfeld, P. & Stanton, F. (eds.) New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce.

feature of modern discussions of the genre. In the article, one of Lowenthal's main findings is that from the start of the 20th century up to the 1940s, when the article was written, a major shift occurred in the types of historical subjects that became popular for biographies. This shift saw a declining interest in figures that Lowenthal terms 'idols of production', characters who are notable for their scientific, medical, industrial achievements and contributions to the construction of the modern world, and a rising fascination with 'idols of consumption', characters renowned for their glamorous lifestyles, fame, and possession of the world's great treasures. Lowenthal attributes this shift to a change in social needs and gratification seeking in America after the end of the First World War.[59]

Alongside this shift, a drastic change in the manner in which such stories were told was also found. Where biographies focussing on 'idols of production' tended to emphasise the genius and 'eureka' moments of the subject's defining cultural intervention, the refocusing of the public gaze upon 'idols of consumption' brought rise to a greater degree of concern with the private lives of public figures. Curiously enough though, romantic affairs did not factor heavily in this new narrative approach, but rather significant focus was placed upon parental roles and friendships, a trait that is almost antithetical to the modern biopic's overwhelming proclivity for emphasising largely heteronormative romantic relationships. Nonetheless, along with the newfound appeal of celebrities, entertainers and sports stars in the magazine biography came a newly attuned concentration upon private lives, a crucial and lingering characteristic of the biopic practically ever since.

There are two aspects of Lowenthal's work imperative to my own consideration of the contemporary biopic. The first is the dichotomy between 'idols of production' and 'consumption'. The 'idol of production' is a figure that I consider in regards to the 'great man' biopic, whereby I analyse films about 'great men' suffering with mental disorder and consider the implications of these representations in regards to the legacy of the 'great man' subgenre. I then consider the 'idol of consumption' with the aim of adding to its definition. Where Lowenthal, and the numerous writers citing his in-

[59] ibid. p. 508-511.

fluential work, refer to 'idols of consumption' as biographical subjects that are renowned for their hedonistic and glamorous lifestyles, I contend that in the contemporary trend of biopics focussing upon mental health issues, we can consider 'consumption' to take on an extra level of meaning, in which numerous characters' struggles with illnesses like addiction reframe 'consumption' in a more literal sense. The second feature of Lowenthal's article that has particular pertinence for my thesis, as well as other key works on the genre, is the contention that biography was a genre that embraced and sought to link stories of individuals to national histories.[60] This is especially important to my work here, as the overarching argument in this thesis is that the depiction of mental disorder in biopics can be interpreted as interrogating central facets of American national identity. To this end, Lowenthal's work has been an important starting point for the direction of this thesis.

Dennis Bingham's extensive work in his 2010 book *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?: The Biopic as Contemporary Film Genre*,[61] goes to great lengths to build upon and expand the initial work undertaken by Custen. Moving away from the production-heavy method of Custen, Bingham's work seeks to break down the genre into a variety of subcategories. As Custen's focus was on an era in which Hollywood biopics largely focussed on white male subjects, Bingham's research explores the contemporary biopic's new forms and the inclusion of new subjects. Arguing that the genre has developed multifarious aesthetic and generic forms over time, and embracing biopics from outside the American marketplace, Bingham has greatly expanded understanding of the genre by discussing in detail its evolution into a multifaceted genre. These subcategories include the minority appropriation biopic, which re-appropriates the genre's traditional conventions in order to subvert their historical application by using them to celebrate and explore historical figures noteworthy as 'queer or feminist, African American or third world',[62] parody forms that create mythological stories of underserving subjects, or, perhaps most prominent, the neoclassical biopic, a turn of the millennium trend that mixes and matches aspects from several of

[60] ibid. p. 527.
[61] Bingham, D. (2010) *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?: The Biopic As Contemporary Film Genre*. London: Rutgers University Press.
[62] ibid. p. 18.

the various categories, exhibiting playfulness and experimentation with the genre's form and content.

There are two aspects of Bingham's work that perhaps mark the biggest departures in building upon Custen's initial research. Where Custen claimed that the studio era biopic existed as a producer's medium, Bingham contends that in the evolution of the genre into its modern form the role of the director has superseded that of producer, with a number of high profile directors, many possessing the status of contemporary 'auteur' (for example, Milos Forman, Martin Scorsese, Todd Haynes or Mary Harron), have been attracted to the genre's newfound capacity for scrutinising and deconstructing the 'greatness' of historical figures or allowing for a focus on forgotten, controversial or marginalised figures on the fringes of popular memory. The other major development that Bingham draws out is his assertion that biopics of female subjects differ significantly enough in narrative and thematic content from what he calls the 'great man biopic' to constitute its own genre. Accordingly, Bingham divides his epic volume into two distinct gendered sections (referred to as Book One and Book Two). The second book is dedicated to exposing the consistent presentation of narratives in which women are plagued by suffering, victimisation, and death and exploring the role of feminist and experimental filmmakers for reconfiguring the role of historical women in film.

In reply to Bingham's contentions about the biopic's clear gender divide, Bronwyn Polaschek conducts a study of a small corpus of films that typify what she refers to as the postfeminist biopic. In *The Postfeminist Biopic: Narrating the Lives of Plath, Kahlo, Woolf and Austen*,[63] Polaschek discusses the emergence of the postfeminist biopic as a third subgenre within the female biopic. The first subgenre, Polaschek explains, is the classical female biopic, which is congruent with modernist patriarchal discourses, typified in the biopic by narratives of suffering and victimisation.[64] The second subgenre is the feminist biopic, by which feminist filmmakers and performers seek to challenge the structures of classical narratives to celebrate the cultural interventions of historically significant women and con-

[63] Polaschek, B. (2013) *The Postfeminist Biopic: Narrating the Lives of Plath, Kahlo, Woolf and Austen*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
[64] ibid. p.3.

front/reject the reductive tropes of female suffering and weakness. Polaschek's contribution of a third subgenre to the taxonomy of female biopics explores contemporary texts that complicate both the classical form of the female biopic and problematize potential feminist readings of the film's subjects, all of whom are historically significant writers and artists who have 'an elevated position in the feminist pantheon'.[65] Both Bingham and Polaschek's research has influenced the analyses in the third chapter of this thesis, which focuses upon the representations of mental illness in female subjects, which often focus upon melancholy, sexuality and suicide as prominent themes, albeit for a variety of reasons and motivations.

In a conscious effort to 'take the study of the genre beyond its associations with studio filmmaking and Hollywood myth making',[66] Tom Brown and Belén Vidal's edited collection *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture* broadens the horizons for considerations of the biopic's relevance and influence on an international scale. With essays ranging in emphasis, including the contemporary French biopic, the biopic in Hindi and South Korean cinema, defining the 'middlebrow' nature of the genre, and the increasingly experimental approaches to biographical filmmaking, the collection makes a valuable intervention in widening the scope beyond the Euro-American context and elucidating the transnational significance of the genre in all its (inter)national forms. The key contribution of this collection to my own work is that, although my focus is on American made biopics, Vidal's introduction to the collection provides an excellent outline of the biopic's development and the key debates that have emerged over the course of its progression into the contemporary film context, and indeed is one of the very few pieces of work that acknowledges the modern biopic's affinity with themes of pathologisation and mental illness.[67] Individual essays concerning the representation of gender and genius by Julie F. Codell[68] and the portrayal of death in Todd Haynes's experimental Bob Dylan biopic, *I'm*

[65] ibid. p. 4.
[66] Vidal, B. (2014) Introduction. In, Brown, T. & Vidal, B. (eds.) *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*. p. 2.
[67] ibid. p. 9.
[68] Codell, J, F. (2014) Gender, Genius, and Abjection in Artist Biopics. In: Brown, T. & Vidal, B. (eds.) *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*. London: Routledge.

Not There,[69] by Jesse Schlotterbeck[70] have also provided useful insights for my chapters on female experiences of mental disorder and postmodernism in the contemporary biopic respectively.

One of the central debates that has persisted in the study of the biopic is the discussion of the genre's relationship to historical accuracy. Prominent scholars in the field, such as Custen,[71] Rosenstone,[72] and Bingham,[73] among others, have confronted this issue directly, insisting that to restrict consideration of the genre, in either popular, critical or academic discourses, to notions of fidelity and historical verisimilitude is to overlook the cultural significance of the genre and the potential for inquiries into its cultural functions, its particular versions of history and their significance to cultural and national narrative, and other wider debates. In short, screenwriters and filmmakers are not obligated to ensure the historical accuracy of the lives, events or eras they recreate, and in numerous instances the truth of the matter may hinder the entertainment value and narrative potential of the (life) story on display. Therefore, as Polaschek neatly summarises:

> It is constructive to move beyond the claimed historical inaccuracy of the biopic to ask different questions. If we consider the genre as a medium for representing the significance of the lives of historical figures, and as an intervention into specific discourses, we might ask: what kinds of individual are currently celebrated by the biopic genre? How are their lives represented?[74]

In reaction to these questions outlined by Polaschek, I contend in this thesis that the kinds of individuals currently in vogue in biographical film fare are historical individuals afflicted by mental disorder, and the central research aims of my work are to explore how these lives and disorders are represented, how the issue of mental illness intersects with other prominent cultural

[69] *I'm Not There*. (2007) Todd Haynes (dir.) USA/Germany/Canada.
[70] Schlotterbeck, J. (2014) I'm Not There: Transcendent Thanatography. In: Brown, T. & Vidal, B. (eds.) *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*. London: Routledge.
[71] Custen, G. (1992) *Bio/Pics*. p. 10.
[72] Rosenstone, R. (2006) *History on Film/Film on History*. p. 91.
[73] Bingham, D. (2010) *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?* p. 7-10.
[74] Polaschek. (2013) *The Postfeminist Biopic*. p. 47.

discourses, and what these representations suggest about the socio-cultural context in which they have been made.

Though academic studies of the biopic have contended with, and largely moved on from, debates around authenticity and factuality (that is not to say, however, that such critiques and scrutiny no longer pervade considerations of the genre elsewhere), the same cannot be said for the majority of existing scholarship in the field of film and media representations of mental illness. An overwhelming body of literature takes a largely myopic critical view about media portrayals of mental disorder. Current research in this area is heavily rooted in discussion and debates around accuracy and fidelity, often focussing upon the media's mistreatment or failure to authentically represent mental disorders and, therefore, creating and perpetuating stigma. One of the most notable trends of this discourse is the number of authors from the field of psychiatry articulating such concerns. In all but a small number of examples, the author(s) of work criticising the media's insensitive treatment of mental illness are academic researchers specialising in psychiatry. One of the central issues to arise from this is the noticeable number of publications that engage with film and media studies debates with a limited or largely obsolete understanding of appropriate methodology.

Critical discussions about media representation of mental disorder almost universally centre discussion upon 'inaccurate' or 'stigmatising' imagery in media discourse (see Wahl,[75] Wedding and Boyd,[76] Byrne,[77] Stuart,[78] Roberts,[79] and Nairn, Coverdale and Coverdale[80]), and indeed these issues tend to be the dominant rhetoric in the discipline. Whilst this may not come as a surprise, after all, the majority of writers in this area are writing from a position and perspective of expertise in psychiatry and thus under-

[75] Wahl, O. (2006) *Media Madness: Public Images of Mental Illness*. 3rd Edition. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press. p. 87-105.
[76] Wedding, D. & Boyd, M. (1999) *Movies and Mental Illness: Using Films to Understand Psychopathology*. London: McGraw-Hill College. p. 2.
[77] Byrne, P. (2000) Stigma of Mental Illness and Ways of Diminishing It. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment.* Vol. 6, pp. 65-72.
[78] Stuart, H. (2006) Media Portrayals of Mental Illness and its Treatments: What Effect Does it Have on People with Mental Illness? *CNS Drugs*. Vol. 20(2), p. 99-105.
[79] Roberts, R. (2011) *Real to Reel: Psychiatry At the Cinema*. Herefordshire: PCCS Books. p. 52-55.
[80] Nairn, R., Coverdale, S. & Coverdale, J. (2011) A Framework for Understanding Media Depictions of Mental Illness. *Academic Psychiatry*. Vol. 35(3), p. 202.

standably focus on the minutiae of symptomology and the representation of their profession in media imagery, what is surprising is the frequency with which broad claims about 'media effects' are made. For instance, Otto Wahl, one of the most prolific authors in the area of media representation of mental illness, contends that '[public] reliance on the media tends to create misconceptions and misunderstanding concerning many of the basic facts about mental illness',[81] and goes on to claim that '[media portrayals] influence broader conceptions and create and support general stereotypes.'[82] Much like counterarguments to criticisms levied at the biopic for its fast and loose interplay with historical facts, there is little doubt that a number of mental illness portrayals in the media are unfairly represented or constructed with little to no research to ensure a level of medical authenticity; just as there is little to no contention that many biopics take significant narrative liberties with their inclusion/omission of historical data. However, just as with the restricting critical concern about the biopic's infidelity to history, the issue with criticisms made about mental illness representation and its subjective, 'inaccurate', portrayals of particular disorders is, as Steven Harper points out, 'the public does not always accept media disparagement of the mentally ill.'[83]

Harper's analysis here identifies a concerning characteristic of the current body of work focussing on mental illness in the media. Though discussion about the potential for mental illness representation to perpetuate imagery that does not correspond to medical definitions or symptoms, and thus influence misconceptions about mental disorder in the public sphere, is an important area for research and critical discussion, ultimately the debates are largely undermined by author's assumptions about 'media effects'.[84] As media studies research has long since debunked notions of the hypodermic model (that presumes that intended messages within media texts are embedded and directly transferred to an accepting and unresisting consumer) and instead moved on to investigate the many ways that viewers and users select and make sense of media, it is curious that such a number of psychiatric

[81] Wahl, O. (2006) *Media Madness*. p. 88.
[82] ibid. p. 90.
[83] Harper, S. . (2005) Media, Madness & Misrepresentation: Critical Reflections on Anti-Stigma Discourse. *European Journal of Communication*. Vol. 20(4), p. 479.
[84] ibid.

perspectives on media representation make such generalisations about the widespread detrimental effects of inaccurate representations. Also, one of the most common oversights in many, though certainly not all, of these discussions, is that, as Steven Hyler notes, 'a surprisingly large number of such portrayals are reasonably accurate.'[85]

Where film genres such horror, science fiction and crime dramas receive a great deal of critical attention for their unflattering depictions of violent psychopaths and unpredictable eccentrics in this literature, little attention is paid to the more serious 'adult' films, with high cultural capital, offering nuanced and complex portrayals of mental disorder.[86] Indeed, the few discussions that do acknowledge the more complicated representation of mental disorder in cinema still tend to scrutinise such portrayals in terms of accuracy, often in contradictory ways. For instance, Ron Roberts's analysis of *A Beautiful Mind*,[87] perhaps the prototypical example of a contemporary American mental health biopic, is rather scathing about the film's portrayal of schizophrenia and its treatment:

> Whilst the representations of gender and class relations, mental health, psychiatric treatment, psychiatric power and state power on display in this production merit serious attention, the one issue which overrides all of these and which must be considered *a priori* is one of truth telling. Had there been an Academy Award for this, *A Beautiful Mind* would most certainly not have been nominated.[88]

However, where Roberts is unconvinced of the film's fidelity to the protagonist's condition, Peter Remington has described the film as 'a tidy representation of schizophrenia',[89] thus highlighting one of the fundamental difficulties with the accuracy debate. Definitions of what constitute an accurate portrayal differ, in this case to the point of polarity, according to subjective experience and knowledge. As such, identifying symptomological inaccura-

[85] Hyler, S. (1988) DSM-III at the Cinema: Madness in the Movies. *Comprehensive Psychiatry*. Vol. 29(2), p. 205.
[86] Harper. (ibid) p. 479.
[87] *A Beautiful Mind*. (2001) Ron Howard (dir.) USA.
[88] Roberts, R. (2011) *Reel to Real*. p. 42.
[89] Remington, P. (2010) Twelve Pages of Madness: Development of Cinema's Narration of Insanity. In: Billias, N. (ed.) *Promoting and Producing Evil*. Amsterdam: Rodopi. p. 161.

cies in representation does little to enhance understanding of the significance of a particular image, and in the case of the more 'serious' film depictions seeking to explore mental illness, overlooks the encouraging shift in contemporary film culture towards thought-provoking portrayals of mental disorder. Therefore, a film studies research project that focuses upon the significance of mental health representation, accurate or not, using an up-to-date and appropriate methodology to explore the portrayal of mental illness would provide a new and vital contribution to developing scholarly discourses in the field. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, a mental disorder in any given case study is counted not by a definition based in medical/psychiatric discourse (for example, as found in the DSM). Instead a disorder is counted either by explicit diagnosis or consistent presence within the film's diegesis. Given that so many critics have lamented the large-scale lack of medically accurate portrayals of mental disorder, it wouldn't make methodological sense to define and analyse mental illness in terms of medical discourse for this study. As a central research aim of this thesis is to explore the creative choices made in representing mental disorder (including ignoring, altering, merging or inventing symptoms to maximise dramatic effect) and show how these choices can be interpreted as an engagement with wider socio-cultural ideas about national identity, it is of the utmost importance to consider medically inaccurate portrayals and ask 'why has this condition been represented this way?' rather than bemoan its 'inauthentic' representation.

As Harper has explained, and as highlighted in the previous paragraph, contemporary cinema has exhibited a recognisable shift towards explorative, rather than exploitative, narratives of mental illness. Nowhere is this more evident than in the biopic genre. Rosenstone has identified three broad categories in the genre: the Hollywood studio biopic, the 'serious' biofilm, which was largely the domain of European cinema but has recently emerged in Hollywood, and the experimental biopic.[90] The recent rise of the 'serious' biopic in contemporary American cinema therefore shows an intertwined relationship with the rise of the 'serious' mental health film, thus solidifying my earlier claim that the simultaneous rise, and overlap, of the

[90] Rosenstone, R. (2006) *History on Film/Film on History*. p. 93.

biopic and the mental health film constitutes a quantifiable contemporary film cycle, thus providing further justification of the need for the comprehensive study of the contemporary American biopic's representation of mental disorder that this thesis provides.

Where psychiatric specialists writing on the issue of film and media representation tend to belabour anti-stigma debates concerning misrepresentation and inaccuracy, what is noticeable from a film and media studies perspective is the relative absence of scholars engaging in discussion of the issue of mental health representation at all. Considering the prevalence of the issue in contemporary cinema, television and media culture, it is baffling that so few have undertaken study in the area. However, though small in number, there have been some necessary and valuable contributions that are worth considering here. In the first instance, works by Michael Fleming and Roger Manvell[91] and by Glen Gabbard and Krin Gabbard[92] are significant because in both cases the co-authors are a psychologist and film scholar respectively. These collaborative projects emphasise the interrelation between modern psychiatry and cinema, both of which were nascent at the beginning of the 20th Century and developed closely in tandem with one another. If one considers the popularity of Freudian or Lacanian psychoanalysis as a methodology for conducting film analysis (and such an approach does factor in to some of my own analyses in this thesis) then the significant overlap between psychiatry and cinema is apparent. In the case of Fleming and Manvell, the book reads rather as a summary of psychiatric literature in which particular film characters exemplify a particular disorder, symptom or development within the psychiatric profession. In truth, *Images of Madness* is heavy on psychiatry and light on film analysis, the contribution of film historian Roger Manvell appears to be an alphabetised filmography of every film mentioned by Fleming in the preceding section, with a brief plot summary of each film. However, one of the useful aspects of the book is evident in the moments in which Fleming discusses the wider American cultural contexts that influenced particular trends in psychiatry. In using discussions

[91] Fleming, M., & Manvell, R. (1985) *Images of Madness: The Portrayal of Insanity in the Feature Film*. London: Associated University Press.
[92] Gabbard, G., & Gabbard, K. (1999) *Psychiatry and the Cinema*. 2nd Edition. Washington: American Psychiatric Press.

of film in relation to this socio-cultural context, Fleming and Manvell laid the foundations for an approach similar to that which I take in this thesis, whereby I relate my interpretation of the various elements of film form and their construction of meaning in relation to mental disorder, and then connect these readings to wider psychiatric, sociological and historical contexts relating to aspects of American culture and national identity.

Gabbard and Gabbard's work, on the other hand, endeavours to bring together critical discourses in psychiatry and film studies in a more meaningful and symbiotic way. In my own attempt to take a film studies approach to study mental health in biographical cinema, I draw upon literature from a number of diverse academic fields as a means of engaging with psychiatric and cultural debates ongoing beyond the realms of film studies, as this bolsters and informs the wider debates that my thesis focuses upon regarding national identity and mental health in contemporary American culture. *Psychiatry and the Cinema* focuses upon the various roles and forms that psychiatrist characters have taken in cinema, with a wide-ranging discussion considering the works of key filmmakers such as Alfred Hitchcock and Woody Allen and landmark texts such as *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.[93] The book moves on to demonstrate how psychoanalytic readings of particular case-study films can be achieved. As the focus of this text is the portrayal of the psychiatrist and the profession of psychiatry, and the focus of my thesis is the depiction of mental illness, rather than its treatment necessarily, the book has limited application for my thesis, but has proved useful for those moments in which treatment is an issue of consideration in my wider analyses.

Aside from these collaborative texts that aim to bring together psychiatry and film studies, a small body of academic work in the media studies discipline has engaged with the representation of mental disorder in film, television and media. An edited collection by Greg Philo of the Glasgow Media Group, titled *Media and Mental Distress*,[94] contains a number of insightful essays that investigate mass-media portrayals of mental illness, industrial and production based inquiries, and a selection of audience studies that seek to elucidate the wider perception of media images of mental disor-

[93] *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. (1975) Milos Forman (dir.) USA.
[94] Philo, G. (ed.) *Media and Mental Distress*. London: Longman.

der. The collection is significant because it directly engages with a number of the issues that are lamented in the critical work authored by psychiatric academics, such as the prevalence of pejorative language describing mental health sufferers in media discourse, media headlines associating mental disorder with violence, and the propagation of misinformation and/or stereotypes about mental health issues and treatment. The overall findings of the work suggest that the majority of individuals with personal experience of mental illness, either personally or through a close personal connection, are dissatisfied with the media's representation of mental health issues, and the collection provides useful insight by interrogating some of the wider industrial practices that have led to such distorted perceptions of mental health issues in fictional and non-fictional mass media.

The primary focus of *Media and Mental Distress* is on mass-media platforms such as newspapers and television, with a limited consideration of films. Though the research in the book convincingly concludes that stereotypes are indeed widespread in the media, as Stephen Harper points out, the studies in the collection have some methodological faults. Perhaps the most notable is Harper's contention that the use of content analysis to compartmentalise various types of mental health representation (for example, 'comic images', 'violence to self' and 'violence to others') has a very limited definition of violence. Therefore the statistical evidence that claims mental health sufferers are more likely to be depicted as violent is undermined.[95] For instance, the study, and a number of others of similar ilk, does not contextualise the specific incidents of violence catalogued, nor offer differentiation between various types of violence (for example, both an unprovoked murder and a character committing violence in self-defence would be counted in the same category).

Another key issue, as both Harper and Simon Cross have noted, is that research of this kind often does not acknowledge the difference between cultural forms, instead analysing content from across various media platforms such as film, television, and print media interchangeably.[96] Cross writes that 'these elisions conveniently avoid the question of whether simi-

[95] Harper, S. (2005) Media, Madness and Misrepresentation. p. 461.
[96] Harper, S. (ibid) p. 463; Cross, S. (2004) Visualising Madness: Mental Illness and Public Representation. *Television and New Media*. Vol. 5(3), p. 202.

larities in representations of mental illness are more significant than the differences arising from the particular genres and forms being deployed.'[97] This thesis therefore acknowledges the methodological issues with large-scale analyses of multimedia representation that both Cross and Harper highlight, and accordingly devotes attention exclusively to the medium of film, specifically focussing upon the biopic genre in order to provide a comprehensive investigation into the similarities, differences and wider implications of representation in a particular cultural form. Cinematic representation demands that mental disorder be represented and narrated in particular ways, and this form of representation is heavily influenced by genre codes and expectations,[98] thus vindicating the in-depth genre study undertaken in this thesis.

Where the aforementioned articles by Harper and Cross provide crucial interventions into stagnating debates about accuracy and stigmatising imagery, the calls that both critics make for more studies to ask new research questions of specific media forms and genres has so far gone largely unanswered. Harper's own monograph, *Madness, Power and The Media*,[99] goes a long way to illustrating the new critical approaches that one can adopt when exploring representations of mental distress. Harper here interrogates the changing role of mental illness in contemporary media, discussing mental health issues in relation to wider ideological and political discourses, dedicating individual chapters to cinema, television and print media respectively. Harper's consideration of the intersection between mental disorder in popular media narratives and wider issues of race, class, gender and celebrity culture all serve to illustrate new critical strategies for revitalising investigation into the portrayal of mental illness, and even briefly gestures to the significance of the biopic. As Burgoyne has noted, 'historical films can be seen as part of the ongoing revisionary enterprise of the late twentieth century; they re-enact the narrative of nation in terms of its tributaries, in terms of stories of ethnic, racial, and gender struggles to reshape the national narrative.'[100] As Harper emphasises the significance of cultural discourses

[97] Cross, S. (ibid).
[98] Harper, S. (ibid), p. 464.
[99] Harper, S. (2009) *Madness, Power and the Media: Class, Gender and Race in Popular Representations of Mental Distress*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
[100] Burgoyne, R. (2010) *Film Nation*. p. 6.

pertaining to gender, race and class to understanding mental disorder, and Burgoyne highlights the prominence of these same discourses in the construction of national narrative in the historical film, my focus on the biopic, the most popular form of historical film,[101] mental health and national identity provides a timely critical intervention into both the study of the biopic genre and mental health representation by cross-examining the portrayal of mental disorder in relation to these key concepts, as well as other prominent American cultural narratives.

Given that both the biopic and films focussing on themes of mental health have been subjected to persistent scrutiny concerning their accuracy, the likelihood is that this demand for historical and symptomological veracity would be exacerbated in instances where the two forms combine. Thus it is important that a project considering the convergence of the biopic and mental health representations shows awareness of the accuracy debates, and justifies, as I have done in this literature review, a new critical approach that builds upon these debates and seeks to move into new critical areas of understanding. The biopic and mental health film have both been revitalised in contemporary film culture, exhibiting a rise in 'serious' texts that explore new creative avenues to the genre and representation respectively. This thesis addresses a gap in the scholarship of both fields by considering the significance of the biopic's most recent trend towards mental health themes and contributing a new critical approach towards wider debates surrounding mental health representation beyond reductive arguments of 'positive' or 'negative' images and complaints of inaccuracy perpetuating stigma.

Methodology

Writing about genre in Hollywood cinema, Richard Maltby explains that 'critics place movies into generic categories as a way of dividing up the map of Hollywood cinema into smaller, more manageable, and relatively discrete areas. Their analyses often suggest a cartographer's concern with defining the exact location of the boundary between one genre and another.'[102] Though Maltby goes on to explain that such a hard and fast approach to defining and itemising genres belies the ever-evolving nature of film genres,

[101] Burgoyne, R. (2008) *The Hollywood Historical Film*. P. 39.
[102] Maltby, R. (1999) *Hollywood Cinema*. Oxford: Blackwell. p. 107.

the rhetoric that Maltby employs in the previous quotation is significant here because of its similarities to the types of terms we use when discussing the idea of nation and nationhood. Indeed, as Rick Altman observes, the way in which nations define and identify themselves, and each other, parallels the process by which genres are established.[103] Altman contends that genres and nations are united in their tendencies to defy and complicate their accepted definitions and conventions, in redefining and redirecting their own characteristics, and evolving and developing with great volatility.[104] Ultimately, he concludes, 'against all expectation, genre theory might actually help us think about nations.'[105] As such, my project seeks to think critically about the American nation through close analysis of a contemporary American genre cycle.

The primary methodological approach in my thesis is to engage in close textual analysis of a selection of case study films. Case studies are grouped in terms of subgenre. In the first instance, films were grouped according to the demographic/profession of the biographical subjects represented (for instance, sportspersons, female protagonists, and musicians). Largely these initial groupings exhibited shared or similar narrative, aesthetic and symbolic characteristics, and as such provided for a balanced structure that allowed for three case studies per chapter. An initial consideration of grouping texts by particular disorders proved inefficient, as certain conditions, such as addiction and schizophrenia, appeared more frequently than other disorders like Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) or Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). So as not to prioritise or neglect any condition or disorder over another, and in keeping with the project's larger aim to discuss wider aspects of American national identity through examination of a specific genre, grouping the case studies by subgenre made both practical and theoretical sense.

In each case study, the representation of mental disorder is considered through both narratological and semiotic analysis. The genre studies approach that I adopt in this thesis uses detailed textual analysis to consider the significance of narrative, mise-en-scène, cinematography and perfor-

[103] Altman, R. (1999) *Film/Genre*. London: BFI. p. 86.
[104] ibid. p. 199.
[105] ibid. p. 206.

mance (among other textual elements) in the construction and representation of mental disorder within the biopic. I then discuss these readings in relation to wider socio-cultural discourses of ideology and cultural values associated with American national identity. As my research aims to engage with critical ideas of mental illness representation expressed by psychiatric experts, my project is rooted in a film studies research methodology but with a conscious effort to build upon and involve critical material from other disciplines, particularly psychiatry. At various junctures I draw on critical material from American studies, anthropology, cultural studies, literature, psychiatry, psychology, and critical theory. Also, where useful, my arguments incorporate evidence from written or recorded press interviews with writers, filmmakers and performers, as well as excerpts from popular film reviews in order to inform and support my readings and interpretations. However, the use of this material is relatively infrequent, and does not constitute a major or essential component of my methodology. Rather this material is included where beneficial as secondary evidence to my own textual analyses.

As explained earlier in this introduction, the selection of case studies began with an advanced IMDb search for all American-made feature films that were listed as 'biographical' released between 1999-2012 (the year research for this project began). I then read through the synopsis of every title featured in the search results for any reference to a mental disorder, mental illness, insanity, madness, or obsession. With a shortlist of over twenty-five titles, I viewed as many as were accessible to begin organising, selecting and grouping the films. All but the final of the five chapters in this thesis contains three case-study films, grouped in terms of subgenre or subcategory. However, where relevant I refer to historically relevant films as well as other contemporaneous films from the same subgenre. Aside from subgenre, films have also been grouped according to their engagement with a particular theme associated with the wider discourses of national identity. Thus, where each group of films tends to share aesthetic and narrative qualities congruent with a particular subgenre, my research also shows how these subgenres tend to centre upon particular cultural narratives. For instance, the first chapter considers a selection of neo-classical 'great man' biopics in terms of the representation of mental disorder in relation to wider discourses of patriotism, American exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny. Common

throughout the case studies here is a presentation of the 'great man' as a troubled genius, in which the fine line between genius and madness is blurred in such a way as to unsettle patriotic discourses so often revered by biopics of the studio era. The chapter begins with analysis of *A Beautiful Mind*, in which discussion centres upon the prominence of a Cold War thriller aesthetic that becomes deconstructed throughout the film to enhance the protagonist's schizophrenic point of view. The protagonist, John Nash (Russell Crowe), is a gifted mathematician who believes he is breaking Soviet codes for the Ministry of Defence, and his mental disorder is discussed in terms of its use as a narrative device to interrogate notions of national identity.

I then go on to consider Martin Scorsese's *The Aviator*.[106] My interpretation of the film centres upon Howard Hughes's (Leonardo DiCaprio) constant striving for technological innovation and greatness as a form of pathology reflected by his OCD. I argue that the representation of OCD here serves to critique the USA's pursuing of military and economic world leadership, undermining concepts of virtuous patriotism in times of national crisis. The chapter then concludes with an analysis of *Kinsey*,[107] which focuses upon the eponymous protagonist's obsessive academic research into human sexual behaviour in America. The film stresses the diversity of the American population and challenges religious ideologies towards sexuality, exemplifying how a studio-era aesthetic can be re-appropriated in a progressive manner to juxtapose traditional form with controversial content that is often elided in the 'great man' subgenre.

The next chapter moves on to consider the ways in which narratives of American sports stars in the contemporary biopic have strong ties to ideas surrounding the American family. In the first two case studies, *Foxcatcher*[108] and *The Fighter*,[109] I discuss the prominence of sibling rivalry, as both films tell stories of competitive fighters overshadowed by an older sibling. In each case, the values associated with the American family are found wanting; often disrupted or corrupted by mental disorder, and either, as in

[106] *The Aviator*. (2004) Martin Scorsese (dir.) USA/Germany.
[107] *Kinsey*. (2004) Bill Condon (dir.) USA/Germany.
[108] *Foxcatcher*. (2014) Bennett Miller (dir.) USA.
[109] *The Fighter*. (2010) David O. Russell (dir.) USA.

the case of *The Fighter*, a non-nuclear family dynamic must emerge triumphant, or, as in *Foxcatcher*, all semblance of the family becomes eradicated. The chapter concludes with an examination of *The Blind Side*.[110] The film's interrogation of the nuclear family centres upon an affluent white family that adopts a vulnerable black youth, Michael Oher (Quinton Aaron), who with their nurturing support goes on to be an American Football star. I relate the film's portrayal of Oher's emotional anxiety and vulnerability to key ideas around racial identity, and discuss the representation of the interracial family, which ultimately appears to heal Oher's trauma, as a reconfiguring of the traditional values associated with the nuclear family.

As both Bingham and Polaschek have written about how the female biopic can be seen as a distinct genre, with its own themes, narrative forms and subgenres that separate it from the conventional 'great man' form, it would be an oversight for this thesis to not engage in discussion about the representation female experiences of mental disorder, which is the focus of the third chapter. In my reading of *Girl, Interrupted*,[111] I consider the film's critical view of institutionalisation and mental health definitions. In particular, I interpret the provocative and polemical ways in which gender is a central theme used to disrupt patriarchal understandings of mental illness. The film, set largely in an all-female psychiatric ward, highlights the ways in which mental health discourse has been exploited as a means of maintaining women's lower social standing within a predominantly patriarchal culture. Key ideas in this section are the vague definitions of particular disorders and symptoms that lead to gendered interpretations of what it means to be mentally ill, and notions of the monstrous feminine, especially in relation to wider cultural beliefs in which female sexuality is rendered as deviant.

In the chapter's second case study I further develop my discussion of the monstrous feminine and the pathologisation of female sexuality in regards to *Monster*.[112] Here, the story of 'America's first female serial killer' touches upon a number of the key ideas in which prostitute and serial killer Aileen Wuornos's (Charlize Theron) crimes can be read as monstrous, unfeminine and as a violent rebuke to patriarchal authority. This independently

[110] *The Blind Side*. (2009) John Lee Hancock. (dir.) USA.
[111] *Girl, Interrupted*. (1999) James Mangold (dir.) USA/Germany.
[112] *Monster*. (2003) Patty Jenkins (dir.) USA.

made film holds no punches in using Wuornos's life story as a platform to highlight gender inequalities in American culture, and the portrayal of Wuornos as a figure of unsound mind serves to problematise value judgements and inflect the film's moral ambiguity. The chapter then concludes with a discussion of the Edie Sedgwick biopic *Factory Girl*.[113] In this instance I examine the detrimental impact that fame can have in narratives in mental health (an idea that I carry on further in to the following chapter). Analysis here focuses upon the relationship between Sedgwick and Andy Warhol (Guy Pearce), set against the backdrop of 1960s New York and the postmodern Pop Art scene, in which issues such as homosexuality, female victimisation and experiences of mental disorder and addiction converge.

In the penultimate chapter I discuss the common tropes associated with the popular music biopic. In both *Ray*[114] and *Walk the Line*[115] I contend that the representation of addiction functions as a critique of the notion of celebrity. This chapter builds upon the key discourses of race and class by exploring their intersection with other American cultural narratives. *Ray* and *Walk the Line* are also important for their depictions of the American South and attitudes towards race and class that construct the South as what William H. Epstein refers to as 'an imagined domestic-regional space of internal "orientalism".'[116] As American national identity is a discursive concept that ostensibly suggests a universal cohesion between diverse and disparate communities across the nation, it is important to illustrate how this discourse in the biopic is complicated through the portrayal of cultural and ideological differences dependant on location and regionality. *Ray* and *Walk the Line* present narratives of troubled celebrities struggling to balance domestic life with life on the road, who are ultimately redeemed by their Christianity. However, the chapter's consideration of *The Soloist*[117] explores the representation of schizophrenia in relation to racial disparities in America (drawing on a number of psychiatric studies that have investigated the relationship between mental health, racism, and ethnicity), and the connec-

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[114] *Ray*. (2004) Taylor Hackford (dir.) USA.
[115] *Walk the Line*. (2005) James Mangold (dir.) USA/Germany.
[116] Epstein, W. (2011) Introduction: Biopics and American National Identity – Invented Lives, Imagined Communities. *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*. Vol. 26(1) p. 6.
[117] *The Soloist*. (2007) Joe Wright (dir.) USA/France/UK.

tions between religious belief and mental health discourse that ultimately undermine and contradict the rags-to-riches narratives present in the chapter's other case studies.

Dennis Bingham's work centres upon the evolution of the contemporary biopic into a diverse genre capable of self-reflexivity, parody and pastiche. To this end, Bingham concludes his book with a consideration of *I'm Not There*, which represents something of an endgame for the biopic genre. Bingham's discussion of the various postmodern characteristics of the film, as well as a thorough and insightful set of historical elucidations that contextualise the film's many aesthetic and thematic tropes. My chapter here builds on Bingham's consideration of the film, exploring how these postmodern approaches to biographical narrative are articulated via mental health discourse (an aspect of the film that Bingham does not address). *I'm Not There* is discussed in relation to its interplay with mental health and gender discourses, with a reading of the film that suggests that by casting a female performer in a male role, and drawing attention to the character's androgyny, the gendered tropes that inflect the way that mental disorder is traditionally represented are ultimately challenged and undermined within the film.

I also consider an interesting counter-discourse to the largely medicalised, clinical, representations of mental disorder that are prevalent in the majority of the other case studies. Where most of the films in this thesis are sutured to medical discourses of representation, many of the surrealist and experimental sequences in *I'm Not There* appear to create a tension between this medical perspective and the more historical associations between art, creativity and delirium, in which many notable historical artists and writers would intentionally enter delirious hallucinatory states in order to enhance their creativity. The reason that I consider the film on its own here is that it a text so rich and loaded with creative subversions and challenges to the traditions and conventions of the biopic that truncating analysis here in order to incorporate other postmodern experimental examples would lead to a rather limited or superficial analysis, and by fully-developing my analysis enables for a better contribution to the dialogue of what is certainly a flagship text within the biopic genre.

Finally, I conclude by summarising the scholarly achievements that this thesis has made. I engage with the ongoing and developing nature of the film cycle of biopics focussed upon subjects' experiences of mental disorder in reference to a number of other films that were not featured in the case study chapters, as a means of exemplifying how the ideas and critical interventions in this thesis are not holistically contained to the borders of the textual analyses undertaken here, but are instead applicable and relevant to wider understandings of the biopic as a site for interrogating mental disorder and American national identity.

Chapter One: Patriotism, Ambition and Mental Disorder in the Neo-classical 'Great Man' Biopic

In representing the life stories of some of America's most notable, celebrated and influential individuals, the biopic is open to questions and interpretations concerning ideology, national identity, and patriotism. In much of the literature discussing the foundations and construction of American national identity one also often encounters the notion of American exceptionalism. A term coined by travelling wealthy European intellectuals to describe the cultural distinctiveness of the 'American experience', central to the concept of exceptionalism is the idea that the United States, as a nation, is qualitatively different in comparison to other countries, that it stands alone as an ontologically unique culture.[118] Whilst this cultural characterisation is not predicated on the notion that the United States is superior to other nations, at times this misconception has been propagated, particularly by right wing neo-liberal advocates and American political leaders attempting to curry favour from the public by appealing to the inherent patriotism attached to the ideology of exceptionalism.

It can be argued that exceptionalism represents something of a paradox. Cultural theorist Seymour Martin Lipset contends that American exceptionalism can be traced back to the idea of the United States as 'the first new nation', in that the country was the first to be successfully formed as the result of a revolution, whose ideological *raison d'être* was centred on notions of egalitarianism, freedom, and liberty.[119] The paradox though emerges when we consider that this 'qualitative difference', which does not itself connote superiority, is frequently appropriated in such a way as to foster a sense of the United States as a global superpower. President Ronald Reagan's farewell address in 1989 typified this form of hyper-patriotic, almost nationalistic, discourse, in which he referenced Puritan pilgrim John Winthrop's famous description of America as 'a shining city upon a hill', and postulated its connotations of freedom, and its symbolism as a 'beacon'

[118] Lipset, S, M. (1996) *American Exceptionalism: A Double Edged Sword*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company: p. 18.
[119] ibid.

of hope.[120] In his critique of American exceptionalism, Stephen M. Walt claims that:

> The United States has enjoyed remarkable success, and Americans tend to portray their rise to world power as a direct result of the political foresight of the Founding Fathers, the virtues of the U.S. Constitution, the priority placed on individual liberty, and the creativity and hard work of the American people. In this narrative, the United States enjoys an exceptional global position today because it is, well, *exceptional* (original italics).[121]

Throughout his article, Walt argues that exceptionalism is a belief that has become deeply entrenched within American mythology. Whilst Walt is sceptical of political rhetoric that strongly invokes ideas of exceptionalism his analysis is important in highlighting the ubiquity of fervent patriotism in contemporary American culture and politics, perhaps typified in the contemporary context by the widespread support of Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, whose campaign slogan 'Make America Great Again' is specifically designed to appeal to ingrained patriotic beliefs in ideologies like American exceptionalism.

As the extract above illustrates, one of the key means of expressing and reaffirming the ideals and patriotic values of America in popular culture is through the celebration of virtuous historical figures such as the nation's Founding Fathers and reverence of legal and political institutions such as the U.S. Constitution. I would argue that biographical cinema has, and continues to play, a prominent role in the propagation and reassertion of the cultural ideologies of patriotic discourse, such as American exceptionalism, individualism and manifest destiny (a recent biopic such as Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln*[122] is a useful contemporary example here). For Deborah L.

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[120] Transcript of Ronald Reagan's farewell address: [Internet] Available at <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreaganfarewelladdress.html> [Accessed 27/06/2014]

[121] Walt, S, M. (2011) The Myth of American Exceptionalism. *Foreign Policy Magazine*. [Internet] Available at <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/the_myth_of_american_exceptionalism?page=0,0> [Accessed 4/4/2013].

[122] *Lincoln* (2012) Steven Spielberg (dir.), USA.

Madsen 'the history of America is a history of redemption – of individuals as well as of the nation itself – and this commitment to America as an exceptional nation is reflected in the way the lives of public leaders have been written as continuing the spiritual biography of America'.[123] This is an important aspect not only of this chapter, but indeed one of the central arguments of my thesis as a whole. If, as Madsen claims, depictions of the American nation are made up via tapestries of individual narratives of leading public figures, lending their cultural capital to the national narrative, then the biopic genre has a vital cultural function in reasserting, scrutinising, or challenging the patriotic ideals of national identity and character.

In particular, 1930s films focussing on pioneers of science, military and industry have become the archetypal historical example of the biopic's capacity for over-zealous celebration of national character, typified by the successes of individual 'great men'. This chapter focuses upon three examples of contemporary 'great men' films that conform to a neoclassical style. Bingham defines the post-millennial wave of neoclassical biopics as characterised by homage to the traditional aesthetics and conventions of studio-era biopics, especially the 'great man' style.[124] However, the key distinction between the celebratory format of the majority of studio-era biopics and contemporary neoclassical examples is the current emphasis on the 'warts-and-all' approach to the subject, in which personal turmoil and tribulations serve to add greater complexity and intrigue to the characters; exploring the great man's flaws.[125]

The analyses in this chapter explore particular instances in which the 'warts-and-all' portrayal of each great man is epitomised by the character's struggle with mental disorder. To this end I aim to analyse how the representation of mental disorders in these films inflects the cinematic expression of patriotic discourse. The chapter will centre on three case study texts: *A Beautiful Mind, The Aviator,* and *Kinsey.* In the first instance, to large degrees these films, in keeping with the essence of the 1930s biopic style they so heavily employ, all narrate the disorders of their protagonists in a manner

[123] Madsen, D, L. (1998) *American Exceptionalism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. p. 14
[124] Bingham, D. (2010) Whose Lives Are They Anyway? p. 6.
[125] ibid.

that emphasises the heroic qualities of their characters. John Nash (Russell Crowe), Howard Hughes (Leonardo DiCaprio), and Alfred Kinsey (Liam Neeson) are all characters portrayed as making significant contributions to the development of the American nation, and in some instances their deeds go on to have notable international impact.

One of the difficulties in considering American exceptionalism, and other aspects of American national identity such as individualism and manifest destiny, in these analyses is that it is perhaps a stretch to claim that such ideologies have a tangible presence in the everyday lived experiences of national character and identity. Compared to some of the other aspects of (national) identity considered in this thesis, such as gender, sexuality, race, and religion, which are explicitly lived experiences that impact and inflect the embodiment of national sensibilities on a day-to-day level, concepts and terms like exceptionalism and manifest destiny exist in the more mythological or allegorical realms of national identity, and thus, despite their frequency in political rhetoric, it is difficult to assert that such metanarratives alone are illustrative of national character. This chapter therefore focuses upon the slightly broader notion of patriotism, as the inherent affective connection to a nation implied by the term pertains to the lived experience of national identity to a much greater extent. However, the consideration of patriotism also allows for such issues as exceptionalism and manifest destiny to not be totally discarded, as in relation to patriotic feeling these ideas have a broader relevance to popular conceptions of national self-image and esteem. Therefore, consideration of patriotism here allows for a focus upon a more visible lived experience of national identity that also contextualises some of the more nebulous metanarratives associated with political discourse. Indeed, as will be demonstrated throughout the forthcoming analyses, the depictions of mental disorders in these films allow for interpretations that destabilise and critique the significance of such ambiguous myths of national character.

A Beautiful Mind: Paranoia, Perspective and Patriotic Discourse

In the opening scene of *A Beautiful Mind* we see John Nash attending his introductory lecture as a new mathematics doctorate student at Princeton. His professor exclaims that ‘mathematicians won the war [WWII], mathematicians broke the Japanese codes and built the A-Bomb.’

He continues, 'the stated goal of the Soviets is global Communism...who among you will be the vanguard of democracy, freedom and discovery? Today we bequeath America's future into your able hands.' This introductory scene fulfils the typical role of establishing the time period of the film and identifying the central protagonist (emphasised through a gradual crane in to close-up shot of Nash), but also clearly stresses the significance of Cold War anxiety as a prominent narrative theme. The early establishment of this sense of Cold War paranoia is essential in enabling the film to mask Nash's paranoia (which we only later discover is a symptom of his paranoid schizophrenia) as a nationwide anxiety rather than personal distress. Thus, from the outset we are encouraged to view the character of Nash as a representative for the national mindset.

The early events of the film follow Nash struggling desperately to discover the 'original idea' for his doctorate. The pressure to be truly innovative in his work is shown as being incredibly stressful and takes its toll on him, often leading to emotional outbursts and minor self-violent acts. Eventually though, Nash has his epiphany whilst studying in a bar and discussing with his peers the properties of competitive behaviour within economic theory. As a result of his breakthrough in Game Theory economics, Nash becomes enlisted as a consulting code-breaker for the Department of Defense. With its Cold War time period and elements of mystery and suspense that are derived from Nash's code-breaking, the film presents a pseudo Cold War thriller narrative that is eventually revealed as being a construct of Nash's paranoid schizophrenia. The seemingly real and believable thriller narrative is enhanced through the use of familiar film noir iconography, such as lingering high angle shots (figure 1.1), high contrast chiaroscuro lighting and the use of venetian blinds as a means of creating unique lighting patterns (figure 1.2). Other conventions, such as car chases, shootouts, period specific costume and nuclear weapon anxieties contribute to the film's noir aesthetic.

The appropriation of film noir iconography in this instance highlights one of the pivotal, and perhaps slightly mystifying, aspects of the biopic genre. Given that, by and large, the genre is dependent upon historical recreation and re-enactment, which inevitably depends on character, place and period, the genre is somewhat notorious for its chameleon-like nature,

leading Neale to claim that the genre 'lack[s] a specific iconography'.[126] For some critics, this absence of a unique iconography has been enough to disavow the biopic's status as a unique film genre. However, in many ways the biopic's penchant for bricolage and hybridity, as well as its multi-generic capabilities are indeed what set it apart from conventional expectations of many other film genres.

Nash's exceptional talent as a code-breaker appears both noble and valiant, as he is presented as using his natural gift for mathematics to help combat the looming threat of Communism. One of the central affirmations of this comes just after Nash deciphers intercepted Russian radio codes, in which a military officer tells him 'you've done your country a great service son.' This clearly exemplifies how Nash's giftedness articulates patriotic virtues (freedom and the preservation of liberty), as Nash embodies one half of a symbiotic effort between civilian and military resources in keeping Communism at bay. However, the longer Nash participates in code breaking, the more paranoid he becomes that he and his family are in danger from Soviet spies.

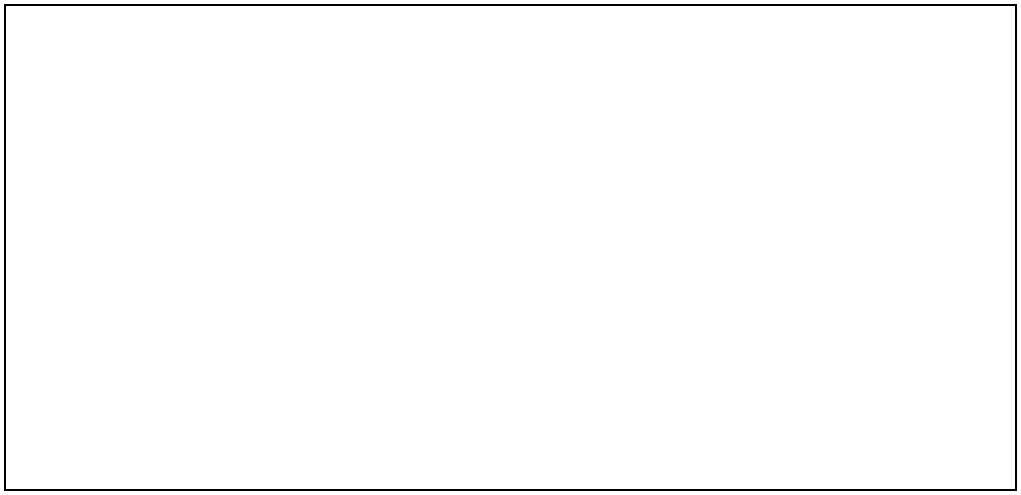

Figure 1.1: Use of high-angled long shot to create a film noir aesthetic in *A Beautiful Mind* (Directed by Ron Howard: 2001, Universal Pictures, DreamWorks SKG, Imagine Entertainment)

[126] Neale, S. (2000) *Genre and Hollywood*. Oxon: Routledge. p. 14.

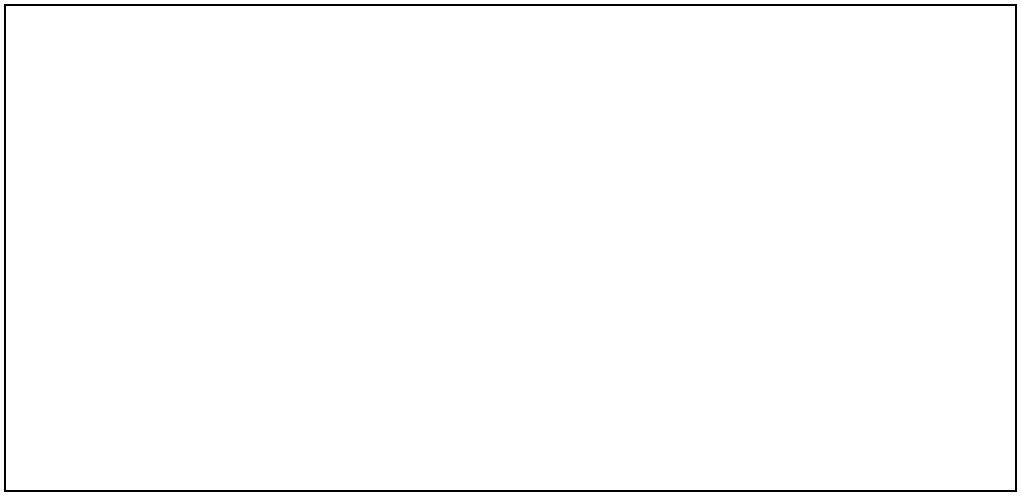

Figure 1.2: Venetian blinds and chiaroscuro lighting are further examples of the film noir style cinematography that heighten the sense of Nash's paranoia. (Directed by Ron Howard: 2001, Universal Pictures, DreamWorks SKG, Imagine Entertainment)

However, once Nash's schizophrenia becomes known to the audience, following his enforced incarceration in a psychiatric ward at the request of his wife Alicia (Jennifer Connelly), the noir aesthetic and pseudo Cold War narrative become subverted and deconstructed, and serve as a contrast between reality and the delusions generated by Nash's disorder. Viewers are initially aligned to Nash's point of view, and experience his heightening sense of paranoia alongside him, believing that his safety is in jeopardy and that Soviet agents are closing in on him. The revelation that Nash's paranoia has actually been due to his, hitherto, undiagnosed schizophrenia serves then to implicate the medium of film itself in constructing a schizophrenic perspective for the audience, a perspective that is eventually shown as a false construct once Nash's point of view is broken.[127] For example, during Nash's institutionalisation the perspective shifts to that of Alicia as she retraces Nash's path to the drop-off box where he earlier believed he was leaving confidential data pertaining to codes he had deciphered. What Alicia finds, however, is not an infrared scanner that Nash believed was to view key-codes embedded in his arm, but rather a rusty and broken inter-com box that clearly has long been defunct. The gates that automatically open once Nash inputs the key-code also turn out to be in fact rusted

[127] In one of the *A Beautiful Mind* DVD extras, director Ron Howard describes this effect as 'the audience [having] the rug pulled out from under them, in the same way that John Nash does." Thus highlighting his attempt to forge an alignment between viewers and John Nash in the early stages of the film.

and hanging from their hinges, and Alicia discovers that the numerous classified envelopes that he had dispatched are uncollected and have been damaged by the weather.

Fredric Jameson uses the term Schizophrenic not in a medicalised sense, but rather as a means of articulating one of the primary cultural characteristics that for him typifies the concept of postmodernism. For Jameson, the schizophrenic is the antithesis of the modernist principal of 'paranoia', in which the construction of the ego creates a sense that events are happening to, and in orbit of, an individual. The schizophrenic therefore, in Jameson's view, is the shattering of this perspective, a breaking down of a tied narrative.[128] A narrative of multiple inputs replaces that which we may consider to have been a singular perspective. In this way then, though Jameson's contention employs schizophrenia as a non-medicalised discursive descriptor, arguably the shift in perspective that occurs within the narrative of *A Beautiful Mind,* in which Nash's diagnosis with paranoid schizophrenia shatters the audience's shared gaze with Nash, forges a somewhat serendipitous link between Jameson's philosophical rumination on the schizophrenic and the cinematic representation of Nash's mental disorder. As the signifying tropes that codified the film as being recognisably noir in its aesthetic become degraded and dissolved after Nash's condition is revealed to both him and the audience, the narrative becomes much more focused upon the impact that his illness has upon Nash's home life. In the second half of the film, far fewer close-up shots of Nash's face are used, as well as a reduction in the amount of shots featuring only Nash. Instead there is an increased frequency in two-shots and wide shots featuring multiple characters. Therefore, a multiplicity of perspectives become mobilised within the film, and it can be argued that the film's shift in representation (in which the depiction of Nash's illness is much more medicalised in comparison to the emphasis on Cold War paranoia in earlier scenes) creates, in Jamesonian terms, a schizophrenic perspective.

Where initially the slick noir iconography serves to enhance the sense of Nash as actively patriotic, in that he is contributing to the greater good of America as one of the 'vanguard of democracy [and] freedom' by

[128] Roberts, A. (2000) *Routledge Critical Thinkers: Fredric Jameson*. London: Routledge. p. 123.

helping resist the threat of communism, as Nash's schizophrenia becomes more visible and overwhelming for him the ideals of selfless patriotic exceptionalism can be seen to be critiqued. In one scene Nash speaks to Department of Defense officer William Parcher (Ed Harris) about the consequences of the Manhattan Project (which Parcher is alleged to have supervised). Where Nash articulates an unquestioning belief that deploying the atom bomb was an unavoidable strategic move which served a greater purpose and ultimately won the war, Parcher appears more troubled and ambivalent, stating that 'we incinerated 150,000 people in a heartbeat...conviction, it turns out, is a luxury of those on the side lines.'

This dialogue exchange ostensibly uses the historical context of WWII nuclear weapons deployment in Japan as a means of making an ideological statement in relation to the contemporary Cold War setting. In the context of the heightening nuclear anxieties in Cold War America this problematising of the moral implications of using nuclear weaponry articulates an anti-nuclear perspective. However, once the peripeteia of Nash's schizophrenia is revealed and Parcher is identified as a hallucinatory figure that Nash has unknowingly formulated due to his schizophrenia, the intricacies of the atomic bomb argument exhibited in this scene are undermined because of their association to Nash's inability to properly conceive of reality. What follows from this is a further deconstruction of the Cold War iconography, which becomes particularly explicit when Nash begins to believe that his psychiatrist is working for the Soviets to convince him he is crazy so he will no longer work for the government. Believing this, Nash secretly stops taking his medication and his hallucinations return. Nash believes that Parcher has set up a radio and communications operation in his derelict shed so he can work at home in secret. The mise-en-scène in his shed stands in stark contrast to the large and modern warehouse facility that Nash had originally constructed as part of his delusion (figure 1.3). As Nash's delusions become less tenable and increasingly detached from reality, so too the theme of nuclear anxiety that is so prevalent in the first act of the film be-

comes undermined and is ultimately replaced by what Stephen Harper calls a 'struggling genius' theme. [129]

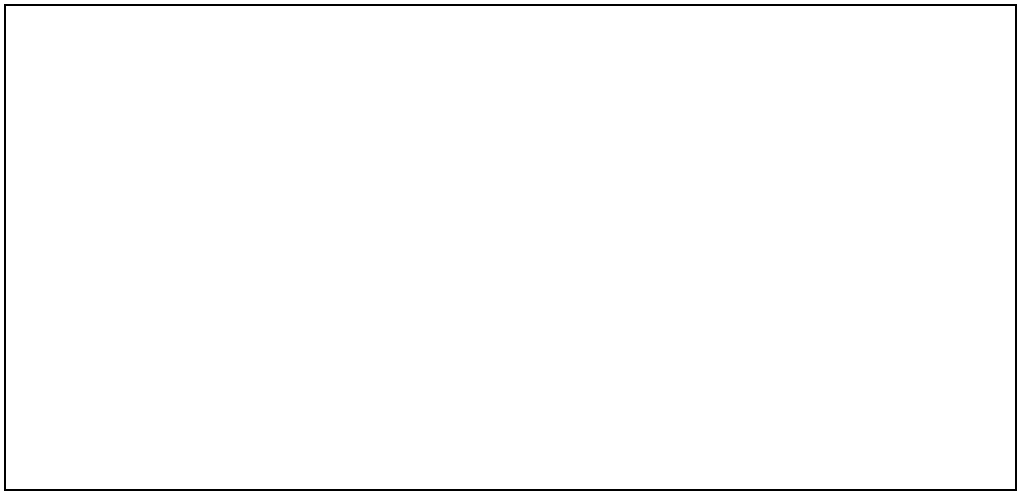

Figure 1.3: Nash's imaginary communications shelter in his garden shed differs greatly from the initial command centre in the warehouse facility. The deconstructed noir aesthetic thus coincides with Nash's deteriorating mental condition. (Directed by Ron Howard: 2001, Universal Pictures, DreamWorks SKG, Imagine Entertainment)

Ultimately though, Nash's heroic persona becomes re-established and redefined. Whilst it transpires that he is not in fact contributing to an American triumph in Cold War conflict with the Soviets, Nash's cultural intervention becomes cemented through winning the Nobel Prize. Despite his brief relapse, Nash's strained family life, and the risk of losing his family because of his instability, helps him realise that his condition needs intense treatment, and eventually he is able to manage his symptoms and take up a teaching position at Princeton. When the now elderly Nash is informed that he is being considered for the prize, he takes tea in the staff tearoom at Princeton. As he does so other academics begin to lay their pens on the table in front of him. Earlier, during scenes of Nash's doctoral studies, we are informed that the ceremonious act of laying down the pens symbolises acknowledgement from peers that a member of the department has made the achievement of a lifetime. It is at this point then that Nash's unique contribution to American, and indeed global, culture is confirmed, as he is told, 'your equilibrium has become the cornerstone of modern economics.' This

[129] Harper, S. (2009) *Madness, Power and the Media: Class, Gender and Race in Popular Representations of Mental Distress*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 74.

scene also appears to symbolise Nash's triumph over his mental disorder. Sam Khorrami explains 'at that moment [the laying of the pens], despite his internal battles, Nash is hailed as the conquering hero, and his former rivals all symbolically offer up their intellectual weapons.'[130]

In reforming Nash's characterisation to that of an all-conquering hero *A Beautiful Mind* is strongly evocative of American cultural mythology. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech towards the denouement, Nash states:

> What truly is logic? Who decides reason? My quest has taken me through the physical, the metaphysical, the delusional...and back...it is only in the mysterious equations of love that any logical reasons can be found.

The quest that Nash refers to in this statement can be interpreted as a form of revisionist hero's journey that has been a familiar trope in American cinema. Where classical Westerns have been noted for their exploration of Manifest Destiny, often articulated by the cowboy's journey through the wilderness of the American landscape, Nash's journey is represented as an internalised journey through the wilderness of his delusional mind. This journey culminates in his apparent triumph from the throes of his condition, which he attributes to the devotion of his loving wife. Director Ron Howard, speaking on a bonus feature documentary available on the special edition DVD of *A Beautiful Mind,* states that 'the real challenge was that we needed to evoke the inner landscape of Nash's mind'. According to Roderick Nash, terms such as 'landscape' and 'wilderness' hold symbolic and mythological connotations inherent to the construction of American national identity: '[the] uncontrolled nature could be beautiful…[and] certainly it had a lot to do with American character and tradition and, possibly, with mental health in an increasingly complex civilisation.'[131] What emerges in *A Beautiful Mind,* then, is a film of multiple and hybridised generic elements. If, as Paul Schrader has argued, film noir of the 1940s moved away from American

[130] Khorrami, S. (2002) Genius, Madness and Masculinity: A Beautiful Mind Examined Through a Men's Issue Model. *Men and Masculinities.* Vol. 5 (1), p. 118.
[131] Nash, R. (2001) *Wilderness & the American Mind*. 4th Edition. London: Yale University Press: p. ixv.

cinema's affinity with frontierism towards themes of paranoia,[132] then *A Beautiful Mind* creates a juxtaposition between the classical Hollywood mythology of the heroic journey through the (mental) wilderness and the aesthetics of a genre that historically focussed more on psychological themes, film noir. What this internalised quest also highlights is the problematic nature of deploying terminology like exceptionalism and manifest destiny in critical discussions of American national identity. Nash's heroic journey is a psychological quest that parallels the motifs of manifest destiny, typifying the ethereal nature of such myths, as they are inherently unseeable and intangible, and yet simultaneously such themes are frequent fare in articulating the greatness of great men in the contemporary American biopic.

In the aforementioned 'making-of' documentary, producer Brian Grazer explains one the central complications of the film's pre-production, 'how do we make thought visceral and real? If we could deal with the multiple realities and give it a thriller context it would make the movie a visceral experience so an audience could relate to it.' Grazer's comments reflect one of the more broadly philosophical questions when it comes to representing mental illness in film. How does one visually depict something that is, by nature, unseeable? As such, questions of accuracy and inaccuracy in representation are ultimately undermined by the inherent unknowableness of the subject matter to most cinemagoers, given that the majority of those who see the film will not have first-hand experience of schizophrenia. In an interview for Al Jazeera TV, the real John Nash stated 'I don't regard [the film] as giving accurate information about me as a particular person…I think maybe it's very helpful in relation to mental illness, it illustrates a case of mental illness and how there might be a favourable outcome over a period of time.'[133] This statement highlights how the film's treatment of mental illness, and its depiction of a life-story, defies scrutiny in regards to discourses of fidelity. In the same interview, John Nash explains that the hallucinated characters in the film, including Parcher, were visions that he never saw, and that indeed he has never had visual hallucinations, but rather his main symptom is hearing voices. Therefore, with Grazer's comments in

[132] Schrader, P. (1972) Notes on Film Noir. *Film Comment*. Vol. 8(1), p. 11.
[133] Khan, R. (2009) *One on One: Professor John Nash Part 1*. [Internet] Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UiWBWwCa1E0> [Accessed 30/05/2014]

mind, it can be argued that the decision to represent those voices as visual characters within the film exploits the visual nature of cinema in order to make the experience of mental illness more tangible for viewers.

Undoubtedly then John Nash is represented as a character of exceptional significance, and is heralded as a prominent American historical figure. The narrative techniques used to illustrate this have a lengthy lineage in Western cultural tradition. The axis of genius and madness, clearly on display in *A Beautiful Mind*, has a history dating back to the musings of Socrates and Plato, in particular articulating that the most gifted and creative minds are those that have been 'touched by madness' (see Zimmerman[134] and Griffith[135]). Leo Lowenthal has noted that the use of references to Greek mythology was a popular means to express the spectacular aspects of subject's lives in magazine biographies of the early 20th century,[136] and certainly the association with genius and madness that stems from ancient Greek philosophy can be seen as an extension of such a technique in this instance.

A Beautiful Mind also appears to conform to the popular narrative resolution that love conquers all, including mental illness.[137] However, it is worth noting that John Nash's arrest for homosexual activities in a public restroom, as well as other homosexual acts during his life, is omitted from the film. As a result of its absence homosexuality is somewhat pathologised (a thought that will be developed in my consideration of *Kinsey*, which offers some interesting counterpoints to themes expressed in *A Beautiful Mind*), and instead it is asserted that only within hetero-normative relationships can love be therapeutic. Nevertheless, while this is clearly problematic, it is undoubtable that *A Beautiful Mind* celebrates John Nash as a heroic and exceptional patriot, one that 'has been transformed into a hero in the

[134] Zimmerman, J, N. (2003) *People Like Ourselves: Portrayals of Mental Illness in the Movies*. Oxford: Scarecrow Press. p. 91.
[135] Griffith, M, B. (2011) Alternate Reality Conceptualisation: Venturing Along the Fine Line Between Genius and Madness. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*. Vol. 62, pp. 624-631.
[136] Lowenthal, L. (1944). Biographies in Popular Magazines. *Radio Research: 1942-43*. Lazarsfeld, P. & Stanton, F. (eds.) New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce. p. 541.
[137] Remington, P. (2010) Twelve Pages of Madness: Development of Cinema's Narration of Insanity. In: Billias, N. (ed.) *Promoting and Producing Evil*. Amsterdam: Rodopi. p. 157-158.

mould of all American heroes'.[138] Where initially Nash's delusions make him believe he is fighting the war on Communism, and hallucinatory characters on numerous occasions praise him for fulfilling his patriotic civic duty and serving his country (clearly illustrating that within Nash's delusions of grandeur he is subconsciously trying to reassure himself that he is patriotic, and therefore using his talents to make a meaningful contribution to the nation), ultimately Nash's heroic virtues are confirmed through his triumph over the adversity of mental disorder, conforming to broader ideals that fundamentally ratify the resilience and determination of the individual human spirit.

The Aviator: Obsession and the Pursuit of Perfection

In its representation of mental disorder *The Aviator* offers several concomitant themes to that of *A Beautiful Mind*, but at times complicates the underlying ideologies and mythology of national identity to a greater extent. Ultimately, the film's depiction of maverick filmmaker and aviation entrepreneur Howard Hughes emphasises his extraordinary achievements and historical significance. As David Courtwright contends, 'the chief virtue of...*The Aviator* is that it restores Hughes to his rightful place as one of America's great aviation visionaries.'[139] However, the film also pulls no punches in using Hughes's mental fragility and pathological drive to succeed as a cautionary tale for the dangers of ambition and desire for greatness. Scorsese's painstaking recreation of the 1920s and 1930s Hollywood machine in the film opens palpable aesthetic and thematic comparisons between the contemporary neoclassical form of the film and the era that it diligently refashions. Hughes's unconventional filmmaking ethos and aviation achievements appear to typify the personal characteristics that render him an American icon. After becoming the 'fastest man on the planet' in a custom-built plane, a news-reel montage sequence lauds Hughes as 'a daring aviator' and 'a true pioneer of the world's airways', proclaiming him to be outdoing in life what Jules Verne could only imagine in fiction. This media sensationalism is ev-

[138] Roberts, R. (2011) *Real to Reel: Psychiatry at the Cinema*. Herefordshire: PCCS Books: p.55.
[139] Courtwright, D, T. (2005) The Aviator. *The Journal of American History*. Vol. 92(3), p. 1092.

er-present in the film, and is precisely what Katherine Hepburn (Cate Blanchett), Hughes's fiancé at the time, begins to grow concerned about. His rising fame and media presence leads her to claim that both she and Hughes will be turned into 'freaks', anticipating and anxious of the shifting cultural landscape towards pathologising celebrity figures (which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 of this thesis).[140]

In much the same way as John Nash's triumphant quest through the wilderness of his mind represents a retelling and internalisation of the classic Hollywood hero's journey, re-appropriating the tropes associated with manifest destiny, Hughes's innovations and inroads in aviation appear to serve a similar narrative function. Conquering the skies and achieving global circumnavigation in record times appears to celebrate American prominence in the expansion of global and intercontinental travel, and the nation's world-leading innovations as a rapidly developing technologized-society. In *The Aviator* it is the sky that becomes the modern wilderness, an emerging frontier for exploration and cultivation. Emphasis on air travel in this way is analogous to the significance of 'The Space Race' to national pride in the 1950s and 1960s, in which outer space became the venue for the continuation of the pattern of expansionism in American culture. This motif of the sky as the new frontier is constructed through a series of aerial sequences that show Hughes flying planes, in which the camera is frequently positioned above his plane so the high-angle shots juxtapose the plane with the barren and arid desert topography below (figure 1.4). That these early aerial sequences always show Hughes flying solo, we can interpret as a straightforward metaphor for his 'spirit of rugged individualism', in which Hughes 'challenge[s] the American status quo…but [is also] unwilling to discard frontier values'.[141] Indeed Hughes's never-say-die attitude and refusal to be restrained by either financial or technical limitations in developing his air-

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[140] Hepburn's fear of her and Hughes being turned into freaks is very similar to one of the prominent themes of *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles [dir.]: 1941, USA). Much in the same way that Charles Foster Kane (Orson Welles) becomes a figure of simultaneous fascination and mockery through media and journalistic sensationalism, Hepburn fears this to be Hughes's fate. This is just one of a number of ways that *Citizen Kane* can be seen as an influential text on the style and narrative of *The Aviator* (no doubt as a result of Martin Scorsese's well-known status as a knowledgeable cinephile).

[141] Cashmore, E. (2009) *Martin Scorsese's America.* Cambridge: Polity Press. p. 267.

craft and directing his movies epitomises the kind of individual endeavour that makes him an icon of resilience and determination; perfectly illustrated through his personal mantra, 'don't tell me it can't be done'.

Ultimately though, Hughes's affliction with OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) is heavily associated with his personal sense of perfectionism and endeavour, in a way that becomes allegorical of a wider sense of national character. For Ellis Cashmore, Scorsese is a filmmaker whose career has been built upon a fascination with obsessive characters, and in making films about obsessives 'he contrives to make films about the society in which they operate and which gives rise to their obsessions.'[142] Despite his uncompromising ambition and drive for success, and his insistence upon constant development and improvement, all ostensibly admirable traits (particularly within the American mindset), it is these very characteristics that exacerbate Hughes's OCD, obfuscating the distinction between ambitious non-conformism and pathological obsessive.

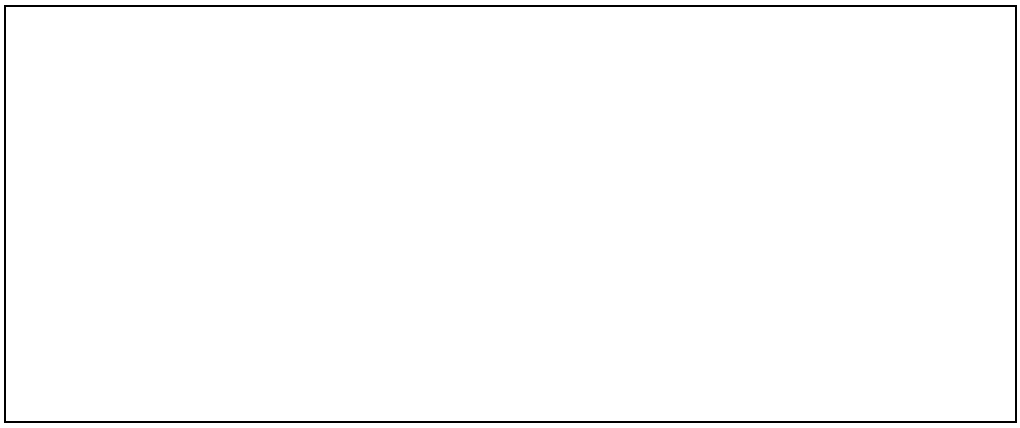

Figure 1.4: Hughes's plane positioned against the backdrop of the desert landscape. Hughes's expansion into the new wilderness (the sky) is contrasted against the landscape that has historically served as the motif of Manifest Destiny in American cultural mythology. (*The Aviator*. Directed by Martin Scorsese: 2004; Forward Pass, Appian Way, IMF, IEG, Warner Bros., Miramax)

In the film's finale we see a flashback, a familiar device for truncating and reiterating key moments in the biographical subject's life, in which

[142] ibid. p. 4.

Hughes, in the midst of an episode, [143] sees a vision of his childhood self in a mirror (referring back to the film's opening scene). The young Hughes proclaims, 'when I grow up, I'm going to fly the fastest planes, make the biggest movies ever, and be the richest man in the world' (figure 1.5). This ambition to be the fastest, biggest and richest appears to coincide with many of the capitalist ideals of mainstream American culture, and the juxtaposition of this with the adult Hughes's relapse into mental breakdown offers a critique of such ingrained values. Lowenthal contends that in magazine biographies of the early-to-mid 20th Century the biographical subject's childhood 'was a midget edition, a predated publication of a man's profession and career. A man is an actor, a doctor, a dancer, an entrepreneur, and he always was…he came into the world and stayed in it, rubber stamped with and for a certain function.'[144] In this manner, the young Hughes's insistence that he will be the world's richest man, fly the fastest planes and make the biggest movies, instils him with a sense of pre-ordained greatness. Indeed the use of such superlative language in talking about his aspirations coincides with Lowenthal's findings that historical magazine biographies often sought to legitimate the greatness of their subject by using superlatives to imbue them with mythological qualities, emphasising the sense of the character's legend and destiny.[145] However, in the contemporary form, though great men may still overwhelmingly be shown to fulfil their destinies and grasp their place in the pantheon of American history, of equal if not greater interest is the extent to which they suffer for that place, and in Hughes's case that suffering stems from his psychological vulnerability.

[143] In this case I refer to the medical definition of 'episode', that is 'a single noteworthy happening in the course of a longer series of events, such as one critical period of several during a prolonged illness.' Hughes's episodes (he has several during the film) show him unable to stop repeating particular phrases, and as these individual occurrences are part of the ongoing development of his OCD, we can class them as 'episodes'. (Definition taken from http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/_/dict.aspx?word=episode [Accessed 24/4/2013]).

[144] Lowenthal, L. (1944). Biographies in Popular Magazines. p. 530.

[145] ibid. p. 541.

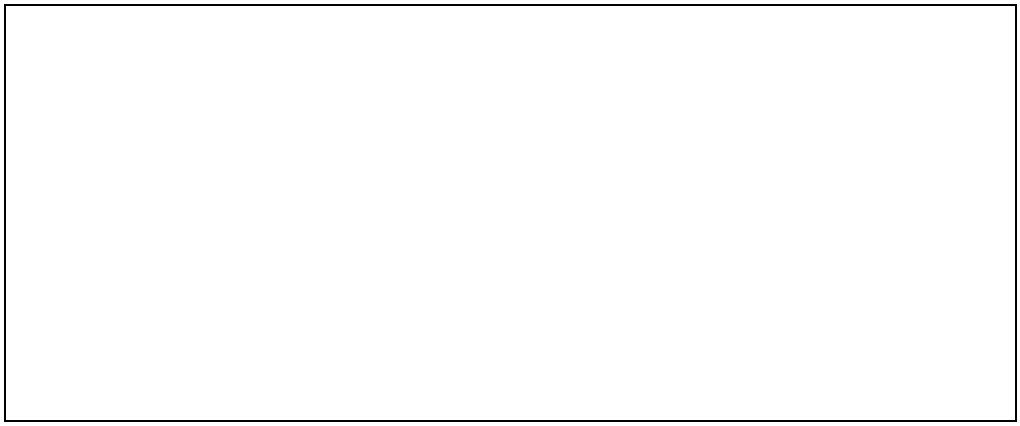

Figure 1.5: The reflection of his childhood self tethers Hughes's mental disorder to his childhood ambitions for faster planes, bigger movies and greater wealth. (Directed by Martin Scorsese: 2004; Forward Pass, Appian Way, IMF, IEG, Warner Bros., Miramax)

Although Hughes certainly succeeds in many of the ambitions and business endeavours he outlined as a child, the film suggests these successes have come at the expense of his mental health and wellbeing. Hughes's final episode sees him unable to stop repeating the phrase 'the way of the future' (he was initially discussing the development of jet plane technologies, but became unable to stop repeating the phrase). His scarred and tired face is the only visible component of the final shot, emphasising his trauma and the toll that his escapades have taken upon his mental and physical wellbeing. [146] 'The way of the future' here becomes detached from its original meaning, and can be understood as a comment on the almost obsessive manner in which contemporary American culture invests great effort in development and progression.

In an interview, published online, director Martin Scorsese stated that the aforementioned scene was one the most fascinating aspects of the story for him:

> The way of the future implies his future, implies the future of our country, it implies the future of the world, really. What I mean about

[146] Wernblad, A. (2011) *The Passion of Martin Scorsese: A Critical Study of the Films*. North Carolina: McFarland & Co Inc. p. 193.

> that is there's a lot that goes on in the story that has to do with accumulating, greed, how much is enough, enough is never enough.[147]

This statement then confirms the allegorical function that Hughes's mental disorder holds in relation to contemporary American culture. Though Scorsese suggests that the metaphorical nature of Hughes's condition has parallels throughout the world, he also singles out America in his explanation. In this context, then, the representation of Hughes's disorder serves to confront the dangers of the insatiable manner in which American culture is structured around capitalist ideologies of wealth accumulation and industrial expansion. Though we may admire the great financial risks that Hughes takes to achieve his goals, such as refinancing his multi-million dollar tool company in order to start a seemingly over-ambitious and untenable commercial airline, as the act of a maverick visionary able to see reward where others see danger, *The Aviator* goes to great lengths to show the pitfalls of such impulsiveness. Though the biopic may frequently insist that such individual recklessness is a virtue of great men who endure the precipitousness of their risks to great bounty, Scorsese leaves us in no doubt here that such characters are the exception to what is often portrayed as a national right by emphasising the detrimental impact that such a mindset can have on those who succeed; let alone those who don't.

Not only is the representation of mental illness a lens through which to scrutinise the overwhelming grasp that free-market capitalism and entrepreneurism has upon American culture, but I would argue that the generic properties of the biopic become equally significant in the articulation of this critique. As Hughes's life-story is a historical account that scrutinises the manner in which American culture is so persistent in its drive for world-leading innovation and development, it is telling that the biopic genre here becomes the platform for expressing that criticism, placing the veneration of a historical figure in direct opposition to that which the character himself yearns for, to the point of exacerbating his own mental disorder. Not only can Hughes's story be read as a warning about the dangers of striving for

[147] Murray, R. (date unknown) *Martin Scorsese The Aviator Interview*. [Internet] Available at <http://movies.about.com/od/theaviator/a/aviatorms121004_2.htm> [Accessed 31/05/2014].

constant betterment, but the inherent relationship between the biopic genre as iteration, a retelling of cultural history and national narrative, results in a cinematic project that emphasises the significance of looking back, rather than forwards, in American culture today.

Indeed we can argue that the biopic in the contemporary context has become a site for filmmakers to connect with, and look back upon, film history in a similar way. If we take Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln*, as well as *The Aviator*, as examples we can begin to better understand this process. Both Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese are products of the 'Movie Brat' era, which coincided with the emergence of 'New Hollywood' in the 1970s. One of the key characteristics of this era and its filmmaking ethos was that young directors, often from the first generations of film school graduates, would showcase their awareness and admiration for historical film styles from the 1930s and 1940s. Indeed Spielberg and Scorsese have been noted for their homages to films of the studio-era, and it is therefore unsurprising that, as I have explained, we can draw a number of narrative and visual parallels between *The Aviator* and *Citizen Kane*, as well as so many Hollywood biopics of the 1930s and 1940s. So to, as Belén Vidal explains, Spielberg's *Lincoln* bears a number of stylistic and intertextual allusions to John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*,[148] and as such we can see the awareness and reverence that these directors have for the 'old masters', and the way that they implement the same visual rhetoric and film language in the construction of their own biopic projects. [149] I would therefore argue that, just as one of the morals of *The Aviator* appears to focus on the dangers of looking forward and striving for constant development, an awareness of (and reference to) the past and the lessons that can be learned from it are central not just to the critique of national identity that the film offers, but is inherent in the ethos of many neoclassical biopics. The incorporation of elements from classical Hollywood productions arguably ensures the survival of historical cinema's legacy, and makes these conventions and approaches to filmmaking readable and accessible to new generations of film viewers and filmmakers. *The Aviator* therefore warns of the dangers of looking too far forward by explic-

[148] *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939) John Ford (dir.), USA.
[149] Vidal, B. (2014) Introduction: The Biopic and its Critical Contexts. In: Brown, T. & Vidal, B. (eds.) *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture.* New York: Routledge: p. 7.

itly emphasising the importance of looking back; in this case looking back to the mental breakdown of a protagonist who typified the extreme characteristics of drive and ambition.

The opening scene of *The Aviator* offers a familiar explanation for the origin of Hughes's disorder. In the first shot, the young Hughes stands in a bathtub whilst his mother washes him. As she does so she warns him about the spreading Cholera and Typhus diseases, telling him that he is not safe. One of the prominent motifs of the film is introduced in this scene also, as Hughes's mother makes him spell out the word 'quarantine'. At numerous junctures in the film Hughes can be seen vigorously cleaning himself and repeatedly spelling 'quarantine' aloud to himself. Indeed, later in the film Hughes does quarantine himself in his cinema screening room during a prolonged mental breakdown. This opening scene also hints that Hughes's mother may have molested him whilst washing him. Though the camera is placed behind the infant Hughes, preventing any conclusive visual confirmation, Hughes's mother clearly gesticulates towards his genitals, and Hughes's quickly stifled gasp of surprise, followed by a close-up of his stunned face, is suggestive of sexual abuse.

Hughes's mental condition is therefore narratively explained by a common theme of the contemporary biopic: parental abuse.[150] If we come to interpret Hughes's disorder as an allegory for the dangers of America's capitalist mentality then this depiction of residual childhood trauma too has a part to play in this metaphor. The capitalist mentality largely stems from the cultural mythology that projects the United States as the 'land of opportunity'. Hughes's mother imparts lasting psychological trauma, and therefore, in the narrative at least, is largely responsible for his frequent panic attacks caused by a fear of germs and dirt. In this way then, Hughes's mother comes to symbolise the passing down of cultural beliefs and ideologies. The cultural history of the American nation, which is propagated via hegemonic mythology such as exceptionalism and manifest destiny discourses, formulates a particular mindset that fosters and transfers a striving for development and progression across generations in a way that is arguably unique to the American nation; "The American condition", as it were. In

[150] ibid. p. 9.

this instance, Hughes's mother comes to represent the transmission of these ideologies: a kind of cultural osmosis.

I have contended that Hughes's aviation achievements can be read in relation to American cultural values and exceptionalism rhetoric. However, the theme of aviation appears to have a double purpose, as one can also see aviation as a metaphor for the vicissitudes of Hughes's mental state. Initially Hughes makes great strides in aviation, a technological Midas touch that contributes to his iconic status. In these moments, Hughes's OCD appears to be contained and has little bearing on his state of mind. However, following a near fatal crash in a prototype spy plane for the military Hughes becomes increasingly unstable and anxious. During his recovery, Hughes meets with Senator Brewster (Alan Alda), who informs Hughes that he will be chairing a committee to investigate Hughes and his companies for potential war profiteering. However, Hughes suspects that the real purpose of the inquest is to discredit him and prevent him from fighting the Community Aviation Bill. The purpose of the bill is to ensure that only one American airline may offer international travel, meaning that Hughes's airline (TWA) would be unable to expand given that Pan Am, with whom Brewster is a silent conspirator, is already operating as an international airline. This threat to Hughes's plans for expansion therefore also threatens his uncontrollable need for innovation and progress, and results in his worsening condition and self-imposed exile. We can therefore read the air crash as a metaphor for Hughes's descent into a state of manic paranoia and extreme germophobia.

The spectacle of Hughes's severe plane crash is an important component in rendering him as a patriotic icon. Hughes's test flight of the prototype spy plane is part of his commitment to the military to develop and produce a series of aircraft that will give them an advantage in the Second World War. Hughes also has a contract with the military to build the Hercules, the largest ever aircraft, capable of transporting troops and military vehicles across the Atlantic without fear of U-Boat attacks. His collaboration with the military has its own obvious connotations of patriotic duty, indeed at one point a voice-over of a radio news presenter exclaims 'even as he edits his newest motion picture, he's been secretly meeting with the US Air Corps. We applaud his patriotism and look forward to his newest mechanical marvel.' This sense of patriotism is only embellished further through the

air-crash scene. Though Hughes crashes in the resplendent Beverley Hills neighbourhood, the spectacular visuals that accentuate the chaotic scale of the crash ensures that this scene is imbued with an aesthetic feeling more commonly associated with combat scenes in the war film. This is made explicit as Hughes frees himself from the burning fuselage of the downed plane, and as he lays incapacitated and ablaze, a uniformed solider emerges from the flames to extinguish Hughes. At this moment, Hughes's tarnished and stained clothes mimic the colour palette of the soldier's uniform and as a paparazzi photographer captures a shot of the wounded and bloodied Hughes on the ground a freeze frame of Hughes gives him the look of a soldier fallen in combat. This is a vital sequence in asserting Hughes's patriotic character, as aligning him to the solider in this way, within the wider aesthetic mode of the war film, ensures that he becomes associated with the sense of national pride derived from the US Military.

That the brutal crash takes place in Beverley Hills, an area associated with the glamour and affluence of Hollywood movie stars and celebrities also serves to reflect the two different areas of culture in which Hughes intervened. Lowenthal distinguishes between the 'Idol of Production', a stalwart feature of the 'great man' tradition, who makes great strides in industry and military matters, and the 'Idol of Consumption', who is 'related to the sphere of leisure time…not belong[ing] to vocations which serve society's basic needs.'[151] However, in keeping with the neoclassical tradition of the contemporary 'great man' biopic to conflate and modify such hard and fast distinctions, *The Aviator* stresses Hughes's relevance in both of these spheres. Indeed Cashmore's summary of the film as 'a study in megalomania, combined with a diatribe against US government and a sideways inspection of the Hollywood film industry in the late 1920s and 1930s'[152] offers an apposite view of this conflation. Cashmore stresses the *industry* of Hollywood as where Hughes made his greatest impact in cinema. Despite the glamour, acclaim and entertainment of his productions, Hughes is shown throughout the film as a filmmaker who pushed the boundaries of filmmaking technique, challenged the regulations of censorship, and was a maverick

[151] Lowenthal, L. (1944) Biographies in Popular Magazines. p. 516.
[152] Cashmore, E. (2009) *Martin Scorsese's America*. p. 144.

in working outside the studio system by independently funding his own epic movies. As such, *The Aviator* celebrates Hughes's impact on the industrial aspects of Hollywood cinema to a greater extent than the entertainment or content of his movies (though this is certainly not overlooked either). Therefore, we come to understand Hughes as a provocateur and visionary within both the spheres of production and consumption, and nowhere is this more explicit than in his spectacular crash in Beverley Hills, which explicitly brings together the two aspects of Hughes's life and career that were the most pioneering.

In the aftermath of his crash things begin to unravel within Hughes's business empire. The military cancel the contracts for the spy planes because of the crash, and cancel the Hercules because it is unfinished and the war is ending. Equally, when Hughes leaves the hospital, he is distraught to find that FBI agents, under the instruction of Senator Brewster, are ransacking his house and offices in order to gather evidence for the impending inquest against him. Brewster is determined to publicly humiliate and undermine Hughes so that he can pass the Community Aviation Bill and put Hughes out of business. As the agents upturn his house, Hughes becomes increasingly paranoid and uncomfortable with their intrusion. Slow-motion close-ups of cigarettes being stubbed out on his carpet and the agent's muddy footprints traipsing through the house, interspersed with close-ups of Hughes scarred and horrified face illustrate the discomforting impact the agent's presence has on his state of mind. This vulnerability and paranoia is a development of earlier moments in the film in which Hughes, still working on military contracts and high-stakes business deals, is paranoid that he's being bugged and spied upon by insiders in his business (a not dissimilar sense of paranoia to that of John Nash in *A Beautiful Mind*). Now that he knows he is under surveillance by the government, Hughes is tipped over the edge and, following his personal meeting with Brewster, who goes out of his way to agitate Hughes's OCD, Hughes quarantines himself in his screening/editing room.

This chapter has already touched upon the significance of wilderness mythology in *A Beautiful Mind*, and also its presence in the aerial sequences that punctuate the early stages of *The Aviator*. It is perhaps in the scene of Hughes's isolation that the pertinence and gravitas of this mythology comes

to the fore in relation to mental disorder. During Hughes's quarantine numerous micro-sequences are cross-cut, including Hughes talking into a microphone explaining the specific details of how his lunch should be delivered to him in order to minimise germ transfer, Hughes urinating into milk bottles, and him repeatedly screening rough footage of his forthcoming film *The Outlaw*.[153] These three strands are edited together using slow-fade transitions and overlapping audio to emphasise the lethargic and delirious state of Hughes's mind. As he repeatedly screens *The Outlaw*, the only shots of the film that are shown to the audience are abstract landscape shots of the American desert. Hughes says to himself, 'I like the desert, it's hot there, but it's clean. It's clean.' This suggests a sense of purity in the traditional folklore that serves as the bedrock of American national identity. Not only does Hughes comment on the desert landscape, but also at various times during this scene several medium shots show images of the desert vistas projected onto Hughes's body (figure 6). Thus, the inherent cultural capital associated with the wilderness, signified by the harshness of the untamed American landscape, becomes internalised (in a manner comparable to that already discussed in *A Beautiful Mind*) in Hughes's mind, and comes to represent his illness as another instantiation of a mythological quest so poignant in American cultural consciousness. Roderick Nash highlights that the concept of 'wilderness' is a cultural construct of the pioneer mindset. Where Native Americans lived off the landscape harmoniously, in a way that didn't position the landscape in opposition to cultural order, Nash's contention is that 'wilderness' is fundamentally an opponent to the construction of civilisation, a dynamic that has been configured within the 'white mind' of America, and etched into the national psyche by the first generation of hunter-gatherer pilgrims.[154] Given that both John Nash and Hughes are, as per the 'great man' tradition, venerated as pioneering figures, the use of the wilderness motif as a means of articulating their mental disorder thus remains in keeping with the notion of wilderness as a construct of the 'pioneer mind'.

[153] *The Outlaw*. (1943) Howard Hughes (dir.), USA.
[154] Nash, R. (ibid) p. xiii

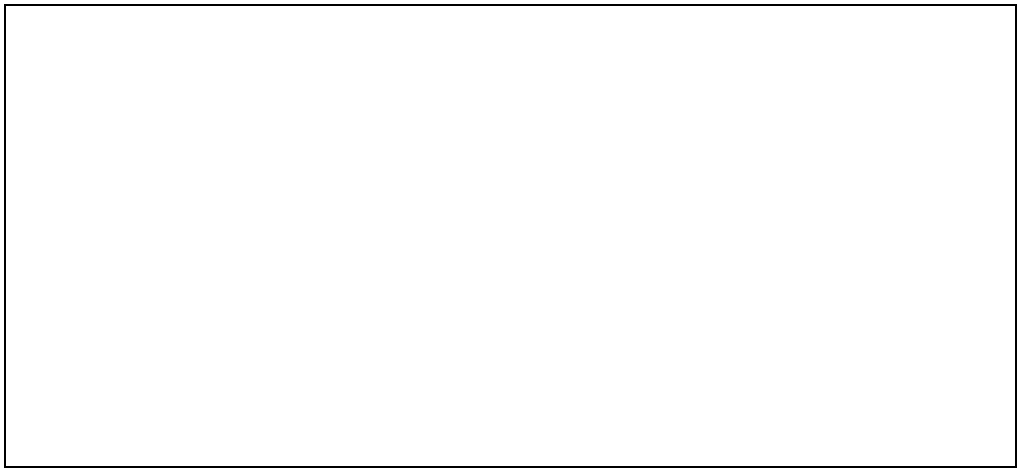

Figure 1.6: Hughes's naked and dishevelled body is emblazoned with vistas of the American desert, internalising his 'quest' through the wilderness of his mind as he contends with the throes of his disorder. (Directed by Martin Scorsese: 2004; Forward Pass, Appian Way, IMF, IEG, Warner Bros., Miramax)

Despite his prolonged breakdown, with the help and encouragement of his new lover Ava Gardener (Kate Beckinsale), Hughes is able to stabilise and clean himself up in time to arrive at the inquest. During the latter stages of his isolation, we see cut scenes, in low-grade black and white news style footage, of Brewster being interviewed about the inquest by the press. From these scenes it is evident that Brewster's intention is to besmirch Hughes's character in order to sour public opinion towards him. Brewster's main strategy for doing so is to attempt to paint Hughes as an unpatriotic war profiteer, claiming 'while brave men were dying on the beaches of Normandy, Mr. Hughes was picking the pocket of the American tax payer.' In another key moment, Juan Trippe (Alec Baldwin), the head of Pan Am, visits Hughes whilst he is still locked in his screening room, offering to cancel the public hearings in exchange for the sale of TWA to Pan Am at a reduced market price. This is part of Brewster and Trippe's strategy to monopolise international air travel, a tactic that Hughes refers to as 'un-American'. As Trippe sits outside the door to the screening room to converse with Hughes, we see a poster for the movie *Scarface*[155] (on which Hughes he was a producer) over his shoulder, bearing the tagline 'The Shame of a Nation'. This proves to be an apt blurb for the inquest sequences, in which Brewster and

[155] *Scarface*. (1932) Howard Hawks and Richard Rosson (dirs.) USA.

Hughes tussle for power and control of the proceedings, attempting to brand one another as unpatriotic and corrupt.

Right before the beginning of the inquest we see the naked and dishevelled Hughes screening a dogfight scene from *Hell's Angels*. The screen is emblazoned with aerial battles, and as Hughes watches a close-up of a downed plane burst into flames he lets out an almighty and pained roar. Thus, we can understand this as Hughes exorcising the trauma of his own plane crash, confronting his distress and attempting to stabilise his mind. When finally at the trial, Senator Brewster attempts to brand Hughes as a war profiteer on account of the military contracts that Hughes failed to fulfil. Through his leading questions and thinly veiled insults Brewster attempts to show Hughes as having exploited the nation at a time it 'could least afford it' by leveraging recent affective memories of World War II. In comparison, Brewster describes Juan Trippe as a 'great American…a patriot,' who 'is not a man who is interested in making money'. In the aforementioned online interview, Martin Scorsese claims that the idea of publicly humiliating well-known figures for political and financial gain is an aspect of the film that carries a significant amount of contemporary cultural relevance: 'I thought that was interesting, I think it has a lot of resonance for today, particularly the investigation smearing people…that happens every second now, and people don't even think about it anymore'.[156] This is certainly a noticeable aspect of American political rhetoric, in which opposing parties and figures attempt to humiliate and undermine one another with 'smear campaigns', and as such *The Aviator* seeks to highlight the inherent flaws within that particular discourse. However, one might argue that the biopic also scrutinises public figures in a not dissimilar fashion. As the genre has gradually developed an increased fascination with the personal and private aspects of the lives of public figures, the 'warts-and-all' factor, this appears to correspond to a wider mindset in contemporary culture that derives greater pleasure from an all-encompassing knowledge of public figure's lives. Lowenthal noticed this development in his survey of magazine biographies in the early 20th century, noting that 'while it was once rather

[156] Murray, R. (date unknown) *Martin Scorsese Interview The Aviator.* [Internet] Available at <http://movies.about.com/od/theaviator/a/aviatorms121004_2.htm> [Accessed 31/05/2014]

contemptible to give much room to the private affairs and habits of public figures this topic is now the focus of interest.'[157] This is certainly a trait of biography that has lingered and evolved into a key trope of cinema biography, as increasingly the genre explores the affairs, traumas and tragedies of public figures and their private lives in a manner not unlike political smear campaigns.

Towards the end of the inquest, after much bitter and hard fought debate and interrogation, Hughes admits that he took millions of dollars from the US Government to build planes that he was unable to deliver. With this admission, Brewster bears a smug grin, believing he has taken the upper hand and destroyed Hughes's credibility. However, Hughes ultimately explains that although he didn't fulfil the contracts, the money that the government paid him paled in comparison to larger contracts that also went unfulfilled and went un-investigated, thus proving Hughes was being scapegoated for surreptitious reasons. Hughes then seizes control of the exchange, turning the inquest upon Senator Brewster and revealing information that he had gathered by having Brewster spied upon by his own representatives. Hughes exposes the ulterior motives of Trippe and Brewster by proving them to be co-conspirators, illustrating how Brewster's attempts to persecute Hughes were not actually with the interest of the nation in mind, but rather for his own avaricious motives. When Hughes finally explains that not only did he spend the government's money on developing planes but also poured millions of his own money into their construction he absolves himself from accusations of exploiting the nation at a time of vulnerability by emphasising his willingness to sacrifice his own personal fortune to ensure the planes were state-of-the-art. The stoic Hughes proclaims 'I've lost millions building these planes, and I'll go on losing millions. It's just what I do.' This changes the whole dynamic of the hearing, and reemphasises Hughes as a maverick industrialist, whose concern is not money but rather using that money to achieve great feats of engineering for the better of the war effort.

Before stoically and heroically deciding he has had enough of the inquest's pettiness and storming out to great fanfare, Hughes, having been

[157] Lowenthal, L. (1944) Biographies in Popular Magazines. p. 521.

taunted relentlessly about how the Hercules plane has never flown, wagers that 'if the Hercules fails to fly I will leave this country and never come back'. This wager exemplifies the never-say-die attitude that contributes to the construction of Hughes as a great man and American icon. Having successfully avoided prosecution for profiteering, and consequently quashing the Community Aviation Bill, the penultimate scene of the film shows Hughes triumphantly piloting the Hercules. As the plane grows larger in the frame, flying directly towards the screen, we hear a voice-over news broadcaster exclaim 'it certainly looks like Howard Hughes will be around the United States for some time to come.'

Hughes's successful resistance to Brewster's surreptitious trial harks back to a very familiar convention of 'great men' biopics from the classical Hollywood era. The use of scenes featuring grandiose public address, especially court trials and government inquests, serves as a platform for viewers and filmmakers to quite literally judge the cultural worth and value of the protagonist; in Custen's words to 'seal the verdict of history'.[158] Where often classical era Hollywood biopics would insert fictional trials into their accounts of notable public figures in order to reap the benefits of such an assuring and clear-cut narrative device, real archival footage of Hughes under scrutiny from Brewster provided a ready-made reference point for Scorsese to meticulously replay Hughes's anti-establishment heroics. This footage also enabled Leonardo DiCaprio, working closely with one of the world's leading OCD experts Dr. Jeffrey Schwartz, to study the more subtle 'ticks' of the entrepreneur's OCD and develop a more nuanced performance of his symptoms when under stress.

Custen elsewhere refers to the trial as a device that has 'the commanding function of…telling the audience what the film is really about'.[159] However, for a film as lengthy and complex in its portrait of Hughes's life, it is perhaps too simplistic to conclude that the trial alone offers any one defining or distilled notion of Hughes's legacy or character, and indeed given the film's obvious influences and allusions to *Citizen Kane* one might argue that this would defy the very essence of the 'rosebud' phenomena, in which ul-

[158] Custen, G. (1992) *Bio/Pics*. p. 187.
[159] ibid. p. 136.

timately the triviality of searching for such an essence is exposed as reductive and meaningless in its attempts to define a life. The one thing the trial does leave us sure of though is Hughes's patriotism, however tied up in megalomania and/or destructive to his own state of mind that may turn out to be. That Hughes defeats Brewster and the senate and successfully pilots the Hercules against all odds leaves little doubt as to his remarkable and admirable character, and that so many of his achievements were attempts to challenge the status quo of a largely conservative and corrupt society (or in the case of Hollywood, an industry oligarchy) asserts the wider cultural impact of Hughes at a more societal level. However, though we may be in little doubt of Hughes's patriotism, we leave the film at the beginning of yet another of Hughes's mental breakdowns, turning attention to the potential pathological and detrimental effects of such a mindset. Cashmore claims that the film leaves Hughes at a point in his life just before his public persona began to wane, presumably as a result of his impending relapse, stating that 'as often happens when interesting figures recede from public view, their myth outlasts and outgrows the person.'[160] This suggests that perhaps Hughes's final legacy will instead be defined not by his charismatic individualism and stoic genius, but instead by mental illness, paranoia and reclusiveness. Where Cashmore contends that the myth outgrows the man, I would argue that in the case of *The Aviator* this process starts with the man outgrowing the myths of the nation. That we see Hughes's disorder and troubled personality articulated through references to historical and mythological concepts of the wilderness landscape, rugged individualism, and political rhetoric associated with exceptionalism suggests an inherent instability or waning relevance of such traditional national concepts, as they are portrayed as intertwined with his disorder and ultimately damaging to the psyche of the 'great man'.

Kinsey: Sexuality, Psychiatry and the Neoclassical Biopic

Bill Condon's 2004 film *Kinsey* tells the story of sexology professor Alfred Kinsey, who in the 1940s and 1950s conducted ground-breaking research investigating human sexual behaviours in America; interviewing people

[160] Cashmore, E. (2009) *Martin Scorsese's America*. p. 151.

from all walks of life about their sexual maturation, preferences and activities. In 1948 he published his first report, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, which was followed by *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female* in 1953. The film begins with Kinsey instructing members of his staff in the proper interview etiquette for social sciences research but also depicts key moments from Kinsey's childhood and important career moments up to the time he was gathering data for the female report. Throughout the film, we are presented with a number of references to the largely conservative cultural beliefs in America that sexuality and insanity were interconnected (this is an area that will be discussed further in Chapter 3, on the women's biopic). Whilst not a new concept, *Kinsey* breaks the mould by illustrating how its eponymous protagonist sought to debunk the entrenched values and beliefs associated with sexuality and challenge the dogma that was intended to enforce strict behavioural codes in American society.

Early in the film we see the young Kinsey in church, where his father, Alfred Sr. (John Lithgow), gives a puritanical sermon, denouncing the invention of the telephone and the zipper as devices that 'cultivate immorality' and allow for the propagation of sexual impropriety. This places what we already know about Kinsey's research at odds with his father's values, and sets up the on-going feud between them throughout the film. Later we see a teenage Kinsey in a scout uniform, camping with another scout who confides in him that he 'had one of the old fits again', insinuating that he had masturbated. Kinsey takes out a book and reads, 'any habit which causes the sex fluid to be discharged must be resisted. Doctors link it to an assortment of illnesses including insanity, blindness, epilepsy, even death.' When asked what can be done to prevent such occurrences, Kinsey reads on, 'keep your bowels open, read The Sermon on the Mount, submerge your testicles in a bowl of cold water, think of your mother's pure love.' The boys then pray. This is followed by a cut shot to Kinsey masturbating in his tent, highlighting the hypocrisy and absurdity of religious dogma attempting to stifle human sexual urges by branding them 'impure' or casting them as pathological. Sander Gilman claims that 'a glance at the history of human sexuality as understood by the human sciences reveals that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was a fascination with the pathological rather than the normal…masturbation was deemed the major devian-

cy.'[161] Gilman goes on to explain that the impetus in pathologising masturbation, as well as numerous other sexual acts was 'clearly theological.'[162]

Kinsey locates widespread anxieties about the corruption of society through sexuality to a religious source, in particular highlighting the use of dogmatic texts as a means of fear-mongering and pathologising sexuality in American society. In one scene, Kinsey is shown meeting with two of his students, who are newlyweds. The couple explain that they are having intercourse problems. Earlier, we had seen that Kinsey and his wife Clara "Mac" McMillen (Laura Linney) also had problems consummating their marriage because of their sexual inexperience. The students come to Kinsey because they know that he has previously advised students on overcoming their sexual problems based on his personal experiences. Kinsey asks the students questions about how they stimulate and arouse each other. He learns that both students had separately heard an old wives' tale that oral sex leads to pregnancy complications. When Kinsey assures them that the myth is untrue, the students are sceptical; stating that as there hasn't been a study confirming it, he couldn't know it was definitely not true. Later we see Kinsey talking to Mac about the meeting, claiming that he felt 'like an amateur' not being able to convince them that oral sex was safe. He claims that he couldn't understand where they would get such an idea, until he discovered a textbook titled 'Ideal Marriage: Its Physiology and Technique'. Once more, Kinsey reads aloud from the book, 'oral contact, while acceptable as a means of stimulation is pathological if carried through to orgasm, and possibly injurious.' Outraged by the book's contents, Kinsey denounces it as 'morality disguised as fact.' This scene acts as the 'Eureka' moment for Kinsey, the catalyst that sets him off on his path towards cultural impact in the form of his pioneering human sexuality study. The 'Eureka' moment is a familiar trope of studio-era biopics, particularly deployed to protagonists from the fields of science and medicine. However, as Levinson notes, the 'Eureka' moment was usually presented towards the end of a biopic, when the protagonist realises their ambition. In contemporary examples, including *Kinsey* and *A Beautiful Mind*, the narratives tend to continue past the break-

[161] Gilman, S. (1985) *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness*. London: Cornell University Press. p. 191.
[162] ibid.

through moment and go on to explore the fallout of the character's intervention and their ultimate decline.[163]

What is important in this scene is Kinsey's rejection of religious dogma. Kinsey's outrage at the pseudo-medical propaganda within these texts is a rejection of religious metanarratives focussed on sexuality. Kinsey rejects the ideologies put forward by these religious doctrines that masquerade as science, challenging the relationship between power and knowledge in a way that appears congruent with Michel Foucault's inquiries into the relationship between language and power. As Michael T. Walker writes, Foucault's conclusion that those with power, such as politicians, corporations and medical institutions, maintain their power through a monopoly on 'knowledge', which they control via language, implicates psychiatry as a unifying discourse that has the power to determine who or what is 'abnormal' or 'pathological': 'the powerful in society promote a dominant discourse…that often pathologises and devalues practices of non-dominant cultures and marginalised groups. The mental health profession acts as an agent of society in this way.'[164]

Kinsey's decision to begin conducting empirical research into America's sexual habits therefore conforms to a postmodern philosophy that debunks the connection between sexuality and insanity put forward by the value-laden instruction manuals he reads during the film. Challenging such metanarratives in this way (and let us not forget that *the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* itself could reasonably be defined as such given its purpose to label and define all the mind's idiosyncrasies and anomalies into symptoms and diagnoses) aligns Kinsey with the ideologies of postmodern psychiatry. Postmodern psychiatry, as Richard and Jonathan Laugharne claim, has a 'disillusionment with the unifying "big stories" offered by science, religion or politics to explain the way reality is. Instead people look towards narratives of individuals or local communities, which are seen as less tyran-

[163] Levinson, J. (2012) *The American Success Myth on Film*. p. 39.
[164] Walker, M. (2006) The Social Construction of Mental Illness and its Implications for the Recovery Model. *The International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation.* Vol. 10(1). Internet. Available at <http://www.psychosocial.com/IJPR_10/Social_Construction_of_MI_and_Implications_for_Recovery_Walker.html> [Accessed 27/08/15]

nical – less demanding of mass allegiance.'[165] In this sense then, postmodern psychiatry would depend less on scientific method, but rather shift emphasis to incorporate a more interdisciplinary approach. Bradley Lewis claims that:

> Postmodern psychiatry would understand itself better as human studies, and as such, it would engage in interdisciplinary work with philosophy, history, literary theory, art, women's studies, cultural studies, area studies, psychology, anthropology, and sociology. Not only would it open itself up to the rest of the university, it would open itself to patients' perspectives and alternative cultural perspectives.[166]

Kinsey's challenge to the pathologisation of sexuality in American culture is a contributing element to postmodern psychiatry. When Kinsey and his protégé Clyde Martin (Peter Sarsgaard) discuss their initial research, Kinsey expresses frustration that he can't glean enough from the anonymous questionnaires they use. Martin suggests that maybe participants would be more comfortable 'if you just talked to them'. This is the zenith of Kinsey's 'Eureka' moment, enabling him to refine his methodology. From this point Kinsey's research takes on a more qualitative approach. Rather than obtaining purely numerical data and interpreting it into a set of unifying statistics (a very modernist approach to scientific practice), his project instead opens itself up to micro-narratives and multiple world-views, exemplified by the anecdotes and personalised involvement of the study's participants, ultimately typifying the postmodern approach to Kinsey's research.

Exhibiting similar characteristics to the other 'great men' in this chapter, Kinsey is shown as an obsessive researcher who becomes consumed by his drive to expand and elucidate the American public's understanding of human sexuality, and to demystify the ignorance and moral panics surrounding sex and its practices. He teaches newlywed couples and staff at his university in the basic physiology of intercourse, having expressed dissatisfaction at the substandard advice offered by the university's

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[165] Laugharne, R. & Laugharne, J. (2002) Psychiatry, Postmodernism and Postnormal Science. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*. Vol. 95(4). Internet. Available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1279521/> [Accessed 27/08/15]
[166] Lewis, B. (2000) Psychiatry and Postmodern Theory. *The Journal of Medical Humanities*. Vol. 21(2). p. 83-84.

health course. During a lecture, which he calls a 'marriage course', Kinsey's slides feature photographs of male and female genitalia, and images of penetration while he explains proper sexual technique(s). This creates a strong juxtaposition between the film's content and its neoclassical form. As Bingham contends, the visual language and iconography of *Kinsey* harks back to Warner Brothers' late 1930s scientist biopics, but its subject matter means that such a film would have been impossible to make in any era of cinema other than the contemporary film context.[167] This refers to a post-Production Code era, but also shows the postmodern re-appropriation of historical genre conventions in order to legitimate a figure that was at times seen as controversial and branded a 'menace' by government and public alike.

Following the 'marriage course' lecture, a queue of people forms outside Kinsey's office. We see a number of direct addresses to camera of people asking questions about sex. Although some of the queries may seem humorous (e.g. 'can you get syphilis from a whistle?') and highlight the trivial level of knowledge of sexual health and hygiene in 1940s America, other questions underline the more troubling beliefs and morality claims that were ascribed to acts considered uncouth or immoral (e.g. 'is homosexuality a form of insanity?'). Indeed associations between homosexuality and mental health discourse have been a familiar cultural trope, and one that will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis. However, it is important to note that, at least within the contemporary American biopic, the examination of homosexuality and mental disorder has been largely confined to narratives of lesbianism, and thus *Kinsey* warrants further study as it is unique in its explicit presentation and assessment of male homosexuality and pathology. That is not to say that lesbianism is an absent aspect of *Kinsey*, indeed some of the film's key moments are dependent on its presence, but rather that, in the context of the 'great man' tradition, my analysis here is more focussed upon the presentation of male homosexuality.

In one instance, Kinsey and Martin go to a gay bar to ask the patrons to participate in their study. One man tells how his father and brothers beat him when they found him with another boy, and explains how his brothers

[167] Bingham. D (2010) Whose Lives Are They Anyway? p. 354-355.

took turns branding them both like they were cattle. The man says 'it's not that I mind being queer, because I don't. It's just, I wish other folks weren't so put out by it.' Kinsey sympathises, replying, 'homosexuality happens to be out of fashion in society now. That doesn't mean it won't change some day.' Back at their hotel, Kinsey and Martin discuss Martin's bisexuality, and it is revealed that Kinsey too has bisexual urges. Martin asks if Kinsey has ever acted upon his homosexual feelings, only to be met with silence. Martin then kisses him. As Martin moves back, Kinsey pulls him back and begins to reciprocate passionately.

The sexual interaction between Kinsey and Martin is a pivotal moment, as it confronts the taboo and pathologisation of homosexuality that Kinsey has explained is rife in American culture, and disrupts the heteronormative order that so often, certainly historically, was the backbone of the 'great man' biopic. Even a recent example such as *A Beautiful Mind*, which bears many aesthetic and thematic similarities to *Kinsey*, eschews any mention of the real Nash's arrest for attempting to solicit homosexual sex in a public lavatory, as well as other homosexual acts throughout his life, in favour of lingering upon the strength and virtuousness of his marriage to Alicia. In *Kinsey* though, the protagonist's bisexuality is embraced and celebrated as a challenge to the conventional norms that other stories in the 'great man' tradition don't acknowledge. Hill claims that:

> The reworking of old materials and representations by postmodernism is interpreted not simply as a kind of surface play (or "depthlessness"), but as part of a critical project to "deconstruct" and subvert old meanings as well as "construct" new ones through the repositioning of artistic and cultural discourse.[168]

In this way then, one can argue that by replicating the aesthetics of studio-era biopics and creating a contrast with its explicit and controversial subject matter, *Kinsey* can be seen as presenting a challenge to traditional attitudes towards sexual identity. In combining historically familiar genre tropes with an issue such as sexuality, which would not have been possible for Holly-

[168] Hill, J. (2000) Film and Postmodernism. In: Hill, J. & Church Gibson, P. (eds.) *Film Studies: Critical Approaches*. p. 102.

wood studios to feature in their films in such a way as *Kinsey* does due to the Production Code and strict censorship regulations, the film can be said to have repositioned this cultural discourse. Hill continues:

> In this respect, the critical engagement with prior representations has been seen as especially attractive to filmmakers who wish to challenge the traditional ways in which particular social groups or "others" (such as blacks, indigenous peoples, women, and gays) have been represented and to do justice to the complexities of identity in the postmodern era.[169]

Kinsey's deployment of classical biopic genre tropes therefore goes beyond homage or sentimental acknowledgement, but rather functions to bring the erasure and absence of homosexuality in to relief. We may also point to a moment later in the film in which Kinsey is informed that J. Edgar Hoover is compiling dossiers about him because Kinsey refuses to use his study to 'help [Hoover] find homosexuals within the State Department'. This alludes to a widespread anxiety and pathologisation of homosexuality within America located not just at the social level, but also institutionally, and can be seen as an explicit indictment of the prevalent homophobia in America both historically and in the contemporary context. Liam Neeson's explanation as to why he accepted the lead role, in a press interview promoting *Kinsey*, offers further insight into this indictment:

> I believed in [director] Bill [Condon], and I believed in the script. And I believed it was a period that we're living in in America…we're living in neo-conservative times. There's an element in our government and society that would like to banish totally all sex education and keep young people in ignorance of their own sexuality because it suits their moral purposes…It certainly has something to say about how we live, and how we should live.[170]

[169] ibid. p. 102-103.
[170] *Kinsey: Liam Neeson Interview*. YouTube Video. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Zmp6VcCyLM> [Accessed 29/08/15]

Neeson here suggests that whilst the film is set in a historical period in which conservative and religious attitudes towards sexuality led to the suppression of sex education and the cultural oppression of 'deviant' sexual acts and identities, the film also speaks to a particular contemporary moment in American culture in which such attitudes have re-emerged. Therefore, the deconstruction of homosexual pathology serves a dualistic purpose, illustrating that there is still much progress to be made, and tolerance to be encouraged; part of what Hill refers to as a postmodern shift in representation that explores 'the changing film representations of men with a breakdown of confidence in the "grand narratives" surrounding masculinity and patriarchal authority.'[171] What we see in this process then is Condon's (an openly gay filmmaker) re-appropriation of the familiar historical conventions of the biopic in order to highlight and celebrate homosexuality in America; confronting the largely patriarchal nature of the traditional 'great man' biopic.[172]

After having sex with Martin, Kinsey is honest with Mac, confessing his infidelity. Devastated by his indiscretion, Kinsey tries to rationalise his actions by claiming people are only prevented from exploring their sexual urges due to social constraints. He claims that monogamy and idealistic family values in Western society are cultural constructs that are detrimental to the core instincts of human nature. When he says that he would not have a problem with Mac sleeping with other men, and that he does not equate sex with love, Mac is incredulous, and exclaims that she doesn't sleep with other people because she values her marriage and her children. Kinsey responds, 'exactly, social constraints.' This is similar to the discourses of mental illness posed by Thomas Szasz and R. D. Laing in the 1960s; in particular Laing's theories that, as Sander Gilman describes, are 'concerned with the family structure as the source of pathology.'[173] Therefore, Kinsey's claims that social conventions and conformity directly impact upon human nature bear resemblance to prominent ideas posited by those, such as Szasz and Laing, from the 'anti-psychiatry' movement, which reframed the etiolo-

[171] Hill, J. (2000) Film and Postmodernism. p. 100.
[172] Cheshire, E. (2015) *Bio-Pics: A Life in Pictures*. p. 88.
[173] Gilman, S. (1988) *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS*. London: Cornell University Press. p. 223.

gy of mental disorders as a consequence of competing/contradictory expectations within social spheres. In this case, Kinsey refuses to hide the homosexual aspects of his personality even though it could be detrimental to his marriage and impact his credibility as a researcher. Ultimately, *Kinsey* locates the pathologisation of homosexuality as part of a mental health discourse forged by social anxiety towards homosexuality and its perceived threat to heteronormative family values in America. In a similar vein, Gebriele Linke views the film's presentation of sexual discourses in the 1940s and '50s as 'a cinematic statement about the insecurities of the nation at the beginning of the new millennium, especially the sense of destabilisation after 9/11 and the renewed rise of the "moral right", its stress on family values and demand for rigid constraint on sexuality.'[174]

In another lecture in his 'marriage course', Kinsey asks rhetorically, 'why is it that some men need thirty orgasms a week, while others almost none?' He answers, 'because everyone is different. The problem is that most people want to be the same. They find it easier to ignore this fundamental aspect of the human condition. They're so eager to be part of the group that they'll betray their own nature to get there.' This suggests that the pressure on individuals to appear normal by society's standards often means they will suppress and/or hide their idiosyncrasies so as to appear to be a functioning member of the group. Again, this notion is analogous to the critiques of psychiatry and mental institutionalisation put forward by figures including Erving Goffman, Szasz, Laing, and Foucault, who indict psychiatry and institutionalisation as a form of social regulation, ostracising and condemning difference in order to preserve and maintain an idealised social utopia. During a montage, we see another homage to the tropes of the studio-era biopic that illustrates this idea. Initially, we are shown a series of talking-head shots of interviewees in Kinsey's study. Participants answer questions about their sex life, and we get a sense of the stark differences between them (for instance, one man claims only once to have ever reached orgasm, whilst another woman claims to have intercourse 2 to 3 times a day). At the end of each conversation, the respondent, directly addressing the camera, asks 'am I normal?' As these voices linger, the camera fades to a shot of

[174] Linke, G. (2011) Kinsey – an Inquiry into American Sexual Identity. *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*. Vol. 26(1). p. 153.

Kinsey and his staff in a car. The shot is constructed using a technique prominent in Hollywood's classical era, where a stationary car positioned against a moving background is used to convey movement. As the montage continues, other talking-head shots are superimposed over a map of the United States as a red line moves from city to city across the map, showing us the journey of Kinsey's study across the nation. This scene reinforces Kinsey's claim that everybody wants to be normal, despite the fact that, as Kinsey states earlier in the film, 'diversity [is] life's universal fact.' Therefore, the idea of 'normality' becomes trivialised by the lack of consistency and sheer diversity amongst the American public's sex history.

This social critique is also pertinent to one of the central ideas of postmodern psychiatry, which, as Laugharne and Laugharne summarise, 'advocate[s] the acceptance of difference and "otherness" rather than the universal and "sameness".'[175] In this framework, derived from the writings of Foucault,[176] psychiatric practice would open itself to treating an individual's feelings, and their description of such feelings, as a form of lived experience, rather than a set of symptoms that can be cross-referenced and attributed to a separate, totalising system (such as the DSM or other diagnostic texts). This also has an impact on the underlying ideas associated with the concept of national identity. That an individual is willing, whether consciously or not, to suppress and betray their human nature (in this case, their sexuality) in order to meet a set of social standards perceived to be coherent amongst a larger group suggests the sacrifice of individual identity in order to obtain a greater sense of belonging to a community that shares a set of values and characteristics linked to the cultural norms of nation. Patrick Bracken and Philip Thomas write that:

> The concepts of sameness and difference are fundamental to how we understand identity. Any concept of sameness must be posited in relation to a difference – a here requires a there, a then a now, a me a you. We have seen that the dialogical consciousness has no access to a pre-existing set of absolute referents, so we constantly have to

[175] Laugharne, R. & Laugharne, J. (2002) Psychiatry, Postmodernism and Postnormal Science. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*. Vol. 95(4). Internet. Available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1279521/> [Accessed 27/08/15]
[176] ibid.

> make judgements about value in relation to the dialogical consciousness of the Other. This has important implications for our understanding of what it means to be a person.[177]

This extract suggests that the construction of identity, both personal and national, is strongly linked to binary distinctions between sameness and difference. The concept of national identity is inherently constructed in relation to, and separation from, characteristics, values, history, and ideologies that set one country apart from another. Therefore, Kinsey's study has a direct impact upon American national identity because it challenges the inherent assumptions and moralistic values that protestant Christianity had cultivated about the sexual behaviours of the American public, insisting that every individual's sexual preferences and patterns of behaviour was different from every other, and that difference was the only universality to be found in American society. This directly applies to psychiatry and mental health discourses because, as Bracken and Thomas write, 'medical narratives that see the person as the passive matrix in which the disease takes place…see patients as monological characters.'[178] In this way, mental health diagnosis and treatment relies on a medical model that underappreciates the individual experiences and symptomologies of each sufferer; a by-product of the mental health culture that has become so prevalent in contemporary American society.

So far, *Kinsey*'s references to mental illness discourse have come exclusively through reference to cultural attitudes towards deviant sexualities and the pathologisation of homosexuality. However, towards the denouement we are finally confronted with the realisation that Kinsey himself is afflicted. After the success of his first report, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, Kinsey becomes something of a celebrity, hounded by reporters, featured on the cover of TIME magazine and making headlines in the national papers; familiar conventions of the biopic that signify the subject's meteoric rise to stardom. However, the acclaim and popularity is short lived, and as Kinsey begins working on his follow-up report, *Sexual Behaviour in*

[177] Bracken, P. & Thomas, P. (2006) *Postpsychiatry: Mental Health in a Postmodern World.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 212.
[178] ibid. p. 213.

the Human Female, the public's perception of him shifts and his reputation begins to disintegrate. In the latter stages of the film, Kinsey is frequently agitated and incensed by the negative press that his new research is receiving. Particularly, his frustration is that senior members of his university and the Rockefeller Foundation (that funds his research) are distancing themselves from him in order to protect themselves from negative press. As Kinsey continues to lose his grip on the size and ever-increasing financial cost of his project, we see him taking prescription pills (though we are not informed what they are specifically). In one scene, the now aged and weary Kinsey is shown giving a public talk about the detrimental impact that marriage, and the cultural restraints that it imposes, has upon the development of sexuality. Kinsey claims that human desire for multiple sexual partners is contradicted and inhibited by the social expectation for monogamous marriage, a problem that he claims 'has not been satisfactorily resolved in our culture.' He goes on to claim that 'America is awash with sexual activity, only a small portion of which is sanctioned by our society.' Kinsey's calls for a reformation of sexual morality causes multiple attendees of the talk to leave. In contrast to earlier scenes during the height of Kinsey's fame, the talk was sparsely attended to begin with, and as the crowd dwindles, Kinsey appears increasingly incoherent, and bears greater resemblance to a bumbling old man rather than a pioneering scientist. Kinsey exclaims 'I sometimes wonder what this country would look like if the Puritans had stayed at home. What if all the rogues and libertines had crossed the Atlantic instead?' As he says this, we are presented with a series of quick-fire, close-up cut shots of Kinsey's face. Each shot breaks the 180-degree rule, showing us Kinsey in portrait from a number of disorientating angles as he collapses to the floor unconscious. Kinsey's similarities to that of a preacher in this scene are evident. In his speech he denounces the social attitudes towards marriage, as instilled by Puritanical Protestantism, which are values and attitudes seen advocated by his father at the beginning of the film. Kinsey's postmodern attitude towards sexuality and culture is therefore juxtaposed and placed in binary opposition to his father. We can also conclude that Kinsey's declining mental state, and his deteriorating reputation, coincides with his repositioning into polar opposition with his father. Where initially Kinsey sought to problematise and shed light on the diversity of hu-

man sexuality in America, ultimately he becomes a prophet, decrying one dogma in favour of his own personal discourse. In essence, Kinsey sees his own research as a new cultural metanarrative, and as such calls for it to replace the old religious metanarratives that he decries.

Kinsey is taken to hospital, where Mac tells Martin that Kinsey is 'killing himself'. This initially appears to be a comment about the obsessive level of devotion Kinsey has invested in his research, but when Martin goes to see Kinsey in his ward we learn that the real explanation is that Kinsey has developed a dependency on barbiturates (a prescription medication used as a strong painkiller and sedative). Whilst this revelation comes as a surprise, it is an understated moment in the film, especially in comparison to the big reveal in *A Beautiful Mind*, for instance. By contrast, where the realisation of Nash's schizophrenia becomes the jumping off point for a narrative shift away from Cold War paranoia towards family-orientated drama, the revelation that Kinsey has been suffering from a drug addiction instead seems to serve the much more straightforward narrative function of explaining his fanatical and incoherent behaviour as a by-product of his addictive personality. This appears congruent to themes visible in both *A Beautiful Mind* and *The Aviator*, in which the constant striving for progress and cultural impact can lead to a psychological breakdown. Kinsey's addiction may also suggest that the reason he becomes something of a preacher in later life, in contrast to the idealistic and postmodern researcher who sought to unsettle all the false logics of American attitudes towards sexuality, is because of his declining mental state. As the effects of drug abuse have a greater impact upon his mental health, Kinsey begins to stray from his own initial ideals that led him to begin his research in the first place.

The final scenes of the film show a weak and debilitated Kinsey recovering from his collapse (though it is unclear if he overcomes his addiction). Kinsey watches a legal hearing on television, in which the head of the Rockefeller foundation is questioned about the Kinsey Reports, and has to face accusations that Kinsey's sex research is damaging to society. The officials of the trial claim that tax-free organisations pose a potential threat to American society as they harbour the potential to further the rise of Communism in America. The trial scene is reminiscent to the closing scenes of *The Aviator*, and the focus on McCarthyism and Communist anxiety harks

back to *A Beautiful Mind*. During the trial it is claimed that Kinsey's research 'aids the Communistic aim of weakening and destroying the youth of our country'. Despite refuting the claim, the Rockefeller Foundation immediately withdraws Kinsey's funding, exacerbating his mental decline.[179]

Without funding, Kinsey continues to conduct interviews by using his own savings. This personal sacrifice renders Kinsey as heroic in a similar manner to Howard Hughes using his own personal fortune to develop military planes. In Kinseys's final interview of the film, a woman explains how she fell in love with a female friend, and that this caused her to become depressed as she tried to cope with, and suppress, her homosexuality. She describes how her husband left her, and her children disassociated themselves from her, leading to her becoming suicidal. When Kinsey says 'it's just another reminder of how little things have changed in our society', she responds with surprise. 'What are you talking about?' she asks, 'things have gotten much better.' The woman tells Kinsey that after reading his report, she learned that there were many other women who had had similar experiences, and that when she spoke to her friend she found that the affection was shared and they had since entered a homosexual relationship. This scene thus acts as the confirmation of Kinsey's cultural impact, illustrating how his research and postmodern perspectives of human sexuality managed to largely debunk the cultural belief that homosexuality was abhorrent and pathological, and that Kinsey instigated a shift in American society that benefitted those in gender and/or sexuality minorities.

Whilst *Kinsey* may appear on the surface to be a familiar and conventional biopic, it is clear that the juxtaposition between neoclassical tropes and the explicit sexual nature of the film's themes sheds light on the evolution of American society's attitudes towards sexuality, particularly homosexuality. Though we never learn if Kinsey overcame his addiction, we see, from both his personal bisexual experiences and from the micro-narratives provided by his interviewees, an explicit rebuke to the association between homosexuality and insanity that had been so pervasive in American culture. *Kinsey* challenges our expectations of the conventional 'Great Man' biopic by celebrating and foregrounding, rather than omitting, the homosex-

[179] Linke, G. (2011) Kinsey – an Inquiry into American Sexual Identity. p. 140.

ual aspects of Kinsey's personality. We are also confronted with a number of sexually explicit images that belie the neoclassical aesthetic adopted by the film, and this juxtaposition serves to highlight and critique the historically pejorative attitudes towards homosexuality in America, and confirms Kinsey's cultural impact through his deconstruction of the pathologisation of homosexuality.

Conclusion

It is clear that in these three case studies mental illness can be understood as a form of obstacle that is a key component of the heroic quest narrative in the neoclassical 'great man' biopic. In *A Beautiful Mind*, Nash's ability to confront his delusions and re-stabilise his professional and family life marks him as a triumphant figure, embodying the resilience and persistence of the American spirit. Similar characteristics also emerge in *The Aviator*, albeit, in this case, although we see Hughes overcome government corruption and persecution, ostensibly signifying his recovery from the throes of his OCD, the film emphasises Hughes's tendency to relapse in increasingly severe fashion; providing a more critical outlook on the tropes and underlying mythologies usually indicative of national virtues and strength of character.

In the context of other biographical films in Scorsese's oeuvre, which have leaned towards morally dubious figures at best and pathological and violent criminals at worst (see *Raging Bull*,[180] *Goodfellas*[181] and *Casino*,[182]) we can see Scorsese has something of a proclivity for real-life stories of remarkable but unstable American historical figures. However, *The Aviator* arguably stands as something of an outlier within this group, given that although Hughes is a maverick suffering from mental disorder, the film casts little to any doubt upon his integrity or legitimacy. Indeed, though the film has several concomitant themes to many others of Scorsese's biopics, what we can identify as the source of this difference is the emphasis on his patriotism. Where the protagonists of the previous examples are obsessed with how much they can take, in terms of fame, power and (especially) money, Hughes instead is portrayed as far more obsessed with what he can do with

[180] *Raging Bull*. (1980) Martin Scorsese (dir.), USA.
[181] *Goodfellas*. (1990) Martin Scorsese (dir.), USA.
[182] *Casino*. (1995) Martin Scorsese (dir.), USA.

that fame, power and money. That the film stresses his determination to develop the most technologically advanced military planes possible illustrates his willingness to contribute to issues of national importance. Given the subsequent release of *The Wolf of Wall Street*,[183] another biopic collaboration between Scorsese and DiCaprio, which explores Wall Street financial corruption through the lens of drug addiction and ostentatious, gluttonous hedonism, *The Aviator* remains a rare departure away from biographical anti-heroes common within Scorsese's body of work. However, mental illness is still utilised in the film as a means of scrutinising national and cultural myths and tendencies. Hughes's ambition and determination to succeed is explicitly highlighted as being unhealthy and damaging, even if he directs that drive in such a way as to make meaningful contributions on a national level, and as such his righteousness and admirable character aren't enough to save him from the dangers of a mindset that reflects a national stance geared towards progress, expansion and success-at-all-costs.

Kinsey bears many similarities in its depiction of the 'great man' to both *A Beautiful Mind* and *The Aviator*. However, it makes for an interesting inclusion in this chapter because it also offers several rebukes to some popular conventions and themes. Kinsey's drive and ambition echo that of both Nash and Hughes, and indeed Kinsey's addiction comes as a by-product of his insatiable desire to learn more and expand his study. Like most 'great men', both historically and in the contemporary context, Kinsey dedicates his life to his work. And like many 'great men' in the contemporary neoclassical form, far more attention is paid to the damaging impact that such dedication can have upon the individual's mental and physical wellbeing. *Kinsey*, like *The Aviator*, emphasises the protagonist's remarkable nature by placing him at odds with a conservative, McCarthy-era, government and society. Although Kinsey doesn't conquer his governmental adversaries, instead returning to a theme familiar from *A Beautiful Mind* whereby Kinsey realises that the love of his wife and family is far more worthwhile and valuable than his increasing workload, the film avoids reverting wholly to a heteronormative 'love-conquers-all' mode by emphasising the plurality of sexual identities and orientations in America, even if

[183] *The Wolf of Wall Street*. (2013) Martin Scorsese (dir.), USA.

Kinsey, himself bisexual, is brought through his personal turmoil via the support and love of his wife.[184] That Kinsey's research is shown to have opened the nation's eyes to the commonality of sexual preferences and behaviours that were often condemned as abhorrent or immoral illustrates a pushing of the envelope for the 'great man' form, which even in the contemporary context has largely been dominated by somewhat conservative ideologies and protagonists. Where *A Beautiful Mind* resolved Nash's mental illness and omitted the homosexual aspects of his personality, *Kinsey* celebrates the diversity of American sexuality in an era that has seen the re-emergence of conservative views towards sex education and the pathologisation of homosexuality. Overall, these three films often compliment one another in terms of the techniques used to articulate the greatness of their respective 'great men', and in particular they each deploy mental illness as a means of undermining tired mythologies and attitudes that reinforce the infallibility of masculinity in contemporary America. The contemporary focus upon figures that we may identify as geniuses or innovative idols of production often emphasises not only the cultural interventions of such personalities, but also the cost at which such interventions come. Polymaths and mavericks in the pantheon of American icons may be remembered for their pioneering and ambitious personalities, but the contemporary neoclassical biopic seems determined to remind us of the toll that such a mindset can take upon the national, let alone individual, psyche.

[184] Linke, G. (2011) Kinsey – an Inquiry into American Sexual Identity. p. 149

Chapter Two: The Sports Biopic: Mental Illness and the American Family

In the previous chapter I illustrated how the resurgence of the neo-classical 'great man' biopic has exhibited an ambivalent relationship with mythologies of American character and greatness. Another subgenre that requires acknowledgement in this regard is the sports biopic. In a similar vein to the 'great man' tradition, Aaron Baker contends that the sports biopic has overwhelmingly been focussed upon heterosexual masculine identities and the achievement of upward mobility through 'free and fair competition modelled on American society, which claims that rewards go to the most deserving individuals.'[185] Therefore, where the neoclassical 'great man' biopic tends to explore such issues through economic, scientific or military themes, in keeping with its idols of production focus, the sports biopic interrogates tropes of national identity and character through its celebration of professional sporting triumphs and narratives that hail underdogs and their individual competitive spirit. This is especially evident in, but by no means limited to, biopics concerning the combative dynamics of prizefighting and the overall representation of physicality in sporting films. That the sports biopic has historically leaned towards narratives of redemption and against-all-odds underdog stories, and has made accounts of individualised success (even within team sports) a high priority, one can see the influence of American cultural mythology, especially in relation to exceptionalism discourse, upon the allure of such narrative traditions.

When considering the sports biopic's engagement with issues of mental illness it is perhaps unsurprising that, as with many of the chapters in this thesis, there are few historical examples to be found. This further highlights how American cinema culture in the contemporary moment is interrogating and utilising narratives of mental illness in a more sustained and explicit way than ever before. However, this could also be due to the comparatively late rise of the sports biopic as a fashionable subgenre. In charting the changing trends in the content and selection of biographical subjects in magazines, Lowenthal found that from the 1900s to the 1920s not one single figure from the world of sports was written about. However, Low-

[185] Baker, A. (2003) *Contesting Identities: Sports in American Film*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press. p. 3.

enthal also found that by the mid 1940s sports figures were 'now close to the top of favourite selections'.[186] Lowenthal attributes this shift in hero-selection to the emergence of new cultural needs that no longer looked to biography as a provider of legitimate information or education but instead viewed the genre as a 'dream world'.[187] This changing terrain in magazine biographies also corresponds to the simultaneous rise of the sports biographies appeal in the cinema, as Custen found, between 1927-1940 almost no biopics concerning sportspersons were made. However, the 1940s in particular proved to be a fruitful period for the introduction of the subgenre, with a steady output in sporting biopics following on from this boom period.[188]

Given the sports biopics relatively late introduction to American cinema, it is hardly surprising that almost no examples of a sports biopic featuring mental illness as a theme can be found. One of the only examples of a sports biopic that explicitly incorporated mental illness as a theme during the classical studio-era is *Fear Strikes Out*.[189] The film focuses upon the nervous breakdown of successful baseball star Jimmy Piersall (Anthony Perkins), who, after a significant amount of counselling, realises that his desire to succeed in the sport was influenced by his overbearing father John (Karl Malden). Another important predecessor, and one that was briefly alluded to in the previous chapter, is Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull*, which tells of the rise and fall of former boxer Jake La Motta (Robert De Niro), whose sociopathic tendencies ruin both his career and his relationship with his wife and brother. In particular, La Motta's fraught relationship with his brother and agent Joey (Joe Pesci) is crucial in articulating La Motta's paranoia and emotional destructiveness, as he eventually becomes so paranoid that he assaults Joey for having an imagined affair with his wife. With these examples in mind, though one could engage in a fascinating and in-depth discussion of the sports biopic's engagement with exceptionalism discourse as articulated through sporting achievement, the focus of this chapter will be upon

[186] Lowenthal, L. (1944) Biographies in Popular Magazines. p. 515.
[187] ibid. p. 517.
[188] Custen, G. (1992) *Bio/Pics*. p. 251.
[189] *Fear Strikes Out.* (1957) Robert Mulligan (dir.) USA.

the representation of mental disorder in relation to critical ideas about the American family.

As the two aforementioned historical examples both connect mental illness with the family, the three case studies in this chapter all focus upon prominent sportspersons and either their own affliction with mental disorder, or the direct impact of a family member's disorder upon them, and link the representation of mental disorder to ideas pertaining to American family values and ideology. Both *Foxcatcher*[190] and *The Fighter*,[191] like *Raging Bull*, place emphasis on difficult sibling relationships, and connect themes of mental disorder to those relationships. Where La Motta lashes out at his younger brother for an alleged affair that didn't happen, in both these contemporary examples the younger brothers take centre-stage as we see the psychological impacts of living in the shadow of a more successful older sibling.

My analysis of *Foxcatcher* includes a psychoanalytic reading of Olympic wrestler Mark Schultz (Channing Tatum), specifically the articulation of his self-loathing and psychological issues through the use of mirrors and reflections throughout the film. I then consider the portrayal of John E. du Pont (Steve Carrell), a paranoid schizophrenic multimillionaire turned murderer who funds Schultz's training and acts as a surrogate father to him. Key to the representation of both characters' psychological issues is the portrayal of them as infantilised figures. As well as impressing upon the viewer the detrimental impact of an overshadowing older sibling (or, in the case of du Pont, a callous and unaffectionate mother) my discussion of *Foxcatcher* considers the use of certain techniques familiar from the film noir genre as a means of contextualising the film's representation of mental disorder, and its implication of the family with wider national and cultural anxieties. Though perhaps not as explicit in its use of noir tropes as *A Beautiful Mind*, the historical significance of film noir's fascination with psychological anxieties remain pertinent to this case study.

My discussion of *The Fighter* again considers the narrative significance of sibling rivalry; this time between boxer Micky Ward (Mark Wahlberg) and his older brother Dicky Eklund (Christian Bale), a retired boxer and

[190] *Foxcatcher*. (2014) Bennett Miller (dir.) USA.
[191] *The Fighter*. (2010) David O. Russell (dir.) USA.

drug addict. My analysis here concerns ideas of class and the unstable nature of the American family. Finally, I consider *The Blind Side*,[192] a film that considers the democratisation of American family values through exploring the virtues of interraciality and the breaking down of racial and economic barriers in order to achieve success. I argue that *The Blind Side* presents contradictory ideas based on racial stereotypes and progressive notions of interracial families as a means of exploring the effects of unstable and dysfunctional family dynamics upon an individual's mental health, within the confines of the familiar sports narrative in which social mobility and African American empowerment is facilitated by athletic achievement.

Foxcatcher: Infantilisation and Family Pathology

Our first introduction to Mark Schultz shows him alone in a medium close-up, practicing his rudimentary wrestling techniques on a dummy in the gym. Despite his imposing frame, the ease with which he throws the dummy around appears almost childlike, as if he were a child playing with an action figure. Allusions to Schultz as infantile are to be a familiar theme throughout *Foxcatcher*, which tells the story of Olympic wrestler Mark Schultz and his relationship with the reclusive and unpredictable multimillionaire John E. du Pont. Throughout the film we see both Schultz and du Pont become increasingly infantilised. It is suggested that the insulated and individualistic nature of wrestling has resulted in Schultz's emotional maturation being stunted, and for the majority of the film we are witnesses to an emotionally frustrated and vulnerable athlete. Soon after this introductory scene, we see Schultz arrive at a school. Sitting in the principal's office, once more Schultz is cast as childlike. Schultz is at the school to give a speech. He addresses a crowd of young children, showing them the gold medal he won at the 1984 Olympics. Visibly nervous about public speaking, his voice quivering, Schultz introduces himself, 'my name is Mark Schultz. I want to talk about America, and I want to tell you why I wrestle.' He raises his gold medal and brandishes it to his audience. He says, 'this is more than just some piece of metal. It's about what the medal represents. The virtues required to attain it.'

[192] *The Blind Side*. (2009) John Lee Hancock (dir.) USA.

Though Schultz's speech appears to draw upon discourses of exceptionalism and individual character, the fact that Schultz receives a cheque for just $20 as payment for his speech, and that the clerk writing the cheque mistakes Mark for his older and more successful brother Dave (Mark Ruffalo), who is also a wrestler, suggests that Schultz's life is notably unexceptional. Once home, Schultz looks at a painting on his wall of a historical battle scene in which the American flag takes pride of place, centre frame. This is the first of many suggestions in the film that Schultz has nostalgic and glamorised notions about his proper place within American society, and similar to themes present in the 'great man' subgenre, highlights his yearning to be idolised as a patriot. As an Olympic gold medallist Schultz feels he should be celebrated and honoured, viewed as the apotheosis of American sporting achievement; instead he is alone, underappreciated and overshadowed by a more successful and respected sibling.

When Dave Schultz is finally introduced in the film, we see the two brothers warming up together. As they lightly spar, the blocking of the wrestling grapples resembles more of an affectionate embrace, creating an interesting juxtaposition between the two as siblings and individual competitive athletes. Despite being the smaller man, Dave outclasses his brother comfortably, and a tightly framed close-up on Schultz's anguished face as he is pinned silently conveys the bitterness he feels in recognising his own inferiority. Afterwards, Schultz looks at himself in the mirror, clearly disgusted at being beaten so convincingly. As he looks upon his reflection, he begins to repeatedly strike himself in the face as punishment. The use of reflections and mirrors is an important device throughout the film for representing Schultz's emotional pathology, and, as I will discuss later, the relevance of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory 'the mirror stage' is significant in interpreting the use of this technique.

Back at his home, we once more see Schultz sitting alone in the dark. Schultz receives a call from one of John du Pont's representatives, asking him to fly out to Pennsylvania to meet du Pont in person. In order to encourage Schultz to agree to fly to Pennsylvania, the man on the phone reiterates the phrase, 'John E. du Pont, of the du Pont family' in order to impress upon Schultz the family's prestigious social status. When Schultz and du Pont finally meet at the du Pont mansion, du Pont claims to be a wres-

tling coach, with a 'deep love for the sport of wrestling'. He asks Schultz what his future goals are. Schultz explains that, 'I want to be the best in the world. I want to go to the worlds [World Athletics Championships] and win gold. I want to go to the '88 Olympics in Seoul and win gold.' Impressed by these ambitious aims, du Pont asks if Schultz is receiving all the support he needs. He also claims that the Soviets take much better care of their wrestlers than the Americans do, and that, 'we as a nation have failed to honour you. And that's a problem. Not just for you, but for our society. When we fail to honour that which should be honoured it's a problem.' He goes on to describe himself as a patriot who wants 'to see this country soar again.' There is a clear suggestion that du Pont is dissatisfied with the state of American society and its values. He draws comparisons between Soviet wrestling and the state of USA wrestling, alluding to Cold War politics in a manner similar to that seen in *A Beautiful Mind* and *Kinsey*, in order to reinforce his beliefs. Resultantly, he offers to fund Schultz's training and to allow him to put an elite wrestling team together to live at Foxcatcher Farms and use the state-of-the-art sports facilities that he has built, as a means of trying to resolve the nation's problems and instil some hope in the country.

Part of du Pont's strategy to convince Schultz to agree is to take him to an area of his estate's grounds that was the site of a historical battle (it is not made clear whether it is a site from the Revolutionary War or the Civil War). He explains '3000 men died here. These patriots were willing to give up everything, including their lives, for freedom. We're going to do great things Mark. I like to come here to remind myself what really matters.' The use of multiple extreme long shots of the battlefield's vistas shows the vastness of the land, and the insignificance of the barely visible protagonists within its expanses. Also, a series of medium shots linger upon commemorative monuments and replica cannon within the grounds in order to create a mise-en-scène centred upon discourses of American freedom and liberty.

Upon his return from Foxcatcher, Schultz looks at himself in the airport mirror and, in contrast to the first time we saw him do so, clenches his fists and silently waves his arms in aggressive relief and jubilation that he has finally been noticed for his own merit and achievements. These intimate moments of (literal) reflection are repeatedly used as a device that clearly signals Schultz's self-perception and mood. Therefore, one can draw paral-

lels to Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theories relating to 'the mirror stage'. Central to Lacan's theory of the mirror stage is an infant's first recognition of its own reflection. Sean Homer notes that 'the reflected image presents a dilemma for the infant because it is at once intimately connected to its own sense of self and at the same time external to it.'[193] As such, the identification with the reflection enables the infant to identify itself as part of the wider (symbolic) world. However, the dilemma emerges in that, as the infant is not yet able to totally control its body and faculties, and yet is in total control of the reflection, the infant is alienated by its own image, and thus the image becomes an idealised 'I' to which the individual may never live up to.[194]

The two critical aspects of *Foxcatcher* that make this psychoanalytic idea relevant to Schultz are that, as previously noted, the film goes to great lengths to render Schultz as infantile and childlike, and also presents his relationship with his brother (his only biological family) as contradictory and unsettled. Whether Schultz berates or congratulates himself in the mirror, we can see that his engagement with his reflection has a dual function. First, it shows Schultz's personal struggle to live up to his own estimations of himself (and thus enter the symbolic world) and also shows how he sees his reflection as an insight into how others see him. In terms of family significance, that Dave Schultz is shown as the superior wrestler and the more emotionally mature of the two siblings perhaps suggests that Schultz's engagement with his reflection represents his sense of self and how he is unable to live up to comparisons with his brother. That the mirror becomes a symbol for Schultz's psychological distress touches upon a familiar use of the mirror in many film noirs. Scott Synder notes how the femme fatale figure was often framed in shots that showed her gazing upon her own reflection in the mirror in order to suggest that these characters had a personality disorder. The reflection signifies the narcissism, deviousness and general untrustworthiness of these female characters.[195] Though not identical in application, the use of the mirror as a motif for Schultz's unbalanced psycho-

[193] Homer, S. (2005) *Jacques Lacan*. New York: Routledge. p. 21.
[194] ibid. p. 24-25.
[195] Snyder, S. (2001) Personality Disorder and the Film Noir Femme Fatale. *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture.* Vol. 8(3). p. 161-162.

logical state in *Foxcatcher* shows an awareness of the representation of personality disorders and psychological distress in earlier film examples and shows the trope in a more modern context. That this technique in film noir was predominantly used to portray female characters in a sinister light may also lead one to argue that this technique in *Foxcatcher* perhaps adds to the scrutiny of the hyper-masculinised milieu of the film, pathologising Schultz's hyper-male ego via a trope more commonly historically associated with female characters.

David Cooper writes that one of the initial ideas instilled in children by their upbringing within a family (and a wider culture that places stock in the social values of the family more generally) is that individuals cannot successfully exist in the world on their own; that is, belonging to a wider unit, 'the family', is constructed as being more fulfilling than living without these social connections.[196] Cooper links this family conditioning to mental disorders, claiming that the family functions to construct ideas of social 'normality', which in turn are placed in opposition to madness.[197] In the case of Schultz we can see that his frequent isolation and bitterness at living in his brother's shadow are key contributors to his pathological self-loathing and self-persecution. This is typified in a later scene when Schultz, having lost an important match, goes into his hotel room, bursts into tears and begins to severely beat himself. Schultz also smashes his head through a mirror, a moment that symbolises how he is unable to cope with living in his brother's shadow. Therefore, Schultz's pathology is connected to the unusual family dynamic that exists between him and his brother. Where the brothers' initial sparring appeared almost affectionate, when Dave finds Mark in the hotel room after his breakdown, first he slaps him and then hugs him, though now the affectionate hug appears more like a wrestling pin, further emphasising the fraught and contradictory relationship between the two (figs. 2.1 & 2.2).

When Schultz first tells his brother that he is moving to Foxcatcher Farms, he recites the spiel that du Pont used to persuade him to move, 'the country has lost its morals and values, the kids are lost, and they don't have any role models and heroes.' He continues, 'I agreed [with du Pont]. All the

[196] Cooper, D. (1971) *The Death of the Family*. London: The Penguin Press. p. 10-11.
[197] ibid. p. 12-13.

stuff he was saying, I couldn't believe he was saying all the stuff that was in my head all the time.' Schultz frames his interaction with du Pont as a meeting of minds, which shows both characters' disillusionment with the state of modern America. When Dave sceptically asks what du Pont gets out of the arrangement, Schultz responds 'America winning. […] Me winning.' This is one of the key motifs in *Foxcatcher*. Schultz and du Pont frequently frame their wrestling project as if it were aimed at getting America 'back on track', and that Schultz links 'America winning' to '*me* winning' (my italics) shows his desire to be seen as a beacon of hope for the country. Key to the idea of the meeting of minds between Schultz and du Pont is not just their disenfranchisement with America, but also a pathological connection between the two. Where we have seen Schultz's unstable moods and severe unhappiness, in the case of du Pont we see a more ambiguous depiction of mental disorder. The film avoids diagnosing du Pont as a character with paranoid schizophrenia, a diagnosis that was given by 8 out of 10 psychiatrists tasked with evaluating the real du Pont's sanity before his trial for murder,[198] instead leaving the definition of du Pont's disorder ambiguous. The representation of his disorder in the film avoids definition, and central to this depiction, as with Schultz's psychological issues, is the detrimental impact of the family.

[198] Vigoda, R. & Odine, B. (1997) *Defense Doctors: Du Pont Feared He Was Target of Conspiracy He Worried About The Russians, One Said. Then He Decided The Threat Was At Home*. Internet. Available at <http://articles.philly.com/1997-02-09/news/25535375_1_john-e-du-foxcatcher-estate-david-schultz> [Accessed 12/02/16].

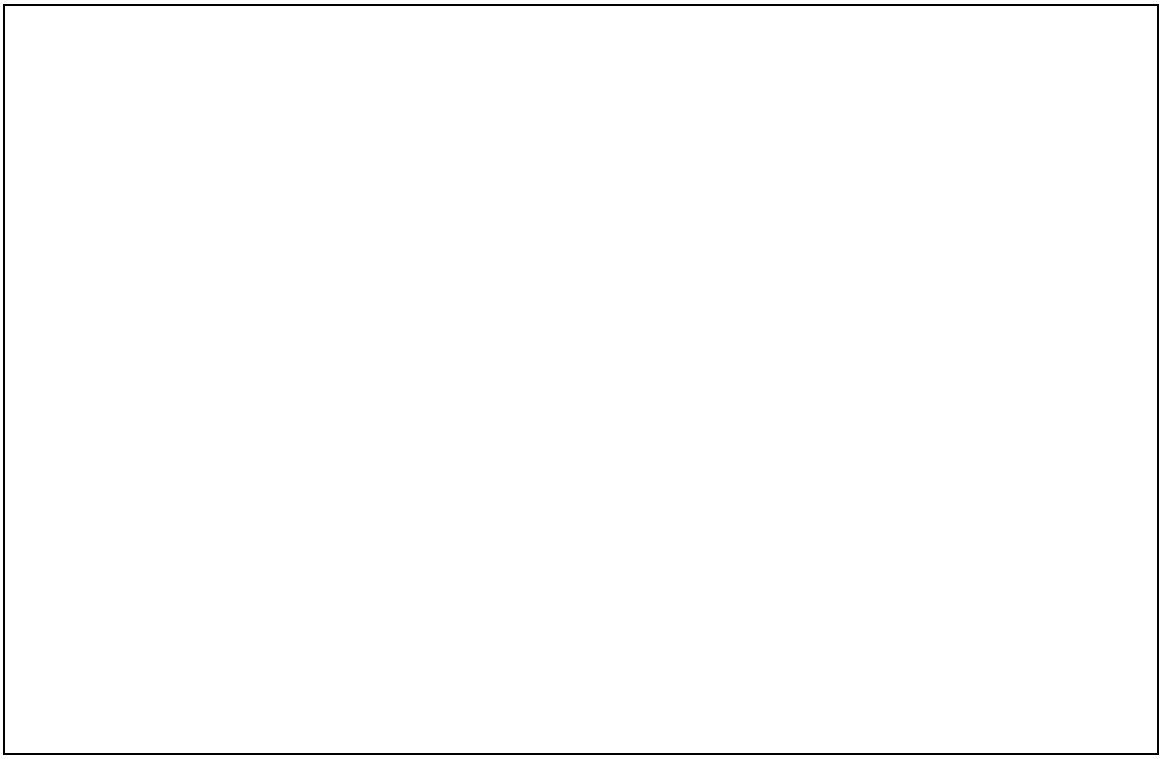

Figure 2.1: The Schultz brothers' sparring appears affectionate. (*Foxcatcher*. Directed by Bennett Miller: 2014; Annapurna Pictures, Likely Story, Media Rights Capital)

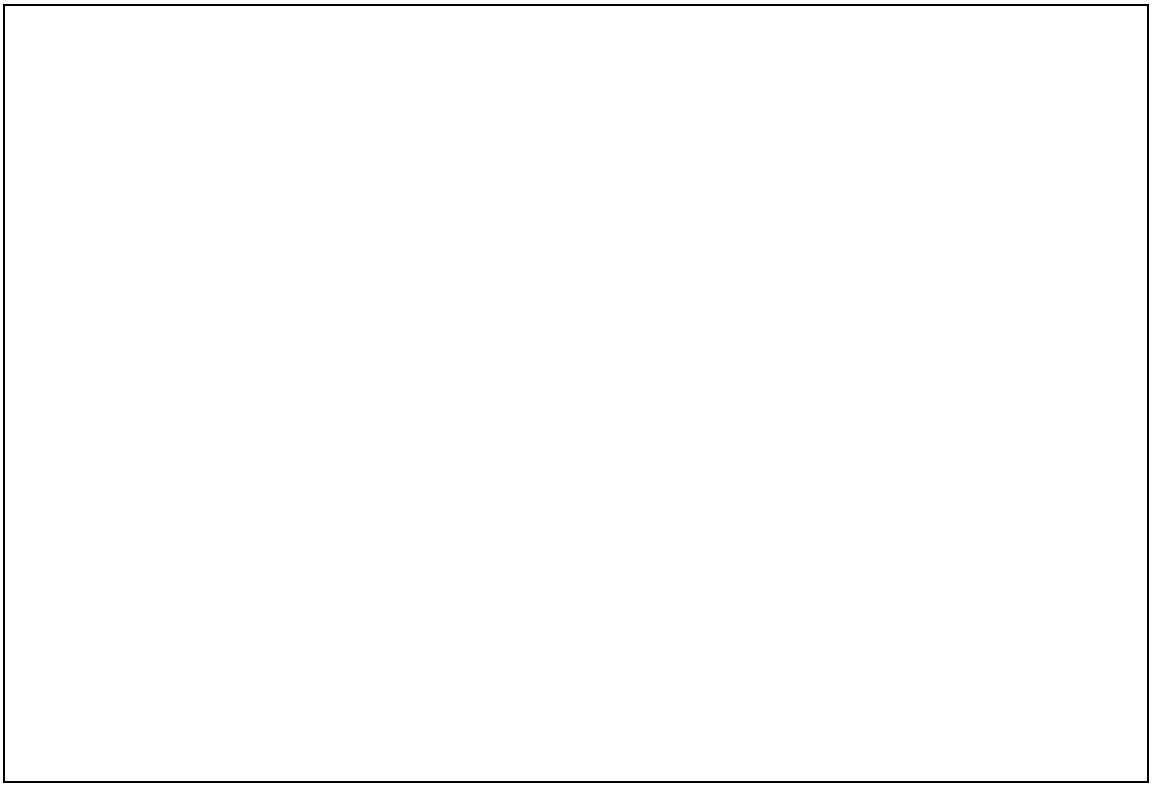

Figure 2.2: However, when the brothers have an intimate moment, this resembles a wrestling grapple, therefore emphasising their contradictory relationship. (Directed by Bennett Miller: 2013; Annapurna Pictures, Likely Story, Media Rights Capital)

Upon arrival at Foxcatcher Farms, Schultz is given a videocassette titled 'du Pont, a dynasty of wealth and power.' The video is a detailed history of the du Pont family, documenting their accumulation of wealth and social status in America. Schultz sits cross-legged on the floor very close to the screen, another portrayal of infantilisation, and watches as the video explains that the family accrued their wealth by manufacturing ammunition for the U.S. Military during the 19th century.[199] With the family's status and power within the American elites now established, as Schultz and du Pont walk through the grounds of the farm, du Pont tells Schultz about his inspirations, 'certainly Abraham Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, they gave me something to aspire to. My father was a role model.' This shows how du Pont views himself and his importance to, and connection with, the upper echelons of American society. That he talks about his father in the same breath as two of the United States most iconic presidents gives an impression not only of the du Ponts' social circles, but also an insight into the delusional self-aggrandisement of du Pont's egotism.

The first explicit allusion to du Pont's mental disorder comes when Schultz competes at the World Athletic Championships. Schultz wins gold, and as he embraces with his brother, who is also competing at the tournament, we see a shot from du Pont's point of view, observing the embrace between the brothers. As he looks upon them, the diegetic sound becomes heavily muted, signifying his dislocation from society and reality. This audio manipulation heightens the sense of jealousy that du Pont feels towards the relationship between the brothers. This motivates du Pont's attempts to position himself as a father figure to Schultz. First, he attempts to exacerbate the inferiority complex that Schultz feels in comparison to his brother. For winning gold at the World Championships, he gives Schultz a $10,000 bonus and says:

> You are more than Dave Schultz's little brother Mark. Dave Schultz is a wonderful wrestler. He, I'm sure, has been an inspiration to you,

[199] This scene's mention of 19th Century munitions supply as the source of the du Pont family's wealth strongly alludes to the American Civil War. That the real du Pont family provided the majority of the Union Army with ammunition during this conflict would appear to confirm this, and therefore make it more likely that the previously discussed scene set in a historical battleground is from the Civil War.

> a mentor to you. But he will always be your older brother. He will never let you be everything that you can be…you have been living in your brother's shadow your entire life…it's your time now.

Schultz admits that he feels that everything he has done and achieved has somehow been accredited to his brother, and that he needs to distance himself from his brother in order to become his own person.

At a charity dinner, in which du Pont is giving a speech, Schultz is tasked with introducing du Pont to the guests. Reading the script provided for him, he announces:

> I'm so proud to introduce my mentor…my mother and father were divorced when I was two years old and I spent a lifetime looking for a father and I found one in the Golden Eagle of America John du Pont.

'The Golden Eagle of America' is du Pont's self-proclaimed nickname that further enhances his feelings of connection to American values and ideology. As du Pont takes the stage, he acknowledges Schultz, exclaiming, 'Mark Schultz. Thank you son.' Here it can be seen that du Pont has successfully infiltrated the Schultz brothers' family unit, positioning himself as a surrogate father to Mark. Ultimately, this only serves to intensify his and Schultz's psychological issues. R. D. Laing and Aaron Esterson note that nobody inhabits just one position within a family structure, but rather we simultaneously occupy multiple roles.[200] Laing and Esterson also note that with each position within a family structure comes an alteration of identity:

> People have identities. But they may also change quite remarkably as they become different others-to-others…not only may the one person behave differently in his different alterations, but he may experience himself in different ways.[201]

As the family constitutes multiple roles and identities for each individual within its structure, this can be linked to du Pont's mental disorder. In a

[200] Laing, R. D. & Esterson, A. (1964) *Sanity, Madness and the Family*. Middlesex: Penguin. p. 20.
[201] ibid.

documentary film that he commissions to be made about himself and his role as an inspirational wrestling coach he claims that 'my athletes look to me as a brother, a mentor, a father and a leader'. The documentary highlights the constructed nature of du Pont's surrogate father role, and his pathology is linked to his confused and overlapping symbolic positions within his surrogate family, the Foxcatcher wrestling team. That du Pont believes he is a symbolic brother and father (as well as mentor and leader) to Schultz, as well as Dave occupying a position of both sibling and paternal carer for his younger brother implicates the instability of the family as a source of pathology for both Schultz and du Pont, whose relationship only continues to deteriorate due to this unstable dynamic. It may also be said that the film's incorporation of documentary-style footage, as well as the earlier documentary videocassette detailing the du Pont's dynasty, comments upon the nature of (auto)biography and its highly constructed nature. In doing so, the film also acknowledges its own participation in the construction of myth and historical character by gesturing to the process of documentary production, forging a connection between the modes of production for both documentaries and indeed biopics, which themselves often assimilate techniques from documentary to capitalise on an assumed relationship between documentary filmmaking and the fictional retelling of a real life.

Familiar to a number of conventional narratives of mental disorder, a significant amount of emphasis is placed upon the detrimental effects of du Pont's relationship with his unaffectionate mother (Vanessa Redgrave). Where du Pont places great stock, and money, in his fondness for wrestling, his elderly mother is shown as disappointed in his choice of sport. In one exchange with his mother she appears uninterested in discussing wrestling, and instead wants to discuss the donation of his train set to the Children's Museum. This conversation topic serves to infantilise du Pont, in a similar manner to that seen with Schultz. In response to the mention of his train set, du Pont attempts to reassert his masculinity and maturity by exclaiming, 'mother, I don't care about the train set. I am leading men. I am training them. I am teaching them. I am giving them a dream. And I am giving American hope.' This shows how delusional du Pont is about his involvement in wrestling, and that he feels the weight of expectation from his

mother. His mother is unfazed by du Pont's claims, instead denigrating wrestling as a 'low sport'. The portrayal of du Pont's mother as a stern and imposing matriarchal figure is another allusion to a trope popularised by film noir, and more generally in Cold War cinema. Michael Chopra-Gant claims that following the Second World War there was a noticeable shift in American popular imagination that reconfigured motherhood as a threat to masculinity, particularly concerning the infantilising effect of imposing motherhood upon men, termed 'momism'.[202]

His mother's callous remarks illustrate the futility of du Pont's desperate attempts to please her, and the psychological impact that this has had upon him. In a later scene, du Pont's mother enters the gym as the Foxcatcher wrestling team are warming up. Noticing her arrival, du Pont instructs the athletes to huddle around him. Desperate to deliver a motivational speech, he encourages the wrestlers to become 'winners in life' and 'good citizens for America'. However, his mother is clearly unimpressed by his patriotic platitudes. He therefore attempts to coach some basic wrestling moves, but his cumbersome movements only further highlight his lack of knowledge of the sport, and his mother leaves in silent disapproval. Significantly, the real Foxcatcher wrestling facility wasn't built until after du Pont's mother had died, and therefore we can see that the inclusion of her character in the film serves to provide an antagonistic force to du Pont, providing a tangible source for his increasing mental illness and underlining the significance of the 'bad mother' trope in American film. Michael Rogin contends that Cold War cinema popularised the 'bad mother' archetype, aligning Communism with 'secret, maternal influence,' and thus representing the mother as a source of anxiety.[203] This is a trait typified in *The Manchurian Candidate*,[204] in which Rebecca Bell-Metereau claims that cultural concerns in America about the effects of momism '[linked] totalitarian communism and female domination'.[205]

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[202] Chopra-Gant, M. (2006) *Hollywood Genres and Postwar America: Masculinity, Family and Nation in Popular Movies and Film Noir*. London: I. B. Tauris. p. 82-83.
[203] Rogin, M. (1987) *Ronald Reagan, The Movie: And Other Episodes in Political Demonology*. London: University of California Press. p. 245.
[204] *The Manchurian Candidate*. (1962) John Frankenheimer (dir.) USA.
[205] Bell-Metereau, R. (2011) Stealth, Sexuality and Cult Status in The Manchurian Candidate and Seconds. In: Pomerance, M. & Barton Palmer, R. (eds.) *A Little Solitaire: John Frankenheimer and American Cinema.* London: Rutgers University Press. p. 52.

As du Pont clearly doesn't feel that he is living up to his mother's discerning standards, one can argue that this impairs his mental stability and sense of identity. As Laing writes, 'the shadow of the "family" darkens one's vision. Until one can see the "family" in oneself, one can neither see oneself nor any family clearly.'[206] Therefore, that du Pont recognises he cannot please his mother means he cannot see the family in himself, and thus he is detached from his sense of family identity, suggesting a fissured or unsettled sense of self-identity. Rocked by his mother's persistent dismissals of him, du Pont lashes out at Schultz, slapping him in the face and calling him an 'ungrateful ape'. He also becomes insistent that Dave comes to join the Foxcatcher team, saying that hiring Schultz was a mistake. From here on, the relationship between du Pont and Schultz becomes increasingly and irreparably strained. Dave's arrival at the farm causes much dismay for Schultz. In the build-up to the Olympics, Dave trains the other wrestlers while Schultz consciously isolates himself. Therefore, Schultz chooses to separate himself from both his biological family and his symbolic father, du Pont, due to the jealousy he feels as a result of Dave's arrival.

Shortly afterwards, du Pont's mother passes away. This causes du Pont to become increasingly misanthropic and unstable. When du Pont tells Dave that he wants Schultz to win a gold medal more than anything he also says that he fears there are some 'psychological issues'. Whilst it is inferred that he is referring to Schultz's psychological issues, the fact that he doesn't specify means that this can be read as a further indication of his own declining mental state. His own psychological issues and the majority of Schultz's have both been created and exacerbated by his attempts to control Schultz, in a way similar to how his mother had treated him.

Dave's arrival at Foxcatcher Farms indicates to Schultz that once again he has been relegated into his brother's shadow. The two brothers meet with du Pont and his lawyer to explain that after the Olympics Schultz has decided to leave the team. Throughout this scene neither du Pont nor Schultz speak. They both sit silently with sullen expressions on their faces. At this moment both characters are shown at their most infantilised. The pair resembles sulking children, who avoid eye contact with one another

[206] Laing, R. D. (1969) *The Politics of the Family, and Other Essays*. New York: Routledge. p. 15.

while their 'adult' representatives negotiate on their behalf. This level of infantilisation illustrates the irreconcilable relationship between them, showing that neither character appears to be a functioning adult. The loss of du Pont's mother, rather than liberating him to become the man of the house, has caused a noticeable regression to an infantile state.

Ultimately, Schultz's ruined relationship with du Pont affects his performance at the Olympic games, and he fails to defend his gold medal. The camera lingers on Schultz being pinned by his opponent, before cutting to a medium two shot of du Pont and Dave looking on helplessly. Once more the diegetic sound is muted, conveying du Pont's increasing detachment from reality, perhaps suggesting his condition is worsening due to his tumultuous relationship with Schultz. It is also arguable that Schultz's defeat becomes a catalyst for du Pont's increasing paranoia and mental decline, as this ultimately means that his project to rejuvenate America has failed.

Schultz's departure from Foxcatcher causes du Pont to become increasingly reclusive and non-compos mentis. Several static long shots show du Pont driving his car around his estate with no sense of destination. He turns up at Dave's chalet to find him playing his with children in the yard. Dave tells du Pont that it's Sunday, which is the day he spends with his family. This further isolates du Pont, as he has not only lost track of the date and time, but also is rebuffed by Dave and his family (the only conventional nuclear family in the film). His expression remains permanently vacant, and he inexplicably wears a vintage American army jacket (figure 2.3). This costume links to his family's heritage and fortune, as well as his idealistic nostalgic visions of American national identity. It also alludes to his glamorised and delusional self-image as an inspiring American leader.

Towards the end of the film du Pont is shown re-watching the documentary he had commissioned to be made about himself. He watches himself in a piece-to-camera talking about how to inspire athletes both in body and mind. This seems to be the inciting incident that precipitates his violent outburst at the denouement. As he sees himself once again talking about how a coach should be like a father, the documentary shows Schultz introducing du Pont at the dinner, 'I spent my whole life looking for a father and now I have found one in the Golden Eagle of America John du Pont.' Real-

ising that his pseudo-parental role has been left in tatters following Schultz's departure, du Pont clearly blames Dave for the erosion of their relationship, and this arguably causes his paranoia to take control over him, leading to him killing Dave unexpectedly. Dave's murder in the film is dramatic not only because it is unexpected, but also because it almost entirely lacks any conventional dramatic motivation. Dave approaches du Pont's car after he pulls up at his chalet, and du Pont nonchalantly draws a gun on him and says, 'do you have a problem with me?' Barely waiting for a response, he shoots Dave three times before calmly driving away, maintaining a vacant expression to emphasise the arbitrary nature of the act. The lack of emotion on du Pont's face shows his lack of mental stability and empathy, and emphasises his disconnect from reality. As du Pont is arrested outside the entrance to the gym, the camera crosscuts between photographs of Dave and his family on a dresser to du Pont's expressionless face as he is marched into a police helicopter. This emphasises the shattering of the only conventional family in the film. Where Schultz and his brother occupy contradictory and oppositional roles as brothers and competitors, and du Pont is isolated and infantilised by his mother, Dave's nuclear family has now been destroyed as a result of du Pont's delusions of power and control that were exacerbated by his paranoid schizophrenia.

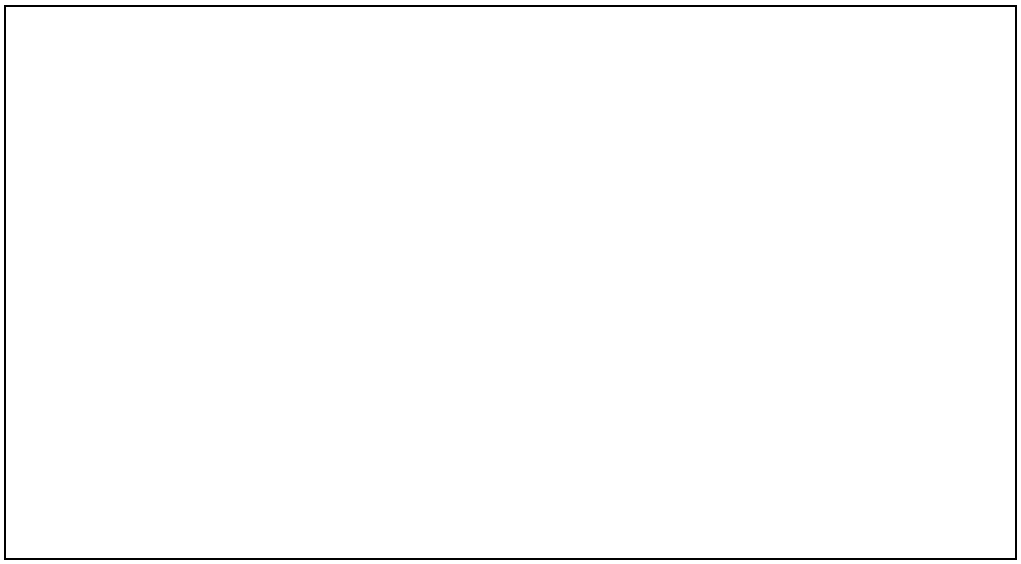

Figure 2.3: John du Pont's anachronistic costume alludes to his idealised nostalgic visions of American national identity. (Directed by Bennett Miller: 2014; Annapurna Pictures, Likely Story, Media Rights Capital)

The film closes by showing Schultz after his brother's death. We see him participating in UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship), a sport that earlier in the film he had mocked for bastardising the pureness of wrestling. That Schultz is now shown participating in the sport shows how disenfranchised he has become with his previous life and career. Now that Dave is dead, he has no remaining familial tie to wrestling, and has completely removed himself from that toxic environment. It is announced that Schultz's opponent is a Russian fighter, linking back to du Pont's earlier comments about how well the Soviets take care of their wrestlers. A close-up on Schultz's face shows a brooding and angry expression, suggesting that Schultz's own psychological issues remain, and that his venture in to UFC will not resolve his turmoil. The screen cuts to black, with only the diegetic sound of the crowd's chants of 'USA! USA! USA!' heard, in a lasting and ironic moment that hints that little has changed in Schultz's perception about the broken nature of the country, and his isolated position within its socio-cultural milieu.

The Fighter: Pathology and the Family Unit in the Boxing Biopic

David O. Russell's 2010 film *The Fighter* tells the story of former professional boxer Micky Ward. The film begins in the early 1990s, in the midst of Ward's career slump, and goes on to show his unexpected rise to claim the world welterweight title. While the biopic has found legendary prizefighters to be attractive subjects (*The Greatest*,[207] and *Ali*,[208] for example), often the genre has leaned towards the against-all-odds underdog stories that have become a familiar parable of the American sports film. *The Fighter* sits alongside other boxing biopics such as *The Hurricane*[209] and *Cinderella Man*[210] in the contemporary underdog narrative tradition, popularised in large part by the *Rocky* franchise (1976-2015).

Aaron Baker claims that *Rocky*[211] instigated the third cycle of the Hollywood boxing film.[212] The first cycle, Baker claims, were Depression

[207] *The Greatest*. (1977) Tom Gries (dir.) USA.
[208] *Ali*. (2001) Michael Mann (dir.) USA.
[209] *The Hurricane*. (1999) Norman Jewison (dir.) USA.
[210] *Cinderella Man*. (2005) Ron Howard (dir.) USA.
[211] *Rocky*. (1976) John G. Avildsen (dir.) USA.
[212] Baker, A. (2003) *Contesting Identities*. p. 104.

era movies that portrayed the boxer as a metaphor for society at large. In these films, the celebration of working class heroes who overcame adversity illustrated the paradox of an individualised account of upward social mobility and the need for the support of a family structure to enable such success. The second cycle, spanning from 1947-1956, relied primarily on noir and realist conventions to critique the exploitation of the working classes through the boxing narrative. Boxing films from this era often criticised capitalist culture in America by highlighting its exclusion of racial minorities, which can be understood as a reaction to the political oppression of people of colour within the sport of boxing itself. Finally, the ongoing third cycle is a diverse contemporary phase in which, in keeping with its 'post-modern moment',[213] films vary between corroborating familiar American ideological narratives (e.g. *Rocky*) and scrutinising the impossibility of such ideals (e.g. *Raging Bull*).

The Fighter then appears to blend characteristics from the first and third cycles. The film not only follows Ward through a series of low-level defeats and his career comeback, but also focuses upon the role that his family plays within that narrative. Therefore, in keeping with the traits of the first cycle, Ward's story juxtaposes the individualised narrative of the boxer's success with his need for the support of his team and family. Ward's hometown, the working-class, post-industrial, city of Lowell, Massachusetts serves as the backdrop for the film. Lowell is a city badly impacted by poverty and crime, increasingly so in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis (often referred to as the worst financial crisis since the Depression), and one can see parallels between the ideologies of first cycle boxing films and *The Fighter*. Ward's underdog story serves as a metaphor for the upward mobility of the American Dream. However, where first cycle boxing films highlighted the contradictions between a narrative based on individual success with the need for social support in the form of a family or community, *The Fighter* also exhibits a more third cycle, postmodern approach, by not only showing us this contradiction, but by also showing the flaws and dysfunctional nature of the American family structure. In particular, the power struggle between Ward's mother/manager Alice Ward (Melissa Leo), his

[213] ibid.

older brother/trainer Dicky Eklund, and his girlfriend Charlene (Amy Adams) are at the epicentre of the narrative.

When we are first introduced to Ward, we see him and Eklund sitting on a sofa, being interviewed by a film crew. Eklund tells them, 'this is my younger brother. I taught him everything he knows.' Eklund also explains that when he was younger, he was a successful boxer, and his crowning achievement was knocking down Sugar Ray Leonard in 1978 (a fight that he went on to lose). Throughout the film it is clear that Eklund still lives off the glory of this moment, pointing out that because of it he became known as 'The Pride of Lowell'. We later learn that Eklund is now Ward's trainer, and, similar to *Foxcatcher*, Ward's feeling of inadequacy in comparison to his older brother is frequently shown. The Ward-Eklund family are shown as being popular in their community. Alice is a stern, firm matriarch who cherishes her eldest son, Eklund. Although the pair is primarily in control of Ward's boxing affairs, their capability is put in question in the film.

In one sequence, Ward is shown in the gym waiting for Eklund, who is late for their training session. The camera crew, who Eklund tells people, 'are making a movie about my comeback' are also waiting. To pass the time, Alice tells the documentary team again about Eklund's fight with Sugar Ray, insisting on showing them the recording. The camera cuts to a close up of Eklund in a dilapidated living room; play boxing with one of his friends. He is also watching a recording of his notorious fight, re-enacting every punch for his friends' amusement. The footage shows the fabled moment that Sugar Ray is felled, which is imitated by Eklund's friend, and, just as he does on the TV screen, Eklund steps over his downed opponent. This match-on-action illustrates the drastically different appearance of Eklund from 1978 to the present of 1993 in the film. Wiry, anaemic and permanently on edge, as Eklund steps over his friend it is to inhale a hit of crack cocaine from a bottle; juxtaposing the pinnacle of his boxing career with his current addiction issues.

Eklund's mental health issues are shown as being detrimental to his relationship with his brother. Though Alice is in denial about Eklund's drug use, it is clear that his addiction is harming Ward's career and causing Ward to re-evaluate his position within the family. In his writing about the evolution of narrative cinema in America, Nick Browne claims that the develop-

ment of visual language in cinema was linked from the very start to the subject of the family, especially concerning narratives in which the 'purity' of the family was threatened or compromised.[214] Browne's analysis illustrates the medium's longstanding fascination with the structure and dynamics of the American family that has rarely, if ever, subsided.

Ward first meets his girlfriend Charlene when she is working in a bar. She tells him that she had heard he was a 'stepping-stone' boxer, an easy opponent used to improve and elevate younger, more promising, fighters. Ward refutes this claim and claims his next fight will show everybody his true potential. They arrange to go on a date the evening that Ward returns from his fight in Atlantic City. The following morning, the family are waiting for Eklund to meet them so they can go to the airport. Tired of waiting, they drive to the crack house where they know Eklund is, just as he was when he was late for his training session with Ward. When Alice knocks on the door of the crack house, one of the addicts inside tells Eklund, who runs to the back of the house and leaps from the upper window into a pile of garbage bags. The garbage bags are symbolic of Eklund's wasted talent, and his status as a 'used up' junkie who 'threw it all away' to drugs. As he gets up from the waste pile, he finds that Ward had been waiting there for him (clearly he'd attempted such an escape before), to whom he says 'don't tell Ma I'm here…pick me up back at house, I'll go through the yard.' This illustrates Eklund's delusion in attempting to hide his addiction from his mother, who, though definitely aware of it, is obviously in denial.

When they arrive in Atlantic City, Ward, Alice and Eklund are gathered in their hotel room, and told by an official that Ward's opponent cannot fight. The only replacement fighter that could be found is 20lbs heavier than Ward, but the official attempts to justify this by informing them that he has just gotten out of prison, and thus isn't in shape. When Eklund and Alice protest, insisting that it is unfair to have Ward fight a much bigger man, they immediately change their tune when they are told that if the fight doesn't go ahead nobody will be paid. After a knowing glance to one another, they set about trying to coerce Ward to fight. Reluctantly he agrees, unable to deny

[214] Browne, N. (1987) Griffith's Family Discourse: Griffith and Freud. In: Gledhill, C. (ed.) *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*. London: BFI Publishing. p. 224.

the persistence of his family, and he is soundly beaten. Though this scene serves to illustrate that Ward's family/backroom team don't seem to have his best interests at heart, and that they are driven by their own greed and self-interests, when Ward is approached by a professional boxing promoter, offering him the chance to train as a full-time paid boxer in Las Vegas, he turns down the offer when the promoter says that he wouldn't be able to bring his brother, whom he describes as 'too much trouble'. On their way back to the airport, Alice and Eklund discuss the offer with Ward, telling him not to trust the promoter because 'he's not family'. Alice asks, 'what are you going to do in Vegas without Dicky? Without your family?' As a member of this dysfunctional family unit, Ward is shown as infantilised and as easily manipulated by Alice and Eklund, who levy prototypical American family values in order to keep him onside.

If, as Browne contends, early narrative cinema in America sought to reaffirm and enshrine the idealised core values of the family, *The Fighter* exhibits a contrary view in which the family unit can be seen as dysfunctional and borderline pathological. This relates to a contemporary cultural narrative that arguably emerged with the rise in popularity of psychoanalysis in America in the 1960s. Freudian psychoanalysis in particular explored the etiology of an individual's pathology and often located such causes as the result of parental abuse or neglect. Stephanie Coontz proclaims, 'we are constantly reminded of the psychological injuries we inflict on our children with every addition to the various support groups for "adult children" of alcoholics, divorced parents, or other "dysfunctional families".'[215] Coontz contends that myths about the erosion of family values, and claims of parents emotionally scarring their children, in contemporary America coincided with the rise of what she terms the 'at risk' industry, which specialises in self-help books, therapeutic audio tapes, therapy culture and so forth. The sports biopic's engagement with issues surrounding the family functions to perpetuate this idea, as *The Fighter* and the other case studies in this chapter all explore the pathological implications of an unsettled and dysfunctional family and its effects upon mental health.

[215] Coontz. S. (1992) *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York: BasicBooks. p. 207.

After his humiliating defeat, Ward returns to Lowell and lays low in his house. However, Charlene arrives on his doorstep, demanding to know why he stood her up. Ward tells her that he tried to call her, but was embarrassed. Though angry that he didn't call, Charlene takes pity on Ward when she sees the cuts on his face from the fight. She notices that one of his bandages is coming off, and takes him inside to apply a new one for him. This affectionate, almost motherly act places her in opposition to Alice, an opposition that is further emphasised when Ward tells Charlene he only fought at his family's insistence. After they finally go on a date, Charlene asks Ward why he took her all the way to the neighbouring Massachusetts town of Lexington, accusing him of trying to hide her from another woman. However, Ward reveals that the reason he didn't take her out in Lowell was because he was embarrassed to show his face in the community after his fight. Charlene responds by asking, 'do you really think your family is looking out for you?' This is the first time in the film that Ward is confronted about his perception of his family and their integrity, and Charlene serves as a disruptive and critical force towards Alice and Eklund throughout the rest of the film.

When Ward hints to Alice and Eklund that he is tempted to go to Las Vegas so he can be paid to train full-time, Eklund promises to find him the money to do so whilst staying with his family in Lowell. In the following scene, we see Eklund sitting and talking with a Cambodian family. He says, 'so, you put in $200, right? Then you get ten other people to put in $200…and you got your $2000'. The father of the family accuses Eklund of trying to rip them off. Eklund's response is simply, 'no, no I'm giving you an opportunity.' When the father suggests that maybe Eklund should give him $200, Eklund tries to explain further, 'no, you get that from people who you offer the opportunity to.' The vagueness of Eklund's pyramid scheme illustrates his detachment from logic and rationality. The fact that he simply refers to an ambiguous 'opportunity' as the core component of the scheme suggests the hollowness or emptiness of the capitalist ideals of the American Dream. When the Cambodian family accuse Eklund of trying to take advantage of them because they are immigrants, Eklund's friend replies, 'it ain't an anti-Cambodian thing. White people do this to other white people. It's what makes the world go round.' Eklund tells them that they are turning

down '[a] once-in-a-lifetime opportunity', before giving up and leaving to get high. This sequence connects Eklund's mental disorder to criticisms of capitalism in America. The ambiguity of his financial scam, and his friend's comments about 'making the world go round', evoke discourses reminiscent of those used in reference to the global financial crisis, in which banking and investing embezzlement schemes led to one of the largest recessions in history.

Unable to raise the money through his scam, Eklund resorts to prostituting his Cambodian girlfriend, and car-jacking the men who pick her up. This is a short-lived endeavour, and quickly Eklund is arrested. The police beat him as he tries to resist arrest. Ward rushes to his aid, only to be arrested and beaten also. The police, recognising that Ward is a professional fighter, bust his hand with their batons in order to nullify his physical threat. However, the wider implication of this action is that we see that Eklund's attempt to help his brother has only further hindered him. Leger Grindon writes that in the boxing film genre, 'the manager is the technician and strategist; a rival to the family. The trainer usually assumes a subsidiary role as the caretaker of the body, though he may…also minister to the soul.'[216] Though this is true in the case of *The Fighter*, what is also clear is that the role of the manager and the trainer provide even more complications to Ward's life and career because his family members occupy those roles. That Alice and Eklund are simultaneously part of Ward's family and his management/training team prevents them from fulfilling either role sufficiently, resulting in Ward's underwhelming career and his now damaged hand. Thus, their inability to fully occupy both roles creates dysfunction and pathology within their family structure. Grindon also claims that the boxing film often places emphasis upon the conflict between the free-market values of American capitalism and nuclear family values, which 'points back to the body-soul opposition as the boxer's career is tied to the flesh, whereas the family is associated with the spirit.'[217] This conflict is typified by Eklund's attempt to scam money from others to help his brother, a ploy that directly results in Ward's broken hand and Eklund's imprisonment.

[216] Grindon, L. (1996) Body and Soul: The Structure of Meaning in the Boxing Film Genre. *Cinema Journal*. Vol. 35(4), p. 59.
[217] ibid.

Whilst incarcerated, Eklund no longer has access to drugs, and thus is forced to go cold turkey. He is shown on his bed in a medium close-up writhing in agony. Curled in the foetal position, Eklund is infantilised by his drug withdrawal. This scene features heavy use of symbolism, evoking a sense of Eklund's rebirth. Eklund's cell becomes emblematic of the womb, and the camera tightly frames him in the foetal position in order to replicate the claustrophobia of being in the womb and to show his regression to an almost pre-birth state. A montage of fade transitions emphasises his lengthy and traumatic experience, his writhing reminiscent of a baby attempting to free itself during birth. We then see a tight close-up of Eklund's face as he lies on his back. Above his head are two superimposed archival footage scenes, allowing us to see the hallucinatory state that Eklund has entered. The first hallucination is the now familiar footage of Eklund's fight with Sugar Ray. The second is home-movie style footage of the Ward-Eklund family, featuring Eklund and Ward as children. The presence of these two juxtaposed clips serves to re-emphasise the conflict between the individualism of boxing narratives and the community of the American family, but also adds greater dimension to the sense that Eklund's realisation of, and recovery from, his addiction will be facilitated by moving on from his glory days and helping to repair the unity of his family (figure 2.4).

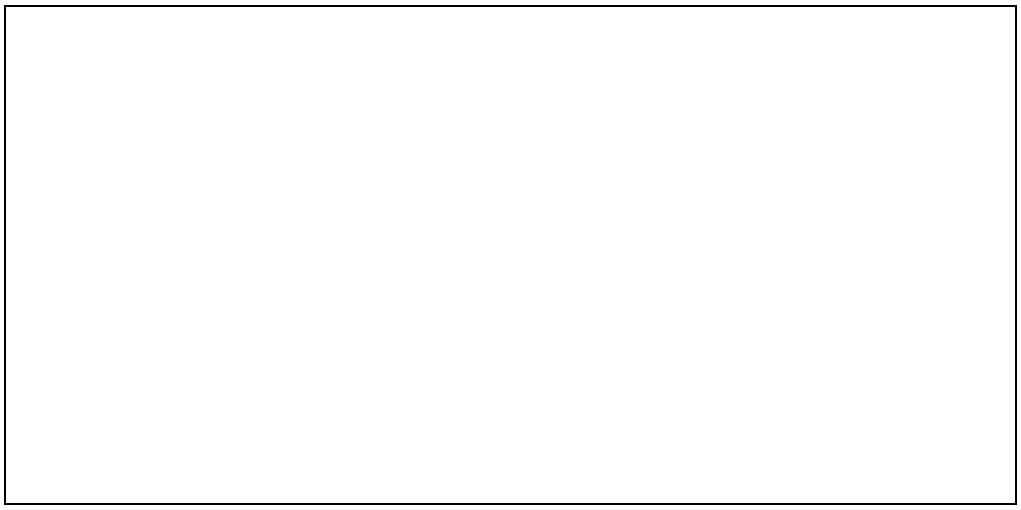

Figure 2.4: The hallucinations caused by Eklund's withdrawal illustrate the conflicting roles he plays in his brother's life and career. (*The Fighter*. Directed by David O. Russell: 2010; Closest to the Hole Productions, Fighter, Mandeville Films, The Park Entertainment, Relativity Media, The Weinstein Company)

Whilst imprisoned, the documentary about Eklund is finally broadcast. The prison agrees to screen the film for the inmates, and as Eklund enters the communal area, he is greeted by a standing ovation from the other prisoners. As the broadcast begins, an establishing shot of Lowell's industrial landscape is shown, and a voice-over proclaims, 'Lowell was the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution in America.' Eklund immediately begins to mock the background information provided by the documentary, much to the delight of his adoring crowd. When the camera cuts back to the television set, we see the title of the documentary, 'Crack in America', which transitions to footage of Eklund and a friend, both of whom are high, driving around the derelict Lowell streets. In the program Eklund is seen in the front of the car, acting almost as a tour guide for the camera crew in the back. The driver of the car points out a shabby house, explaining, 'this white house here, that's where I got my first crack.' Eklund quickly quips, 'did you know they smoked crack in the White House?' The camera returns to focus upon the inmates, who are now in a state of raucous laughter. Eklund's comment is clearly loaded with a critical discourse, explicitly connecting the debilitating effects of drugs, and its status as a contemporary epidemic, to the institutions associated with American national identity. That the white house in the film's mise-en-scene is a shabby and well-known crack house literally visualises how Eklund and the people of Lowell perceive the American government.

Though the beginning of the documentary is met with a jovial fanfare inside the prison, once the program moves on to show how many people in Lowell are disappointed in Eklund, especially because of his drug habit and penchant for petty crime, Eklund finally begins to realise that the documentary is not about his triumphant comeback at all, and instead is confronting him with the damaging impact of his addiction. An interviewee in the documentary even claims that Eklund didn't knock down Sugar Ray, but that he slipped. Alice is distraught by the film's content. On the phone to Ward she asks pleadingly, 'What are they [HBO] doing to us?' This suggests that Alice, in denial throughout most of the film about Eklund's addiction believes that the film is an intentional character assassination of the family. Ward rejects Alice's claims that Eklund is being 'set up' and tries to make her see the reality of the situation. With all parties being confronted

with the seriousness of Eklund's drug problem, and their complicity due to their denial of his disorder, this scene pathologises the Ward-Eklund family unit by showing its dysfunctional and vulnerable state.

Much like Stephanie Coontz's contentions concerning America's fixation with therapy culture, Claire Perkins contends that increasing focus upon the family as a site for pathology and vulnerability in contemporary American cinema is a by-product of the influence of psychoanalysis in Western culture.[218] Perkins explains that in these instances, 'the figures of parents, siblings and other relatives are presented directly or implicitly as forces with enormous capacity to inflict emotional distress through attitudes of detachment, self-absorption, jealousy, tactlessness and derision.'[219] I would argue that in this instance, as well as in the other case studies featured in this chapter, mental disorder (and its connections to wider discourses of national identity) could also be added to this taxonomy, especially within the biopic genre. Eklund's disorder is seen as explicitly compromising the stability of his family, leading to Ward's broken hand as well as the family's humiliation on national television.

The morning after seeing the documentary, Ward decides to begin training at the gym once again. Having decided to give up boxing after his arrest and the injury to his hand, the unflattering content of the documentary provides him with the motivation to get back in shape and start fighting again. Simultaneously, Eklund begins to use exercise as a way of aiding and managing his rehabilitation. Close-up shots of Ward gradually testing his injured hand are accompanied by the Red Hot Chili Peppers track 'Strip My Mind', reinforcing the connection between Ward's physical healing and Eklund's mental recovery. Parallel editing of both brothers shadowboxing is used to show their simultaneous progression in separate locations, Eklund confined to his cell, Ward confined within the claustrophobic enclosure of the ring. In each clip, sequenced by match-on-action, both brothers are positioned left of centre frame, suggesting that though their location and wounds may be different, they are in the same position, working their way back up from the bottom, using boxing as their cathartic outlet.

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[218] Perkins, C. (2012) *American Smart Cinema*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. p. 11-12.
[219] ibid. p. 12.

When fit enough to begin fighting again, Ward has to find a new trainer due to Eklund's imprisonment. He begins to work with local police officer and volunteer trainer Mickey O'Keefe (playing himself in the film). Charlene, O'Keefe and Ward's father George (Jack McGee) begin to help Ward get back on track and start organising new fights. However, in exchange for their help, Ward agrees with them that he will no longer allow Alice and Eklund to interfere. Upon Eklund's release, he immediately goes to the gym to try and resume his training with Ward. As he gets changed, he tells Ward that '[prison] got me clean, it got me clear up here', gesticulating towards his head. However, after Ward tells Eklund that he can no longer work with him because of the promise he made, an argument breaks out between Alice, Eklund, Charlene and O'Keefe. As they all clamour for Ward's allegiance, Ward is shown on his own in the ring, highlighting his isolation. Ward is reluctant to pick a side, once again infantilised by his childlike appeals for everyone to get along. Ward proclaims, 'I want Dicky back. And I want you Charlene. And I want O'Keefe. I want my family. What's wrong with that?' Unwilling to compromise on their deal, Charlene and O'Keefe leave the gym and Eklund and Alice resume their duties.

When sparring ahead of his title fight, Ward begins to launch heavy blows at Eklund, knocking him to the ground and repeatedly striking his face. The ring then functions as a space for Ward to exorcise his repressed animosity towards his older brother, whose shadow he has lived in his whole life. That Ward doesn't feel able to train or succeed without his unreliable brother becomes reminiscent of Eklund's own addiction. Ward has a clear dependency issue, relying on his brother to make him feel safe and confident, but ultimately holding him back, further emphasising the pathologisation of their family bond. Alice enters the ring to try to break up the siblings' fight, and as she does Ward confronts her about how she favours Eklund over him, and how her neglect of him has damaged his life and career. Alice apologises and embraces Ward, and the ring therefore becomes a space not only for physical exorcism, but also for emotional and familial healing.

In order to redeem himself to his family, and thus to fully complete his recovery, Eklund realises that he must confront his history of drug abuse directly. He takes the cake that was baked as a welcome home gift (embla-

zoned with ‘The Pride of Lowell’) and marches to the crack house. When he arrives at the house his group of crack addict friends greet him. They ask if he wants to come upstairs and do drugs with them ‘like old times’. Eklund remains silent, simply looking up at the house. A point of view shot from a low angle frames the house as a looming and imposing presence, signifying Eklund’s feeling of temptation. However, he simply gives the cake to his friends and leaves without a word. Here Eklund finally realises that the crack house is not his home, and that it does not fulfil a family function but instead has compromised his relationship with Ward. His surrendering of the cake, and therefore also his ‘Pride of Lowell’ title, represents his departure from the past, and his newfound commitment to his family. Leaving behind the glory days that led to his addiction, Eklund goes on to make amends with Charlene and O’Keefe and convince them that they all need to be united in order to offer Ward the proper support that he needs to win the title.

With all his family and friends finally onside, Ward and company fly to Great Britain for the world title fight. In the press conference, Ward forgoes the almost obligatory performative displays of bravado and masculinity in the pre-fight weigh-in. Rather than engage in the ‘trash talking’, Ward simply explains to the press, ‘I’m just grateful to be here and to have the opportunity. Thank you guys for the [title] shot.’ This is another instantiation of the opportunity motif. Where Eklund earlier, in his deluded and mentally unstable state, attempted to extort money from a family of immigrants by alluding to a nondescript ‘financial opportunity’, tethered to ideas of the American Dream, Ward’s opportunity is finally tangible and obtainable now that his family is reunited. In the true underdog narrative fashion, the first few rounds of the fight show Ward’s inferiority, using diegetic sound to emphasise the brutality of the blows that he receives. The fight scenes throughout the film were all filmed by actual HBO sports crews in order to capture the aesthetic of a real pay-per-view boxing broadcast, and the final fight scene in the film heavily utilises rapid cutting between multiple cameras and cutaway shots of the concerned spectators to heighten the sense that Ward’s opponent is in the ascendency. Indeed the use of documentary footage in the film, as with *Foxcatcher*, and the recreation of pay-per-view sports broadcast aesthetics typifies the contemporary biopic’s strategy of

blending aesthetic textures in order to enhance the sense of historical legitimacy (this is a strategy that is also often deployed in the popular musician biopic also).

Just when the fight appears to be beyond Ward's grasp, Eklund comes in to the ring between rounds to motivate his brother. The diegetic sounds of the crowd are softened, and the use of a heavy reverb effect on Eklund's voice illustrates the poignancy and almost spiritual nature of his words, emphasising the emotional connection between the two brothers in the ring. Eklund says to Ward:

> Are you like me? [I] Was just good enough to fight Sugar Ray. Never had to win did I? You gotta do more in there, you gotta win a title; for you, for me, for Lowell. This is your time, all right? You take it. I had my time and I blew it. You don't have to. Use all the anger, all the shit we've gone through over the fucking years, you put it in that ring right now.

Eklund uses the trials and tribulations of both of the brothers' difficult family lives to motivate his brother, coaxing him from beneath his shadow. He alludes to his own failures as a means of explaining to Ward that he can restore the pride that Lowell used to take in the family's successes. With a final repeat of the brothers' boxing mantra, 'head-body head-body', Ward ventures once more into the ring and delivers a knockout blow to his opponent to seal his unlikely victory. 'Head-body head-body' refers to a boxing strategy in which shots to the head take away a fighter's defence from their body, leaving it exposed for further attack. However, in this instance, it also can be read as a symbolic and emotional connection between Eklund and Ward and all the difficulties they have overcome. Eklund's recovery from addiction, enabling him to reconnect with his family and play a pivotal role in Ward's win, represents the 'head', where Ward's ability to overcome his broken hand (a consequence of the detrimental loyalty he felt towards his brother) and win the world title represents the 'body'.

Upon the ringing of the final bell, Ward's family and friends charge in to the ring to embrace him and Eklund. For the first time in the film, the entire family are situated inside the ring, and the crossing of the barrier con-

notes the resolution of their family issues. The ring becomes a symbol of catharsis for the family, signalling that Ward's victory has repaired the damage that Eklund's mental disorder had inflicted upon their family.

Though *The Fighter* goes further in its examination of the flaws and unromantic nature of the values at the heart of the American family unit than the average boxing film, Eklund's ability to recover from addiction and to use his sobriety to inspire Ward to a world title becomes a motif that signals the restoration of the Ward-Eklund's family utopia. Ultimately, this corroborates and attests to the resilience of the virtues of a united and functional family. As David Hoberman, a producer for *The Fighter*, states in the DVD's making of feature, 'it's a story of adversity, overcoming odds, [and] redemption. Which are stories we [Hollywood] love to do.'

The Blind Side: Trauma and Interraciality

The second highest paid player on an American football team in the NFL (National Football League) is the Left Tackle. According to Leigh Anne Tuohy (Sandra Bullock), this is because, 'as every housewife knows, the first cheque you write is for the mortgage, but the second is for the insurance. And the Left Tackle's job is to protect the Quarterback from what he can't see coming. To protect his blind side.' Tuohy's voice-over typifies a number of the prominent aspects to John Lee Hancock's 2009 film *The Blind Side*. After explaining why the Left Tackle position is so well paid, Tuohy goes on to list the 'rare and expensive combination' of physical attributes required for the ideal Left Tackle. As she does so, a long shot of 'Big' Michael Oher (Quinton Aaron) fades in, showing him walking through the poor black neighbourhood of Hurt Village, Tennessee. This suggests that Oher embodies that 'rare and expensive combination'. As Oher gets closer to the camera, and larger in the frame, we see a series of momentary flashbacks showing a tussle between unidentified authorities and an African American woman. The tussle appears to arise from the woman's forced separation from her child, who one assumes is the young Oher. Where Tuohy's voice-over identifies the film's concern with the combination of domesticity and (American) football, our introduction to Oher hints at the significant role of childhood trauma within the narrative.

The Blind Side tells the story of Leigh Anne Tuohy, an affluent interior designer and suburban socialite whose family took in and legally adopted Michael Oher, a homeless and emotionally vulnerable African American youth who went on to be a football star. The film charts the initial meeting between Oher and the Tuohy family up to Oher's selection by the Baltimore Ravens in the first round of the NFL college draft (this final scene uses the technique of the modern biopic of using recorded footage, in this instance from the 2009 televised draft, to emphasise the story's connection to real events, again illustrating the blending of aesthetic elements discussed in the previous case study). In this section, I discuss the representation of Oher's emotional vulnerability as a result of childhood trauma, the direct correlation between his vulnerability and depictions of the American family, and racial issues that inflect this representation. Focussing upon Oher's assimilation into the Tuohy family, and his ability to transcend racial and economic barriers as a result of this ingratiation, *The Blind Side* subverts the common convention of the multicultural support group, which Baker identifies in sports films as 'allow[ing] female and black characters to contribute to the success of the white protagonist without challenging traditional gender roles or the racial status quo.'[220] Rather, the film reverses this common model by focussing upon the impact of the successful, white, Tuohy family's support and charity upon the vulnerable, black, Oher. Though the film encapsulates the common narrative of sport as a vehicle for the upward mobility of the American underclasses, it does however jettison another of the sports film's pervasive conventions in regards to minority representation, in which 'all black athletes [are reduced] to pure physical ability and natural aggression rather than determination, sustained effort and intellect.'[221]

Though Oher is represented as vulnerable and emotionally reserved, and the use of flashbacks showing his forced separation from his mother at the age of seven strongly suggests that he suffers from PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), there is no explicit moment of diagnosis or statement of his affliction with any mental disorder. Rather, Oher's fragility and vulnerability are linked to sociological factors and stereotypes deployed to

[220] Baker, A. (2003) *Contesting Identities*. p. 25.
[221] Montez de Oca, J. (2012) White Domestic Goddess on a Postmodern Plantation: Charity and Commodity Racism in The Blind Side. *Sociology of Sport Journal*. p. 143.

pathologise black culture. Coontz claims that, 'among all classes and ethnic groups, charges have been levelled against "toxic parents", absent fathers, and selfish mothers for putting children "at risk". But the most powerful visions of parental failure, at-risk youth, and family collapse…have been tinted black.'[222] Coontz's contention here is that American cultural stereotypes of black families as broken and/or dysfunctional have led to the pathologisation of black culture. Unflattering stereotypes of absent fathers, crack-addicted single mothers and children running wild have been perpetuated by mass-media, resulting in a distorted image of the black family in disarray in American cultural consciousness.[223] *The Blind Side* does little to challenge this dominant discourse. Early in the film, a friend takes Oher to Wingate, a prestigious private Christian school. Once there, the man seeks out Coach Cotton[224] (Ray McKinnon), the school's football coach, in order to persuade him to vouch for Oher's admission in to the school. He says to Coach Cotton, '[Oher] sleeps on my couch from time to time. It's a bad deal, you know? His mom's on that crack pipe.' Similar to *The Fighter* then, crack addiction becomes a pathologising symbol for the American underclass's diminished social position. We can therefore see that, although Oher does not suffer from a specific mental disorder (though he is definitely traumatised and psychologically fragile), his mother's addiction serves as a means of undermining the stability of the (African) American family, and is thus implicated in Oher's psychological frailty. Jeffery Montez de Oca writes:

> Although Oher is situated in the opening scene as a valuable commodity produced by Hurt Village, the ghetto also traps him in a *tangled web of stereotypes* that includes poverty, family breakdown, ignorance, drug abuse, violence, and gangs. In sports narratives like *The Blind Side*, the ghetto may produce star athletes like Michael Oher, but their redemption comes from resisting ghetto life.[225] (Original italics)

[222] Coontz, S. (1992) *The Way We Never Were*. p. 232.
[223] ibid. p. 235.
[224] Though perhaps coincidental, the name Coach Cotton itself draws out discourses of slavery in a noticeable way.
[225] Montez de Oca, J. (2012) White Domestic Goddess on a Postmodern Plantation. *Sociology of Sport Journal*. p. 139.

Therefore, in Montez de Oca's view, Oher's redemption from the stereotypical pitfalls of ghetto culture is reliant on his transcendence and assimilation into the nuclear family, which hasn't been biologically available. However, though the nuclear family is a unit traditionally codified as white[226] (and therefore Oher's transition is not just from dysfunctional to functional family but also from black culture to white) the relationship between Oher and the Tuohy family is presented as one of transference and mutual growth.

When the Tuohys first meet Oher, Leigh Anne realises that he has nowhere to sleep because he is wearing a t-shirt and shorts on a cold night. She insists that he spends the night with the Tuohys. As Oher sits on the sofa that Leigh Anne has prepared as a makeshift bed for him, he notices a leaflet on the coffee table depicting a white middle-class family having Thanksgiving dinner. This is immediately followed by a quick cut to another of Oher's flashbacks, showing the young Oher clinging to his mother's waist with a non-diegetic scream that carries over into the next frame, which once more shows Oher looking at the leaflet. This contrasts the stability of the idealised utopian family with the reality of Oher's situation, directly linking his emotional anxiety and reclusiveness to the instability of his biological family.

Ultimately, the Tuohys invite Oher to Thanksgiving dinner. The Tuohys pile their plates high with food and sit in the living room to watch a football game. However, Oher heads to the dining room alone to sit at the large but empty dining table and eat the tiny amount of food that he felt comfortable taking. Leigh Anne sees this and thus turns off the television set. The camera then cuts to the dining room, a high-angle shot at the foot of the table emphasising the plentiful feast that now lies across the table. As the family join hands to say grace, Oher nervously takes the hand of the Tuohy children, SJ (Jae Head) and Collins (Lily Collins), and observes almost in wonder at this performance of Christian ritual. Therefore, Oher can be seen as encouraging the family's enactment of the performance of the stereotypical middle-class nuclear family.

Oher's influence upon the Tuohys in this scene actually brings the family closer to the embodiment of the archetypal American family. That is,

[226] Evans, N. (2002) The Family Changes Colour: Interracial Families in Contemporary Hollywood. *Screen*. Vol. 43(3), p. 276.

he persuades them to perform whiteness in a way more akin to the illustration he saw of Thanksgiving on the leaflet, and thus instils a greater sense of the traditional values associated with the nuclear family in them. This links to Coontz's argument that the middle-class values associated with the traditional nuclear family in America are based more on a cultural mythology preoccupied with perpetuating images of upward mobility and social harmony than on any identifiable or tangible evidence. As such, Coontz contends that contemporary anxieties about the erosion of family values in America refer to an idealised nostalgic image of utopian family life in the 1950s in order to reify such concerns, whereas any evidence (of which there is plenty) that family life was equally turbulent and varied then as it is now is omitted.[227] Therefore, that the Tuohys, who order in their Thanksgiving dinner and eat in front of the television, are silently encouraged by their black guest to adhere to a performance of the traditional American family suggests that the diversification of this nascent interracial family better embodies the utopianism of the contemporary American family.

Now staying with the Tuohys indefinitely, Oher looks on while the family have their portrait taken for Christmas greetings cards. Leigh Anne encourages Oher to come into the picture, and as the camera shutter clicks, a superimposed still of the family portrait is shown, with the DOG title, 'Merry Christmas from the Tuohys'. This symbolises Oher's ingratiation into the family unit. At a gathering with other affluent women in her neighbourhood, Tuohy's friends make fun of Oher's presence in the card. One woman comments on how tiny Collins looks next to Oher, likening her to Jessica Lange in the 1976 remake of *King Kong*.[228] That she doesn't realise her flippant comments are racially offensive speaks to a particular attitude towards race that is often depicted as common in Southern American states (I discuss this idea in more detail in chapter 4, regarding the popular music biopic and racial identity). Another of the women asks Tuohy if she has taken in Oher out of 'white guilt' and goes on to ask 'what would your daddy say?' These comments suggest that taking in a poor black boy is something to be ashamed of, or something that Leigh Anne does in order to atone or subconsciously apologise for her affluent white privilege. Tuohy chastises

[227] Coontz, S. (1992) *The Way We Never Were*. p. 211.
[228] *King Kong*. (1976) John Guillermin (dir.) USA.

this myopic bigotry, and when her friends comment on how wonderful her actions are, they say that she is changing Oher's life, to which Tuohy responds, 'no, he's changing mine.'

This scene reiterates my earlier claim that the relationship between Oher and the Tuohys is based on transference and mutual development, alluding to a democratisation of the contemporary American family by showing the interracial family as one capable of stability and tolerance. However, one of the women finally comments, 'but what about Collins? Aren't you worried…he's a boy, a large black boy, sleeping under the same roof.' Though Leigh Anne scorns the woman for her suggestion that Oher is a sexual threat to her daughter, ultimately she asks Collins if she is comfortable with Oher living in their home, explaining that she could make other living arrangements for him if Collins felt threatened at all. Though Collins says that she is perfectly comfortable with Oher, that Leigh Anne felt the need to ask illustrates that her tolerance and acceptance on the surface is accompanied by an underlying scepticism and latent concern based on entrenched racial prejudices inculcated by her affluent surroundings.

Montez de Oca likens this paradox to mental health discourse, claiming:

> Although Leigh Anne chastises the friend for making an explicitly racist comment, the film still operates on an axis of bipolarity that positions Michael as a beast. Oher is safe so long as he does not…pose a phallic threat to the white goddess. He can be accepted as a noble savage, a brute with domestic (white) qualities, who also retains market (and thus social) value by being ferocious to protect the white goddess.[229]

This extract likens the dynamics of the interracial family to mental health discourse through the idiomatic use of the term 'bipolar'. Montez de Oca claims that Oher's presence in the Tuohy family is coded as white through his domestic assimilation into the nuclear family, but also retains elements of reductive stereotypes used to dehumanise African Americans as bestial

[229] Montez de Oca. (2012) White Domestic Goddess on a Postmodern Plantation. *Sociology of Sport Journal*. p. 143.

and aggressive. This is a similar discourse to historical accounts of patients in mental asylums, in which those afflicted with mental disorders were depicted in the arts as subhuman and animalistic.[230]

In the early stages of his football career at Wingate, Oher struggles to understand the rules of the game. Throughout the film we have been shown Oher struggling with his studies, being informed that in all of his aptitude tests he scored towards the very lowest of the spectrum. Because of his low IQ and lack of schooling, it is unsurprising that he struggles with the sport's complexities. However, with SJ's help, using condiments arranged into football formations at the dining table (which has become the film's motif for familial bonding) he gradually learns. However, Coach Cotton is disappointed with his lack of physicality and understanding of the game. As Cotton isn't getting through to him, Leigh Anne and SJ come to one of the training sessions to observe. Eventually Leigh Anne barges on to the pitch and interrupts Cotton's instructions. She takes Oher to one side and asks him to think about when she took him to pick up his clothes from his mother's apartment in Hurt Village. In that scene Oher locked Tuohy in her car so as to prevent her from potential harm in the crime filled area. Using this example, Tuohy explains how Oher protected her and goes on to explain, 'this team is your family Michael. You have to protect them from those guys [the opposition].' She points out the Quarterback to Oher and tells him to think of him as if he were her. She then asks him, 'are you going to protect the family Michael?' This scene typifies the 'bipolar' nature of Oher's position within the family that Montez de Oca refers to, whereby he is domesticated by his assimilation into the family structure, but also still able to embody the aggression and violence associated with pejorative stereotypes of black culture via football.

Though the use of the family as an example to simplify and explain his role within the team brings about immediate improvement from Oher's performances in training, he still appears out of his depth in his first match. He is also the subject of racial abuse from the opposing team. When Coach Cotton accuses the match referees of being racially prejudiced for failing to penalise any of the abuse against Oher, he finds his own team unfairly pe-

[230] Gilman, S. (1982) *Seeing the Insane*. p. 126.

nalised as a result. Cotton raises his voice and exclaims, 'this boy plays for my team, and I will defend him like he's my own son.' Yet again, the loyalty that Oher recognises from Cotton's reference to him as a son inspires immediate improvement in his performance. As he gets down for the next play, he hears Tuohy's words in his head once more, 'are you going to protect the family Michael?' He immediately humiliates his main aggressor from the other team by tackling him and taking him the length of the field before throwing him over a fence, showing that the core family values trigger his protective instincts and bolster his athletic performance.

Later in the film, Oher asks Tuohy to help him obtain a driver's license, so he can have 'something to carry with my name on it', showing his yearning for a stable sense of personal identity. However, this proves difficult, as Oher has been homeless for so long that he has no official records to confirm his identity. The Tuohys realise that the only way to get a license for Oher is to legally adopt him. As Sean and Leigh Anne discuss it, they realise that they need to find out more about Oher's background before they can commit. Sean rejects Leigh Anne's suggestion that they should take him to a child psychologist, saying, 'do you really expect him to lie down on a couch and talk about his childhood like he's Woody Allen or something? Michael's gift is his ability to forget. He's mad at no one and he really doesn't care what happened in the past.' Though this is how the Tuohys perceive Oher, our exposure to his traumatic flashbacks contradicts this opinion and informs us that his trauma still affects him. When Leigh Anne and Sean hug at the conclusion of this scene, having agreed to adopt Oher, the use of costume (Leigh Anne's white nightgown and Sean's black T-shirt) symbolises the coming together and completion of the interracial family (figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5: As the Tuohys agree to adopt Oher, the use of costume symbolises the coming together of the interracial family. (*The Blind Side*. Directed by John Lee Hancock: 2009; Alcon Entertainment, Left Tackle Pictures, Netter Productions, Zucker/Netter Productions)

Tuohy feels that she can't morally adopt Oher without finding his biological mother first. After an appointment at the records office, the full story behind the piecemeal flashbacks of Oher's traumatic childhood is revealed. We learn that Child Services authorities had to forcibly remove Oher from his mother's care on account of her addiction and inability to care for him. Oher and his siblings (of which there are at least a dozen) were all separated and put into foster care. When Tuohy finally tracks her down, Oher's mother is amazed that Tuohy doesn't receive state funding to care for Oher, and describes Tuohy as a 'fine Christian lady'. Ashamed by Tuohy's Christian values, Oher's mother breaks down in tears, confessing she 'can't even remember who the boy's father is.' Ultimately Oher's mother approves on his adoption by the Tuohys, relinquishing her own maternal role in the process. Claire Jenkins contends that representations of alternative (that is non-nuclear) families in Hollywood are often problematic, portraying such families in a position of otherness, especially black families.[231] Therefore, we can read Oher's mother's approval of the Tuohys' adoption as permitting him to enter into the dominant social order in the hope of healing his childhood trauma and allowing him to escape the ghetto.

[231] Jenkins, C. (2015) *Home Movies: The American Family in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*. London: I. B. Tauris. p. 226.

By constructing the white nuclear family as the norm, and counter-pointing Oher's emotional trauma (as well as his mother's drug abuse and parental failings) with the core values of the American family, *The Blind Side* correlates to a number of studies concerned with the psychological effects of racial discrimination (this is another area that I will discuss in more detail in chapter 4). Suman Fernando explains that the 'The Moynihan Report' (a 1965 study positing that the rise of black single-mothers and psychological issues among African Americans came as the result of the lasting impact of slavery) heavily suggested that the disorganised and non-cohesive family structure of African Americans was 'a tangle of pathology', due to discrimination experienced on account of their racial and cultural differences.[232] So too, Anne E. Barrett and R. Jay Turner express surprise in their study that more research hasn't been conducted into the relationship between family structure, discrimination and mental health because 'the clear race-ethnic differences in family structure and the greater exposure of nonwhites to all forms of discrimination suggest that individuals from single parent families are more likely to experience discrimination and suffer its negative effects on socioeconomic achievement.'[233] Therefore, in order to heal Oher's emotional trauma, and facilitate his upward mobility through professional sports towards socioeconomic achievement, Oher must successfully complete his transition into the dominant order of the white nuclear family. *The Blind Side* therefore reinforces the common Hollywood narrative whereby 'the ability to escape [a] bleak future of violence and poverty is linked directly to family status'.[234]

After being courted by a number of prestigious college football coaches, Oher decides to accept a scholarship to The University of Mississippi (known as Ole Miss), the alma mater of both Sean and Leigh Anne Tuohy. To help Oher reach the GPA (Grade Point Average) required for college admission, the Tuohys hire Miss Sue (Kathy Bates), a private tutor and Ole Miss graduate. Miss Sue feels obliged in her interview to inform the

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[232] Fernando, S. (2010) *Mental Health, Race and Culture*. 3rd Edition. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan p. 70.
[233] Barrett, A, E., & Turner, R, J. (2005) Family Structure and Mental Health: The Mediating Effects of Socioeconomic Status, Family Process and Social Stress. *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*. p. 159.
[234] Jenkins, C. (2015) *Home Movies*. p. 233.

Tuohys that she is a democrat, feeling that her political affiliation would hold her back from getting the job in the affluent republican neighbourhood. However, the Tuohys hire her regardless, and Sean exclaims 'who'd have thought we'd have a black son before we knew a democrat?' This sequence highlights the democratisation of American family values through the inter-racial and inter-political complexion of the Tuohy family's makeup.

Having chosen to study and play football at Ole Miss, Oher is called in to a meeting with the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association). In the meeting, Oher is questioned about whether the Tuohys took him in in order to coerce him to play football for their alma mater. Visibly distressed by the line of questioning, the use of rapid cut close-ups and extreme high-angle camerawork to dwarf Oher's large frame in his chair emphasise his discomfort. When the NCAA investigator makes an explicit accusation that the Tuohys took Oher in, clothed him, paid for his tuition and his car as a means of ensuring that their beloved Ole Miss would obtain the services of his sporting prowess, Oher panics and flees the building, believing the claim to be true. This incident touches upon familiar sociological perceptions of interracial American families. Nicola Evans claims there has been, until re-cently, a 'tendency among scholars to pathologise interraciality, viewing every relationship that crosses racial lines as inevitably exploitative or op-pressive.'[235] Thus, Oher's interrogation as to whether he has unwittingly been manipulated by the Tuohys draws attention to, and indicts, common pathologising discourses of both him and the interracial family. Oher returns to Hurt Village in search of his biological mother. However, he only suc-ceeds in finding her drug dealer, who invites him in to wait for her. Inside, the dealer enquires about Oher's white family. When Oher tries to leave, the dealer shows him his concealed gun, telling him to sit back down or else he'll 'drive east to pay a visit to your cracker-ass mama and her sweet little daughter.' This threat angers Oher, who attacks the dealer and his gang. One of the women in the room holds a crying baby, distressed by the loudness of the violence and destruction. This in turn triggers another of Oher's flash-backs, causing him to realise that he no longer has a place within the Hurt

[235] Evans, N. (2002) The Family Changes Colour. *Screen*. p. 272-273.

Village ghetto, typified once again by the allusion to family dysfunction. Oher therefore returns to the Tuohys, his real family.

Towards the end of the film, Oher returns to the NCAA to conclude his meeting. More assured and confident that the Tuohys didn't take him in for surreptitious purposes, he tells the interviewer that he was disturbed by the amount of questions concerning why people wanted him to go to Ole Miss. He says, 'not once did you ask why *I* wanted to go to Ole Miss' (italics added). When the interviewer finally does ask Oher why he chose Ole Miss, he responds, 'because it's where my family goes to school. It's where they've always gone to school.' Satisfied by the sincerity of his answers, the NCAA find no ethical issue with Oher's situation, and the film concludes by showing the Tuohys dropping Oher off at the Ole Miss campus for the beginning of his first semester before showing archival footage of the real-life Oher's selection at the NFL draft in which Oher poses with his Ravens jersey and his family.

We can therefore see that *The Blind Side*'s representation of the American family connects issues of race and mental health. The pathologisation of African American culture remains a component of the film, despite numerous paradoxical moments in which the progressive nature of the interracial family suggests a democratisation of contemporary American family values. Oher's psychological trauma is connected to his experiences within a broken and dysfunctional family that is unstable and irreparable due to his mother's problems with addiction. The film shows that the resolution of Oher's psychological issues can only be achieved by his successful assimilation into the dominant order of the white nuclear family. Therefore, though the film at times exhibits contradictory representations of race, darting between progressive ideas of the potential benefits of interraciality and reductive stereotypes of black culture as dangerous and primitive, the film undoubtedly shows a strong affiliation between mental health discourses, American family values and national identity.

Conclusion

In his discussion of the classical era Hollywood biopic, and building upon initial thoughts posed by Custen, Steve Neale claims that biopics beginning *in media res* tend to frame the protagonist as highly self-dependent

and filled with a strong sense of individualism, thus downplaying the role and contribution of the family in the realisation of a character's achievement(s).[236] Neale goes on to suggest that biopics that begin at birth or focus upon the early years of the subject tend to take the opposite approach and emphasise the family's function.[237] My analysis of these case studies has shown this not to be the case in the contemporary context, instead asserting that the sports biopic exhibits a strong affiliation with themes associated with the American family, despite all three examples beginning *in media res* (one may argue that *The Blind Side* focuses upon Oher's youth, however the relative absence of Oher's biological family and the focus upon the interracial family clearly marks this as divergent from the trend that Neale discusses). As such, this chapter has highlighted an evolution in the biopic genre, or at least certainly in the sports subgenre, in the contemporary context.

In particular, running through all three examples in this chapter, and building upon themes prominent in historical examples such as *Fear Strikes Out* and *Raging Bull*, the values associated with the unity and solidity of the archetypal American family are interrogated through narratives of dysfunctional and unconventional family dynamics. The dysfunctional nature of the relationship between the Schultz brothers, and the interference of John du Pont as an unwelcome surrogate father figure, suggests that the isolating nature of individual sports, and Schultz's hyper-competitive nature pathologises him and exacerbates his emotional distress. Schultz's envy at his brother's success, as well as the detrimental impact of du Pont's attempts to control and position himself as an inspirational father figure to Schultz serves to infantilise both Schultz and du Pont. In the case of Schultz, this infantilisation is connected to Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, articulated through the use of mirrors and reflections as a means of conveying his emotional instability. In the case of du Pont, his mother's unaffectionate and callous nature is portrayed as a significant factor in the onset of du Pont's disorder, causing him to become increasingly sociopathic, detached from reality and, ultimately, violent.

The Fighter's exploration of family issues focuses on the difficulty for family members to fulfil multiple functions. That Ward's mother and

[236] Neale, S. (2000) *Genre and Hollywood*. p. 56.
[237] ibid.

brother also act as his manager and coach only weakens the familial bonds between them (this is also noticeable, as mentioned earlier, in *Raging Bull*). It is not until Eklund is able to redeem himself by recovering from his own mental disorder that the deep-rooted family pathologies can be healed, enabling the Ward-Eklund family to be finally reunited. The wider issues of class in the film relate the drug epidemic in America to economic factors, suggesting that the impoverished city of Lowell has become a hotbed for drug culture to thrive due to the widespread poverty in the area. Once he has recovered from his crack addiction, Eklund is able to re-unite his family in order to aid Ward's world title bid, ultimately reaffirming the virtues of a united family.

Finally, *The Blind Side* also addresses class issues, but in a manner that also emphasises discourses of racial identity. Michael Oher's sporting prowess is recognised and nurtured within the white nuclear family, which allows him to escape from the dangers of the ghetto. The stereotypes of black culture that are noticeable in the film, including gang violence, homelessness, crack addiction and broken homes, somewhat undermine the progressive narrative of upward mobility, which in this instance is facilitated by the democratisation of the American family to embrace interraciality. Ultimately though, Oher's psychological distress is assuaged by his transition into a stable family unit, corroborating the social values of the family. That Leigh Anne Tuohy encourages and nurtures Oher's talent, as well as helping him develop emotionally off the field, attests to the significance of motherhood in cultural narratives of the contemporary American family. However, where the influence of a strong mother in this instance is shown as having a beneficial impact upon mental health issues (much like the healing capabilities of the loving wife in the 'great man' biopic), biopics concerning women's affliction with mental disorders often exhibit starkly different narrative trends to those found in either the 'great man' tradition or the family-centred tales of real-life sporting figures, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Three: Gender, Sexuality and Madness in the Woman's Biopic

When considering biopics of notable mental illness sufferers, one notices that there is something of a historical precedent for narratives focussed upon female experiences of mental disorder. Though by no means extensive or necessarily frequent, we may point to *The Snake Pit*,[238] a film adaptation of Mary Jane Ward's 1946 semi-autobiographical novel of the same title, and *I'll Cry Tomorrow*,[239] as examples from the Hollywood studio era. In the 1980s, *Frances*,[240] which tells the story of Hollywood actress Frances Farmer (Jessica Lange) and her issues with addiction and abuse in a mental institution, set the tone for several of the key tropes and themes that I discuss in relation to contemporary examples in this chapter. Jane Campion's 1990 film *An Angel at My Table* is also an important landmark as a film that challenges many of the general conventions of the biopic, as well as confronting the genre's frequent portrayal of female subjects in a reductive way that commonly reinforces patriarchal discourses.[241] Though not an American film, *An Angel at My Table*'s representation of author Janet Frame's (played by Alexia Keogh, Karen Fergusson, and Kerry Fox to cover various stages of her life) false diagnosis with schizophrenia, and her near-miss with a lobotomy, exposes socio-cultural perceptions of creativity and difference as alien and pathological, especially in regards to female subjects. In recent years the American film market has seen an upsurge in biopics focussing on women with mental disorders, and *An Angel At My Table* shows noticeable influence and shared tropes with the first two case studies in this chapter, which also focus upon female authors and their experiences of mental disorder.

Dennis Bingham writes, 'to put it simply, biography requires a subject, usually someone who has done something noteworthy in the public world. Women historically have not been encouraged to become such subjects, at least not of discourse that patriarchal society takes seriously.'[242] Bingham suggests that, traditionally, female subjects have been taken less

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[238] *The Snake Pit*. (1948) Anatole Litvak (dir.) USA.
[239] *I'll Cry Tomorrow*. (1955) Daniel Mann (dir.) USA.
[240] *Frances*. (1982) Graeme Clifford (dir.) USA.
[241] Bingham, D. (2010) *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?* p. 314-315.
[242] Bingham, D. (1999) "I Do Want to Live!": Female Voices, Male Discourses, and Hollywood Biopics. *Cinema Journal*. Vol. 38(3), p. 3.

seriously in the biopic in comparison to those based on male subjects. As Bingham argues that the biopic is divided along gender lines to the point that both male and female biopics comprise their own genres with their own set of conventions, I analyse here how biopics of female mental disorder contain unique themes and conventions in their representations, and discuss the relevant larger socio-cultural issues visible in the films.

In consideration of female autobiographies, Leigh Gilmore states, 'two questions hound women's autobiographical efforts: Can women tell the truth? [and] Do women have lives worth representing?'[243] Gilmore contextualises these questions as part of a 'gender politics of truth-telling',[244] in which male testimony has been prone to less scrutiny or scepticism as to whether their subjects are 'appropriate' for autobiographical representation. What this extract illustrates is that the biopic is not a unique media genre in its scepticism of female subjects, but rather it would appear that representations of real women's lives have struggled to be taken seriously in media culture more broadly.

As stated in the introduction to this thesis, 'truth-telling' is just one standard by which we may scrutinise the biopic and depictions of mental disorder, and there are many other ways of investigating these texts aside from notions of historical or symptomological fidelity. As such, my study of gender politics in the biopic focuses less on 'truth-telling' and more on the way in which gendered visions of mental illness are constructed. However, I am not trying to undermine the gender politics of 'truth-telling' in autobiographies here, which Gilmore quite rightly identifies as important. Rather I am proposing that when considering biopics, the questions that Gilmore poses are useful in providing an insight into cultural views of women as subjects of both autobiography *and* the biopic, whilst suggesting that biopics with female subjects, and more generally, are more usefully investigated when not simply held accountable to certain levels of 'honesty' or 'truthfulness'. As there are essential differences between autobiography as a medium and biopics, one cannot simply apply identical methods of analysis to each but rather should take more specific critical and methodological ap-

[243] Gilmore, L. (2001) *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*. New York: Cornell University Press. p. 21.
[244] ibid.

proaches. Autobiographies arguably carry an even greater expectation for 'truthfulness', whether rightly or not, given that the autobiographical subject is understood as self-representing. Therefore biopics must be considered in different ways because there are greater levels of collaborative construction and mediation, as well as the merging of genre tropes from fiction with content based on true events and real lives.

In this chapter I will consider three case study texts that challenge and subvert stereotypical ideas of ostensibly orthodox gender roles by centring on female subjects and their experiences of mental disorder. In breaking away from the formulaic portrayal of 'woman-as-carer' as seen in other examples in this thesis, these case studies present narratives that indict patriarchal cultural discourses associated with gender and madness. *Girl, Interrupted*, *Factory Girl* and *Monster* provide interesting and challenging representations of womanhood, sexuality, and mental illness that are useful for analysis. In *Girl, Interrupted* I read the film in terms of its critique of psychiatric discourse as inherently patriarchal. Focussing upon the ambiguous nature of psychiatric definitions and the way that such definitions vary according to cultural understandings of gender, the film challenges mental health discourses through themes of institutionalisation and the various ways that women 'perform' girl/womanhood.

In my consideration of *Monster* I develop the idea of 'performing' womanhood and the 'monstrous feminine' that are introduced in the first case study. In this particular example, I focus upon the portrayal of serial killer Aileen Wuornos as a mentally unstable figure who is pathologised as a result of cultural anxieties of lesbianism and violent women. That Wuornos violently rebels against a patriarchal culture that has discarded and taken advantage of her reframes her as a victim of a culture weighted against women and prone to overlooking their suffering and hardships. The film offers a violent rebuke to the abuse of patriarchal power, subverting and rejecting cultural configurations of gender and sexuality in order to expose the iniquities of the American Dream and the position of women in patriarchal American culture.

The chapter concludes with an analysis of *Factory Girl*, in which I consider the portrayal of Edie Sedgwick as an important statement concerning attitudes towards gender and mental illness. This case study centres up-

on notions of the changing cultural landscape of 1960s America, which despite numerous challenges to the status quo still appears to be inaccessible to women who resist patriarchal power. Sedgwick's issues with addiction are presented as a result of her isolation and close relationships to drastically different figures of patriarchal power that take advantage of her in various ways, and her inevitable death is interpreted here as a gesture towards the discrepancies between narratives of mental health and attitudes towards gender.

Girl, Interrupted: Adolescence and 'Performing' Womanhood

An adaptation of author Susanna Kaysen's popular memoir, *Girl, Interrupted* is based on Kaysen's (played in the film by Winona Ryder) experiences of being institutionalised in a women's psychiatric ward in the 1960s. Throughout the film, critical views of the oppression of mentally ill women are presented in tandem with themes based on the nascent and emerging women's liberation movement of the time. However, it is not only within the confines of the mental institution that the characteristics of womanhood, gender and oppression are put under scrutiny. *Girl, Interrupted* also seeks to identify problematic issues facing women within the wider socio-cultural milieu of 1960s America. The voice-over narration at the beginning of the film immediately identifies the main thematic aspects of the story. Kaysen's voice-over says, 'maybe I was just crazy. Maybe it was the 60s. Or maybe I was just a girl, interrupted'. This opening dialogue contextualises the narrative within the 1960s, but also tethers this time period to the aspects of mental illness that are identified. As Kaysen concludes the monologue by voicing the film's title she breaks the fourth wall and stares into the screen, placing extreme emphasis on both the title of the film and the connotations of psychiatric institutionalisation interrupting Susanna's development from adolescence to womanhood.

In breaking the 4th wall here, Mangold's direction draws a visual parallel to the Johannes Vermeer painting *Girl Interrupted at her Music* (1660-1661), which is the source of the title for Kaysen's memoir.[245] Vermeer's painting features an adolescent girl reading sheet music, being inter-

[245] Marshall, E. (2006) Borderline Girlhoods: Mental Illness, Adolescence and Femininity in *Girl, Interrupted*. *The Lion and the Unicorn*. Vol. 30(1), p. 124.

rupted by her adult male teacher. The girl stares out of the frame, her gaze directed towards the viewer, emphasising her vulnerability. Elizabeth Marshall explains that, as stated in Kaysen's memoir, the painting serves as a warning of the potential impact that patriarchal figures and authorities can have upon a girl's development.[246] Therefore, the opening scene's reference to this shows awareness not only of the source material but also of the key role that patriarchal culture plays in telling Kaysen's story.

Indeed female development and progression from girlhood to womanhood is a central aspect of the film, and a theme that is closely tied to mental illness. For instance, Kaysen's sexual activities are foregrounded as a problematic issue for her doctors and nurses. Her incarceration comes after she attempts suicide by taking a whole bottle of aspirin and drinking a bottle of vodka. This suicide attempt is presented as being a response to Kaysen sleeping with her married teacher, her feeling of guilt in doing so, and his persistent attempts to seduce her again. As Harper notes, this sexual abuse and Kaysen's subsequent suicide attempt constructs '[a] fitting...association between madness and patriarchal power.'[247] In taking advantage of Kaysen and making continued sexual advances towards her, her teacher appears to be the instigator for the emergence of symptoms and attitudes that lead to Kaysen being diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder. Also, by suggesting that her teacher has brought about the onset of her symptoms, a greater connection to the sub-text of Vermeer's painting is forged.

Kaysen's sexual abuse by her teacher creates not only a morally problematic gender dynamic, but also a dynamic that is equally constructed around the notion of age and generation. Kaysen is presented as a young adult, a recent high school graduate considering her options for adult life. The Dean of Students at her high school tells her that she is the only graduate with the 'distinction of not going on to college'. Kaysen expresses no interest in further education and states that her intention is to write, a suggestion that is dismissed. She then claims, 'I'm not going to burn my bra, or drop acid, I just don't want to end up like my mother'. The Dean responds, 'Women today have more choices than that', which is met with a sardonic

[246] Marshall, E. (ibid).
[247] Harper, S. (ibid), p. 73.

reply, ‘no they don’t’. Susanna disassociates herself from the women’s liberation movement in order to ease the concerns of the stern middle-aged traditionalist values of the Dean, yet she is insistent on not befalling the same fate as so many of the previous generation of women; that of traditional 1950s housewifery. What this dialogue exchange illustrates is that *Girl, Interrupted* not only sets up critiques of patriarchal culture, but also engages with the emergence of Second Wave Feminism that was approximately contemporaneous to Kaysen’s institutionalisation.

At numerous junctures in the narrative, critiques of conservative ideas of femininity are presented. Many of these critiques, much like Kaysen’s conversation with her Dean, are centred on the issue of women’s ‘choices’. For example, in a flashback to her father’s birthday party, one of the mothers of Kaysen’s high school colleagues takes pride in telling Kaysen and her mother that her daughter ‘just got accepted to Radcliffe’. Despite this prestigious achievement, the woman goes on to describe this as ‘a conundrum’, because she herself ‘was a Wellesley girl’. Thus there is a friction created between the potential new endeavours of the generation of young women of the 1960s and the longstanding traditions venerated by older generations that create social and cultural pressures. Whilst there is a clear heritage attachment to Wellesley for this woman, she concludes by claiming ‘I think young women should just make up their own mind’. However, later in the film Kaysen runs into the woman and her daughter at an ice cream shop, and upon asking how she is finding Radcliffe, the daughter informs her that she is actually attending Wellesley. This is an explicit critique suggesting that while older generations may superficially appear to believe in progressive ideologies such as women’s liberation and feminism, in actuality deeply entrenched cultural traditions and beliefs still provide an overbearing pressure that can be detrimental for new generations of women. Also reinforced here is Kaysen’s assumption that, though she may have been ‘crazy’, life itself is actually ‘crazy’, and she is just a product of the changing cultural environment and is being persecuted for it.

What is also interesting in this instance is how *Girl, Interrupted*’s scrutiny of the discordant attitudes between traditionalist American women and the younger generation is articulated using the Seven Sisters Colleges as a backdrop. Wellesley and Radcliffe each hold an elite status as members of

the historical Seven Sisters group of women's colleges that have long been associated with academic prestige and have been regarded in popular American opinion as a female equivalent to the Ivy League men's colleges.[248] To therefore link narrative criticisms of traditional middle-class values of American womanhood to arguably one of the most notable and respected institutional infrastructures for women's education in America is a strong indictment of conservative attitudes towards the contemporary landscape of adolescence and womanhood in 1960s America.

We can consider the presentation of these issues as not only concerning gender, but also class. Betty Friedan, in her book *The Feminine Mystique*,[249] discussed a widespread malaise amongst American middle-class housewives that, in part, came from oppressive attitudes propagated within a largely patriarchal culture that had rigid expectations about what women could, and should, realistically aspire to. As Friedan explains:

> Over and over women heard in voices of tradition and of Freudian sophistication that they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity. Experts told them how to catch a man and keep him…how to dress, look, and act more feminine and make marriage more exciting…they were taught to pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women who wanted to be poets or physicists or presidents. They learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights - the independence and the opportunities that old-fashioned feminists fought for…All they had to do was devote their lives from earliest girlhood to finding a husband and bearing children.[250]

From this extract, we can glean an insight into what were considered to be appropriate ambitions for middle-class women in the late 1950s to 1960s. The emphasis on starting a family and 'acting feminine', and to shun those whose inclinations lay elsewhere, was a firm ideology amongst middle-class suburban America, one that impacted the patterns of social life in a manner

[248] Harwarth, I., DeBra, E., & Maline, M. (1997) *Women's Colleges in the United States: History, Issues and Challenges.* Pennsylvania: DIANE Publishing. p. 6.
[249] Friedan, B. (1963) *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co.
[250] ibid p. 5-6.

similar to America's ideological investment in the family and seemed to impose numerous pressures and restrictions on the avenues open to young middle-class adult women. To further enhance the class issues present in *Girl, Interrupted*, we can look to the scene in which the hospital's head nurse, Val (Whoopi Goldberg), reprimands Kaysen during one of her insolent outbursts. After Kaysen refers to the hospital as a 'fascist torture chamber', Val tells her that she used to work in state hospitals, and that this private hospital is a '5 star hotel' in comparison. Val also tells Kaysen that she isn't really crazy, and that instead she's just a 'lazy, self-indulgent little girl, who is driving herself crazy'.

These critical ideas around limited career and lifestyle options for women engage with a conservative and narrow-minded cultural perspective in relation to youth and femininity. This is a theme of *Girl, Interrupted* that is also reinforced in the film's presentation of attitudes towards sexuality. During one of her late-night excursions into the restricted areas of the hospital with the troublesome and antagonistic Lisa (Angelina Jolie) and a group of the other patients, Kaysen and the group break into one of the doctors' offices and find the files that contain their respective diagnoses. After reading that she has been diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), Kaysen looks up the condition in the DSM. She reads aloud the definition of her condition, 'an instability of self-image, relationships, and mood…uncertainty about goals, impulsive in activities that are self-damaging such as casual sex'. This definition identifies two interesting issues in relation to mental illness and gender. Firstly, the symptomatic 'instability of self-image and relationships' appears to outline a gendered perspective of the illness in which the failure to construct a coherent image of acceptable femininity, along with numerous casual sexual encounters with her teacher, her boyfriend, and one of the hospital orderlies consequently pathologise Kaysen. In one of her therapy sessions, Kaysen challenges this diagnosis, asking how many people she would have to sleep with to be considered 'textbook promiscuous'. When asked how many she thinks Kaysen responds, 'Ten? Eight? Five?' and without waiting for a response then asks how many girls a man of her age would have to sleep with to be considered promiscuous; 'Ten? Twenty? One-Hundred and Nine?' Kaysen here brings into question the very definition of her condition, which identifies promis-

cuity as a telltale symptom. Given that cultural attitudes towards promiscuity are influenced by gender, Borderline Personality Disorder in this instance can be understood as a condition that differs according to dominant attitudes towards gender and sexuality.

At this juncture it is useful to consider the wider-contextual history of BPD in relation to the cultural context of *Girl, Interrupted*'s narrative. As I have argued above, in *Girl, Interrupted* the diagnosis of BPD is severely indicted due to its incongruous diagnostic criteria, especially in relation to gender politics. If we consider that the DSM during the time that Kaysen was institutionalised in the 1960s didn't list BPD as an official mental disorder, then one can argue that the film uses the diagnosis retrospectively to forge a connection between changing cultural attitudes towards womanhood and the evolving attitudes towards the illness itself, which eventually became listed in the third iteration of the manual, DSM-III, in 1980.
The DSM-II was the first revised edition of the manual, which was published in 1968. Although this version did not feature BPD, it provides useful context for the landscape of mental health debates contemporaneous to the historical period of the film. The DSM-II came as the result of increasing pressures and criticisms from within the field of psychiatry, as well as other fields within cultural theory, and gay rights activism. Writers such as R. D. Laing,[251] Thomas Szasz,[252] and Erving Goffman[253] were sceptical and critical of the DSM, and of conventional psychiatry more broadly, asserting that mental illness was a cultural construction used to police and vilify social non-conformity. In many ways these arguments bear similarities to Michel Foucault's historical considerations of mental illness and cultural attitudes in *Madness and Civilization,*[254] though in a more modern context. However, these criticisms also become relevant in that they appear to typify many of my own assertions about the way in which *Girl, Interrupted* presents a critique of the gender incongruities of BDP. The film is clearly critical of the traditional conceptions of what it meant, in the 1950s and early 1960s, to conform to prevalent cultural attitudes of 'acceptable' femininity.

[251] Laing, R. D. (1967) *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
[252] Szasz, T. (1961) *The Myth of Mental Illness*. New York: Harper & Row.
[253] Goffman, E. (1961) *Asylums*. New York: Anchor Books.
[254] Foucault, M. (1964) *Madness and Civilization*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Debra Simmons contends that many of the debates that surrounded BDP, prior to its inclusion in the DSM-III, concerned the way in which the list of diagnostic criteria meant that diagnosis of the disorder was heavily skewed towards women.[255] Simmons argues that one of the main theories proffered as to why women were three times more likely to be diagnosed with BPD during this time was that the list of 'abnormal' behaviours that constituted the main symptoms of the condition were not gender neutral, and indeed reflected 'conflicting ideas of what is normal or acceptable behaviour for males and females in our society.'[256] As such, it is clear that *Girl, Interrupted* illustrates the way in which the American psychiatric industry, and BPD more specifically, can be understood as condemning and potentially punishing non-conformist or 'unacceptable' behaviour in the 1960s under the guise of mental health treatment. More specifically still, the cultural evolution of BPD shows how gender discourses can influence the way in which one could be considered to be non-conformist and/or mentally ill. For Susan Hubert, psychiatry in the 1960s was considered a weapon for enforcing conformity upon those who had rejected 'the prescriptions and values of American society.'[257] In particular, Hubert criticises the DSM as psychiatric dogma that defined who was 'normal' and who was not, constructed by a majority of wealthy middle-class white men. Her conclusion is that 'by following the diagnostic criteria…almost any woman could be labelled "abnormal"'.[258]

In failing to present an image of femininity that appears socially acceptable, it can be argued that Kaysen's mental illness becomes narratively linked to her refusal to adhere to social expectations of womanly behaviour. It is here that the concept of 'performing' gender becomes an important point to consider. Judith Butler states that we should consider gender as a 'corporeal style, an "act", as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where "performative" suggests a dramatic and contingent con-

[255] Simmons, D. (1992) Gender Issues and Borderline Personality Disorder: Why do Females Dominate the Diagnosis? *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*. Vol. 6(4), p. 221.
[256] Simmons, D. (ibid).
[257] Hubert, S. J. (2002) *Questions of Power: The Politics of Women's Mental Madness Narratives*. p. 94.
[258] ibid. 96.

struction of meaning.'[259] In the case of *Girl, Interrupted*, Kaysen's institutionalisation can be read as a social positioning outside the societal norm. Her 'performance' of femininity, as it were, does not coincide with the consensual and collectively approved performance of traditional femininity as observed in her milieu, and thus she is othered and segregated.

If Kaysen is rendered as initially performing femininity in a way that is aberrant to the socially preferred embodiment of womanhood in the 1960s, then Lisa's character can be seen as the complete antithesis of 'acceptable' femininity. Throughout the narrative Lisa is depicted as an antagonistic, anti-authoritarian, and highly sexualised sociopath. Her uncanny ability to mislead and provoke the other patients of the ward, particularly Kaysen, results in her becoming understood as a figure that consciously refuses to abide by socio-cultural expectations of gender. In exploiting her sexual nature for her own benefit and indulging her natural desire to disrupt order and the treatment she is receiving, Lisa becomes more associated with characteristics that are perceived as being masculine than in any way appropriate female behaviour. This is typified in the aforementioned scene where Kaysen reads the definition of her condition. In this scene Lisa discusses her own condition as a diagnosed sociopath, stating proudly that 'we [sociopaths] are very rare, and we are mostly men.' It is clear, therefore, that Lisa sees her association to the masculine characteristics of sexuality and sociopathology as a badge of honour, which separates and distinguishes her from the others in the ward who are in many ways trying, albeit with varying degrees of success, to form a coherent feminine identity in line with socially approved conventions. Skip Dine Young argues that Lisa's representation as an 'erotically charged agent of chaos'[260] is symbolic of an intrinsic cultural anxiety towards both the distress associated with mental disorder and the expression or appearance of overt female sexuality. Lisa's explicitly sexual persona is seen as both self-destructive and harmful to the other patients, and therefore promiscuity and eroticism become pathologised as a means of highlighting wider socio-cultural apprehension towards female sexuality.

[259] Butler, J. (1999) *Gender Trouble: Tenth Anniversary Edition*. London: Routledge. p. 177.
[260] Dine Young, S. (2012) *Psychology at the Movies*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, p. 47.

Initially Lisa takes Kaysen under her wing, becoming defiant and sceptical of her treatment and engaging in activities that are frowned upon by the doctors and orderlies of the ward. Vera Chouinard contends that such activities and attitudes towards treatment show how both characters come to construct 'inappropriate and unfeminine ways of embodying and performing being a woman with mental illness'.[261] Therefore, building on Butler's argument of gender as a performance that is constructed in relation to dominant cultural attitudes, Chouinard considers the way in which being a woman with mental illness is just as much a performance in its own right, and, if properly embodied, suggests that 'to be a woman with mental illness is not all that different from those without - "just themselves amplified" as Susanna puts it'.[262] The description of mental illness as an 'amplification' of the self corresponds to Burgoyne's discussion of the surrealist biopic *Gainsbourg*, [263] in which he notes that artists and writers such as Charles Baudelaire, William Blake, Edgar Allen Poe and Arthur Rimbaud often entered self-induced delirious states through drug use, hallucination and other extreme mental states as a means of finding inspiration for their artistic visions.[264] This means of stimulating inspiration through delirium can clearly be likened to the kind of 'amplification' of the mind that Kaysen describes, albeit that in Kaysen's case it is clear that her position within an oppressive and patriarchal environment stifles any potential for her capitalise on her own feeling of elevation or amplification.

Kaysen eventually realises, following a brief escape from the ward with Lisa, that Lisa's attitudes towards mental health and treatment are ultimately self-destructive, and it is for that reason that Lisa will never be considered sane enough to be released from the ward, as she seems unable to construct a coherent performance of acceptable femininity in line with dominant cultural attitudes.[265] Upon their escape, Susanna and Lisa go to Dai-

[261] Chouinard, V. (2009) Placing the 'Mad Woman': Troubling Cultural Representations of Being a Woman with Mental Illness in Girl Interrupted. *Social and Cultural Geography*. Vol. 10(7), p. 794.
[262] ibid. p. 797.
[263] *Gainsbourg*. (2010) Joann Sfar (dir.), France.
[264] Burgoyne, R. (2014) *Gainsbourg*: Puppetry in the Musical Biopic. In: Brown, T. & Vidal, B. (eds.) *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*. London: Routledge. p. 260-261.
[265] Indeed at one point in the film, Lisa describes herself as 'a lifer', acknowledging that she cannot construct an appropriate feminine identity that will enable her to be cured and subsequently released.

sy's (Brittany Murphy) house, a patient who has recently been discharged from the ward. During this scene Lisa taunts and provokes Daisy about her incestuous relationship with her father, stating, 'everybody knows that he fucks you, what they don't know is that you like it.' Daisy's mental illness, much like Kaysen's, is therefore foregrounded as being a result of her victimisation within a patriarchal social structure. Lisa's cruel taunts push Daisy too far, and later Kaysen discovers that Daisy has slashed her wrists and hung herself. Lisa's cold and remorseless reaction to this enables Kaysen to realise that Lisa is a detrimental role model and becomes the precipitating factor to Kaysen's return to the ward with a revitalised enthusiasm to engage in treatment and combat her illness.

In engaging with her treatment and making efforts towards recovery, Kaysen personifies what Harper describes as a 'voluntaristic understanding'[266] of mental illness, whereby through simply applying force of will Kaysen is able to complete her 'journey' to enlightenment. Harper's argument here highlights that the 'hero's journey' narrative, which I have discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, becomes as prevalent in *Girl, Interrupted* as it has been in numerous other mental illness biopics, constituting a repeating genre trope. Here though, Kaysen is not depicted as being remarkable or gifted, as in the 'great man' tradition. Kaysen's writing, which she begins whilst still in the psychiatric institution, is instead represented as providing a therapeutic function. Therefore Kaysen's ability to write is not constructed as a talent per se, but rather as a means of facilitating her recovery.[267] Thus, this use of (autobiographical) writing appears much more procedural than creative, contrasting to the understanding of 'amplification' or delirium discussed above. In both *A Beautiful Mind* and *The Aviator* we can understand the gifts/talents of the protagonists as being something that comes under threat as the result of mental illness (e.g. John Nash claims that medication and treatment prevents him from 'seeing the math', and Howard Hughes struggles to continue expanding his aviation empire and innovating new technologies whilst he is in the throes of his disorder). Kaysen's recovery and release comes as a result of her rejecting the unfeminine embodiment of mental illness that is a prominent facet of Lisa's characterisation.

[266] Harper, S. (2009) *Madness, Power and the Media*. p. 73.
[267] ibid. 76-77.

As Chouinard asserts, 'it is through her struggles to make the right moral choices, and overcome the monstrous other in Lisa and herself...that [Kaysen] ultimately affirms the feminine.'[268] In affirming an appropriate version of femininity, Kaysen can be seen as having successfully navigated from girlhood to womanhood, her interruption finally alleviated as a result of performing an acceptable embodiment of femininity.

It is also important to remember that Kaysen's performance of acceptable femininity appears in conjunction with the changing landscape of women's liberation in the 1960s. By the time of Kaysen's release it can be argued that the conservative attitudes towards womanhood held by the previous generation were being challenged en masse by a cultural movement of women resistant to the ideologies and patriarchal pedagogies typified by 1950s housewifery. Therefore Kaysen's recovery from her illness is arguably in part due to this changing landscape of womanhood in the 1960s, which happened to coincide with the changes in psychiatric practices and psychiatric and cultural attitudes towards mental illness and its treatment.[269] Thus, although we can argue that Kaysen adopts an 'acceptable' performance of womanhood, this is not necessarily a performance that conforms to the 1950s housewifery characterisation that would have been the predominant cultural expectation at the time of her institutionalisation. Rather, in correlation with the changing attitudes towards women in American culture through the 1960s, Susanna's performance, with a few behavioural adjustments, is one that her socio-cultural milieu has less objection to than in the recent past. Thus Kaysen's journey becomes in a way allegorical of the socio-political inroads that Second Wave Feminism brought about throughout the 1960s in American culture.

As already discussed, the cultural development of attitudes towards womanhood alluded to in *Girl, Interrupted* can be linked to the socio-historical development in the practices of mental health treatment. With that in mind, it is useful to briefly point towards *Prozac Nation*[270] as a continuation of this trajectory in biopics of mental disorder. Where *Girl, Interrupted* focuses on the cultural attitudes towards treatment of mental disorder as be-

[268] Chouinard, V. (ibid), p. 802.
[269] Marshall, E. (ibid) p. 120.
[270] *Prozac Nation*. (2001) Eric Skjoldbjærg (dir.) USA.

ing led by institutionalisation and psychiatry, *Prozac Nation*, an adaptation of Elizabeth Wurtzel's 1994 memoir of the same title, explores the shift in treating depressive illnesses towards that of psychopharmacology. Both Susanna Kaysen and Elizabeth Wurtzel (Christina Ricci) are depicted as aspiring writers, from middle-class backgrounds. The key differences in these representations are that Wurtzel's story occurs in the mid-to-late 1980s, and that Wurtzel goes to Harvard, whereas Susanna doesn't attend college. Given my earlier discussion of the Seven Sister's colleges being seen as a female alternative to the Ivy League, Wurtzel's attendance of Harvard is indicative of the breaking down of patriarchal pedagogies of education and gendered institutions. Set in the 1980s, *Prozac Nation* is similarly critical of the 'in vogue' means of treating depressive disorders as *Girl, Interrupted*, only that in the cultural context of the 1980s-1990s the shift towards culturally 'fashionable' prescription medications (primarily Prozac) is under scrutiny, rather than institutionalisation and psychotherapy. As Wurtzel proclaims at one point in the film, 'if you're going to recommend therapy, I'm living proof that it doesn't work.' Therefore it is useful to consider *Prozac Nation* during my conclusion of *Girl, Interrupted* as a means of exemplifying how the continuing cultural development of attitudes towards women and mental health treatment is propagated beyond the parameters of one text, and can be seen as a theme congruent across a range of biopics that represent and scrutinise women with mental health disorders through a variety of periods in 20th Century American culture.

Monster: Criminality, Class, and the 'Monstrous' Feminine

Patty Jenkins' first feature film, *Monster*, tells the story of Aileen Wuornos, a prostitute and convicted serial killer. Wuornos is often referred to as America's first female serial killer. However, as David Schmid has made clear in his study of serial killers in American culture, Wuornos's status as the original female serial killer in the USA is apocryphal, as there were numerous female serial killers in America prior to Wuornos' killings in the 1990s. Nevertheless, as Schmid goes on to note, this was a key component of the mass media's treatment of Wuornos during her trial and in the build-

up to her execution.[271] Whilst much has been made of Charlize Theron's 'transformation' from the tall, beautiful blonde into the 'ugly' Wuornos, there are other, more pressing, aspects of the film that make *Monster* a valuable contribution to this chapter (for discussions of Theron's transformation see Carrigy,[272] Kumarini & Rousseau,[273] and Horeck[274]). As well as the film's cosmetic proficiency, several prevalent themes in the biopic's representation of mentally ill women emerge. To this end, my consideration of *Monster* will explore themes of femininity, lesbianism, and dominant sociocultural values, whilst expanding upon the link between mental disorder and national identity.

In the first instance, it is important to highlight that *Monster*, like *The Blind Side*, does not explicitly label Wuornos as mentally ill, or at least never places a specific narrative diagnosis on any condition that she may be afflicted with. However, I justify my inclusion of this case study by drawing attention to the numerous ways that the characterisation of Wuornos in *Monster* implicitly constructs her as a delusional and unstable character, specifically as the result of her abuse from the patriarchal figures in her life. Though no exact label is given to her condition, I argue that we can read the character of Wuornos as mentally ill, or certainly as a character of unsound mind. It is perhaps also useful here to note the controversy surrounding Wuornos's trial and her being receiving the death penalty. At the forefront of the legal defence's protestations to the death penalty were claims that Wuornos suffered from both Borderline Personality Disorder and Antisocial Personality Disorder, and therefore should be exempt from capital punishment.[275] Whilst these pleas were not granted, and Wuornos was indeed sentenced to death, it is clearly relevant to include *Monster* for analysis in my thesis, as not only does the film hint at Wuornos's mental instability, but in

[271] Schmid, D. (2005) *Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture*. London: University of Chicago Press. p. 229.
[272] Carrigy, M. (2015) Hilary Swank and Charlize Theron: Empathy, Veracity, and the Biopic. In: Bell-Metereau, R. & Glenn, C. *Star Bodies and the Erotics of Suffering*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
[273] Kumarini, S. & Rousseau, D. (2013) Defining Deviance: The Rearticulation of Aileen Wuornos in *Monster*. In: Macdonald, A. (ed.) *Murders and Acquisitions: Representations of the Serial Killer in Popular Culture*. London: Bloomsbury.
[274] Horeck, T. (2007) From Documentary to Drama: Capturing Aileen Wuornos. *Screen*, Vol. 48(2). pp. 141-159.
[275] Chesler, P. (1993) A Woman's Right to Self-Defense: The Case of Aileen Carol Wuornos. *St. John's Law Review*. Vol. 66 (4), p. 965.

light of the controversy surrounding Wuornos's sentencing, one can establish a solid connection between *Monster* and wider discourses of mental health in the USA.

Our first glimpse of the adult Wuornos shows her in a medium shot sitting underneath a freeway overpass, silhouetted against a wet and rainy background. We become aware that this silhouette is Wuornos once an accompanying on-screen graphic fades in showing the film's title, and in doing so tells us that the 'monster' in this film is the figure that we can see, Wuornos (see figure 3.1). A close-up shot then lingers on a revolver in Wuornos's hand before cutting to a tight low-angle close-up of her wet and blotchy face. The impression that is given here, and one that is later confirmed by Wuornos's voice-over, is that Wuornos is on the cusp of committing suicide. In this moment, one could argue that Wuornos is rendered as a form of 'fallen woman'. The 'fallen woman' archetype is a common figure from 19th century art, especially British oil-on-canvas painters like the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Depictions of the 'fallen woman' typically express the melancholy of sexually 'impure' women, usually prostitutes. The main conventions for expressing such melancholy tended to depict the death, usually suicide, of the woman by drowning, evocative of longstanding cultural associations between women and water as a form of birthing or 're-purifying' metaphor.[276] These conventions have clearly permeated the contemporary biopic's aesthetic strategy for portraying mentally ill female protagonists; *Iris*[277] and *The Hours*[278] are both good examples of a more straightforward assimilation of such iconography, as they focus upon British protagonists. However, as Wuornos is an American protagonist in a much more modern setting, the allusions are somewhat more subtle, re-appropriated for a different national and historical context. In this early sequence, the heavy use of pathetic fallacy through the torrential rain and Wuornos's clear suicidal intent bears resemblance to conventions of the 'fallen woman' archetype, and add extra depth to the suggestion of Wuornos as a dejected and melancholic figure.

[276] Cregan-Reid, V. (2012) Drowning in Early Dickens. *Textual Practice*. Vol. 19(1), p. 71-91: Brown, R, M. (2001) *The Art of Suicide*. London: Reaktion Books. p. 153.
[277] *Iris*. (2001) Richard Eyre (dir.), USA/UK.
[278] *The Hours*. (2002) Stephen Daldry (dir.), USA/UK.

What makes the 'fallen woman' characterisation more significant in this instance is that viewers learn, through an introductory childhood scene that precedes the first shot of Wuornos as an adult, is that Wuornos has been a prostitute since she was an adolescent. As the vast majority of representations of fallen women took the form of 19th Century prostitutes who had drowned, there is a clear overlap thematically between this type of characterisation and the manner in which Wuornos is represented, particularly in this scene.

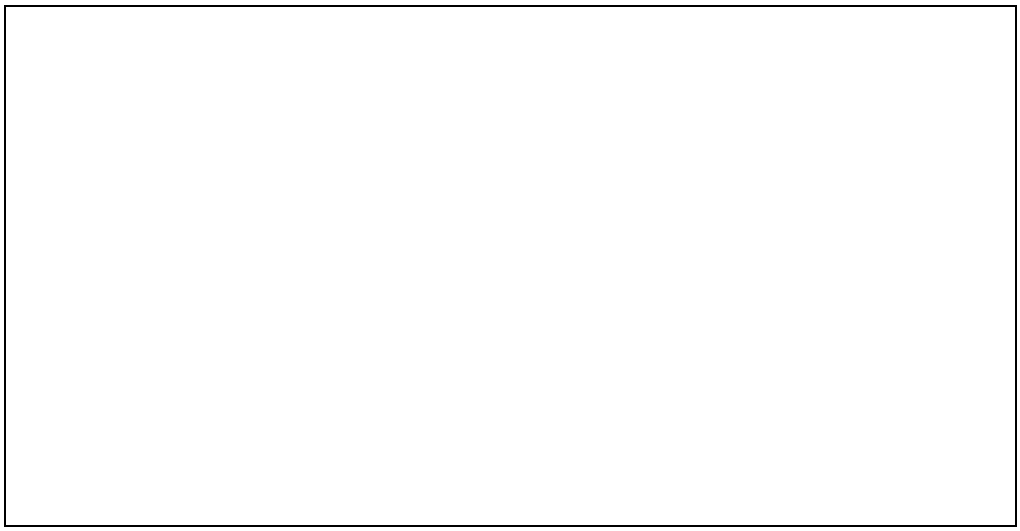

Figure 3.1: The silhouetted figure of Lee Wuornos in this shot can be seen as a re-appropriated version of the 'fallen woman' character, given her suicidal state-of-mind in conjunction with the pathetic fallacy of the rainy background. (*Monster*. Directed by Pattie Jenkins: 2003; Media 8 Entertainment, Newmarket Pictures, DEJ Productions, K/W Productions, Denver & Delilah Films, VIP Medienfonds 2, MDP Worldwide)

Gillian Rose has noted that the prostitute is a figure that has been constructed discursively using recurring imagery centred around female bodies and death.[279] The 'fallen woman' archetype is definitely befitting of this description, given that predominantly the fallen women of oil-on-canvas paintings were prostitutes who had drowned, whose serene and peaceful bodies were purified by death. Furthermore, Rose asserts that 'prostitutes were portrayed as both evil women and as victims of an evil society' and that 'both arguments work to place her outside her "normal" femininity.'[280] This is a point that very much factors in to the representation of Wuornos in

[279] Rose, G. (2012) *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*. 3rd Edition. London: SAGE Publications. p. 214.
[280] ibid.

Monster. After meeting Selby Wall (Christina Ricci) in a lesbian bar, Wuornos decides against committing suicide, holding out in order to have one more chance at the loving romantic relationship that she so desperately seeks, but has so far been unable to obtain heterosexually.

In engaging in a lesbian relationship Wuornos becomes detached from heteronormative conceptions of femininity. Throughout *Monster* she becomes increasingly defeminised, separated from the heteronormative ideas of 'performing' acceptable womanly behaviour, even before killing her first victim. Schmid claims that 'to the extent that hegemonic definitions of womanhood are heterosexual, a lesbian…violates the code of womanhood and consequently a violent lesbian violates that code even more seriously.'[281] Wuornos's detachment from the conventions of acceptable womanhood are therefore multi-layered, her 'white trash' status as a prostitute is only compounded and exacerbated by her homosexuality and then furthermore by her descent into murderous rage and paranoia. Therefore, in a similar way to Lisa in *Girl, Interrupted*, Wuornos can be perceived to be an embodiment of the monstrous feminine, in that she 'performs' femininity in a manner that is not coherent with the predominant socio-cultural attitudes of what female behaviour should be.

Wuornos's sanity and mental wellbeing in *Monster* are heavily linked to factors surrounding her abusive upbringing and her persistent degradation within a patriarchal culture that she cannot assimilate in to. Documentary filmmaker Nick Broomfield claimed in an interview with *The Guardian* that he assisted Charlize Theron in researching her performance of Aileen Wuornos by providing her with a copy of his 1992 documentary *Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer*[282] and with rough footage of his (at the time) incomplete follow-up documentary: *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer*.[283] In the interview, when asked for his thoughts about *Monster* Broomfield stated that, whilst he was impressed by Theron's performance, 'what the film doesn't do is examine Wuornos's background. It doesn't go into her childhood…we don't get a clearer understanding of what

[281] Schmid, D. (ibid) p. 229.
[282] *Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer*. Broomfield, N. (1992), UK.
[283] *Aileen: The Life and Death of a Serial Killer*. Broomfield, N. (2003), UK/USA.

might have led to her killing seven men…[Wuornos] was badly abused by all the men in her life.'[284]

Broomfield's qualm here is somewhat unfounded, although not unique. In her discussion of *Monster* in relation to Gothic character tropes, Caroline Joan Picart, like Broomfield, bemoans the lack of consideration that *Monster* gives to Wuornos's youth and upbringing,[285] as do Silva and Rousseau.[286] However, I would contend that *Monster* in fact does provide key information and insights into Wuornos's past, but does so in a manner that defies the conventional storytelling techniques that are common to other biopics. Flashbacks and montage sequences, so often staples of the biopic for contextualising events prior to the main narrative,[287] are largely absent from *Monster*. The adult Wuornos herself instead provides the majority of the important information about her life through dialogue. The only exception to this is in the very opening scene of the film. Shot on 8mm film stock and utilising cinematography in the style of a home-movie, this scene provides glimpses into the young Wuornos's life as a child and adolescent, leading up to the beginning of her career as a prostitute. Her voice-over tells us that she had always dreamed that she would be a rich movie star, like the ones she saw on TV, and that she wanted to grow up to be beautiful. Quick cut shots show the young Wuornos dressing up and playing, as seemingly normal children might. However, she is frequently interrupted by an unidentifiable adult male authority figure, followed by shots of the child Wuornos with a black eye (figure 3.2). We also see a clip of the teenage Wuornos exposing her breasts to a group of boys in exchange for money, hoping that one of them will fall for her. However she is disappointed when the boys giggle and run away, and the scene ends by showing the first time Wuornos has sex in exchange for money. As her voice-over explains that she was looking for romance and for someone to take her away from the working-class Florida area, we see her significantly older customer push her out of

[284] Rose, S. (2004) 'I Thought I Was Really Watching Her'. *The Guardian* [Internet] Available at < http://www.theguardian.com/film/2004/mar/24/usa.world > [Accessed 30/11/13].
[285] Picart, C. (2006) Crime and the Gothic: Sexualising Serial Killers. *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*. Vol. 13(1), p. 9.
[286] Kumarini, S. & Rousseau, D. (2013) Defining Deviance: The Rearticulation of Aileen Wuornos in *Monster*. In: Macdonald, A. (ed.) *Murders and Acquisitions: Representations of the Serial Killer in Popular Culture*. London: Bloomsbury.
[287] Custen, G. (1992) *Bio/Pics.* p. 182.

his car once he has paid her. This sequence shows that Wuornos has been victimised and ostracised by patriarchal figures all her life. The face of the adult that reprimands her as a young child is never shown, meaning that blame cannot be placed upon any individual but rather becomes a synecdoche for patriarchal culture more widely.

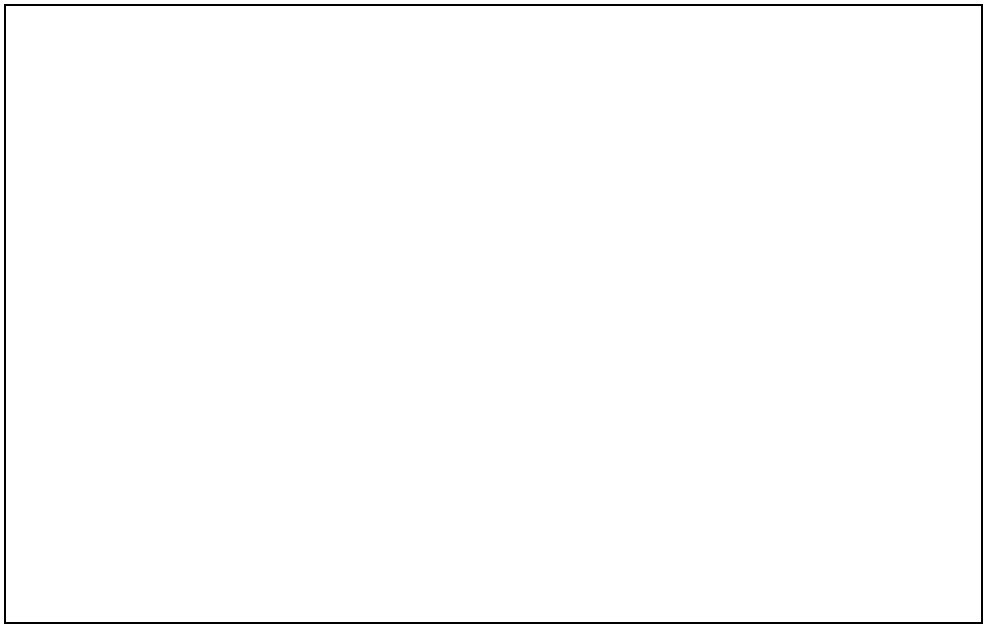

Figure 3.2: The young Aileen is reprimanded by an unseen male authority figure, symbolising her persistent oppression within a patriarchal culture. (Directed by Pattie Jenkins: 2003; Media 8 Entertainment, Newmarket Pictures, DEJ Productions, K/W Productions, Denver & Delilah Films, VIP Medienfonds 2, MDP Worldwide)

Whilst some have criticised *Monster* for not engaging with Wuornos's past, the aforementioned scene depicting her youth would appear to contradict this view. As well as this introductory scene showing glimpses of her childhood, numerous dialogue exchanges throughout the film reveal personal details about Wuornos's youth and upbringing. For example, through voice-over, we learn that when she was 13 years old Wuornos had a child that she had to put up for adoption. Later in the film Wuornos explains to one of her victims that one of the main reasons for her hatred of men is that she was frequently raped by one of her father's friends as a child, and that when she told her father he didn't believe her and would beat her for lying. Therefore I believe that it is fair to say that Wuornos's past is very much a feature of *Monster*. Furthermore, I would argue that these instances provide critical information that go a long way to narratively explaining not only Wuornos's hatred of men, but also her fragile and delusional state of

mind. Indeed in the opening scene that establishes her abusive childhood, her voice-over tells us that she would 'escape into her mind' in order to forget about her environment. Thus I contend that, contrary to the arguments of some others, *Monster* does indeed explore Wuornos's past and its significant contribution to her actions for which she is notorious, only that the devices used to narrate this exploration are perhaps less frequently deployed in larger budget more mainstream biopic productions.

The majority of Wuornos's delusions appear to be based around contradictions in the ideological values associated with the American Dream. J. Emmett Winn explains that the American Dream is commonly centred on the idea that 'individuals [can] succeed without being burdened by unfair limitations. Even a poor person with few resources can, through hard work and perseverance, achieve success.'[288] In the case of Wuornos, despite her continued effort to emancipate herself from the constrictions of her low social status as a 'white trash' prostitute, this ideal becomes increasingly critiqued, and tethered to Wuornos's decreasing mental state. Wuornos is seemingly unable to obtain her American Dream, and is frequently rejected by the society that she endeavours to be a part of. This critique becomes particularly prominent after she commits her first murder. Rather than a cold-blooded murder, Wuornos's first kill comes as she defends herself from a man who had knocked her unconscious and tied her up, with the intention of raping and killing her. Immediately this sets her up as a victim, who had no choice but to fight back. In fear of being caught by the police Wuornos tells Selby that she is quitting hooking (though she doesn't mention shooting the man) and that she is instead going to 'get a career; house, car, the whole fucking shabang'. Initially Wuornos claims that she intends to become a veterinarian, until Selby reminds her that she would need a degree in order to do so. This nonchalance about getting a career, and a lack or realistic goals illustrates the skewed perception of the American Dream that Wuornos has. Thus her hold on reality can be deemed questionable. What also becomes evident is that, although her new aspirations for a career and a house are still unrealistic, they are significantly scaled back from her childhood ambitions of stardom and fame, and thus serves to illustrate the ever

[288] Winn, J. E. (2007) *The American Dream and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema.* London: Continuum. p. 1.

decreasing chances of prosperity that Wuornos has as a result of both her gender and social position within the American class system.

What then follows are a series of crosscut scenes of Wuornos trying to find a job. There are two crucial aspects to these scenes that are relevant to my analysis. Firstly, Wuornos's mental stability becomes evermore fragile as she is rejected time and again by the people she reaches out to for help. Wuornos is depicted as hostile, menacing and intimidating towards characters that she has gone to looking for work. Though these characters are at times mocking and scorning of Wuornos, her reactions show her as a mentally volatile figure whose rage is easily provoked the more she is turned away. Secondly, her failure to elevate herself into the working classes can be read as a metaphor for her inability to perform an appropriate version of femininity. This is typified when she speaks to a receptionist at the job centre, pleading 'the truth is, I'm a hooker and I'm trying to clean my life up, go all straight and Christian and all.' When her references to the values of the straight[289] and Christian lifestyle that permeate discourses of American national identity don't help her, Wuornos becomes increasingly desperate, stating 'I'm just trying to talk to you here woman to woman, truthfully.' When the receptionist walks away without responding, this is a clear indication that Wuornos isn't considered to be a woman befitting of the straight and narrow working class lifestyle that the American Dream would suggest she is entitled to.

Beverley Skeggs writes that 'the entry of the lesbian into discourse was a historical construct that not only pathologised and criminalised her but also displaced the threat of women's sexual "deviance" onto women of colour and working-class women'.[290] Skeggs goes on to argue that 'the lesbian was sexed through association with the already sexed Black and White working-class woman, groups who through their distance from the feminine were classed as "non-women" and as dangerous'.[291] Skeggs's claims here are particularly apt when considering the representation of Wuornos. In being both a prostitute and a lesbian, she embodies the 'deviance' of sexuality

[289] In this instance, Wuornos's reference to the 'straight' lifestyle can be read as a double entendre, dualistically referring to discourses of both cultural legitimacy and an ironic gesture to Wuornos's sexual orientation.
[290] Skeggs, B. (2001) *Formations of Class and Gender*. London: SAGE. p. 122.
[291] ibid.

that middle-class hetero-normative culture condemns. Consequently, Wuornos's pathology and mental disorder becomes implicated with her low social position in the class system. Wuornos is 'white-trash', below the working class, and sexually deviant. In defying social norms of femininity, she is instead rendered an abject figure.

Cavanagh suggests that Wuornos becomes codified as an abject woman; framed as a persona non grata by the dominant cultural order on account of her brutality and her lesbianism:

> Socially abject people are those who are perceived to be outside or at odds with a normative ideal. Aileen Wuornos is read as abject because she is branded a lesbian, a prostitute, because she is underhoused and street-active, jailed and eventually sentenced to death.[292]

Indeed Wuornos's failure to assimilate into a 'straight', Christian, lifestyle is arguably in part down to her lesbianism. The combination of violence against men and her lesbianism places her in direct opposition to an image of appropriate femininity, as defined by the hetero-normative pedagogies of patriarchal American culture.[293] Wuornos is therefore represented as a form of 'monstrous' woman.

One could read Wuornos's characterisation as a violent woman, who exclusively kills men, as a version of an abject woman, whose presence serves as a threat of castration. Barbara Creed has discussed this concept in relation to psychoanalytic readings of horror films, contending that 'it is male fear of castration that ultimately produces and delineates the monstrous.'[294] In the case of Wuornos, however, though I do not dispute nor disregard reading her characterisation in this way, in my own reading I would argue that in many ways Wuornos's representation as a monstrous woman is articulated by ascribing her as inherently masculine. As part of a lesbian couple, Wuornos is very much depicted as taking up the masculine behaviours associated with the male role within a heterosexual couple. Selby is

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[292] Cavanagh, S. (2013) "White Trash": Abject Skin in Film Reviews of *Monster*. In: *Skin, Culture and Psychoanalysis*. Cavanagh, S., Failler, A., & Hurst, R, A, J. (eds.) Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 242.
[293] Picart, C. (ibid). p. 3.
[294] Creed, B. (1993) *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, feminism, psychoanalysis.* London: Routledge. p. 5

diminutive, vulnerable and wary of the authority figures in her life, especially her Christian father, whose house she describes as a 'closet', carrying obvious connotations of an environment designed to stifle her homosexuality. In contrast, Wuornos is tall, thickset and abrasive. On some occasions she even wears garments of her male victim's clothing. Wuornos is seen as the breadwinner of the couple, going out to work hooking, and killing, in order to support Selby financially. In a later scene when Selby and Wuornos move in to newly rented accommodation Wuornos even carries Selby over the threshold of the door (figure 3.3). Therefore, we can see that Wuornos's femininity (or lack thereof) is overridden by her masculine characteristics, and this is reflected not just in her adoption of masculine gender tropes, but also by the brutality of her later murders.[295] One could also argue that her rejection of conventional womanhood, and her shift towards more masculine mannerisms and ways of dressing, can be seen as an attempt to rebalance her position within a class culture that prioritises, and offers greater opportunity to, men, and is linked to the concept of Wuornos abandoning her sense of 'self'.

[295] Wuornos's first murder, as explained, is in self-defence. However, the remaining killings in the film are in part due to her violent reaction to patriarchal abuse and also her need to rob her victims to support her lover Selby.

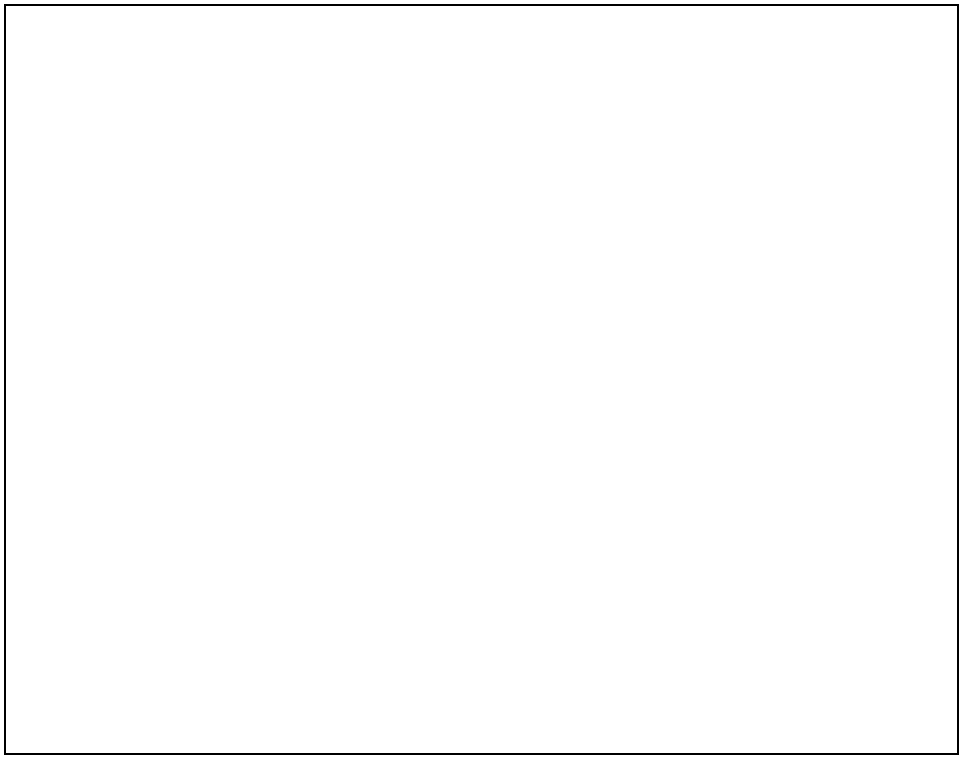

Figure 3.3: Wuornos is rendered as masculine through her mannerisms, dress sense (including wearing her male victims' clothes) and contrast to her fragile, diminutive, lover Selby. (Directed by Pattie Jenkins: 2003; Media 8 Entertainment, Newmarket Pictures, DEJ Productions, K/W Productions, Denver & Delilah Films, VIP Medienfonds 2, MDP Worldwide)

In summary then, *Monster* is a complex case study, populated with many of the tropes used to represent mentally ill women as discussed in the previous case studies in this chapter. However, what is interesting to note is that while we can identify elements in the text that may signify Wuornos as a 'fallen' woman, and/or as personifying aspects of the 'monstrous' feminine, this representation illustrates the way that these tropes do not serve to create a homogenised view of mentally ill women. Instead, in depicting a figure of such low social and class status as Wuornos, a very different image of what it is to be a woman with a mental illness emerges in comparison to the bourgeois lifestyle of a character like Susanna Kaysen. Though the codes and conventions used to frame and represent Wuornos are at times noticeable in *Girl, Interrupted*, and in the following case study more consistencies are noticeable, clearly what *Monster* illustrates is that there are diverse means of representing women suffering from mental disorder(s).

The representation of Wuornos as both a form of 'fallen' and 'monstrous' woman constructs a strong indictment of the abuse of patriarchal power that is exposed as being the major cause of her mental anxiety and

paranoia. Jenkins's direction strips Aileen Wuornos of her femininity as a means of highlighting her rejection by the patriarchal order within America, ostracising her and positioning her on the fringes of society. In doing so, Wuornos's rejection of hetero-normative behaviour means she is denied her American Dream, a central component of the ideology of American national identity that every American is entitled to as a birthright.[296]

Monster seeks to explore the manner in which lesbianism becomes pathologised, particularly in conjunction with mental disorder. Wuornos's lesbianism serves to dilute femininity here by heightening her masculine traits, and positioning her as the sole breadwinner of the relationship. Thus Wuornos's rage and violence become linked to the supposed masculine side of her persona, which stands in stark contrast to her naïve, delusional, female aspirations she displays at the beginning of the film, such as wanting to be like the rich beautiful movie starlets she has seen on TV. Overall, *Monster* contributes to the discourses of representing women with mental health issues in ways that explore and critique ideas of patriarchal power, heteronormativity and national identity. Pattie Jenkins's direction of this independent feature explicitly critiques the entrenched patriarchal, hetero-normative, values that are writ large in the American class system, typifying Bingham's definition of the feminist biopic, that re-appropriate and subvert the genre's conventions as a means of reframing female subjects using the very tropes often used to marginalise them in the classical form.

Factory Girl: Patriarchal Power, Queerness and Isolation

So far in this thesis I have often begun with a discussion of a case study film's opening scene. In this instance, however, I find it apt to start with the end. As the credits roll on George Hickenlooper's film *Factory Girl*, we are presented with a series of video vignettes featuring interview footage from individuals who were intimately familiar with the film's subject. In one instance, an interviewee proclaims 'who was Edie Sedgwick? Edie was the combination of every tragic woman that had come before her.' The film focuses upon the troubled life of the 1960s American actress and socialite

[296] Levinson, J. (2012) *The American Success Myth on Film*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 1.

Edie Sedgwick, and particularly her friendship with renowned Pop Art icon Andy Warhol.

The Pop Art movement of the 1950s and 1960s was noted for its ethos of breaking-down traditional conceptions of 'high art' by focussing instead on references to popular culture. Excessive use of bricolage and pastiche as a means of decontextualising and re-contextualising disparate images and icons typified postmodern aesthetics and attitudes among prominent figureheads in the Pop Art movement, and became a familiar calling-card of Andy Warhol's painting and filmmaking.[297] Therefore, we can interpret *Factory Girl* itself as a simulacra of a particular period in which the mass-production and commodification of popular culture was under scrutiny from Pop Art. Indeed, the aforementioned comment that Sedgwick 'was a combination of all the tragic women that had come before her' is suggestive of a recursive process, an almost Baudrillardian simulacra, in which Edie Sedgwick, and Miller's portrayal of Sedgwick, are both reiterations within a continuum of narratives and characterisations focussed upon female mental health and tragedy.

From the outset of *Factory Girl* it is suggested that the protagonist's death is a foregone conclusion. The film opens with a shot that imitates the head leader of a film reel loading into a projector. We see a black and white 8mm style close-up of Sedgwick sitting still and silent whilst the camera records her. This is a visual recreation of the cinematographic style of Warhol's 'Screen Test' film series, in which Warhol would film people with very little activity or dialogue, intentionally contravening the purpose of an actual screen test recording. While we gaze upon the still portrait of Sedgwick, we hear her, through voice-over, proclaim 'my great, great, great, great uncle was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and my mother's side started building New York before the Revolution. You get the idea.' And we do, Sedgwick identifies her family heritage as being inexorably connected to the foundations of modern America; she is a socialite of the highest esteem and pedigree. The camera effect that opened the film then reoccurs, as if the tail leader had run through the projector, bringing the screen test to an end. There is then a cut to a new shot, now in colour, of

[297] Hutcheon, L. (2006) Postmodernism. In: Malpas, S. & Wake, P. (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Critical Theory*. London: Routledge. p. 116.

Sedgwick, looking dishevelled and distressed, running through New York traffic in slow motion. The voice-over continues, 'I went to a party once and there was a palm reader there, and when she looked at my hand she just…she froze. And I said to her, "I know. My lifeline is broken. I know I won't live past thirty."' After a third cut, we see Sedgwick, now much calmer, talking to her psychiatrist in a rehabilitation clinic in California; the year is 1970, and we see that this is the diegetic source of the voice-over. These three short sequences immediately set up the film's medley of significant themes. The meta-textual reference to the process of filmmaking, exhibited by the mimicry of projection equipment and the plurality of cinematographic styles once again foregrounds the biopic's tendency to blend aesthetic textures to enhance the sense of historicity, and uses those techniques to connect and intertwine the tropes of mental health discourse, female suffering and premature death.

In his review of *Factory Girl*, Peter Bradshaw wrote:

> Here's a movie to make you sympathise with the radical feminist Valerie Solanas, who once, as they say, filled Andy Warhol full of lead. She shot the famous pop artist (non-fatally) in 1968 after he allowed her to become a minor figure at his court, but then refused to produce her play, Up Your Ass, and treated her, as she thought, slightingly. Her story was dramatised by director Mary Harron in the 1996 movie *I Shot Andy Warhol*, and it is the mirror image of this [*Factory Girl*].[298]

That Bradshaw begins his review with reference to another biopic featuring Warhol, *I Shot Andy Warhol*,[299] illustrates the manner in which cinema, the biopic perhaps in particular, typifies one of the core ideas of postmodernism. By describing *Factory Girl* as a 'mirror image' of *I Shot Andy Warhol*, Bradshaw alludes to the aesthetic similarities of the films, their similar narratives, and their shared connection to Warhol. This aptly summarises the notion that postmodern art has no 'origin', but rather media texts refer to one another through shared and re-appropriated signs and symbols, contrib-

[298] Bradshaw, P. (2007) Factory Girl. *The Guardian.* Internet. Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2007/mar/16/drama> [Accessed 25/07/15].
[299] *I Shot Andy Warhol*. (1996) Mary Harron (dir.), USA/UK.

uting to what Jim Collins refers to as 'the "array" – the perpetual circulation and recirculation of signs that forms the fabric of postmodern cultural life.'[300] The representations of Valerie Solanas and Andy Warhol in *I Shot Andy Warhol*, and Edie Sedgwick and Andy Warhol in *Factory Girl* all refer to a variety of media images of their given subjects, including the latter to the former, illustrating the biographical film's inherent relationship to visual history and intertextuality.

In a similar fashion to *Girl, Interrupted* and *Monster*, *Factory Girl* explores the relationship between Sedgwick's mental disorder and the patriarchal figures in her life. I believe that the tension between the three intimate male figures that Sedgwick interacts with in the film presents the most telling insight in to the representation of her disorder, and that the extreme differences between the traditional cultural values of Sedgwick's father and Warhol's relationship to contemporary culture (typified by the aesthetics of his artworks) presented in the film emphasise Sedgwick's social isolation and dislocation, leading to her untimely demise.

In the first meeting between Sedgwick and Warhol in the film, the pair is introduced after one of Warhol's associates insists he must meet Sedgwick because she is 'old money', alluding to Warhol's penchant for befriending much richer people than himself and exploiting their wealth and connections for personal gain. As the pair talk, Warhol tells Sedgwick that he'd love for her to be in one of his movies, to which she enthusiastically agrees. After she leaves, Warhol says to his associate 'I'd sure love to work with her. I've never seen a girl with so many problems.' The following scene provides greater details of Warhol's character for the audience. Warhol is shown in a medium shot, in black and white, as if he were the subject of one of his own 'screen test' movies. An interviewer asks from off-camera 'what is it you're trying to do in your films?' Warhol responds casually 'we're just trying to make it bad, but doing it well. You know where you get the most scratches you can on a film, or all the dirt you can get on a film, or zooming badly, where you zoom and you miss the most important thing. And your camera jiggles so that everybody knows you're watching a film.' Here then

[300] Collins, J. (1993) Genericity in the Nineties: Eclectic Irony and the New Sincerity. In: Collins, J., Radner, H., & Preacher Collins, A. (eds.) *Film Theory Goes to the Movies.* London: Routledge. p. 246.

we are given the key points to understanding the nature of Warhol's work, and are thus given greater insight into his persona as a character at the forefront of avant-garde cinema in the 1960s. As Warhol describes his use of poor zooming, the camera begins to zoom in on him in precisely the way described, as if following his direction. So too, when he explains that he often jiggles the camera in order to shatter his audiences' suspended disbelief, the camera again obligingly rocks and re-centres itself.

Warhol's description of the self-reflexive techniques that underpin his work become noticeable in our own watching of *Factory Girl*, integrating meta-textual elements of the Pop Art philosophy into the film's own aesthetic. Collins explains that when films use movie screens as part of the mise-en-scène, they draw attention to one of the central themes of postmodern historiography, 'that history can exist for us now only in forms of representation, that we construct the significance of the past only as we see it in the present.'[301] This scene featuring Warhol's description of his own directorial style can be seen as fulfilling a similar function. Although there is no movie screen shown within the frame, it is the camera's imitation of Warhol's directorial style that severs the viewer's immersion into the narrative by directly confronting us with the film's artifice.

When Sedgwick first arrives at The Factory, Warhol tells her that he is 'making a cowboy movie'. Warhol's cowboy movie consists of five men, dressed almost as caricature cowboys, surrounding a horse (figure 3.4). Warhol asks his sound engineer to lower the boom microphone into the shot, 'so we can see it', again typifying his reflexive aesthetic and alerting us that we are observing a (re)construction, on multiple levels. The cowboys then remark at the large size of the horse's genitalia, and a cut shot to behind the camera shows a stagehand holding a stage-direction written on a large card that reads 'everyone approach the horse sexually'. The absurdity of this homosexual and bestial take on the Western genre, one of the most longstanding and revered of classical Hollywood film genres, illustrates Warhol's irreverence for the traditional aesthetics and narratives associated with popular cinema. Rather, Warhol's film queers the heteronormative masculinity inherent in the historical icon of the cowboy, using parody as its

[301] ibid. p. 248.

principal deconstructive tool. As the Western is also a genre intrinsically linked with the foundational mythologies of American national identity, Warhol's subversion and challenges to the genre's traditional form illustrates the degree to which cultural change in the 1960s was disrupting and deviating from such cultural and national narratives.

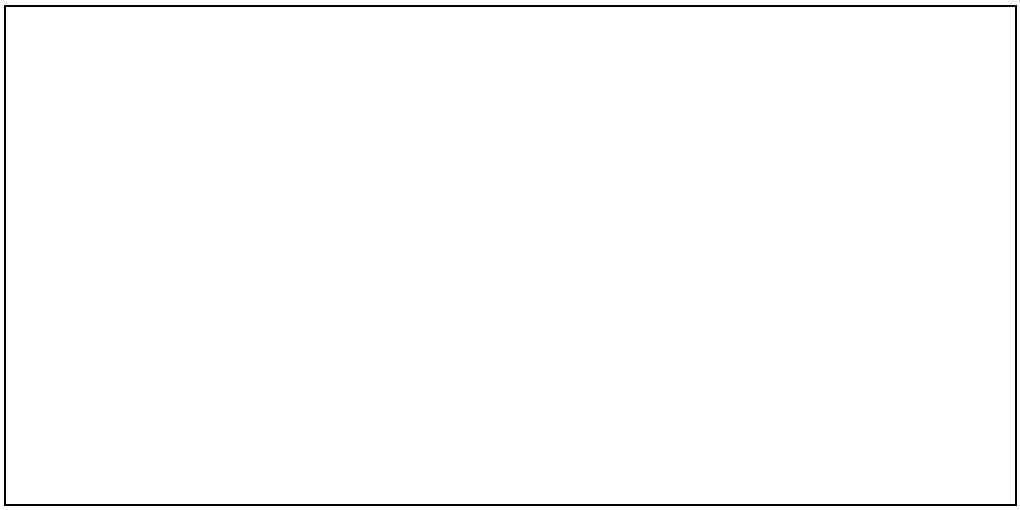

Figure 3.4: Sedgwick looks on as the boom microphone is lowered in to frame at Warhol's request, typifying his reflexive, postmodern, direction used here to 'queer' the Western. (*Factory Girl*. Directed by George Hickenlooper: 2006; The Weinstein Company, LIFT Productions, Holly Wiersma Productions)

If Warhol's directorial warping of the tropes and conventions of the Western genre tell us something about the subversive attitudes he holds towards traditional art and culture, and indeed tells us something about the character's own sexuality (the film frequently alludes to Warhol's homosexuality), then Sedgwick's father comes to symbolise a different form of masculine identity, which is again articulated via his own relationship to the Western and its iconography. This ultimately creates a strong tension between the two characters, which becomes implicated in Sedgwick's growing addiction and other mental health issues, based on the fraught relationship she has with both characters.

Despite being an almost quintessential New England socialite figure, with a long bloodline going back to the Declaration of Independence, we learn that Sedgwick's family wealth comes from her father, nicknamed Fuzzy (James Naughton), having struck oil 'Out West', and that she was born and raised on a ranch in Santa Barbara, California. Therefore, Sedgwick's heritage appears to be a combination of the historical New England

immigration culture and the more contemporary mythology of Western Expansionism, typified by the iconic figure of the cowboy. In a restaurant scene, Sedgwick is shown having dinner with her parents and Warhol. Her father is rude to Warhol, and dismissive of his work. He boasts that he has been commissioned to build a bronze statue of a stallion in California, and it is clear that he perceives this as a more worthwhile project than anything in Warhol's oeuvre. As the dinner progresses, Fuzzy continually strokes Sedgwick's wrist. The camera's lingering close-up ensures that this act seems sinister and discomforting, insinuating that there is an unsettling sexual undertone. Fuzzy says that he 'wanted to meet the man who got my little girl all turned around.' He goes on to say 'I don't have a thing to worry about do I? You're a full-blown queer.' As Sedgwick gets up to leave in outrage, he says sternly 'Edith don't you dare make a scene', as he drags her back into her chair. This dialogue exchange not only infantilises Sedgwick, making her appear vulnerable and susceptible to strong patriarchal figures, but also emphasises the vast differences between the two prominent male figures in Sedgwick's life. Whilst his comments about Warhol's sexuality serve to pathologise homosexuality, a familiar trope of mental health narratives that I have discussed earlier in my thesis, they can also be read as a descriptor of the way that Warhol's art queers or subverts the traditions and iconography of popular American culture, as seen with his 'cowboy movie' earlier in the film.

Soon after, we see another excerpt of Sedgwick having therapy; from the 1970 storyline occurring after her relationship with Warhol had ended. Sedgwick recalls how her brother, now deceased, had been 'an embarrassment to the family because he was different.' She explains that he was homosexual, and that when he came out to the family, their father called him a 'faggot'. We are then shown another flashback; identifiable from its grainy footage and high contrast lighting filters. The flashback shows the Sedgwick family ranch, and Sedgwick's voice from the therapy session carries on over the footage, explaining that her father's abusive treatment of her brother led to him committing suicide. As she explains that her father 'broke him', we see a close-up silhouette figure of a cowboy, wearing a ten-gallon hat (figure 3.5). Though we cannot see the face of the cowboy, the insinuation is that the cowboy is a figurative representation of

Sedgwick's father, and the patriarchal, heteronormative, values that he stands for. This is a similar technique as in *Monster*, in which home-movie style footage of the young Wuornos being berated and abused by an unseen male figure sought to locate the cause of her pathology as rooted in her persistent oppression within a patriarchal culture. In this instance, the cowboy icon stands for values of heteronormativity and machismo, and even Sedgwick's claim that her father 'broke' her brother plays on the idea of a rancher or rider breaking-in a stallion. These are much more traditional and familiar tropes of the Western genre than Warhol's interpretation, which, as Fuzzy himself disapprovingly identified, are 'full-blown queer'.

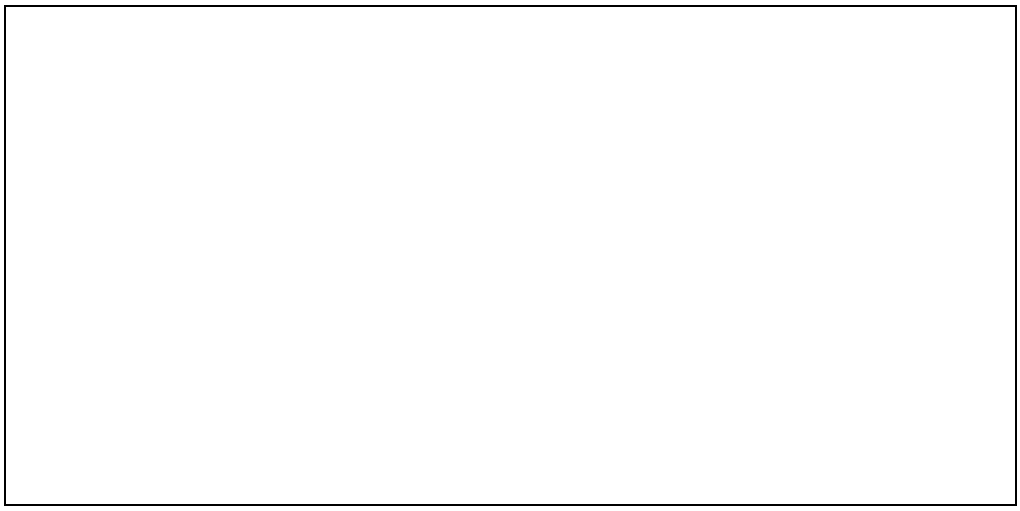

Figure 3.5: The silhouette of the iconic cowboy in Sedgwick's flashback uses the conventional aesthetics of the Western to symbolise Fuzzy Sedgwick's traditional heteronormative masculine values. (Directed by George Hickenlooper: 2006; The Weinstein Company, LIFT Productions, Holly Wiersma Productions)

In another of her 'screen tests', Sedgwick is asked intimate questions about her past by Warhol. She explains that when she was a child she walked in on her father having intercourse with one of their neighbours. Consequently, her father claimed that she had imagined what she saw, and so committed her to a mental hospital, where she was heavily medicated. In a similar fashion to *Girl, Interrupted*, Sedgwick's first experience of forced institutionalisation comes at the behest of her father, who is the embodiment of traditional, patriarchal values and power. In the first section of this chapter I explained how institutionalised patriarchal values in American culture are often seen to oppress or punish perceived female transgressions. Susanna Kaysen's promiscuity and attitudes towards sex are a major factor in her

continued incarceration and Aileen Wuornos is pathologised in part because of her lesbianism, and in the case Wuornos her status as a prostitute and her violent retaliations against men all contributed to her persecution. In the case of Sedgwick, however, her childhood institutionalisation is entirely a means of silencing her and protecting patriarchal power. Sedgwick's father institutionalises her in order to prevent his sexual infidelities being revealed. Susan Hubert claims that 'while bearing in mind that there is no universal patriarchy that oppresses women similarly regardless of context, it is important to note that psychiatry has a particular function for women and other marginalised people.'[302] Hubert's claim therefore identifies that there is a multitude of different forms of patriarchal power, and that psychiatry has a long history of participating in the expression and continuation of that power. In the case of Sedgwick we see that, contrary to other female mental health biopics, which often frame institutionalisation as punishing female transgression, psychiatry is instead used here to prevent her from revealing her father's transgressions.

As Sedgwick recalls her time in the hospital we see a series of flashbacks of her treatment. Rather than provide actual narrative context however, the flashback scenes of the hospital appear more as ambiguous and abstract snapshots of brief moments, connoting the unreliable state of her memory and the inhibitive effects that heavy medication would have upon Sedgwick's ability to recollect with any reliability. This use of flashbacks therefore illustrates a creative approach to real-life storytelling in the contemporary biopic, one that directly enhances the representation of mental disorder, as the use of unreliable and uncertain flashbacks in this way directly contravenes the traditional function of the conventional flashback in the biopic. We see numerous shots of male hospital staff frogmarching Sedgwick down dilapidated corridors, and a glimpse of her receiving electroshock therapy; which, in terms of cinematic representation, stands alongside the lobotomy as the ultimate method of torture and punishment, rather than treatment, for mental disorder. The interview between Sedgwick and Warhol concludes with the question 'who was the first boy you ever kissed?' Sedgwick answers 'Fuzzy'. This is the film's first suggestion that Sedg-

[302] Hubert, S. (2002) *Questions of Power*. p. 96.

wick's father sexually abused her as a child, closely followed by the wrist-stroking described above, and later Sedgwick explicitly states, in order to solicit sympathy so as to get money for drugs, that her father sexually abused her from the age of eight. Therefore, the familiar trope of childhood trauma and sexual abuse becomes a contributing factor to the later developments of mental disorder that plague Sedgwick over the course of the film.

At first, it might appear that Sedgwick's childhood abuse is responsible for her mental health issues in her adult life. However, the film suggests that her relationship with Warhol plays just as crucial a role in the onset of her disorder. In the early stages of the film the friendship between Sedgwick and Warhol is shown to be a fruitful one, elevating both protagonists to fame and fortune. However, alongside the success, Sedgwick begins to partake in recreational drugs, primarily at parties in The Factory (Warhol's creative den where most of his films were shot). At one such party, Sedgwick asks a wealthy friend, who is also shown to be an addict, how she knows so much about drugs, to which she responds that her parents had her 'doped up on diet pills since [she] was ten'. Sedgwick laughs and replies 'my parents plopped me in the bins before I could drive.' These shared anecdotes seem to draw attention to, and provide a critique of, the exploitation of the then emerging 'therapy culture' in America that is suggested here to be commonplace amongst the wealthy and elites in society. As psychiatry and psychiatric medications became more commonplace and accessible to those who could afford it, social elites are suggested here to have used such a development as a means of controlling and subduing their children. The pair then proceed to take heroin, a close-up freeze-frame shot of the syringe entering Sedgwick's thigh is followed by sped-up, multi-colour filtered footage of Sedgwick frantically wandering around the party, taking yet more and more drugs.

Sedgwick's growing dependency on drugs begins to sour her relationship with Warhol, as does her new romantic affair with a folk music star. Though clearly intended to be Bob Dylan, the character's name had to be changed because of litigation threats from Dylan, who believed the representation of the relationship between him and Sedgwick suggested that he

was somehow responsible for her death, and was thus defamatory.[303] The character's name was changed to Billy Quinn (Hayden Christensen), and one assumes that the pseudonym Quinn is taken from Dylan's 1967 song 'Quinn the Eskimo (Mighty Quinn)'. This is also true for Todd Haynes's experimental Bob Dylan biopic *I'm Not There*, in which Cate Blanchett plays a version of Dylan named Jude Quinn (this film will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter of this thesis).[304] During their brief romance, Quinn is constantly sceptical about Warhol, believing that he is exploitative. Sedgwick tells Quinn that the reason she wanted to act was because she saw a poster for *Breakfast at Tiffany's*[305] and was transfixed by the glamour of Audrey Hepburn; she also confesses that she hasn't seen the movie or read the novel. Quinn explains that the novel is quite different from the movie, and that the book is about a working girl who creates stories that are then taken by a writer, who publishes the stories to great success. He concludes by saying, 'the girl doesn't get anything.' It is apparent that Quinn is drawing a parallel between the novel and his own perception of Sedgwick's relationship with Warhol. Indeed, when Quinn and Warhol eventually meet, and after an uncomfortable exchange in which Quinn makes fun of Warhol for making phony art and for not paying the actors in his films, Quinn tells Sedgwick that 'your friend [Warhol] is a bloodsucker, you know that? You're his prop, okay? You're disposable to him. You should fucking hate him. He'll fucking kill you.' After Sedgwick admits that she can't hate Warhol, suggesting that she realises that he is exploiting her but is too loyal to challenge him or end their friendship, her relationship with Quinn comes to an end.

It is therefore clear that none of Sedgwick's intimate relationships with the three central male characters in her life function positively, as it appears that both her father and Warhol continually exploit and control her, taking advantage of her mild-mannered and timid personality for their own gain. So too, Quinn ultimately gives up on Sedgwick, disappointed by her lack of agency and self-empowerment, and thus abandons her. In particular,

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[303] Smith. D. (2006) Dylan's Got it Wrong about My Movie, Says Sienna. *The Observer*. Internet. Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/dec/31/musicnews.film> [Accessed 31/07/15].
[304] Bingham, D. (2010) Whose Lives are they Anyway? p. 386.
[305] *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. (1961) Blake Edwards (dir.) USA.

as I have said earlier in this section, the relationship that both her father and Warhol have to the Western genre goes a long way to explaining Sedgwick's isolation and mental decline. Whilst Fuzzy Sedgwick is aligned with the traditional machismo and heteronormativity of the genre, typified by the archetypal 'Marlborough Man' cowboy figure, and Warhol is at the forefront of a new cultural frontier epitomised by his queer, avant-garde appropriation of the Western's conventions, it is equally obvious that Sedgwick cannot assimilate into either the traditional or the postmodern cultures of these prominent patriarchs. As such, she becomes a dejected outcast, shunned by both. These competing cultures, articulated via the metaphor of the two different cowboys, seemingly have no place for Sedgwick after Warhol spurns her from The Factory due to her excessive drug use, only sending Sedgwick further into poverty and uncontrollable drug dependency. In his discussion of *Thelma and Louise*,[306] Collins says 'the reality of the subjugation of women [is addressed] through its concerted reworking of the reality of the buddy film and the Western, repeatedly emphasising the interconnectedness of gender difference and cinematic representation.'[307] I would argue that a similar representational strategy is visible in *Factory Girl*, as the competing aesthetics of the Western genre in the film function to symbolise the contrasting cultural landscapes in 1960s America, bringing to the fore notions of female subjugation as neither culture appears accessible to Sedgwick due to their strong affinities with patriarchal figures in Fuzzy Sedgwick and Andy Warhol.

In one early scene in the film, Sedgwick is shown at an art school, getting ready to move to New York City. Her friend Syd (Shawn Hatosy) is looking at a painting, an abstract version of a map of the USA. He says 'it looks like the country's disintegrating. Lost all its hope.' Sedgwick refutes his claim, stating 'there's always hope.' However, during the film, as Sedgwick's struggles with poverty and addiction intensify, she later claims that 'I started to scheme about how I could get drugs. I shot heroin to come down from speed and keep the big sadness at bay.' Here then there is an amalgamation of two different mental health discourses, Sedgwick's drug use and addiction are familiar features in discourses of fame and celebrity,

[306] *Thelma and Louise.* (1991) Ridley Scott (dir.) USA/France.
[307] Collins, J. Genericity in the Nineties. p. 255.

whereas the ‘big sadness’ that Sedgwick refers to seems more attuned to the historical discourses of melancholia that have closer associations to gendered perceptions of mental health. Towards the end of the film, Sedgwick walks in to The Factory to find that Warhol and his friends are making a ‘screen test’ film of a woman named Ingrid (Mary Elizabeth Winstead), who looks similar to Sedgwick. When Ingrid says that she isn’t sure what to do in front of the camera, she is told to ‘just be like Edie’, to which Warhol quips ‘apart from the bit where she does too many drugs’. Warhol then claims that ‘Edie and Ingrid could be sisters.’ Sedgwick, clearly insulted, responds ‘Andy she looks nothing like me!’ However, Ingrid imitates Sedgwick’s outcry, resulting in laughter from the group and an exclamation that ‘the resemblance is uncanny.’ This seems to be the final straw for Sedgwick and her friendship with Warhol, as she feels she has been replaced.

The fact that Ingrid is said to have an uncanny resemblance to Sedgwick seems to allude to the mass-production and commodification of celebrity culture, as Warhol can replace his ‘Superstar’ muse, who he views as having been tainted by addiction, with an almost like-for-like replacement, tying in with postmodern ideas of simulacra and simulation. Indeed, during a montage at the height of Warhol and Sedgwick’s fame, Sedgwick’s voice-over states that ‘Andy took ordinary objects and made them iconic. I always thought he was throwing America back in its face…turning the assembly line in to the punch-line.’ Though Sedgwick here is referring to inanimate objects (e.g. Warhol’s iconic Campbell’s Soup can), her statement that Warhol made ordinary things iconic can also be seen as a comment about his ability to turn people in to ‘Superstars’, giving them what he famously dubbed their ‘fifteen minutes of fame’. The allusion to the ‘uncanny’ resemblance between the two women perhaps also can be seen to have relevance to the biopic genre more broadly, in which performers are often praised for their ability to embody, inhabit, and imitate other famous historical figures, and likeness has become a key expectation of the genre for modern viewers. Bingham contextualises the increased significance of mimicry acting as part of contemporary culture’s ‘postmodern period’, insisting that the more alike a performer is to the subject, the more believable and

unquestionable the presentation of private and fictionalised events are as integral aspects of a real-life story.[308]

One of *Factory Girl*'s final scenes shows Sedgwick in a taxi with Syd, who has just saved her from being robbed by her drug dealer while she was unconscious. In the taxi, he shows Sedgwick a picture that he took of her outside the art school at the beginning of the film. He asks 'do you remember that girl?' Sedgwick begins to weep and simply answers 'no'. Sedgwick then darts out of the taxi and begins to run through traffic, bringing the narrative almost full circle, back to the slow-motion shot shown at the beginning. However, the first time we see this image, the scene uses camera trickery to imitate the feel of a film projector. In this instance, Sedgwick is shown running, with a shift from a normal speed, colour image, to a slow-motion shot with black and white cinematography. This alters the feel of this repeated scene, eschewing the meta-textual allusion to cinema projection in the first instance in favour of an almost photographic, historical, aesthetic. Sedgwick doesn't remember the girl in the photograph, and the dishevelled downtrodden Sedgwick running through the traffic becomes an artefact consigned to history and memory. The film concludes in 1970, at the end of Sedgwick's therapy session. Before Sedgwick leaves her doctor's office, she says 'I'm not saying that anyone else is responsible. I made decisions, life decisions that I regret. But I really feel like I can do this. I can stay off the drugs, and I realise that it will be a battle every day, but so far so good, right?' As she walks away from the doctor's office, again in slow motion, a DOG reads 'Edie returned to Santa Barbara in 1968, where she struggled to control her drug dependency. She was released from Cottage Hospital for the last time in the summer of 1970. A year later she married a fellow patient. That fall, Edie died from a drug overdose. She was 28 years old.' Having initially told Syd, when he claimed the country looked like it was losing all its hope, that 'there is always hope', *Factory Girl* quashes the final semblance of hope by counterpointing the optimistic Sedgwick in recovery with the cold, hard, reality of her untimely yet seemingly inevitable death. Where many a 'great man' has been portrayed as 'up for the fight' of

[308] Bingham, D. (2010) Living Stories: Performance in the Contemporary Biopic. In: Cornea, C. (ed.) *Genre and Performance: Film and Television*. Manchester: University of Manchester Press. p. 78-79.

contending with, and overcoming, mental disorder in the biopic, Sedgwick's intentions to battle every day become a means of inducing sorrow and remorse for another woman, 'the combination of all the tragic women that came before her', who we are told is unable to cope with the intensity and pressures of suffering from mental disorder. The socialite who struggled to deal with her mental illness and addiction becomes emblematic, a synecdoche for the female gender, of a changing cultural landscape in 1960s America that still appears to have no place for, in Warhol's words, 'a girl with so many problems.'

Conclusion

Issues of gender and sexuality provide many valuable insights into new ways to consider mental illness and its representation in the biopic genre. *Girl, Interrupted*, *Monster* and *Factory Girl* are rich with critiques of conservative or ostensibly traditional gender dynamics, which often inflect the way in which characterisations of mental illness are represented. Where male protagonists who often battle their way through the turmoil of mental disorder to a state of enlightenment or success do so with the support of a doting wife, often female protagonists are isolated and shunned due to their 'unfeminine' performances of womanhood, socially unacceptable expressions of sexuality, or refusal to engage with treatment for their mental disorders. In subverting and deconstructing formulaic ideas of gender roles these films urge us as viewers to begin to take female subjects and their mental conditions more seriously, and to not take their seemingly inevitable suffering and demises lightly. Depictions of female mental disorder in cinema may often be problematic, suggesting that often women are 'passive victims of their disordered psyches',[309] but the biopic in recent years has shifted in perception to consider women and their mental illnesses alongside men with theirs, and thus the biopic may still prove to be a fruitful platform for real women's experiences of mental disorder to break this narrative mould.

This chapter has explored several of the recurring tropes used to represent mentally ill women, and many of the popular themes that are present

[309] Harper, S. (ibid), p. 77.

in these biopic narratives. Discussion has focussed on the way that biopic narratives of female mental disorder can be contextualised within wider artistic discourses predating cinema, the manner in which mentally ill female characters are shown to not perform socially 'acceptable' forms of womanhood, and the way that sexuality becomes entwined with mental illness. What has also been touched on is the way that, in comparison to the common trends in the majority of male narratives, women are often presented in much more morose or sombre circumstances, and their suffering comes to the fore with little in terms of narrative redemption.

However, my reading of each of these films illustrates how the various narrative conventions deployed in each has been constructed as a means of critiquing prevalent cultural attitudes towards women and their experiences with mental health. This is perhaps best, and most explicitly, demonstrated in the final scene of *Monster*, in which, as Wuornos is escorted out of the courtroom after receiving her death sentence, her voice-over can be heard, 'love conquers all, every cloud has a silver lining, faith can move mountains, love will always prevail, everything happens for a reason, where there's life there's hope…they've got to tell you something.' In this moment Wuornos not only ridicules the superficiality of innocuous one line mantra's that pervade discourses of individual wellbeing, but in doing so also calls into question the 'love conquers all' theme in which doting wives facilitate the recovery of their genius husbands. In this moment the film ensures that the outsider figure of the mentally ill woman, so often persecuted or totally absent, is not overlooked, and critical questions are raised about the way in which women's experiences with mental health issues have been represented historically.

Chapter Four: The Popular Musical Biopic: Race, Celebrity Culture, and Religion

In my thesis so far I have explored several of the ways that representations of mental disorder in the biopic can be seen to intersect with wider aspects of American national identity. I have considered how depictions of mental disorder in the biopic have come to inflect and, at times, critique, these longstanding cultural traditions in considerations of patriotism and genius in the 'great man' biopic. I have discussed the link between mental disorder and the cultural values associated with the traditional American family in the sports biopic; as well as highlighting in the previous chapter how the contemporary women's biopic has re-appropriated and subverted the conventional tropes associated with depicting women's mental disorder in order to scrutinise patriarchal narratives of women's suffering.

At this point my research turns to consider portrayals of mental disorder and issues of race, class, religion, and celebrity. Building on the discussions regarding race and class in my chapter on the sports biopic, here I aim to analyse in greater detail the ways that another of the prominent subgenres of the biopic utilises mental health narratives to engage with notions of racial and socioeconomic differences in America. Here I explore case study texts that provide more diversity in terms of racial and cultural identities. As touched upon in the sports chapter, historically social mobility for African Americans, and Americans of other racial/ethnic minority groups, was largely only available through the avenues of sporting or musical prowess. Therefore, in this chapter, I consider the portrayal of popular musicians and mental disorder in the popular music biopic, which, even within the wider resurgence of the biopic genre, is currently experiencing something of a renaissance period.[310]

The increased production of popular music biopics in recent years unsurprisingly includes a number of films that focus on musicians who have had mental health issues. Though issues of class, and race in particular, are central to this chapter, when considering a subgenre that focuses on some of the most famous musicians and entertainers in history, one cannot simply ignore the other aspects pertaining to national identity and contemporary

[310] Marshall, L. & Kongsgaard, I. (2012) Representing Popular Music Stardom on Screen: The Popular Music Biopic. *Celebrity Studies*. Vol. 3(3), p. 346.

American culture that arise alongside those of race and class. As the sub-genre is heavily occupied with 'rags-to-riches' stories and narratives of characters overcoming the tribulations of poverty and discrimination to achieve great fame and success, one cannot overlook the significant part that celebrity culture plays as part of the inherent appeal of such films. Therefore, as well as providing close textual analysis of three case studies in regards to mental disorder, racial, and socioeconomic factors, I also aim to provide nuanced analysis of how the depiction of mental health in these films can be read as intertwined with contemporary concerns about notions of stardom and celebrity culture.

Initially, the few biopics produced in the 1930s and 1940s about the lives of entertainers were narratively uncomplicated affairs, which strived to exploit the appeal of being able to hear the musical entertainer's songs on screen for the first time in the nascent era of synchronised sound, often borrowing many codes and conventions from the Hollywood musical in order to achieve this. Custen explains that by the 1950s, Hollywood biopics about entertainers expanded to take up 28% of the genre's share in the marketplace, although their popularity was beginning to wane due to the formulaic nature of many of their narratives.[311] However, studio executives seeking to reinvigorate the tired format of telling the life stories of successful entertainers were soon given an unexpected fillip after the Paramount Decree. Whilst the vertically-integrated oligarchy of the 'big 8' studios in Hollywood were dealt a severe financial blow as a result of the 1948 Decree, one of the few benefits for the studios was that it decreased the stringent sanctions and regulations of film censorship. Therefore, the studios were afforded the opportunity to finance and create films with less sanitised stories, meaning the biopic genre could incorporate much more sombre and mature content. Topics such as alcoholism, substance abuse, and mental disorder, hitherto sternly scrutinised by censorship bodies, were no longer seen as a cinematic faux pas, but became viable themes for biopic narratives. As Custen notes:

[311] Custen. G. (1992) *Bio/Pics*. p. 169-170.

> By the 1950s, the notion of the life of an entertainer had changed dramatically from the 1930s and 1940s strategy of whitewashing. Considering the genre initially was purported to be escapist fare at the time of its genesis, by the 1950s, people might have been going to other genres, like musicals, to escape the anxiety induced by these once cheerful but now increasingly problem-laden biopics of musical performers…once filled with bravos and cheers, life could also be shown as a difficult struggle to overcome obstacles; talent was no longer enough to guarantee a happy ending.[312]

Therefore, contemporary popular music biopics that centre on mental illness as a theme have a clear historical precedent. The current renaissance period that Marshall and Kongsgaard describe comes off the back of a lean period in which there was an extended absence (1993-2004) of high-profile Hollywood music biopics in cinemas.[313] As I claim in this thesis, the emergence of mental illness as a prominent characteristic of the biopic is part of a contemporary trend instigated by a handful of films released on the cusp of the millennium, a cycle that appears congruent with the return of the popular music biopic. As previously highlighted, there were a small number of biopics from the late 1940s and 1950s that, as a result of the Paramount Decree, featured mental illness in their portrayal of musicians and entertainers. I would argue that we are seeing a similar cycle in contemporary film culture, in which the reinvigorated prominence of the music biopic constitutes a corpus of films focussing on the sombre and solemn theme of mental disorder, albeit that the reasons for such a reprise may differ from the initial cycle in the 1940s and 1950s. To this end, I have chosen three of the most high profile films from this current cycle for analysis here.

The case studies I have selected for this chapter are *Ray*,[314] *Walk the Line*,[315] and *The Soloist*.[316] *Ray* is the story of blind pianist and soul singer Ray Charles (Jamie Foxx), his rise from the rural South to stardom, the childhood death of his brother, and his struggles with heroin addiction. *Walk*

[312] ibid. p. 170.
[313] Marshall, L. & Kongsgaard, I. (ibid), p. 346-347.
[314] *Ray*. (2004) Taylor Hackford (dir.) USA.
[315] *Walk the Line*. (2005) James Mangold (dir.) USA.
[316] *The Soloist*. (2009) Joe Wright (dir.) USA/UK/France.

the Line tells a similar story in its exploration of the life of Johnny Cash (Joaquin Phoenix), the country and rock 'n' roll star who also suffers the childhood death of his brother, and whose amphetamine addiction threatens to ruin him. Finally, *The Soloist* is a biopic set in the early 2000s, focussing on Nathaniel Ayers Jr. (Jamie Foxx), a homeless, schizophrenic cellist whose mental disorder causes him to drop out of Julliard and take to the streets, whereupon Steve Lopez (Robert Downey Jr.), a crusading journalist, writes columns about Ayers's condition and musical talents, catapulting both characters into the public eye.

There are a number of reasons for these choices. Firstly, they constitute the most explicit portrayals and explorations of mental illness in the popular music biopic subgenre. Second, they typify many of the conventions associated with the subgenre, but also at times utilise idiosyncratic techniques in representing mental disorder, allowing for a counterpoint analysis that goes beyond a simple inventory of conventional biopic tropes. Finally, even though *Ray* and *Walk the Line* have received a good deal of academic attention, rarely is the prevalence of substance abuse and mental illness considered in any great detail. Therefore, I will contribute to the critical discourses surrounding the popular music biopic by addressing this gap in the literature, as well as including analysis of *The Soloist*, a film that has received little academic attention, in order to add original insight to the body of existing work. While *Walk the Line* and *Ray* explore the troubling aspects of stardom, fame, and addiction, *The Soloist* allows for a contrasting analysis as a result of its very different themes of homelessness and schizophrenia.

The theme and iconography of Christianity also plays a large role in the narrative of all three case studies. Therefore, a section of this chapter will also consider how mental disorder and trauma are frequently employed in such a way as to interrogate notions of Christian identity in American culture. Not only does religion have a significant role in the representation of African American culture, but it also has strong ties to the American South, as exemplified by the informal nickname for the region; 'The Bible Belt'. It is with this in mind that my analysis of religion and mental illness goes beyond issues of race, but also includes consideration of region, social mobility, and wider issues of class.

As previously mentioned, celebrity culture is one of the central concerns running through these case study films, and the popular music biopic's depiction of mental illness is often closely imbricated with notions of celebrity, its commodification, and fan's 'worship' of celebrity figures. One of the central motifs for articulating these narratives of celebrity and social mobility is in the iconography of the road. Therefore, I will conclude this chapter with a consideration of the way that certain codes and conventions associated with the mystique of the road, and the road movie, come to inflect each film's scrutiny of social mobility and celebrity culture. Finally, the chapter concludes with a more general discussion about the wider theoretical implications surrounding celebrity culture, and how the conflicting discourses of identity associated with academic considerations of celebrity come to resemble similar conceptions of media representations of mental disorder more generally.

Race and Mental Health

In an article discussing *Ray* and *Walk The Line*, Glenn D. Smith Jr. claims that both films 'downplay the relevance of racism and class struggle, which have long been identified as significant barriers to upward mobility, and introduce a more personal issue, psychological trauma'.[317] However, in this section I will show that, contrary to Smith's claim, issues of race, racism and ethnicity, alongside that of psychological trauma, are in fact integral aspects of *Ray*'s narrative, as well as exploring the same themes in *The Soloist*. Here I will explore the ways that *Ray* and *The Soloist* interweave racial issues with mental disorder as a means of scrutinising American culture, history, and identity. Robert Burgoyne has noted that, often, African Americans have been represented in film 'in a resolutely nonpsychological fashion [but are] associated instead, as if by way of compensation, with a kind of spirituality and resilience'.[318] It is therefore interesting that, in recent years, the biopic (especially the popular music subgenre) has endeavoured to tell stories of African American subjects' experiences with mental disorder, directly contravening the more familiar and stereotypical approach to repre-

[317] Smith Jr., G. D. (ibid) p. 223.
[318] Burgoyne, R. (2010) *Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at U.S. History*. Revised Edition: Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. p. 22.

senting race that Burgoyne has identified. It is therefore the aim of this chapter to explore in detail how both Ray Charles and Nathaniel Ayers are represented in explicitly psychological ways, whilst still foregrounding themes of racial identity and racial inequality.

In one of the first scenes in *Ray* we see Charles waiting to board a bus going from Florida to Seattle. The driver says he cannot allow him onto the bus alone, because he does not want to take responsibility for a 'blind nigger'. This immediately establishes the film's period as a socio-historical era in which racial discrimination and segregation were commonplace in America. Charles convinces the driver to allow him on to the bus by pretending he lost his sight fighting in World War II, claiming that he has earned the right to board the bus, and that, 'I ain't taking no charity from Uncle Sam, I've got a job waiting for me in Seattle.' This statement illustrates how Charles attempts to reassure the bus driver by ameliorating the inferred class issues associated with discriminatory attitudes towards African Americans. Later we find out that Charles did not fight in WWII, and instead lost his eyesight as a child. So, it becomes clear that the character of Charles realises that in order to nullify the racial prejudice that threatens his social mobility, he must invoke the inherent patriotism associated with military service. Burgoyne, elaborating on the work of Paul Gilroy,[319] notes that racial difference can be 'dissolved in warfare, valorising war as the defining moment when racial and national self-realisation coalesce.'[320] Although Burgoyne's discussion here is in relation to the American Civil War, Charles's evocation of this discourse in relation to WWII illustrates that the cultural attitudes towards war, military service, and race are largely consistent with Burgoyne's notions concerning race and national identity. Montage shots of Charles's bus traversing the countryside signify the start of his journey, the initial steps towards social mobility. However, despite the idyllic exterior vistas connoting promise and social mobility, the interior shots show Charles sitting in the 'colored' section of the bus (figure 4.1). As such, this reiterates the racial tensions that were still prevalent in America, espe-

[319] Gilroy, P. (1987) *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. London: Hutchinson.
[320] Burgoyne, R. (2010) *Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at U.S. History.* Revised Edition. London: University of Minnesota Press. p. 17.

cially the Southern states, during the 1940s, and creates a contrast between the conceptions of the United States as a 'promised-land' and the cultural attitudes and prejudices towards ethnic minorities.

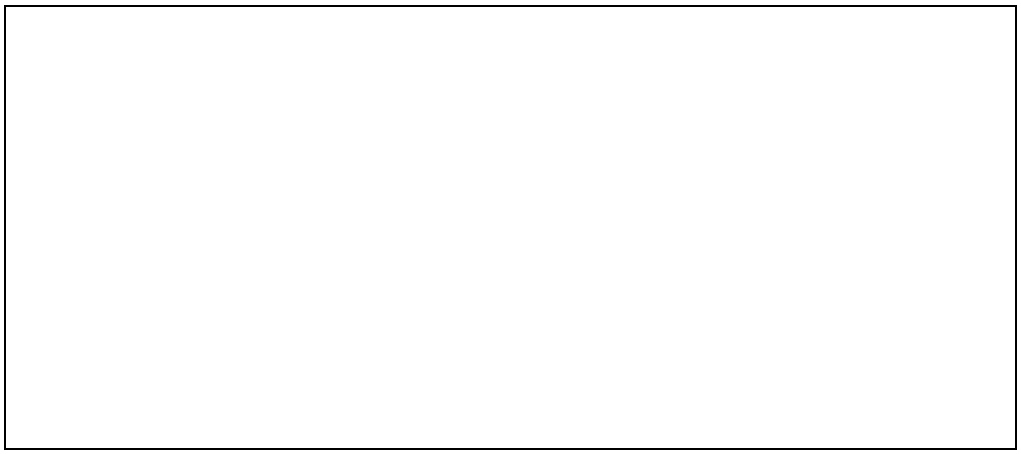

Figure 4.1: Charles sitting in the 'colored' section of the bus contrasts the connotation of mobility in exterior shots of the road with the entrenched racial prejudices rife in the American South. (*Ray*. Directed by Taylor Hackford: 2004; Universal Pictures, Bristol Bay Productions, Anvil Films, Baldwin Entertainment Group)

The necessity for Charles to lie about serving in the war immediately conveys the sort of prevalent racial adversity that Charles, and other African Americans, faced in the American South. Indeed the film frequently constructs a dichotomy between the Southern and non-Southern regions of the United States, particularly in relation to racial attitudes. This speaks to what William H. Epstein refers to as the common representation of the South as a generic regional other, constructed as a 'domestic-regional space of "internal orientalism."'[321] *Ray* often reinforces this idea by contrasting Charles's life experiences in the South to the consummation of his success and ambition in the cultural hub of California. Before signing his first record deal, the head of the record label takes Charles to a nightclub in Los Angeles. He says to Charles, 'smell that, Ray. Smell the success. We're in L.A., man…the place where the Negro comes to spread his wings'. This statement constructs an idealistic notion of Los Angeles as a place of freedom and promise, where African Americans can escape the stagnant and oppressive milieu engendered in the South. This mantra is reiterated at a later point in the film, when Charles, at the height of his success, moves his family from

[321] Epstein, W. H. (2011) Introduction: Biopics and American National Identity – Invented Lives, Imagined Communities. *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*. Vol. 26(1), p. 6.

Texas to Los Angeles. Though his wife, Della Bea (Kerry Washington), is reluctant and unhappy about the move, Charles exclaims, 'I don't want my kids growing up in the South. L.A. is where a Negro can spread his wings and fly.' This reaffirms the conceptualisation of the South as a region of stifling inequality for black Americans, counterpointed and exacerbated by the untold commercial promise of the urbanised, progressive metropolis of L.A.

In the early stages of the film, Charles is shown touring the Chitlin' Circuit, a collection of venues predominantly in the Southeast and Deep South regions that were considered safe for African American performers during racial segregation. At numerous points during his touring, Charles experiences hallucinations. At one point, whilst packing his suitcase to resume his tour, Charles believes that his case is filled with water, and that he can feel the leg of his deceased baby brother in the case (figure 4.2). Through numerous flashbacks we discover that Charles's younger brother George (Terrone Bell) drowned in a wash bucket while Charles watched, too startled to move or help. Soon after this tragedy, Charles loses his sight, and we see his mother (Sharon Warren) instruct him, 'don't let nothing or nobody turn you into no cripple'. Though Charles's mother is suggesting that it is his physical disability that will cause him difficulty in his adult life, and uses that to spur him on to strive for success and work hard, ultimately it is Charles's experience with mental illness that threatens to ruin him.

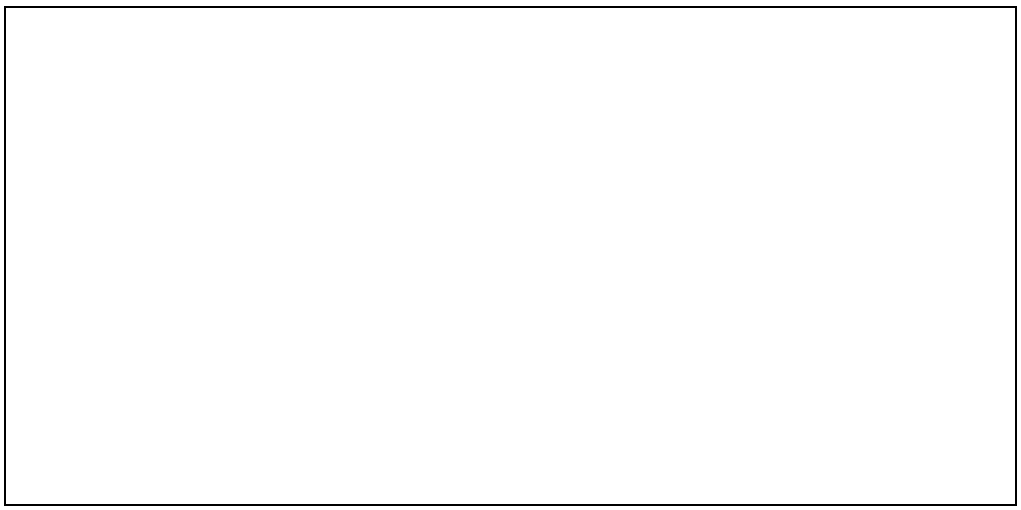

Figure 4.2: Charles's hallucination foregrounds the significance of childhood trauma in the onset of his disorder. (Directed by Taylor Hackford: 2004; Universal Pictures, Bristol Bay Productions, Anvil Films, Baldwin Entertainment Group

Charles continues to experience hallucinations whilst undertaking rehabilitation for his heroin addiction. In his final hallucination, Charles actually enters the world of his hallucination, as opposed to the aforementioned moments when aspects of Charles's past appeared in his everyday milieu. In this instance, Charles is able to interact with his hallucinatory surroundings, and is even able to take his sunglasses off and see, thus signifying that this sequence is fantasy, rather than part of the realist diegesis that constitutes the film's primary setting. This sequence clearly represents the moment that Charles confronts the underlying trauma of his brother's death, which sets him on the road to recovery. During this hallucination sequence, Charles approaches his mother, and claims that he kept his promise to her. However, his mother corrects him, claiming that ultimately he still became a cripple because of his dependency on heroin. Eventually, Charles's brother appears, and reassures Charles it wasn't his fault he died. This moment of catharsis is the confirmation that Charles's treatment will be successful.

So far, I have identified moments where *Ray* presents themes of racial identity, and instances when mental illness has been a dominant issue. It is at this point that the two themes can be discussed in relation to one another. What convinces Charles to finally receive treatment for his addiction is when Bea tells him that, unless he gets clean, he will go to jail and be unable to write and play music. Having already been arrested twice for drugs possession at this point in the film, Charles realises that this is his final chance. Conforming to the codes and conventions of the subgenre, *Ray* presents Charles's songs and music as being heavily tethered to Charles's identity, as often the songs are used as a narrative device whereby Charles's state of mind and emotions are reflected through the lyrical content of his songs.[322] In one scene, following Charles's arrest for narcotic possession, two white police officers interrogate Charles in an aggressive and abusive manner. When Charles attempts to protest, 'it ain't like I'm dealing it man. I'm not hurting nobody.' The officer responds, 'you're hurting everybody. Your jungle music is poisoning our kid's minds. I'm gonna put your black ass away forever.' Given that throughout the film various characters have referred to heroin as poison, it is telling that now the police officer uses sim-

[322] Schlotterbeck, J. (2008) "Trying to Find a Heartbeat": Narrative Music in the Pop Performer Biopic. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*. Vol. 36(2). p. 86.

ilar rhetoric to discriminate against Charles's music because it is 'black music'. This shows how the discourses surrounding addiction become sutured to racist discourse in this instance in order to belittle and insult Charles's music, and thus his (black) identity. The demeaning of what is considered to be 'black music' in this scene is reminiscent of one of Charles's first flashbacks, in which the leader of a country music band attempts to prevent Charles entering the band because he believes that he will only play black music: 'boy this is a country band, we don't play no boogie woogie.' Thus the use of pejorative slang terminology such as 'jungle music' and 'boogie woogie' come to illustrate the way that Charles's identity, which in these moments becomes something of a conduit for black identity more broadly, are ridiculed by white authority figures in the film.

E. Patrick Johnson states that 'often it is in times of crisis (social, cultural, or political) when the authenticity of older versions of blackness is called into question. These crises set the stage for "acting out" identity politics'.[323] Throughout *Ray* we see this idea coming to the fore. The narrative spans from Charles's childhood upbringing in Florida in the 1940s up to the immediate aftermath of the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1968. Thus the film takes place during a time of racial and political tension, where strong protests and campaigns for changes in segregation laws and increased rights for African Americans were common. The film shows Charles's breakthrough in the music industry coming as the result of his merging gospel music with other musical genres, such as rhythm & blues and jazz in order to create soul music. Johnson goes on to say, 'the fact that gospel music arose from an oppressed people is what makes it so "empowering."'[324] Thus, *Ray* illustrates how, in an era punctuated by social and political unrest, Charles's appropriation of traditional music styles, predominantly associated with black culture, forms a new musical genre that comes to question historical notions of black identity and culture in America. The evolution of traditional 'black music' that Charles innovates therefore comes to symbolise the progression and development of black identity in American culture, coinciding with the growing presence of the Civil Rights move-

[323] Johnson, E. P. (2003) *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity.* London: Duke University Press. p. 2.
[324] ibid, p. 14.

ment. Thus, the songs and music of Ray Charles function as both an insight into the mind and emotions of the character of Charles, and as a form of audible cultural artefact that is symbolic of the mounting political significance of Civil Rights protests occurring at the time.

In the moments that the discursive aspects of mental disorder and racial prejudice coalesce, *Ray* appears to present attitudes consistent with the main hypotheses of several sociological studies investigating the relationship between race and mental illness. Some of these studies suggest that African Americans have a greater chance of experiencing mental health issues during their lifetime than white Americans.[325] What some studies find is that African Americans' greater risk of mental disorder is related to issues of low socio-economic status, as African Americans constitute a disproportionate number of the poorest Americans, suggesting that issues of class play a significant role in the onset of mental illness.[326] There is also the suggestion that the experience of racism can affect the likelihood of suffering from mental illness.[327] Finally, other studies indicate that African Americans have been, and remain, generally more sceptical than nonblacks about the genetic model of mental disorders, as the suggestion that mental illness is genetic closely resembles the form of hegemonic discourse that was historically used to subjugate and discriminate against black people, and to justify their disadvantaged position in American society.[328]

One of the central facets of all these studies is the investigation of how attitudes towards mental disorder and its treatment differ according to cultural factors such as racial identity and/or socioeconomic status. To varying degrees, each of the aforementioned studies did find a perceivable difference in beliefs and attitudes about mental illness between black and nonblack Americans. Jesse Schnittker, Jeremy Freese and Brian Powell note that this racial difference 'appear[s] to reflect cultural differences, or ideo-

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[325] Warheit, G. J., Holzer III, C. E., Arey, S. A. (1975) Race and Mental Illness: An Epidemioloigc Update. *The Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*. Vol. 16(3), pp. 243-256.
[326] Williams, D. R., Yu, Y., Jackson, J. S., and Anderson, N. B. (1997) Racial Differences in Physical and Mental Health: Socio-economic Status, Stress and Discrimination. *Journal of Health Psychology.* Vol. 2(3), pp. 335-351.
[327] Williams, D. R., & Williams-Morris, R. (2000) Racism and Mental Health: The African American Experience. *Ethnicity & Health*. Vol. 5(3/4), pp. 243-268.
[328] Schnittker, J., Freese, J., Powell, B. (2000) Nature, Nurture, Neither, Nor: Black-White Differences in Beliefs about the Causes and Appropriate Treatment of Mental Illness. *Social Forces*. Vol. 78(3), pp. 1101-1130.

logical differences that can be traced to the particular history and structural position of blacks and whites in the United States.'[329] With this in mind, it is pertinent that *Ray* places an emphasis on Charles's mental disorder whilst maintaining a critical perspective about the changing landscape of racial politics in America, as this appears congruent with the notion that the emergence of differing attitudes towards mental illness can be traced through historical narratives of African American identity and activism.

The denouement of *Ray* presents a narrative in which the confirmation of Charles's redemption, which is achieved through his successful treatment for heroin addiction, coincides with his recognition as an instrumental figure in the Civil Rights movement. In an earlier scene, Charles is shown arriving at a venue in Georgia; where he is due to perform. Outside the venue is a crowd of Civil Rights protesters, picketing the concert because of its adherence to the Jim Crow laws. The Jim Crow laws concerned segregation, and stated that any public facilities in the former Confederate states in America were required to segregate their facilities so that black Americans and white Americans could not mingle. Often this meant that conditions for African Americans in these venues and facilities were inferior to those provided for whites. As Charles is ushered inside by the venue owner, one of the protestors accosts him and implores him not to perform, as 'the dance floor is for whites only. Negroes can't leave the balcony.' At first Charles claims that 'that's how it is man, this is Georgia,' again rendering the South as a region where inequality was rife. Quickly though, Charles changes his mind, and orders his band to return to the tour bus. Visibly shocked, the owner of the concert hall exclaims, 'I'm not going to lose money just because you suddenly got religion'. It is interesting that the owner of the venue equates Charles's changing stance on the Jim Crow laws as 'getting religion', as this appears to be making a critical comment about the nature of Christianity in American culture, something I will consider in relation to mental disorder later in this chapter. The result of Charles cancelling the performance is that he is sued by the owner of the venue, and is ultimately banned for life from performing in the state of Georgia.

[329] ibid. p. 1102.

In the final scene then, we see Charles, having successfully completed his rehabilitation, at a formal presentation ceremony in which Georgian State Senator Julian Bond presents Charles with a full pardon on behalf of the state. Indeed the appearance of Bond, playing himself in the film, is significant for the film's presentation of racial politics. A former Civil Rights leader and nonviolent activist, Bond was instrumental in the passing of Civil Rights legislature. As Bond says in the film, during his speech:

> We're here to right a wrong that was done to one of our native sons almost twenty years ago…Ray Charles was banned from performing in the state of Georgia because he refused to play before a segregated audience. Thankfully, we've come a long way since then. Some of us have fought for equality through the political process, but Ray Charles changed American Culture by touching people's hearts.

That the film concludes at this point suggests that Charles's mental disorder is permanently cured, and that this coincides with a new dawn of equality and possibility for African Americans. That Bond plays himself lends a greater sense of credibility to the film's claim that Ray Charles changed American Culture through his music and his refusal to perform in Jim Crow venues. Thus, as is common to the biopic genre, this is a means of 'authenticating' the biographical subject's cultural impact, and serves to legitimate Charles's influence on the development of (African) American national identity. In his discussion of *Mississippi Burning*,[330] Robert Brent Toplin notes that Senator Julian Bond was particularly critical of the film, claiming on ABC's television show *Nightline* that the film was '"condescending" in its treatment of blacks' and that '*Mississippi Burning* leaves the impression that African Americans in the South did not exercise any leadership' in protesting for their Civil Rights.[331] With this in mind, Bond's cameo in *Ray* certainly reifies the political message concerning Charles's influence on the Civil Rights movement, and serves to boost the film's cultural cache in the presentation of this narrative theme. This presentation ceremony once again reiterates a genre trope of biopics concerning mental illness in a manner

[330] *Mississippi Burning* (1988) Alan Parker (dir.), USA.
[331] Toplin, R. B. (1996) *History by Hollywood: The Use and Abuse of the American Past.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press. p. 35.

similar to *A Beautiful Mind* and *The Aviator*. John Nash's cultural significance, as well as his successful recovery from his condition, are symbolised by his public address at the Nobel Prize ceremony, whereas Howard Hughes is redeemed to the public via his successful resistance to the persecution of a corrupt government inquest, again suggesting that he has re-stabilised himself from his mental breakdown (even if later scenes suggest this not to be a permanent recovery). Thus, in the neoclassical biopic genre, the public address becomes a means of symbolising not just the cultural interventions of geniuses, pioneers and political revolutionaries, but also a means of redeeming such figures from their personal traumas and pathologies.

Where *Ray* constructs a narrative that intertwines notions of African American identity and addiction, by combining the discourses of mental health and racial discrimination, *The Soloist* places greater emphasis on the potential consequences of substandard care for those with mental health issues. Where *Ray* casts a critical eye towards the issues of racial discrimination in the context of the emerging Civil Rights movement, the more contemporary setting of *The Soloist* seeks to illustrate how the current landscape of post-recession America still engenders a fractured class system, based not only on race and ethnicity, but also on mental health. Therefore, both films considered together chart a remapping of the coordinates of American cultural and national identity for African Americans, both pre and post-Civil Rights. Importantly, both films do so whilst keeping a critical perspective on the way that racial distinctions and prejudice remains a facet of contemporary American culture.

While both *Ray* and *The Soloist* engage with similar themes of mental disorder and racial identity, there are some fundamental differences in the ways that each film addresses and represents such issues. In the first instance, the portrayal of each character's respective disorder utilises differing techniques and approaches. Whilst this may be expected to some degree, as the symptoms of drug addiction and schizophrenia are very different, and therefore require different audio-visual signifiers in their representation, what is perhaps the most striking difference is that diegetic and non-diegetic music and sound play largely different roles in each film. As the popular music biopic centres on musicians and their lives/careers, it is inevitable that music and sound are elements that play a crucial role in the construction of

meaning, and yet these aspects are employed in largely different ways. As already described, *Ray* uses the oeuvre of Ray Charles as a means of providing insight into the personal emotions and thoughts of Charles, often in relation to his addiction and sexual infidelities. *The Soloist*, however, foregrounds Nathaniel Ayers's obsession with the composer Ludwig van Beethoven, and uses sound editing in an explicit way to make the representation of his schizophrenia more tangible to viewers. Where *Ray* uses the historically familiar biopic trope of live performance as the principal means of incorporating musical cues and songs, coherent with Bingham's claim that the film is neoclassical in form,[332] *The Soloist* uses a more experimental approach to sound editing. In *The Soloist*, diegetic and non-diegetic sound blend and drift in and out of sync with one another as a means of communicating and expressing the social alienation that Ayers experiences as a result of his anxiety and schizophrenia, which are heavily implied as being linked to factors of racial discrimination.

In the film, Ayers first comes to public attention after Steve Lopez has a chance meeting with him by a statue of Beethoven in Los Angeles. Lopez, desperately struggling to find an original story for his L.A. Times column, decides to write a series of articles about how Ayers, a talented, Julliard trained, musician came to be homeless and living on the streets. When Lopez first hears Ayers play the cello, which he gives to him as a gift on behalf of one of his readers, it is in a tunnel of a busy L.A. road. The use of sound editing becomes important in reinforcing Ayers's affinity with the streets. As he plays, the resonance and timbre of the notes are accompanied by the ambient traffic noise of the tunnel, as well as the distant sounds of police car sirens. The camera then rises above Lopez and Ayers, and begins to float above the streets of Los Angeles as the music continues to play. The piece is an original composition for the film, titled 'A City Symphony', and therefore it is clear that the piece purposely blurs diegetic and non-diegetic sound to emphasise Ayers's association with the urban area as a result of his homelessness, which is accompanied by visuals that first focus on Ayers and his performance, but ultimately culminates in a series of abstract aerial shots of the Los Angeles topography.

[332] Bingham, D. (2010) *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?*, p. 349.

Lopez tells Ayers that he cannot keep the cello on the streets, and that he has to keep the instrument at a local community service facility called LAMP, which provides support to the homeless community in L.A. Ayers at first becomes disorientated and anxious about the instrument being taken away from him, exclaiming, 'you'll put water on the bridge, you'll drown her.' Interestingly, the way in which Ayers ascribes a gender to his new instrument, by expressing his concern that Lopez will drown *her*, links with my earlier discussion regarding the association between water and drowning in depictions of female mental illness. While Lopez waits at LAMP for Ayers to arrive, he sits and listens to a group therapy discussion, in which a homeless African American woman discusses her struggles with different medications for the voices that she hears. She says that, quite often, the voices comfort her, and that when she takes the lithium prescribed to her, there is nobody to comfort her. This moment correlates to the anthropological and psychiatric research discussed in the introduction to this thesis, in which schizophrenic patients from various cultures were found to experience the hearing of voices in diverse ways according to cultural factors. That the woman claims to experience a benign relationship with her voices is more akin to the experiences of schizophrenic patients in India and Africa. Thus, one could argue that the psychopharmacological treatment of this woman's disorder in the film suggests that the cultural aspects of her disorder are being ignored/overridden by the homogenised, drug-based, treatment model that is so prevalent in American psychiatry today.

Later, still waiting for Ayers to arrive, Lopez talks to two other characters at the homeless shelter: a Southern white woman and her African American boyfriend. The woman discusses how, in the past, medical staff have talked to her like she was trash, and that her aunt received multiple 'shock treatments' because 'she didn't want to go to bed with her sex-crazed husband'. These interactions with other characters suffering from mental disorders, homelessness and disenfranchisement all serve to locate Ayers's mental disorder outside the boundaries of an exception, or a 'personal struggle' that is so common to the biopic. In doing so, the film seems to present mental disorder as a social problem, an issue not confined to individual experience, but rather as something of an epidemic, especially amongst those in less privileged social positions. These instances also reaffirm many of the

notions I have discussed earlier in my thesis about the gendering of mental health and the imbrication of mental health treatment and issues of patriarchal control. That the African American woman laments the fact that her medication silences the voices that comfort her serves to illustrate her social alienation, and the white Southern woman's claims that she has been discriminated against by medical professionals on account of her social status as 'white trash' reiterates the cultural conception of the South as an unsophisticated and backward area. Overall, this scene casts a critical eye towards the state of healthcare in America, especially in relation to mental health.

The use of a number of flashback scenes depicting Ayers's teenage years is where the link between racial discrimination and mental illness are most explicitly elucidated in the film. Again, the use of sound editing is crucial in constructing this. In one scene, the young Ayers is shown sitting in the auditorium of a concert hall at the Julliard School with his peers. He is the only black character in shot; indeed the film never shows any other black characters in the Julliard School, suggesting that Ayers is the only black pupil. A wide shot shows Ayers in the middle of the group of students, the ambient sound of muttering and talking is interrupted by the sudden non-diegetic sound of a tuning fork being struck; at the same moment the shot cuts to a close-up of Ayers's face. When the camera returns to a wide shot Ayers appears sitting in the auditorium alone, and thus the intentional discontinuity from the previous wide shot alerts the viewer that something isn't right. This sequence emphasises Ayers's isolation from his peers, as the only black member of the group. As the sound from the tuning fork fades out, nondescript male and female voices can be heard repeatedly calling out Ayers's name. As Ayers is shown alone, we come to understand them as auditory hallucinations, and thus the tuning fork comes to symbolise the precipitous moment that Ayers's disorder begins to manifest. It is significant here that sound editing is the chief component of the construction of the schizophrenic experience for viewers, as it seemingly appeals to the inherent significance that sound has in the popular music biopic subgenre. Ayers's illness is represented primarily through sound bites and musical cues, whereas, in contrast, John Nash's schizophrenia, as discussed in Chapter 1, is represented in *A Beautiful Mind* in mostly visual terms. Nash's vi-

sions manifest in the form of delusionary characters that he interacts with, despite the real John Nash's protests that the film 'showed things [I] never saw.'[333] That Nash's symptoms were presented as visual hallucinations shows how, in this instance, the representation of mental disorder in visual form better served the dramatic interests of *A Beautiful Mind*. Therefore, Ayers's schizophrenia is arguably depicted in primarily audible terms as this better fits the popular music biopic's reliance on sound.

In another flashback, Ayers, clearly distressed by the growing presence of the voices that he hears, attempts to find a hiding place in the school. As he does so, the voices can be heard making racially provocative comments, such as, 'they hate you with all their white heartless anger'. Indeed when Ayers does find a closet in which to hide, the voices tell him that he will never be able to hide well enough. They then begin to clash indecipherably, creating an audible sense of the disorientation that Ayers is experiencing. Eventually, as the camera gradually zooms in on Ayers's anguished face, the only word that can be picked out of the mélange of sound is the word 'whiteness', which is repeated several times, at increasing volume, until the end of the scene. Though the film never shows Ayers being racially abused by other characters, the fact that his hallucinations manifest in such a way as to racially persecute Ayers illustrates his concerns and anxieties about being the only African American in his class, and is consequently why he drops out of the school without graduating. Thus, his social isolation on account of his minority status is implicated as being significant in the onset of his mental disorder. That the voices Ayers hears are so aggressive conforms to what Luhrmann et al. found in their study as a more typical American experience of schizophrenia, in which voices heard by American patients were generally far more malicious and threatening than of those from parts of Asia or Africa. Thus, not only is Ayers's disorder implicated with racial anxieties, but is also connected to an experience of hallucinations more in line with a specifically American cultural context.[334]

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[333] Khan, R. (2009) *One on One: Professor John Nash Part 1*. [Internet] Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UiWBWwCa1E0> [Accessed 03/11/2014]

[334] Luhrmann, T, M., Padmavati, H, T., & Osei, A. (2015) Differences in Voice-Hearing Experiences of People with Psychosis in the USA, India and Ghana: Interview-Based Study. *British Journal of Psychiatry*. Vol. 206(1), p. 43.

As Lopez's relationship with Ayers develops, Lopez speaks to David (Nelsan Ellis), the head of LAMP, about Ayers's condition. Lopez asks, 'what does he have? Schizophrenia?' David's response is simply, 'I don't get too hung up on diagnosis'. Lopez then suggests that Ayers needs medication, to which David replies, 'I'll tell you what he doesn't need: one more person telling him he needs medication'. This again appears congruent to studies concerning the relationship between race and mental health issues in America, which suggest that African Americans are generally more sceptical of, and reluctant to seek out, treatment for mental disorders.[335] In a later conversation with David, Lopez asks if the facility can provide an apartment for Ayers, so that he can have a space for cello lessons. David asks Lopez if Ayers wants an apartment, in response Lopez lies and says that he does. In the following scene Ayers tells Lopez that he doesn't want an apartment. As the two characters converse, Ayers is centred in the shot, shown wearing an ostentatious costume, akin to that of the iconic Uncle Sam outfit, with his face painted white (figure 4.3). In the background of the shot are also several 'Stars and Stripes' American flags. This scene therefore utilises iconography that is heavily associated with the American nation, icons and symbols that evoke and bring into consciousness the essence of nationhood. That Ayers's face is painted white has clear racial connotations, suggesting that his schizophrenia, which I have already explained is foregrounded as being caused by his fear of racial discrimination and social alienation, has fractured the construction of a cogent 'self'. Resultantly, Ayers's face paint has an aura of artifice that suggests an incoherent attempt to assimilate into the dominant cultural order, which for him is typified by whiteness and white identity.

[335] Schnittker, J. (2003) Misgivings of Medicine?: African Americans' Skepticism of Psychiatric Medication. *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*. pp. 506-524: Schnittker, J. et al. (2000) Nature, Nurture, Neither, Nor: Black-White Differences in Beliefs about the Causes and Appropriate Treatment of Mental Illness.

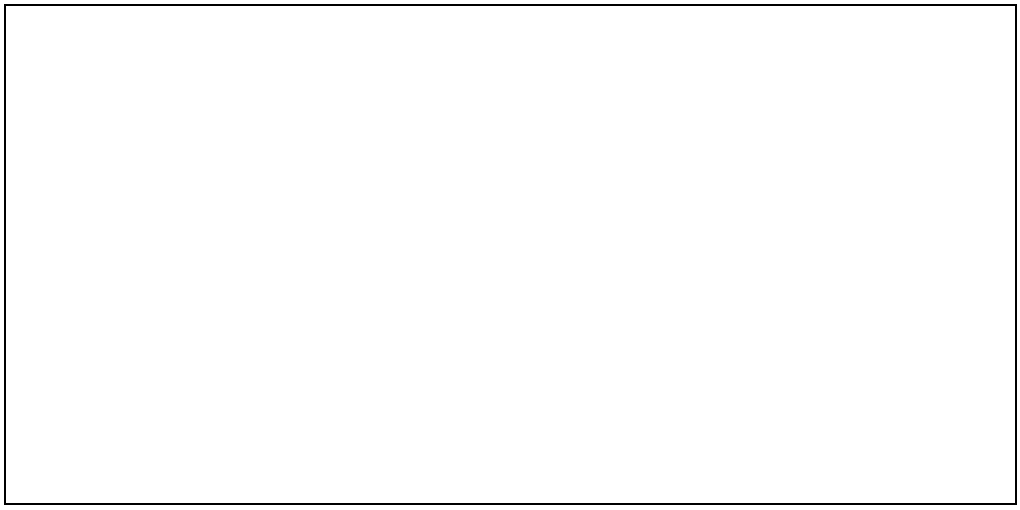

Figure 4.3: Ayers's white face paint and iconoclastic outfit represents his conscious attempt to assimilate into the dominant social order. (*The Soloist.* Directed by Joe Wright: 2009; Dream-Works SKG, Universal Pictures, StudioCanal, Participant Media, Krasnoff Foster Productions, Working Title Films)

Dyer claims that 'the presence of black people [in film] allows one to see whiteness as whiteness, and in this way relates to the existential psychology that is at the origins of the interest in "otherness" as an explanatory concept in the representation of ethnicity'.[336] In this way then, one can argue that Ayers's painting his face white in some ways shows a cognizance of the disparity between white and blacks within the social structure of the American class system; in a way that mocks the artificiality of the binary categories used to divide the class system according to racial identity. Extrapolating from Dyer's work, Burgoyne states that 'the effective display of white identity…depends on a relation of rigid contrast with black identity, a contrast that recalls the absolute binarisms of racist thought.'[337] With this in mind, Ayers's imitation of the aesthetic of whiteness brings into relief the stark contrast between the characteristics of whiteness and black identity, which have been highlighted throughout the film as being the overwhelming factor in the onset of Ayers's schizophrenia.

Ayers's white face paint may also be significant as a reference to the historic practice of skin bleaching, a flourishing cosmetic industry in the 1920s in which African Americans would undertake treatment to lighten their skin tone. Ronald Hall argues that this practice was for 'African Amer-

[336] Dyer, R. (1993) *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation.* London: Routledge. p. 130.
[337] Burgoyne, R. (2010) *Film Nation: Revised Edition*. p. 19.

icans who internalise[d] light skin and other dominant culture criteria as the ideal point of reference for full assimilation into American society.'[338] Thus, in Hall's view, many African Americans wished to lighten their skin as part of a conscious effort to integrate into American society by appearing more in line with the dominant (white) order. Jacob Dorman explains further that 'skin bleaching practices…constituted a profoundly micro-political form of self masking and identity shifting mediated by both ideology and consumerism.'[339] With this in mind, one can see the relevance of Ayers's painted face to this historical, and often desirable, practice. His attempt to impersonate whiteness, spurred by the racial anxieties at the epicentre of the onset of his schizophrenia, makes a clear gesture to a prominent industry in which African Americans could alter their sense of racial identity in an effort to fit into a social structure that prioritised whiteness.

In the end Lopez is able to convince Ayers that it is in his best interest to have an apartment. Towards the conclusion of the film, Ayers is asked to sign a document giving his sister legal care of him and his affairs. When he reads the document, Ayers becomes agitated and belligerent when he notices the document refers to him as having a 'schizophrenic mind'. When Lopez tries to ease Ayers's anxiety, explaining that 'it's legal jargon…they try to put people into [categories],' Ayers lashes out and attacks Lopez, placing a hand over Lopez's mouth and saying, 'I don't go where you say go. I go where I want to go. You don't put me away Mr. Lopez, you don't' put me away'. As Lopez struggles Ayers becomes more aggressive and pins him to the floor, and exclaims, 'I'm not your boy! I'm not Mr. Colonel Sanders!' In this moment, Ayers vocalises his inner anxiousness about racial discrimination and institutionalisation, as he invokes racist rhetoric by using the term 'boy' to critique his relationship with Lopez. Ayers also mentions the globalised corporate image of the Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise (whose logo features a portrait of the unmistakably Southern Colonel Sanders) as a means of linking the racist discourse he uses back to

[338] Hall, R. (1995) The Bleaching Syndrome: African Americans' Response to Cultural Domination Vis-à-Vis Skin Color. *Journal of Black Studies*. Vol. 26(2), p. 172.
[339] Dorman, J, S. (2011) Skin Bleach and Civilization: The Racial Formation of Blackness in 1920s Harlem. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*. Vol. 4(4), p. 48.

notions of pre-Civil Rights era America, and especially to the geo-political conceptions of the South as discussed above.

Ayers also criticises Lopez for patronising him in their conversations, saying, 'Nathaniel, Nathaniel, I'm sick of being Nathaniel and you're Mr. Lopez.' In the same way that Ayers used the term 'boy' in reference to his racial heritage and identity, Ayers's claim here is that where he refers to Lopez throughout the film as 'Mr. Lopez', Lopez has always called Ayers, 'Nathaniel'. Ayers therefore admonishes Lopez for what he perceives to be the use of oppressive and condescending discourses related to racial identity, and to attempt to reaffirm that he doesn't have a schizophrenic mind. In doing so, Ayers brings to the fore notions of double consciousness. In 1903, W. E. B. Du Bois used the term double consciousness in reference to the psychologically liminal state that blackness and black identity in America occupied. As Dickson D. Bruce Jr. contends, for Du Bois double consciousness referred to 'an internal conflict in the African American individual between what was "African" and what was "American."'[340] Double consciousness therefore is an important factor to take into consideration in relation to the construction of national identity. Johnson claims that 'blackness resides in the liminal space of the psyche where its manifestation is neither solely volitional nor without agency.'[341] As such, the implication of double consciousness is that African Americans must simultaneously think both in terms of being an American and a 'Negro'.[342] Both Bruce Jr. and Johnson refer to this duality as being akin to a form of 'split personality',[343] which again associates cultural conceptions of mental illness discourse to those of national and racial identity, and certainly applies to the character of Nathaniel Ayers insofar as, although schizophrenia doesn't entail multiple personalities, the vicissitudes of his disorder are frequently framed as etiologically related to racial discrimination. So too, the practice of skin bleaching is often discussed critically in similar terms, in which African Americans having their skin bleached to assimilate into the dominant culture experi-

[340] Bruce Jr., D. D. (1992) W. E. B. Du Bois and the Idea of Double Consciousness. *American Literature*. Vol. 64(2), p. 301.
[341] Johnson, E. P. (2003) *Appropriating Blackness*, p. 8.
[342] Gilroy, P. (2005) Multiculturalism, Double Consciousness and the 'War on Terror'. *Patterns of Prejudice*. Vol. 39(4), p. 440.
[343] Bruce Jr., D. D. (1992) W. E. B. Du Bois and the Idea of Double Consciousness. p. 300: Johnson, E. P. (2003) *Appropriating Blackness*. p. 8.

ence, in Hall's words, a 'psychic conflict'.[344] Thus, double consciousness is a vital aspect of considering the representation of Ayers's disorder in the film, as it specifically references historical practices and critical theories that explore the psychological impacts of racial differences and identities.

It is clear that, contrary to Smith Jr.'s claim referenced at the beginning of this section, *Ray* does not in fact downplay issues of racial adversity and class struggle in place of psychological trauma. Rather, this section has illustrated how these themes coexist and intertwine in such a way that the discourse and rhetoric of mental health and addiction can be seen as critically engaging with issues of racism and the historical hegemonies of a fissured class system predicated on race. The film frames racial struggles and Civil Rights protesting in a way that coalesces with narrative themes of addiction, rehabilitation and redemption. That the musical works of Charles are used as a conduit narrative device, through which viewers are given insight in to the personal life and traumatic experiences that precipitate Charles's addiction, and that the emergence of new forms of 'black music' is so severely persecuted by numerous white characters goes some way to illustrate the manner in which African American culture has been historically oppressed. That these aspects of African American identity have been undermined and discriminated against using similar discourses to those found in the rhetoric of the mental health profession (for instance claims about the genetic etiology of some mental disorders bears resemblance to historical hegemonic beliefs that African Americans were genetically inferior to white Americans), justifies the exploration of the ways in which mental health and issues of racial identity in American culture are significant for consideration in relation to one another.

Where *Ray* primarily foregrounds the presence of racial prejudice in the South, locating racist ideologies within the socio-historical milieu of an American region whose history has a long lineage of African American subjugation, *The Soloist* illustrates how, in the contemporary context, tensions over racial differences still exist and have a contemporary relationship to notions of mental disorder. Whilst *Ray* constructs Los Angeles as a place of escape and promise, where 'the negro comes to spread his wings', *The Solo-*

[344] Hall, R. (1995) The Bleaching Syndrome. p. 48.

ist critiques that notion by presenting the largely African American homeless community of Los Angeles's Skid Row as a society in which mental disorder is common, emphasising the vulnerability of the underclasses in a post-recession environment. That Ayers's schizophrenia is so thematically and etiologically linked to his personal anxiety of racial isolation and persecution serves to illustrate how issues of race, national identity and mental disorder can be seen conjoined in the popular music biopic. Therefore, both films represent mental disorder in such a way as to highlight the prevalence of racial discrimination within the disparate American class system.

Divine Madness: Christianity and Mental Disorder

So far, I have illustrated the significant role that issues of racial identity and inequality have played in conjunction with the representation of mental disorder in the popular music biopic. In this section, I go further by analysing the importance to the subgenre of religious themes and iconography. Earlier I cited numerous psychiatric and sociological studies that investigate the links between racism, ethnicity and mental disorders. In conducting this research, it also became apparent that a great deal of attention from these disciplines has also been paid to the link between religion and mental wellbeing. In the abstract to their article on the matter, Jeff Levin, Linda M. Chatters and Robert Joseph Taylor explain that, 'the very best of this work comes from epidemiological studies of African Americans'.[345] It is therefore appropriate to include analysis of the relationship between themes of religion and mental health in the biopic at this point, following directly from my discussion of racism, mental disorder and African American identity.

The association between divinity and mental health has a long history in Western culture, dating back as far as Platonic Greek philosophy.[346] In a similar vein to my discussion in Chapter 1, whereby genius, creativity, and madness have become culturally intertwined as a result of the impact of early musings of Greek philosophy, religion, madness, and creativity become

[345] Levin, J., Chatters, J. M., & Taylor, R. J. (2005) Religion, Health and Medicine in African Americans: Implications for Physicians. *Journal of the National Medical Association.* Vol. 97(2). pp. 237-249.

[346] Zimmerman, J. N. (2003) *People Like Ourselves: Portrayals of Mental Illness in the Movies*. p. 91: Schnittker, J. et al. (2000) Nature, Nurture, Neither, Nor: Black-White Differences in Beliefs about the Causes and Appropriate Treatment of Mental Illness. p. 1102.

imbricated through a similar discursive process, owing to Plato's contention that '[creativity] is a divine madness, a gift from the gods'.[347] It is therefore fitting that contemporary biopics concerning the lives of mentally ill musicians feature a plentiful supply of religious themes and iconography. Here I will investigate the prevalence and the pertinence of Christian motifs in relation to mental disorder across my case study texts. As the USA is a predominantly Christian country, and that religious identity holds such a weight of significance to the rudiments of American national identity, it is clear that Christianity and the concept of faith are central facets of the sense of communal belonging felt towards the nation. That Protestant Christianity has been so historically entrenched within predominant conceptions of American national identity is perhaps best typified by the referral to the USA in the pledge of allegiance as, 'one Nation under God'. As such, an analysis into the way that mental health narratives engage with, and can be inflected by, wider concepts of American national identity cannot elide the significance of religion and Christian values that are so imbued within American cultural history and identity.

As noted earlier in this chapter, Smith Jr. has claimed that *Ray* and *Walk the Line* present narratives that underplay issues of race and class in favour of narratives about personal redemption. While in my own discussion I have refuted that claim, what is also interesting to note is that Smith Jr. has framed his conception of redemption in these narratives as possessing a 'secular tone'.[348] In the following analysis, I will again present a counterargument to Smith by presenting an alternative perspective in which the narratives of redemption in *Ray* and *Walk the Line* can be read as reinforcing the cultural values of Christianity so endeared to wider American consciousness. However, my analysis will also take into account *The Soloist*, and its depiction of a counter-narrative in which Nathaniel Ayers's disorder and personality are juxtaposed against religious iconography and themes, in such a way that marks a shift away from both notions of religious identity and narratives of redemption.

At this point, it is worth noting that when I refer to religious identity in this section, I am referring more so to a discursive notion of Christian

[347] Neihart, M. (1998) Creativity, the Arts, and Madness. *Roeper Review*. Vol. 21(1), p. 47.
[348] Smith Jr., G. D. (2009) Love as Redemption. p. 225.

identity in America, a form of civil religion, rather than any form of adherence to a particular Church or denomination. Though several of the protagonists in the films that I analyse here are shown to be practicing Christians, their specific denominations are rarely, if ever, shown. As such, I use the references and themes of Christianity present in the films as a means of elucidating wider issues relating to the discursive concept of America as a 'Christian nation'. As Jeremy Brooke Straughn and Scott L. Feld highlight, despite the USA becoming more religiously diverse in recent years, and the percentage of self-identifying Christians decreasing, paradoxically the perception of America as a 'Christian nation' has increased, with a greater percentage of Americans considering the USA to be a Christian society.[349] Straughn and Feld contend that, 'rather than merely describing the demographic status quo, statements like "America is a Christian nation" represent a discursive practice that seeks to align the boundaries of national belonging with adherence to the dominant religious faith.'[350]

In her discussion of black jazz biopics, Simone Varriale explains that, 'the films shape music genres as social worlds, making a straightforward – almost homological – connection between "kinds of music" and the kind of people that music is supposed to *naturally* represent' (original italics). [351] With this in mind, in *Ray*, Charles's music, which as previously discussed is considered original due to its merging of musical genre conventions, can be seen as conflating a number of different social worlds, with gospel music representing the devoutly passionate Christian population so prevalent in America. Where Charles causes much controversy in the film is by merging the songs and styles of gospel music with ostensibly more raucous and sexualised forms of music. In one scene of Charles performing, a ruckus can be heard amongst the audience, as a middle-aged couple shout, 'stop it! Y'all done lost your minds! Stop all this stuff!' When Charles stops playing to find out what the commotion is, the couple call him a devil for 'turning God's music into sex…making money off the Lord'. It is prescient

[349] Straughn, J. B., & Feld, S. L. (2010) America as a "Christian Nation"? Understanding Religious Boundaries of National Identity in the United States. *Sociology of Religion*. Vol. 71(3). p. 281.
[350] ibid.
[351] Varriale, S. (2012) Rockin' the Jazz Biopic: Changing Images of African American Musicians in Hollywood Biographical Films. *Jazz Research Journal*. Vol. 6(1). p. 33.

that this outburst is put in terms of 'losing your mind', as this comes to foreshadow Charles's mental breakdown and increasing struggles with heroin addiction later in the film. Charles then asks the audience, 'if all y'all want to hear me keep playing, let me hear you say "amen"'. Ray also asks his manager to find him a girl, 'a church-trained girl, but without the church attitude', to sing in his band. Here Charles is irreverent to the entrenched Christian values ubiquitous amongst his fellow African Americans, as presented in the film, and as such is at odds with the social world that his gospel roots symbolise.

Throughout the majority of the film, Charles's personal misdemeanours and salacious affairs are placed in contrast with the icons and values of Christian life. For instance, When Charles first auditions Mary Ann (Aunjanue Ellis), the 'church girl without the church attitude' that he wants for his band, she is positioned alone on a stage with a strong beam of overhead light coming through the window. This is a clear reference to the visual rhetoric associated with divinity that has appeared in countless media representations of Divine Intervention. Here though, this iconography becomes subverted, as this marks the introduction of Charles's first mistress, and thus the religious connotations of the lighting are overwritten with the suggestion of sin and transgression, and the beginning of Charles's descent into a self-destructive lifestyle typified by drugs, alcohol and womanising. In the very next scene Ray is placed in the exact same spot, playing his piano with the lighting on him in the same way it was Mary Ann, serving to reinforce the suggestion of their burgeoning prurient relationship. As the couple have their first kiss the shot begins to fade out, with a transition to a fade in of a close-up shot of a match being lit. This is a symbolic visual, which has connotations of the consummation of Charles and Mary Ann's elicit affair (quite literally, a spark has been lit), and yet as the camera zooms out we see that the match is under Charles's heroin spoon. This creates a visual link between Charles's drug abuse and his amorous affairs, which stand in stark contrast to the religious morals of his wife at home.

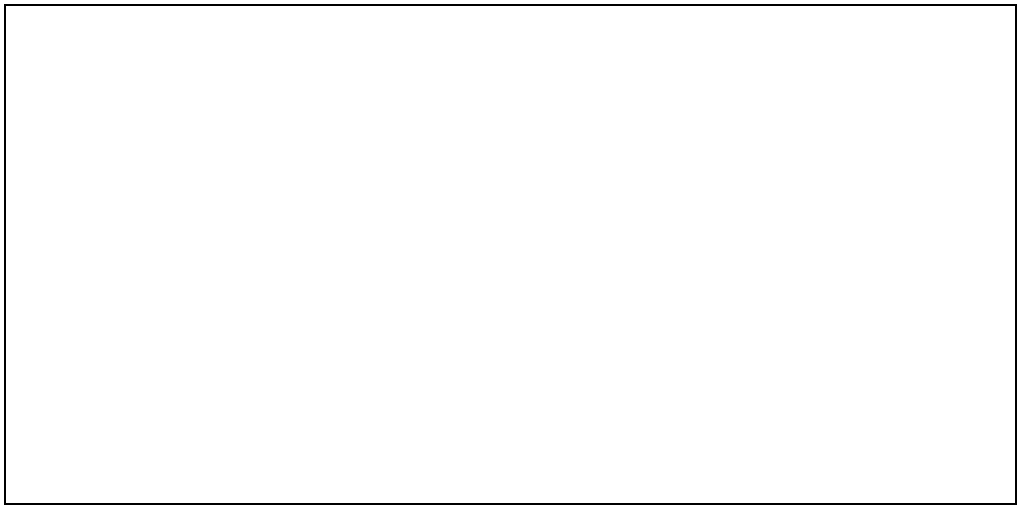

Figure 4.4: The use of focussed overhead backlighting has religious connotations, a trope that is subverted through its use to highlight the burgeoning affair between Charles and Mary-Ann. (*Ray*. Directed by Taylor Hackford: 2004; Universal Pictures, Bristol Bay Productions, Anvil Films, Baldwin Entertainment Group)

In many ways, Della Bea acts as a form of custodian of Christian values for Charles. For example, when Charles and Della go on their first date, Della wears a crucifix necklace, and tells Charles that she is living with a preacher and his family whilst embarking on her musical career. Later, after their first tryst, Charles leaps out of bed, suddenly inspired with an idea for a new song. As he begins to play what will become the hit 'I Got a Woman', Della admonishes him for sexualising religious music by vamping up what was originally a gospel song, as she sees it as sacrilegious. It is therefore clear that Della Bea comes to symbolise the discipline and religious virtuousness that becomes contrasted with Charles's indulgent and hedonistic lifestyle. Though he is religious, much of the criticisms aimed at Charles by the public are that he is bastardising God's music, and doesn't live his life by the teachings of the Bible. Instead he is promiscuous, adulterous, and dependent on illegal substances, counterpointed with Della Bea's characterisation as the film's representative for Christian family values and virtues so prevalent in ideas of American national identity. After being caught with drugs at the airport, Charles faces a potential prison sentence. While trying to hide at home from his problems, Bea says to him, 'a needle ain't going to solve this. Only thing that can help you is God, Ray.' Della here typifies Schnittker's contention that, 'some [Americans] view mental illness in strongly religious terms and consider psychiatric disorders to reflect the will of God (or of some other higher power). They may believe

that the best hope for recovery from mental illness is prayer or a stronger commitment to the Church.'[352] Charles responds scornfully to Della:

> God? Do you know how it feels to go blind and still be afraid of the dark? Every day you pray for just a little light, and you get nothing. God don't listen to people like me. As far as I'm concerned me and God are even and I do what I damn well please. And goddammit if I want to shoot up, I'll shoot up.

This dialogue exchange makes clear that Charles is positioned in such a way that he is at odds with his wife, and therefore at odds with the proper and righteous way of life that Della represents. However, as he is able to recover from his addiction, end his illicit affairs, and re-commit to his music and his wife, it is clear that *Ray* frames redemption in an explicitly non-secular manner.

In creating a series of contrasts between the religious and the secular, where Charles's misdemeanours and addiction are framed as antithetical to religious virtues, while his family life and ultimate redemption are fully locatable within Christian traditions, *Ray* evokes the historical lineage of several black-cast musicals, which, to a much greater degree than 'white' musicals, explicitly dealt with religion as a theme, in particular contrasting the nonsecular and the secular.[353] This link speaks to the way that the institution of religion was used to control and oppress racial minorities in American history, and how the re-appropriation of religious discourse became a mobilising tool for the Civil Rights movement.

In a similar vein, the depiction of Johnny Cash in *Walk the Line* uses comparable techniques to highlight the self-destructive tendencies of Cash's personality. Where Della Bea represents Christian virtue in *Ray*, as we know, much of Charles's personal trauma comes from a feeling of guilt at the childhood death of his brother. *Walk the Line* also plays upon this theme, highlighting Cash's trauma at the death of his older brother Jack (Lucas Till). Where the young Cash (referred to during his childhood as J. R.) is portrayed as being a talented singer, J. R. expresses a yearning to be

[352] Schnittker, J. et al. (2000) Nature, Nurture, Neither, Nor. p. 1104.
[353] Knight, A. (2002) *Disintegrating the Musical: Black Performance and Musical Film*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. p. 98-99, 144-145.

like his older brother, whose ambition is to be a preacher. J. R. asks Jack, 'why are you so good?' and expresses a feeling of inadequacy that his brother is on what he perceives as being a more virtuous path in life than he is. After Jacks' death in a woodworking accident, Cash's father, John Sr. (Robert Patrick) tells J. R. that 'God took the wrong son'. This moment contextualises the cold and hostile relationship that Cash has with his father throughout the film, as he persistently tries to impress his father with his achievements and success, only to continue to be reminded by his father that he is divorced, barely sees his children and lives alone in a 'big empty house'. In claiming that God should have taken J. R., Cash Sr. renders him as a pariah, which comes to typify Cash's stage identity as 'The Man in Black'.

Ultimately, Cash's drug habit and abuse of alcohol are framed as stemming from his feeling of inadequacy in comparison to his father's idealised image of his brother. That Cash's success has come from country and rock 'n' roll music only serves to hurt his image in his father's eyes, whereas Jack's aspirations to work within the Church mean that Cash can never live up to Jack. Indeed, Cash's early attempts to break into the music industry are as a gospel performer. However, he is ridiculed by his wife, and bluntly shot down by record label owner Sam Phillips (Dallas Roberts), who tells Cash that he can't market gospel anymore because it doesn't sell, having waned in popularity in favour of the rock 'n' roll movement, which was much maligned by many of the older generations in America. This is suggestive of a cultural transition towards the rise of a youth culture in the 1960s, typified by pop culture and consumerism, in which the fervour and fundamentalism of Christian values were seen by some as stale and passé. This new generation is aptly typified within the popular music biopic with the emergence of the nascent rock 'n' roll and soul music genres, of which both Cash and Charles respectively were pioneers.

When Cash presses Phillips as to what is wrong with his gospel music, Phillips tells Cash that he doesn't believe him when he sings about God. In response, Cash plays a song he wrote whilst in the U. S. Air Force, which has much more irreverent, bitter and sombre lyrics; songs not of redemption, but of misery and contempt. It is for this musical style that Cash ultimately makes his name as an exciting new performer, turning his back on

his hopes of being a gospel singer, and it is as Phillips tells him, success 'doesn't have anything to do with believing in God. It has to do with believing in yourself.' In this moment, Phillips summarises the binary attitudes that are at odds within the socio-historical context of the film; those of the staunchly religious values venerated by the generations of yesteryear, and the shift towards an indulgent individualism associated with the youth culture of America's future. In this instance then, the American Dream mythology is shifted from its roots in Puritan lore, which told of God's will and generosity in promising a new life in a new land, to a mythology in which success, now epitomised by fame and stardom, is available to all willing to seek it. Quentin J. Schultze describes the rise of consumerism in American culture as being analogous to religious conversion, in which people become transformed into consumers and are then encouraged, via capitalist institutions and advertising, to live faithfully within the parameters of a capitalist, consumer community.[354] Therefore, the American Dream is placed, in the context of *Ray* and *Walk the Line*, in secular terms, showing how success is now typified for the youth generation by the consummation of aspirations for fame and success. However, this is done in a way that highlights the potential downfalls of trying to 'have it all', culminating in the manifestation of repressed guilt and trauma in the form of infidelity and drug addiction. Redemption, however, takes the form of a return to the initial values of Christianity, a return to non-secular principles.

In his discussion of Puritan values, and the way that such values still permeate the fabric of American consciousness and identity, George Walden claims that, 'the Puritans loved nothing so much as a sermon of redemption, and the sinner who atones for his crimes publicly and with brio can emerge cleaner and purer than the man who never committed them in the first place'.[355] *Ray* uses Charles's confrontation with his brother, via fantasy hallucination, as a form of psychological catharsis that occurs during his rehabilitation, coinciding with his redemption. Cash's recovery from addiction also plays on a similar theme. While June Carter (Reese Witherspoon)

[354] Schultze, Q. J. (2003) *Christianity and the Mass Media in America: Toward A Democratic Accommodation*. East Lansing: University of Minnesota Press. p. 11.
[355] Walden, G. (2006) *God Won't Save America: Psychosis of a Nation*. London: Gibson Square. p. 44.

and her family lock and guard Cash in his house while he recovers cold turkey, high positioned cameras cast Cash in a low angled position, connoting his weakness and dependency on drugs. Cash hears the last words his brother said to him before he died, 'you go on ahead J. R', and so, as in *Ray*, Cash's recovery is linked to his traumatic past and the childhood death of his brother.

The music in both recovery montage sequences is much slower and calmer than in other instances in the films. So, rather than being suggestive of success and the fast paced lifestyle of a popular entertainer, the music suggests a long, drawn-out, recovery from addiction. In both films, this technique counterpoints the typical use of montage in the popular music biopic as a condensed sequence of success. At the end of the montage in *Walk the Line*, Cash tells Carter his father was right, and he should have been the one who died. Carter consoles him, saying that God has given him a chance to make things right. In doing so, Carter is shown in the archetypal lover/carer role, bringing Cash back to a position in which he is no longer antithetical to the Christian lifestyle. This is most explicitly reiterated when Carter takes Cash to church, which is the final shot of the sequence charting his recovery. Carter has to take Cash's hand as he is reluctant to go inside, but with Carter's encouragement and support, he is able to return to God. Therefore, Cash's redemption, signified by his successful rehabilitation from addiction, culminates in a return to a Christian way of life, and therefore Cash's redemption can indeed be read as a return to non-secular themes.

Charles's redemption too is one that is heavily tethered to the ecclesiastic. In the previous section of this chapter, I explained how Charles's rehabilitation is confirmed by the state of Georgia's pardoning of him, and how this had specific connotations about the development of racial politics and equality in America. However, what is also significant about this scene is that as Charles accepts his pardon and embraces the warm reception of the crowd, Della Bea is at his side. In reality, Ray Charles did not receive a lifetime ban from the state of Georgia, and by the time of the real ceremony (which was to appoint 'Georgia On My Mind' the state's official song) Charles and Della Bea had divorced. Therefore, it is clear that particular liberties were taken in order for *Ray* to uphold many of the important values

closely entwined with American national identity. The film instead ends on a note that reaffirms the value and sanctity of marriage, by showing Charles atoning for his sins (drug abuse and adultery) and earning his wife's forgiveness. In particular, as already explained, as Della Bea is the cypher character who represents the upstanding morals of Christian lore, Charles's earning of her forgiveness symbolises his return to Christian family values from his indulgent and self-destructive lifestyle.

Whilst *Ray* elides the real-life divorce of Charles and Della Bea in favour of a narrative resolution that upholds and reaffirms the sanctity of marriage, *Walk the Line* conversely emphasises the tumultuous romance between Cash and Carter. Throughout the film, both are shown as being unhappily married to other people; Cash to the unsupportive and stifling Viv (Ginnifer Goodwin), and Carter to a number of absent male characters. Much of the narrative centres on their 'will they, won't they?' romance. One of the key moments in the development of their relationship comes when Carter is accosted by a store clerk, who says to her, 'your ma and pa are good Christians in a world gone to pot'. Again, the use of slang rhetoric associated with pejorative ideas of mental illness to make a critical comment about the changing nature of American culture in the 1950s is pertinent here, particularly with a contrast to Christian values. The clerk also says she is surprised Carter's parents still talk to her after her divorce, as divorce is an abomination and marriage is for life. Unlike *Ray* then, *Walk the Line* here places Carter in a position where we feel sympathy for her, thus nullifying the anxiety and stigma attached to divorce as being unchristian. Therefore, in the denouement in which Carter finally agrees to marry Cash, now that he is clean from his addiction and has proven himself a man of moral upstanding, neither Christian dogma nor mental disorder stand in their way, and their engagement ensures that both Carter and Cash remain situated within a pro-Christian tradition.

So far this section has illustrated the ways that redemption from mental disorder in the popular music biopic can be read in explicitly religious terms. Both *Ray* and *Walk the Line*, despite Smith Jr.'s claim to the contrary, frequently incorporate religious iconography into the mise-en-scène in order to contrast the self-destructive lives of their subjects with the ultimate salvation and redemption that each character experiences. In each

case, it is the prominent female lead that comes to symbolise the humility and virtuousness of Christianity, typifying the predominant Christian values at the heart of American national identity. Both films tether such religious themes to the changing socio-cultural milieu in which they are set. Ray Charles and Johnny Cash are both framed as instigators and pioneers of a new pop culture movement in the 1950s and '60s, in which their music, and the perils of fame that they encounter, are representative of an American nation in the midst of a cultural transition, where the values of Christianity are waning in lieu of the emergence of a new youth culture predicated on hedonism, indulgence and a laissez-faire attitude towards drugs and sexuality. At this point, I consider how *The Soloist* challenges many of the central themes and aspects of the more familiar approaches outlined in relation to both *Ray* and *Walk the Line*.

In one of the early conversations between Ayers and Lopez, Ayers is shown muttering almost nonsensically, rapidly switching from one topic of conversation to another, in an incoherent manner. Suddenly, amidst all the jumbled dialogue, Ayers stops, points to an aeroplane in the sky and asks Lopez, 'are you flying that plane?' Lopez, visibly confused, responds, 'no, I'm right here'. Ayers looks puzzled, and then exclaims, 'I don't know how God works'. Soon after, a flashback to Ayers's childhood shows his mother talking to him about his musical talent. She describes listening to his music as 'hearing the voice of God', and goes on to explain that his gift is something special, 'a way out' from the impoverished area they live in. Therefore, familiar themes of God-given talent, social mobility and class struggles are presented. However, Ayers's trajectory towards social mobility is interrupted and derailed by the onset of his mental illness, causing to him to drop out of Julliard. It is clear then that Ayers's characterisation and illness, which led to him living on the streets, appear discordant with the typical narrative arc of redemption and religious salvation that appear in *Ray* and *Walk the Line*.

In the Skid Row area of Los Angeles, where Ayers spends most of his time, a flickering fluorescent sign reads, 'the wages of sin is death: but the gift of God is eternal life'. Whilst this would seem to reinforce the ubiquity of a religious identity amongst the largely African American homeless community that reside on the streets, the fact that the sign is flickering can

be read as indicating the fallibility of religion, especially in relation to mental illness. Where *Ray* and *Walk the Line* take place in a milieu that highlights the transition towards a new culture based on consumerism and away from a conservative attitude towards religious values, *The Soloist* takes place in contemporary, post-recession America. The film includes references to the Schwarzenegger administration and shows how the L.A. Times, Lopez's employer, has to downsize and fire employees. Therefore, the film critiques the Republican government and the state's descent into austerity. Paul Harris contends that George W. Bush's presidential campaign was heavily reliant on emphasising Bush's status as a 'born again Christian', especially in relation to his recovery from alcoholism.[356] This appears to reaffirm the idea of non-secular redemption. Given that Bush went so far as to claim he was chosen by God to be leader of the free world, it is perhaps unsurprising that *The Soloist* is critical of Christianity in relation to its themes of poverty and austerity as a means of critiquing the current administration.

Ayers's characterisation is one of a confused and reluctant religious identity. At one point, Ayers decides to reject God, instead proclaiming Lopez as his new deity. When Ayers tells Lopez, 'Mr Steve Lopez, you are my god', the theme of religion becomes problematized. Lopez then says, 'as your God, I command you to turn up at LAMP one week from today at 2:00pm for a cello lesson'. This is problematic, as Ayers initially said he didn't want a lesson, and therefore Lopez exploits his authority position to coerce Ayers to go. He then says 'if you do [attend the lesson], I might even grant you eternal life', echoing the message on the flickering fluorescent sign and therefore reinforcing the critical approach the film takes towards a conservative Christian identity in America.

After Graham Claydon (Tom Hollander) gives Ayers his cello lesson, he says that Ayers should live in the apartment that LAMP has provided for him. Claydon says if he doesn't live in the apartment he is squandering a gift from God, and he owes it to God to take it. In response, Ayers becomes belligerent and insistent that Lopez is his God, and thus a fractured sense of religious identity is created. Ayers states, 'I love my God, I love

[356] Harris, P. (2003) Bush says God chose him to lead his nation. *The Guardian*. Internet. Available at < http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/nov/02/usa.religion> [Accessed 17/01/2015].

you [Lopez]'. This challenges the narrative trope of heterosexual love as redemption. Whilst there is no suggestion that the love Ayers claims to feel is anything other than plutonic, it challenges the notion that other films, such as *Ray*, *Walk the Line*, and *A Beautiful Mind* all present, that the efforts and support of a loving wife are tantamount to medicinal treatment and have a curative efficacy. Indeed during the close of the film, Lopez's voice-over can be heard explaining that there are some who believe that the simple act of being somebody's friend changes a person's brain chemistry. Lopez claims that some people say he has helped Ayers, but he is not so sure that is the case. As such, the film concludes showing little in terms of redemption, Ayers is not cured of his schizophrenia, has only just moved in to an apartment that he isn't even sure he wants, and is hardly better off than he was when Lopez first met him. Therefore, *The Soloist* challenges the trope of love as redemption, and also critiques the cultural beliefs propagated by other popular music biopics, such as *Ray* and *Walk the Line*, that show religion as a route to recovery and path to a life free from mental disorder.

The Perils of Fame: The Road, The Home, Addiction, and Celebrity Culture

Stephen Harper has discussed the interconnectivity between mental disorder and celebrity culture visible in media culture, noting that 'it is clear that mental illness can be turned to commercial advantage in a media culture in which celebrities must be rendered remarkable.'[357] In his discussion, Harper makes salient remarks about the (often contradictory) ways that the mass media report and portray the mental health issues of celebrities, which I will elaborate on in my own discussion. However, where my analysis differs from Harper's work is that, while Harper takes a multimedia perspective, focussing on mass media outlet's journalistic treatment of celebrities in the form of 'reality' discourse, my considerations are directed towards fictional portrayals of celebrity figures as portrayed by performers in the biopic, and the way that we can consider these representations as components of a critical engagement with American national identity.

[357] Harper, S. (2006) Madly Famous: Narratives of Mental Illness in Celebrity Culture. In. *Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity Culture*. Holmes, S. & Redmond, S. (eds.) Oxon: Routledge. p. 316.

The portrayal of both Ray Charles and Johnny Cash brings to the fore issues of fame, celebrity, and the detrimental effect stardom can have on individuals, thus bringing the notion of celebrity under scrutiny in a historical context. The theme of celebrity in these two films is often predicated on conflicting aspects of 'identity', the fissures and tensions between the public and the private self that is inherent to the nature of stardom. This also has a congruent relationship to the popular cultural rhetoric associated with certain forms of mental disorder as pertaining to a splitting of the self. Indeed this is a narrative trope that is articulated in both *Ray* and *Walk the Line* in similar ways, often linking these ideas to concepts of travel and the mythical status of the road.

Charles and Cash's biographical narratives are tales of celebrity stardom and addiction. There appears to be a pertinent overlap between these two elements. In the contemporary context of celebrity culture, in which fame is considered the ultimate aspiration for so many, one could argue that we live in a time of mass celebrity consumption. It is fitting then that these films focus on substance abuse, a condition typified by excessive consumption. Celebrity has become a cultural commodity that is consumed at ever-increasing levels. Aside from media products such as reality TV and social media, contemporary cinema's most explicit engagement with, and scrutiny of, celebrity culture arguably comes through the biopic. As Marshall and Kongsgaard state, 'biopics seemingly offer to reveal the reality behind the celebrity image, to tell the true story, to reveal what he or she was really like'.[358] However, as I have already addressed in the introduction to this thesis, the idea of the biopic as a 'true story' has severe limitations, and Marshall and Kongsgaard go on to comment that, '[popular music] biopics perhaps tell us less about individual stars and more about the nature of popular music stardom itself.'[359]

Custen's consideration of the historical shift in biographical subjects becomes a useful point for consideration here. Initially, in the heyday of the biopic during the studio era, the vast majority of biographical subjects were scientists, political and military leaders, businessmen, famous doctors, and so forth. In other words, subjects were usually those who had made notable

[358] Marshall, L. & Kongsgaard, I. (ibid), p. 346.
[359] ibid.

contributions to the construction and production of cultural development in the increasingly technologized world. Custen referred to such subjects as 'Idols of Production'. However, Custen, in reference to Leo Lowenthal's 1944 article on magazine biographies,[360] noted that a shift occurred in the latter stages of the biopic's prominence in the studio system; a shift towards portraying subjects such as sports stars, performers, and entertainers, aptly referred to by Lowenthal as 'Idols of Consumption', who, rather than having attained power and fame through participating in making the world, were noticeable for their glamorous lifestyles. Custen puts this down to a 'shift in American values' and a shift in the 'lessons of history', that biopics offered audiences; lessons and morals that were much more in keeping with the 'new myths' of capitalism and 'mass culture' that typified 20th Century America.[361] I would argue that, where the term 'Idols of Consumption' typically referred to subjects that were well known for their fame and fortune, now, in the contemporary age of unprecedented celebrity worship and reverence, the term is perhaps better applied to the way in which celebrities themselves are the objects of cultural consumption. Thus, addiction becomes an apposite metaphor for the nature of celebrity culture.

One of the principle ways that both *Ray* and *Walk the Line* emphasise the significance of celebrity culture is through narrative references to the iconography and mystique of the road, incorporating a variety of references to the potential of the road as a site for social elevation. The road to fame and success is emphasised in both films through lingering, high-angled shots of roads, and recurring motifs of travel and mobility. As Katie Mills contends, 'simply put, a road story shows that experiences away from home – perspectives gained on the road – reveal and even transform identity. The road presents a way to experience life, affect others, and change ourselves – and the road *story* dares us to dream of a better life.'[362] For Mills one of the principal narrative functions that the road serves is as a source of potential enlightenment and self-improvement, enabling the traveller to achieve social mobility and achieve their aspirations. This motif plays into the cultural

[360] Lowenthal, L. (1944). Biographies in Popular Magazines. *Radio Research: 1942-43*. Lazarsfeld, P. & Stanton, F. (eds.) New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce.
[361] Custen, G. (1992) *Bio/Pics*. p. 33.
[362] Mills, K. (2006) *The Road Story and the Rebel: Moving Through Film, Fiction, and Television*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. p. 22.

history of the United States, as a nation founded and developed by intrepid migrant explorers, traversing the harsh landscape in search of prosperity and natural commodities. The road has a significant place in the visual rhetoric associated with the American nation.

Despite the frequent portrayal of the road as a site for social mobility, and the route to success, the road is also shown in an alternative light at times in these films. It is their time on the road, during musical tours around the country, that both Charles and Cash encounter recreational drugs for the first time. In *Walk the Line*, Cash is offered mysterious pills by one of his fellow touring musicians, and is ultimately convinced to try them after he is told that Elvis Presley (Tyler Hilton) also takes them. On the other hand, in *Ray,* Charles actively seeks out his band mates at a rest stop during their tour in order to convince them to give him a taste of the heroin they're both using. In both these instances the taking of drugs is predicated on trying to embody the persona of the mythical rock 'n' roll star and to gain the acceptance of their peers; Cash wants to emulate Presley in order to fit in to the perception of a cutting edge, cool, music star, and Charles, who up until this point has been ignored and neglected by his band mates because of his blindness, wants to take drugs in order to appear to be part of the group.

Marshall and Kongsgaard contend that the portrayal of drug use in both *Ray* and *Walk the Line* is reflective of the physical demands of touring as a professional musician, which then ultimately develops into an addiction.[363] Whilst this is certainly true of the latter stages of both narratives, what Marshall and Kongsgaard do not consider is that, as I have explained, the first instances in which Charles and Cash encounter drugs are not concerned with easing the physical demands of touring, but instead reflect the insecurities of each musician in the nascent stages of their career and their resultant attempts to 'play the part' of the successful touring musician. So, in these instances, the road becomes rendered as a potentially treacherous entity, filled with the promise of stardom and riches, but also with the temptation of drugs, alcohol, and women.

When Charles has an argument with Della Bea after she finds his heroin kit, she asks him to give up drugs. When he refuses, she says that she

[363] Marshall, L. & Kongsgaard, I. (ibid) p. 352.

will come on tour with him, to which Charles responds, 'I don't think that the road is a place for you and the baby…what I'm saying is that when I get home, I hope that you're here at my house'. This creates a more ominous interpretation of the road's significance to the narrative. The road is not only where Charles first discovers heroin, but also where he is able to fuel his habit away from the domestic milieu of his home, a place to which he consigns his wife in order to prevent her from intervening in his drug use. This also constructs the road as a gendered space, which is further emphasised in the film when Charles finds out that one of his backing singers, who was also his mistress and mother to his illegitimate son, has died of an overdose. Indeed this juxtaposition of the road and the home is a prevalent narrative device in both *Ray* and *Walk the Line*. It is as Charles holds his newborn child for the first time that Bea says to him, 'I love you…but don't bring the road into our home again', thereby making an explicit distinction between the road and the home. This is Bea's way of letting Charles know that she is aware of his sexual infidelities on the road, and that he is still using heroin. *Walk the Line* uses similar narrative techniques to create a distinction between the road and the home, as Cash's first wife Viv bans him from talking about the tour whilst he is at home with her.

The dichotomy between road and home creates a clash between the private and the public, a familiar concept in relation to the notion of celebrity and also central to the contemporary biopic's narration of public lives. Marshall and Kongsgaard,[364] Harper,[365] Smith Jr.,[366] and Dyer[367] have all discussed the contradictory ways that celebrity identity is constructed in contemporary culture. Each discuss how celebrity discourse functions because of, and in spite of, a set of contrasting personas that exist within the public and the private spheres; how consumers of celebrity culture strive to go beyond the public image of the celebrity in order to gain insight into the 'real' person behind the façade of public identity. In many ways the biopic exploits this urge in order to heighten its appeal by offering a constructed

[364] Marshall, L. & Kongsgaard, I. (2012) Representing Popular Music Stardom. p. 349.
[365] Harper, S. (2006) Madly Famous. p. 322.
[366] Smith Jr., G, D. (2009) Love as Redemption: The American Dream Myth and the Celebrity Biopic. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*. Vol. 33(3). p. 226.
[367] Dyer, R. (2004) *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*. 2nd Edition. London: Routledge. p. 2.

version of the 'reality' of the celebrity's life before their rise to fame, and the 'warts-and-all' aspects of their private, often tumultuous lives during their time in the spotlight as they struggle to live up to the hype associated with their public profile. It is here that I believe that mental illness in these films begins to coalesce with aspects relevant to national identity.

Julie Levinson notes that, 'many success myth heroes share this sense of personality as performance…the modernist notion of identity as a fluid construct is very much at the heart of classic American success stories, which posit selfhood as a strategically selected costume that allows its wearer to win the desired role'.[368] This is certainly true of Cash, who is told that his gospel music isn't marketable anymore, as it is not fashionable amongst the youth of America. The scathing and scornful songs that Cash sings in response to this claim reflect his anger and resentment at the death of his brother, his traumatic childhood, and his poverty as an unsuccessful door-to-door salesman. It is the anger in his music that becomes synonymous with his 'Man in Black' persona, which Smith Jr. argues 'is constructed so as to be closely identified with…society's shared values or experiences'.[369]

The motif of the 'split self', or multiple personas, in relation to celebrity culture is reiterated time and again in *Walk the Line*. For instance, after Cash and Viv divorce, Cash is shown living in a derelict apartment, with no money and a disconnected phone line. Cash's only aim is to get in touch with June Carter. After unsuccessfully trying to cash a cheque at the bank in order to reconnect his phone, Cash instead walks a considerable distance to Carter's home. Visibly intoxicated and hardly compos mentis, Carter admonishes him, asking, 'where's my friend John? What'd he get, high? Or is he incognito? Is he gone? Because I don't like this guy Cash?' In making a distinction between 'Cash' and 'John', Carter references the rhetoric of split personas that is so prominent in the theorisation of celebrity culture. 'Cash', the drug addicted, selfish, irreverent music star, and 'John', the sentimental, romantic, affectionate man that Carter knew from backstage on their tours. The duality of personality is nothing new in mental health discourse either; folklore character(s) such as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde ex-

[368] Levinson, J. (2012) *The American Success Myth on Film*. p. 27.
[369] Smith Jr., G. D. ibid.

emplify the way that the metaphor of the split personality, the binary extremes of one's benevolent and malignant personality traits, come to be contrasted through the trope of split personas. As such, we can see an overlap in the rhetoric of celebrity, which Dyer explains is fundamentally contradictory, as stardom inherently renders the star as both 'ordinary' and 'special',[370] and popular rhetoric associated with mental illness. Therefore, in the context of *Walk the Line* and *Ray*, we see narratives that seek to negotiate the contradictions in the construction of celebrity using the theme of mental disorder as a conduit for such representation.

Whilst the portrayal of the celebrity as a tortured, fractured, soul is nothing new, the way that these contemporary biopics use mental health as a means of articulating this shows a new, introspective, view on the nature of celebrity. *Ray* and *Walk the Line* are also, at times, highly critical of celebrity culture in other ways, though they remain consistent in utilising discourses of mental disorder to inflect meaning upon these critiques. For instance, in both films, the protagonist is arrested for drugs possession. Charles and Cash are both accosted by hoards of reporters and cameramen, intrusively asking abrasive questions and trying to capture snapshots of the drug-worn disgruntled music stars. This is a familiar trope of celebrity scandal narratives, in both film and everyday culture. In these scenes, both films adopt a critical perspective on the nature of celebrity consumption, as although the films are largely critical of Charles's and Cash's drug use, now the suggestion is that, just as the music stars have problems with substance abuse, the clamouring for celebrity gossip and prying into the personal lives and trauma of the rich and famous is not dissimilar to a form of cultural addiction, an addiction to the consumption of celebrity culture.

Criticisms of the nature of fame are consistently presented at various points in both films. In one scene Cash's wife begins to voice her concern about the amount of fan mail Cash receives from young girls, which she describes as 'obscene'. She is upset that girls are sending pictures of themselves to him, and Cash's only response is, 'it's just crazy right now'. Here Cash links the nature of celebrity consumption and fandom to mental disorder, explicitly articulating this extreme type of fandom as a form of pathol-

[370] Dyer, R. (1998) *Stars*. London: British Film Institute. p. 43.

ogy. This is congruent with the findings of John Maltby, Liza Day, Lynn E. McCutcheon, Raphael Gillett, James Houran, and Diane D. Ashe, whose study has shown that those who fervently engage in excessive 'celebrity worship' often run significantly greater risk of detrimentally affecting their own mental health.[371] According to Smith Jr., 'no society has worshipped the celebrity figure as intently as Americans have'.[372] Smith Jr. continues to explain that the reason that Americans perhaps worship and consume celebrity culture more enthusiastically than other nations is that the figure of the celebrity 'becomes a marketable symbol of the American Dream',[373] and as such resonates with some of the core ideologies associated with American national identity. With this in mind then, it is clear that *Ray* and *Walk the Line* explore the somewhat socio-pathological manner in which the American public seek to consume celebrity culture in all its forms, using the protagonist's addiction as a metaphor to scrutinise one of the most prevalent issues in contemporary American popular culture.

Conclusion

Clearly the popular music biopic has a multitude of approaches to using mental illness as a narrative device to scrutinise issues of American national identity. Through analysis of *Ray* and *The Soloist* I have shown how discourses pertaining to mental health have been used to interrogate the oppression of African Americans, both historically and in a more contemporary context. Both films present their respective character's illness as the result of external factors, heavily sutured to anxieties around racism and social alienation. By using tropes familiar to the popular music biopic, such as montage and using music and sound as a narrative device in such a way as to represent mental health disorders, both films highlight the pervasive nature of racial persecution and the detrimental effects that such attitudes can have on the mental health of those on the receiving end of such prejudice.

All three case studies in this chapter comment upon the prevalence of Christian identity in America. *Ray* and *Walk the Line* depict character

[371] Maltby, J., Day, L., McCutcheon, L, E., Gillett, R., Houran, J., Ashe, D, D. (2004) Personality and Coping: A Context for Examining Celebrity Worship and Mental Health. *British Journal of Psychology*. Vol. 95. p. 424.
[372] Smith Jr., G. D. (2009) Love as Redemption. p. 222.
[373] ibid.

arcs in which redemption from the perils of addiction and the struggles of fame comes in the form of a return to Christian values. By ending their illicit affairs, seeking help in overcoming their dependencies on drugs and alcohol, and reconciling with their true love, Charles and Cash are redeemed, and their cultural impact is realigned to conform to pro-Christian ideologies. Conversely, *The Soloist* takes a more critical approach to idealistic notions of devout faith and its potential for redemption and curative effects. Throughout the film Ayers is confused by, and sceptical of, religion, and is often agitated by other character's references to God and Christianity, usually as they are trying to convert or manipulate him.

Finally, the popular music biopic often casts a critical eye on fame and celebrity, and my analysis in this chapter has shown how the relationship between mental disorder and fame is particularly pertinent. American culture is populated with cultural narratives of 'rags to riches' and 'against all odds' tales of success and stardom. However, my analysis has shown how new narratives come to the fore in these films, in which the obsessive nature of striving for fame is critiqued, illustrating the perils of life at the top. Ray Charles and Johnny Cash's struggles with addiction demonstrate parallels with the apparent cultural consumption of, and addiction to, celebrity personalities and the coveting of their prized celebrity status that appears to be so rampant in contemporary American culture. With the recent release of biopics on Brian Wilson and Miles Davis, *Love & Mercy*,[374] and *Miles Ahead*[375] respectively, this trend of exploring pathology and mental disorder in the popular music biopic shows little sign of receding.

[374] *Love & Mercy*. (2014) Bill Pohlad (dir.), USA.
[375] *Miles Ahead*. (2015) Don Cheadle (dir.), USA.

Chapter Five: *I'm Not There*: Provocations of Genre, Gender and Artistic Discourse

Towards the conclusion of the film *Walk The Line* we see Johnny Cash, having successfully recovered from his addiction, enter the offices of Columbia Records to tell the producers that he wants to record a live album from inside Folsom Prison. One of the executives at the label exclaims, 'while Johnny was out recuperating the world changed. [Bob] Dylan has gone electric, The Byrds are electric, The Beatles are electric. Hell everyone's electric. He [Cash] needs a fresh sound, and all he wants to do is cut a live album with the same old pickers in a maximum security penitentiary.'

In this instance, Cash's identity as a performer is described as stagnant and old-hat. Ultimately this sequence serves a narrative function whereby Cash's subsequent album, 'At Folsom Prison', which is shown as being treated with scepticism and disapproval by the executives, becomes a great commercial success, flying in the face of the notion that Cash's sound and image were in need of reinvention. Where success in this regard appears to be tied to the notion of 'being true to one's self', a familiar Hollywood trope and a particular favourite of the biopic, it is apposite for this chapter that *Walk the Line* refers to Bob Dylan and his switch to electric music, as this chapter's case study is Todd Haynes's film *I'm Not There*.[376] I will argue that *I'm Not There* intentionally eschews the traditional biopic form in order to challenge the notion of identity and 'knowability' of the (absent) biographical subject: Bob Dylan. In particular, by considering Cate Blanchett's performance as Jude Quinn, a doppelganger for Dylan in his 'electric era', I will explain how *I'm Not There* rejects the traditional popular music biopic form, including the 'be true to one's self' convention, by obfuscating the biographical subject's identity through the use of mental illness as a narrative device.

Prior to the release of *I'm Not There* in 2007, director Todd Haynes had already earned a reputation for his unorthodox approach to biographical filmmaking, largely because of his controversial student short film *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story*,[377] a film in which Haynes explored Carpenter's struggle with, and untimely death as a result of, anorexia nervosa.

[376] *I'm Not There*. (2007) Todd Haynes. (dir.), USA/Germany/Canada.
[377] *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story*. (1988) Todd Haynes (dir.) USA.

Using Barbie dolls in lieu of real performers to embody the Carpenter family, *Superstar* indicted the commodification of celebrity culture, and unrealistic standards of female body image that have been perpetuated by the American media. Using the familiar genre trope of the suffering female subject, Haynes's inextricably linked eating disorders and their impact upon mental health to discourses of gender and celebrity in American culture.[378] Though the film asks several interesting questions about issues of mental health and offers a fascinating breakdown of the biopic form, ultimately *Superstar* was, and remains, banned from public exhibition as Haynes used several songs from The Carpenters' back-catalogue without permission.

Music rights were also an issue for another of Haynes's projects. Having not been able to secure permission to use the music of David Bowie, Haynes's film *Velvet Goldmine,*[379] a thinly veiled, surrealist representation of Bowie's 'Ziggy Stardust' era in the days of 1970s British glam rock, was forced to use alternative music. *Velvet Goldmine* was based on a specific era of Bowie's career, particularly in regards to his flamboyant, androgynous style and the perception of him as a star that defied sexual orientation and heteronormative culture with his liberal attitudes towards (bi)sexuality. In a familiar conceit, noticeable in a number of biopics from *Citizen Kane* to Gus Van Sant's Kurt Cobain inspired *Last Days*,[380] *Velvet Goldmine* used pseudo-fictional characters as a form of postmodern homage to some of the most notable real-life figures of the glam-rock era, a representational strategy Haynes would reprise for his Bob Dylan project.

Considering his previous forays into the genre, one can see that Haynes has a penchant for approaching the biopic in ways that attempt to eschew or deconstruct the traditional codes and conventions of the genre. *I'm Not There* proves to be an extension of this philosophy. When Haynes co-wrote the Dylan biopic with screenplay writer Oren Moverman, he already intended to push the boundaries of the genre's form by portraying the folk/rock star through a series of fractured narratives, contemplating the numerous personas and phases of Dylan's life and career as individual narratives that, at certain junctures, fluctuate in and out of each other. Going

[378] Bingham, D. (2010) *Whose Live are they Anyway?* p. 225.
[379] *Velvet Goldmine*. (1998) Todd Haynes (dir.), USA/UK.
[380] *Last Days*. (2005) Gus Van Sant (dir.), USA.

even further in an effort to standout from traditional biopic fare, Haynes cast six different performers to embody the 'music and many lives of Bob Dylan', as the film's introductory DOG proclaims. Eleven year old African American performer Marcus Carl Franklin, British actors Ben Whishaw and Christian Bale, Australian performers Heath Ledger and Cate Blanchett, and Hollywood star Richard Gere all feature as pseudo-Dylans, illustrating the film's attempt to creatively and provocatively interrogate issues of race, gender and celebrity culture in the biopic genre.

Primarily my discussion of the film centres upon Blanchett's role as Jude Quinn. Whilst at times in my analysis I will refer to specific moments in the narratives of some of the other Dylan incarnations, I will only do so when these moments are relevant to the character and story of Quinn. There are a number of reasons for my focus upon Blanchett's Quinn. First, of all the different Dylans, Quinn is the character that can be read as having a mental disorder. Second, Blanchett's casting as Quinn raises a number of interesting issues concerning gender that are not only of crucial importance to my analysis of the film, but, I believe, relate to issues discussed earlier in my thesis that warrant reassessment in light of the postmodern aesthetics and philosophies in the film. Finally, Quinn is the most visually reminiscent of the real-life Dylan,[381] even though a female performer plays him. This creates an explicit tension between ideas of biographical representation, gender and mental health and deconstructs the stereotypical notions of women's suffering in the contemporary biopic. It is for these reasons I believe Quinn is the most appropriate point of focus for my analysis.

This chapter begins by discussing the film's various creative strategies towards unsettling the established conventions and expectations of the contemporary biopic, with a particular, though not exclusive, focus on the popular music biopic. As the film does not completely elide prominent discourses and tropes from the genre, this discussion will highlight the familiar themes and characteristics of the biopic that do feature, and contextualise their function and significance within the postmodern approach of the film. The chapter will then shift to focus on the casting of Cate Blanchett as Quinn, with an explicit focus upon the tension created by casting a female

[381] Cheshire, E. (2015) *Bio-Pics: A Life in Pictures*. London: Wallflower. p. 30.

performer to play a male role. In particular, this section is concerned with the manner in which Dylan's issues with addiction and anxiety are associated with tropes that bring in to relief traditional ideas of women's suffering and victimisation regarding mental illness, that are consequently unsettled and subverted by their association with a male character played by a woman. Finally, the chapter returns to an idea briefly considered earlier in the thesis regarding artistic hallucination and delirium as a source of creative inspiration for artists and writers. In this instance I consider how the various embodiments of Dylan in the film create ambiguous tensions between the competing discourses of artistic delirium or possession and more solemn representational strategies common in the biopic that frame mental disorder as restrictive, isolating, or as prohibitive to human potential.

Representation, History and a Postmodern Genre Approach

'Reality has always had too many heads'
Bob Dylan, 'Cold Irons Bound'.

Jude Quinn's storyline re-enacts the beginning of the now infamous period in the mid-1960s in which Dylan 'went electric', which fans met at the time with great anger and resistance, considering this to be transgressing from the acoustic based protest-folk music that Dylan was famous for. Dylan's electric period coincided with his construction of a new persona, one vastly different from his political folk persona. Quinn is depicted as acerbic, anxious, and antagonistic towards his dedicated folk following and their feelings of betrayal. The name Jude itself alludes to an infamous incident in which members of an audience at one of Dylan's performances began referring to him as 'Judas', signifying their feeling of betrayal from an icon that in the folk music scene was considered almost godlike.[382] Much of Quinn's anxiety appears to come from a persistent threat from the press, who attack and provoke him about the fan's dismay at his new persona. In particular, the character Keenan Jones (Bruce Greenwood), a stern and imposing British journalist, comes to be the main antagonist to Quinn, and is an ever-

[382] Axmaker, S. (2008) *Todd Haynes and a Whole Slew of Dylans*. [Internet] Available at <http://www.greencine.com/central/toddhaynes> [Accessed 13/05/2015].

present and looming investigator keen to get to the bottom of Quinn's motivations for 'selling out'.

In Quinn's battles with the press, and his numerous attempts to flee from their scrutinising gaze, it is evident that critical perspectives about the nature of celebrity and the detrimental impact that fame can have upon a performer's state of mind are present in *I'm Not There*. This suggests that, although Haynes's film clearly diverts from a more traditional format for the biopic, there is still an awareness and presentation of familiar themes that the popular music biopic is known for, many of which have been outlined in the previous chapter of this thesis. Indeed, in a discussion of the film at the New York Film Festival, Haynes himself claimed:

I knew [*I'm Not There*] was never going to deliver the kind of palpable, reductive results that the traditional biopic usually delivers. And yet, it is a biopic, it does quote at the early life of somebody, the famous moments in somebody's life that we come to the theatre with some knowledge of, the hit songs at the hit moments. It does give you those kernels, those handles.[383]

Haynes's claim therefore establishes the duality of the film's form. One the one hand, the multi-narrative structure and the multiple Dylan doppelgängers show a willingness and desire to move away from more traditional approaches that audiences may be accustomed to with the biopic genre, and yet in order to ensure the film is recognisable as a biopic, the film must still incorporate enough of the tropes and conventions associated with the genre in order to be coherent and accessible to viewers. Therefore, as Haynes himself touches upon, certain narrative themes, (such as the scrutiny of celebrity culture) and genre codes (including the use of archival footage and scenes of live music performance), are present in the film so as to not totally deviate from the genre. Acting almost as a compromise then, in order to experiment with the genre's form, the film has to have enough recognisable elements remaining.

[383] *Conversation with Todd Haynes PART 2*. YouTube Video. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CffhQWFG1I8&spfreload=10> Accessed [29/06/2015].

In the opening scene of the film we see a long, wide-angled, landscape shot of Quinn riding a motorcycle down a country road. The title of the film is imposed adjacent to the landscape. A cut shot then presents us with a close-up portrait of the top half of Quinn's head (Figure 5.1). It is evident that Quinn is dead, as the transition from the opening shot to this close up is executed using the match-on-action editing technique, in which a cloth is pulled from over the top of Quinn's lifeless body, to execute the transition. This foreshadows Quinn's motorcycle crash at the end of the film that closes the cyclical narrative structure of his story. As Quinn's body is prepared for his funeral, a voice-over (narrated by Kris Kristofferson) proclaims, 'there he lies. God rest his soul and his rudeness. A devouring public can now share the remains of his sickness...There he lay, poet, prophet, outlaw, fake, star of electricity.' A jump cut between each of the different Dylan incarnations accompanies each of the descriptions that the voice-over lists, finally returning to a medium close-up of Quinn laid in his coffin, still wearing a pair of large sunglasses that symbolise his attempts to avoid the gaze of the demanding press and public. That we see a close-up of just the top half of Quinn's head connotes an obfuscation of identity, visibly reminiscent of Dylan himself, and yet purposefully different. Showing only a portion of the biographical subject's face illustrates the inability for representation to enable us to 'know' the whole subject or their story. That the shot focuses upon the character's forehead locates the Dylan doppelganger as a figment of the imagination, a transcendent mental (re)construction. It is also interesting to note that the voice-over describes the 'devouring public' as 'sharing the remains of his sickness', immediately identifying Quinn as having suffered an ailment or illness of some kind. As this dialogue accompanies the shot of Quinn's forehead, one could argue that this is a visual link, locating Quinn's 'sickness' as a being in the mind, alluding to his mental disorder.

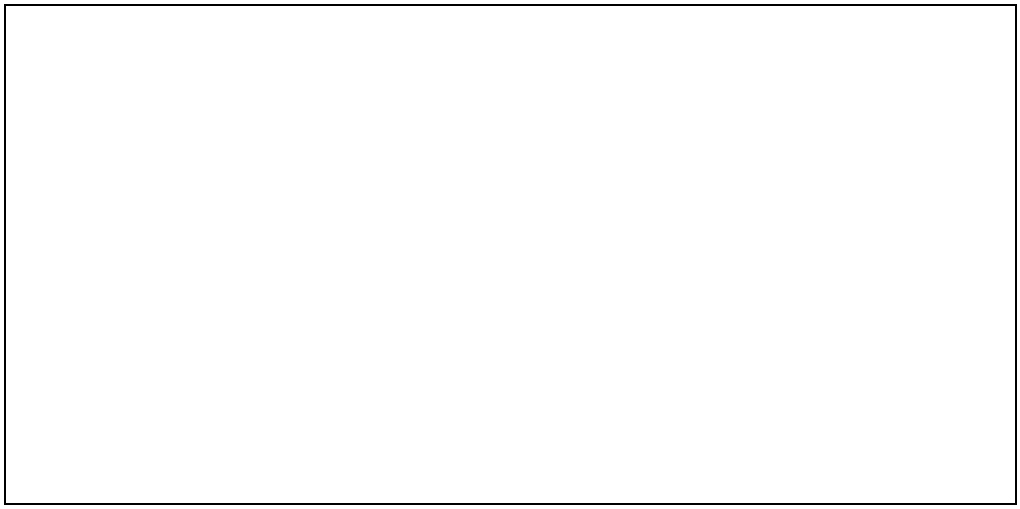

Figure 5.1: Quinn's partially blocked face typifies the film's obstruction and rejection of identifying the biographical subject; visually evocative of Dylan, yet tangibly (an)other. (*I'm Not There*. Directed by Todd Haynes: 2007; Killer Films, John Wells Productions, John Goldwyn Productions, Endgame Entertainment, Dreammachine, Film & Entertainment VIP Medienfonds GmbH & Co. KG, Grey Water Park Productions, Rising Star, Wells Productions)

The film then moves on to introduce the narratives of the other Dylan incarnations. When we return to Quinn's story, we see him arrive in England to begin his new tour (debuting his electric music in the UK). In his hotel, Quinn is shown taking prescription pills. A slow-motion tracking shot follows him down a corridor towards the privacy of a bathroom where he takes amphetamines. Simultaneously, a soft, eerie, musical piece can be heard, a cover of Dylan's track 'Cold Irons Bound'. The lyrics, 'I'm beginning to hear voices, and there's no one around. Well I'm used up, yeah, and the fields have turned brown' accompany a shot of Quinn looking at his reflection in the mirror whilst he takes the pills. The pairing of this imagery and music serves to create an explicit allusion to mental health discourse. The slow motion tracking shot acts as a visual recreation of the experience of being under the influence of drugs, and the music's description of hearing voices brings to mind the symptomology of certain schizophrenic conditions alongside the more familiar portrayal of the rock star as a drug abuser. The use of the mirror as a framing device while Quinn takes the drugs typifies the fractured sense of identity/identities present in the film, a fracture that is only exacerbated by the inter-gender relationship of performer and character, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

Haynes's direction here illustrates a shrewd knowledge of the taxonomy of narrative themes prevalent in the popular music biopic. In his direc-

tor's commentary on the film's DVD, Haynes explains that he consciously devised 'creative strategies to avoid the pitfalls of the biopic.' In an interview, published online, Haynes provides greater detail of these pitfalls:

> [Biopics] are usually required to expose a certain amount of private history or conflict with drugs or philandering or something, and then show how that gets recovered or resolved. So to me, it's a formula, almost more nakedly so than other film genres because whatever the life [of the biographical subject] is [it] has to fit in this one package.[384]

Here then we can see that Haynes has a critical awareness about the prominence of the redemption narrative, which I have discussed elsewhere in this thesis. Whilst *I'm Not There* presents images of, and allusions to, Quinn (and, by proxy, Dylan) as a drug user/addict, where Haynes confronts this 'narrative pitfall' is that in no way does the film attempt to resolve or redeem Quinn and his addiction. In fact by opening the film with Quinn's death, and therefore the metaphorical death of Dylan himself (even as Dylan is alive and well to this day), Haynes articulates a specific critique of not only the nature of the biopic genre at its most generically reductive, but also implicates the audience as complicit in the almost gluttonous consumption of celebrity culture that is so rampant in contemporary American culture. As Jesse Schlotterbeck explains, '[*I'm Not There*] defamiliarises the pop-star story and implicates the audience as part of a "devouring public" that wishes to consume another's identity. It makes a familiar story – in which a musical star seems to perform not only their work, but their life and death for an audience – strange.'[385]

That *I'm Not There* contemplates the hypothetical death of Dylan brings to the fore issues pertaining to two prominent aspects of the biopic as a genre. Firstly, the anachronistic death of Quinn brings in to relief the hagiographic tendencies writ large across the genre, in which cultural and historical icons become immortalised at the moment of their death, often depicted as the defining moment in which such characters' places in the annals

[384] Axmaker, S. ibid.
[385] Schlotterbeck, J. (2014) I'm Not There: Transcendent Thanatography. In: Brown, T. & Vidal, B. (eds.) *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*. London: Routledge. p. 228.

of cultural mythology are justified and confirmed. As Schlotterbeck explains, 'death [is] a kind of apotheosis. How much more satisfying is the forever-young image of James Dean versus the aged image of Elvis Presley?'[386] Figures such as James Dean, Marc Bolan, Jimi Hendrix, Kurt Cobain, and Amy Winehouse, many of whom have been the subjects of their own biopics, are indicative of the cultural phenomena in which stars that die young become imbued with a legacy of eternal stardom, often consecrating the now deceased celebrity as a cultural legend. Therefore, the death of Quinn, which has little direct correlation to the actual life of Bob Dylan, serves as a jarring moment in which the viewer is confronted by a juxtaposition between their expectations for a biopic to resemble 'the truth' and the familiarity of narrative devices used to persuade audiences that a person is worth their place in cultural mythology. Put simply, by falsifying the death of Quinn/Dylan, *I'm Not There* challenges the predominant belief that the biopic is capable of representing the life of someone truthfully by deploying a common genre trope often used to convince us that the subject's life is remarkable. Although, as Jonathan Lupo and Carolyn Anderson note, most biopics include fictionalised endings, dramatised plot points, or rearranged chronologies as a means of providing the film with 'an appropriately theatrical third-act performance and satisfying narrative arc',[387] *I'm Not There* pushes this standard genre practice to its extremes by killing Quinn while Dylan remains a living historical figure to create an explicit tension between representation and history; exemplifying the film's postmodern scrutiny of the genre. Nick Lacey writes that 'some postmodernists have suggested that we are at the "end of history" as we have dispensed with the primacy of reality; our reality is now only understood with reference to culture.'[388] With this in mind, I would argue that *I'm Not There* nullifies the potential for historical criticism. The figurative 'that's not how it happened' that so often befalls conventional biopics, owing to their ostensibly inherent relationship to history, is redundant here because Quinn's story begins by separating rep-

[386] ibid. p. 239.
[387] Lupo, J. & Anderson, C. (2008) Off-Hollywood Lives: Irony and Its Discontents in the Contemporary Biopic. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*. Vol. 36(2), p.108.
[388] Lacey, N. (2000) *Narrative and Genre: Key Concepts in Media Studies*. Hampshire: Palgrave. p. 99.

resentation and history in killing the protagonist before viewers have a chance to locate him within a specific time and place.

Bob Dylan/Jude Quinn acting 'just like a woman'?

> 'Now Ophelia, she's 'neath the window, for her I feel so afraid, on her twenty-second birthday, she already is an old maid. To her, death is quite romantic, she wears an iron vest, her profession is her religion. Her sin is her lifelessness.'
>
> Bob Dylan, 'Desolation Row'.

Given that Haynes specifically wrote Quinn as a man-played-by-a-woman,[389] the second implication of his death, after the separation of representation and history, is that Quinn's characterisation of Dylan casts a critical eye towards the archetypal suffering female character that, as I have explored earlier in my thesis, has been so pervasive in biopics about female characters suffering from mental health disorders. Blanchett's portrayal of the anxious and paranoid Quinn comes to illustrate an acute awareness of the commonplace narrative themes prevalent in the portrayal of women afflicted with mental illness. David Muldoon claims that 'the imitation of hysteria in Dylan is essentially performed by being a woman.'[390] Muldoon here argues that Blanchett's casting and performance only serves to reinforce stereotypes of hysterical female behaviour, which he claims is a predominantly masculine idea.[391] This resonates with my own discussions regarding the 'fallen woman' and representations of women as passive sufferers of mental disorders. However, Muldoon's overarching argument is that, contrary to claims made by Dennis Bingham, *I'm Not There* does not deconstruct or interrogate issues of gender through the inter-gender relationship between performer and character, but rather remains situated within established traditional hierarchies of gender in contemporary culture. At this point, I will challenge this view and argue that Blanchett's performance can indeed be

[389] *Todd Haynes Talks I'm Not There – Part II.* YouTube Video. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXXIWvsz9vA> [Accessed 09/06/2015].
[390] Muldoon, D. (2012) The Postmodern Gender Divide in the Bob Dylan Biopic *I'm Not There*. Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies. Vol. 46. p. 68.
[391] ibid.

seen to unsettle traditional notions of gender and its relationship to mental health, and that the androgyny of the character complicates gender issues by bringing those very issues to light through postmodern pastiche.

In the aforementioned scene, where we first see Quinn taking illegally obtained prescription medication, Quinn is shown looking in the bathroom mirror at his reflection. Upon doing so, using an eyeliner pencil, he draws an almost cartoon-esque moustache above his lip before returning to the living quarters of his hotel room (Figure 5.2). The act of drawing a moustache upon his face explicitly illustrates the postmodern gender dichotomy that underpins Quinn's character. Robert Stam writes that 'in general, postmodernism foregrounds the fragmented and heterogenous nature of socially constituted [identities] in the contemporary world'.[392] In the case of Quinn, the semiotic significance of the pencil moustache quite literally draws attention to the self-referential casting of a female performer in the role of a male character, thus bringing into relief the socio-cultural aspects that contribute towards the construction of gender. In this instance, gender is deconstructed through semiotics. Peter Brunette has discussed the way that post-structuralist thought has led to deconstructions of the binary concepts that underpin structuralism; such as truth-error, good-evil, and man-woman. Brunette goes on to contend that 'the principal work of deconstruction has been to reverse and – since a mere reversal would not disturb the underlying binary logic – to displace these ostensible oppositions as well.'[393] Therefore Quinn's moustache (a physical feature commonly associated with masculinity) is rendered absurd because of its artificiality, which accentuates the gender difference between Blanchett as performer and Quinn as character. Thus, the moustache becomes a postmodern, deconstructive device that emphasises the obfuscation of the binaries between man-woman and character-performer.[394] Bingham also expresses a similar view, arguing that the moustache functions as a humorous form of pastiche, an intertextual allusion to a

[392] Stam, R. (2000) *Film Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell. p. 300.
[393] Brunette, P. (2000) Post-structuralism and deconstruction. In: Hill, J. & Church Gibson, P. (eds.) *Film Studies: Critical Approaches*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 92.
[394] It is also interesting to note that Haynes opted to shoot Quinn's segment of the film in black and white, mimicking the European art cinema aesthetic of Italian director Federico Fellini's *8 ½* (1963). I would argue that the black and white cinematography also ties in to the deconstruction of the binary cultural logics that Brunette alludes to.

particular androgynous image of Dylan found in the D. A. Pennebaker documentary *Don't Look Back*.[395]

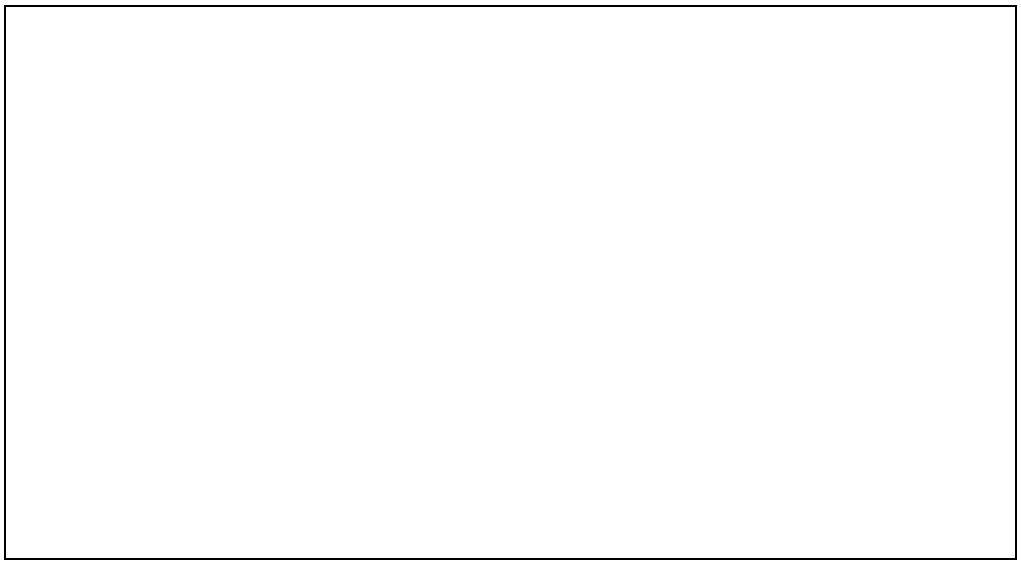

Figure 5.2: Quinn's pencil moustache draws explicit attention to the conflation of female performer and male character through the pastiche of conventional gender tropes. (Directed by Todd Haynes: 2007; Killer Films, John Wells Productions, John Goldwyn Productions, Endgame Entertainment, Dreammachine, Film & Entertainment VIP Medienfonds GmbH & Co. KG, Grey Water Park Productions, Rising Star, Wells Productions)

Nöel King writes that 'many commentators seize on the notion of "surface" as a definitive element of postmodernism.'[396] King goes on to describe postmodern culture as offering a plurality of surfaces from which cultural production can simulate and reiterate identities. In this instance, Quinn's fabricated moustache becomes symbolic of an idea put forth by Judith Butler: that the human body is itself a surface from which performances of gender are constructed through the development, adoption, and/or rejection of recognisable gender tropes.[397] Therefore, the bogus moustache comes to typify Quinn's androgyny by creating a tension between the feminine performer and the male character. It is this androgyny that Haynes himself stated was central to the character's identity and the ethos of the 1960's music scene he was attempting to represent.[398]

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[395] Bingham, D. (2010) *Whose Lives are they Anyway?* p. 387; *Don't Look Back*. (1967) D. A. Pennebaker (dir.) USA.
[396] King, N. (2007) Postmodernism and Film. In: Cook, P. (ed.) *The Cinema Book*. 3rd Edition. London: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 547.
[397] Butler, J. (1999) *Gender Trouble: Tenth Anniversary Edition*. London: Routledge. p. 177.
[398] *Todd Haynes Talks I'm Not There – Part III.* YouTube Video. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xPP9iUE-9hk&spfreload=10> [Accessed 07/06/2015].

Indeed Haynes has also claimed that Quinn is a representation of a particular era in which Dylan appeared to be 'trying out' a new persona that was heavily androgynous:

> [Dylan] had completely divorced himself from every vestige of traditional masculinity, especially as we've come to understand it in the popular musician [of] the time, because he had just become so skinny and strange and feline, and amorphous. And yet there was that completely playful teenage heterosexual lust.[399]

Quinn's persona can therefore be seen as a contemplation on the performative nature of gender, as not only is the gender identity of the performer embroiled within the construction of the character, but also within the diegesis, as Quinn parodies signifiers of masculinity by mocking their artifice. Muldoon claims that:

> The use of an actress to play a male role, to imitate Dylan, is not a sign of a move beyond masculinity. Blanchett's embodiment of Dylan supports masculine ideas of feminine behaviour as hysterical. Her imitation of Dylan reinforces the stereotype of women as hysterical that goes back to the beginnings of modern science.[400]

However, I would argue that Muldoon's reading of *I'm Not There*, and Quinn in particular, has overlooked the androgynous conceit of the character that is crucial to problematising discourses of gender in the film. Therefore, contrary to Muldoon's claims that Blanchett's performance reinforces reductive stereotypes of hysterical women, Quinn's character, without the need to move entirely beyond masculinity, serves as a representational conduit that implicates masculinity within the cultural construction of such pervasive stereotypes.

Muldoon claims that Blanchett's imitation of Dylan is befitting the description of hysteria given by Michel Foucault in *Madness and Civiliza-*

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[399] *Conversation with Todd Haynes PART 2*. YouTube Video. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CffhQWFG1I8&spfreload=10> Accessed [09/06/2015].
[400] Muldoon, D. (ibid).

tion, typified by frenzied movement and insomnia, and that, as hysteria is exclusively female, *I'm Not There* simply reinforces gendered stereotypes of mental illness.[401] However, the description that Foucault provides is for an ailment that, historically, had separate nomenclature depending on the gender of the sufferer; 'it is called a hypochondriacal disease when it attacks men…[and] it is called a hysterical affection when it attacks women.'[402] Therefore, when Muldoon concludes that Blanchett's performance is one that exhibits hysteria, one could counter that as Quinn is a male character, the affliction is perhaps more appropriately described as hypochondriacal, rather than hysterical. As neither term is used in the film, to suggest that Quinn is hysterical presupposes that, as Muldoon asserts, Blanchett's identity as a female performer overrides and negates the masculine identity of Quinn; that Blanchett is essentially playing Quinn female. Such a reading clearly places a great deal of emphasis on the binary oppositions of hysteria-hypochondria and man-woman. As post-structuralist thought seeks to unsettle and open binary oppositions to a plurality of readings and interpretations, I would suggest that, as Quinn is an androgynous character whose gender identity is challenged and complicated by the very presence of the performer embodying him, perhaps the vague symptomology of Quinn's mental disorder is indicative of the character's potential function to contradict and critique traditional socio-cultural binaries of gender, in keeping with the post-modern philosophy of the film.

So far, I have explained that Quinn is another instantiation of the biographical music star suffering from drug addiction. I have also outlined how Quinn is an androgynous character that deconstructs binary notions of gender. I also believe that these two ideas are interrelated. As a character, one of Quinn's functions is to problematise the boundaries of gender, whilst simultaneously bringing in to relief the prominent discourses associated with mental health in the biopic. As already mentioned, Haynes has spoken about the biopic's tendency to derive formulaic narratives out of addiction recovery. Throughout the film there is no attempt to resolve or redeem Quinn's drug abuse and, given that we know his tragic fate from the outset

[401] ibid.
[402] Foucault, M. (1965) *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. New York: Vintage. p. 145.

of the story, we can see that Quinn's continued suffering and psychological decline are a crucial part of his narrative. Therefore, whilst I do not agree with Muldoon's beliefs that the film is non-progressive in terms of its representation of gender and operates within traditional gender hierarchies, I do believe that representing Quinn's disorder in a way that elides the potential for recovery and/or redemption situates the representation of his disorder within the themes and aesthetic tropes more commonly identifiable in narratives relating to female suffering, as outlined in my earlier chapter. However, I believe that Quinn's portrayal is progressive in not only its recognition of these tropes, but in its subversion of their commonplace application. For instance, in another of the Dylan storylines we are presented with an explicit allusion to the historical lineage of the aesthetics of suffering that typifies so many narratives of female mental disorder.

Billy The Kid (Richard Gere) is an incarnation of Dylan that refers to his fascination, later in his career, with the mythology of the Western film genre and its influence on his later records.[403] In Billy's story, we learn that many of the residents of his hometown are preparing to leave because of plans to develop and build a highway in the valley where the town is located. We also learn that a number of people in the community have committed suicide as a result of their apprehension about the new highway destroying their livelihood. One of the locals tells Billy about a man who shot himself in front of his sisters, who all 'went insane on account', and goes on to explain how a young woman, Clarice Henry, cut her own throat. When Billy arrives in the centre of the town, he finds that the remaining villagers are congregating around a gazebo where Clarice Henry's funeral is taking place. A medium close-up of the open casket shows the girl, who bears a striking resemblance to John Everett Millais's *Ophelia* painting (figure 5.3). Millais was one of the founder members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood whom, as I explained in Chapter 3, were known for their imagery and aesthetics relating to the 'fallen woman' archetype. Millais's painting of *Ophelia*, which depicts her drowning in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, makes for an interest-

[403] Indeed Dylan's fascination with the iconography and mythology of the "Wild West" extended so far as to see him feature in Sam Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973), where he played a character called Alias, an apt title given Dylan's now notorious penchant for self-reinvention. It is also his appearance in this film that led to Gere's character being named Billy, and his antagonist Old Man Garrett (Bruce Greenwood).

ing reference point, as Ophelia was indeed a character that was understood as being 'mad'. Her madness and subsequent suicide has been interpreted by many as connected to issues of patriarchal control and oppression, especially with regards to control over women's bodies and sexual purity, rendering her as an symbol of traditional conceptions of women as hysterical.

The assemblage of flowers in Clarice Henry's coffin, the costume choice, and the colour and style of her hair are all reminiscent of the mise-en-scène in Millais's painting. Whilst Clarice Henry didn't drown, as is often the case with 'fallen women' characters, Dylan did make reference to Ophelia in his song 'Desolation Row', which may have influenced Haynes's aesthetic allusion here. Such imagery has clear relevance to the portrayal of mental disorder in the film, as it illustrates an awareness of the suffering female stereotype and its history, which ties in to the representation of Quinn's disorder using motifs of female hysteria and melancholia to subvert the gendered perceptions of mental illness in contemporary film culture. Indeed, in one scene where some of Quinn's fans express their disgust at his move to electric music, one of his fans claims that Quinn is prostituting himself in order to conform to popular taste. The reference to prostitution as a means to describe Quinn's musical transgression further enhances the connections between mental health discourse, female sexual transgression and the representational modes of Quinn's disorder.

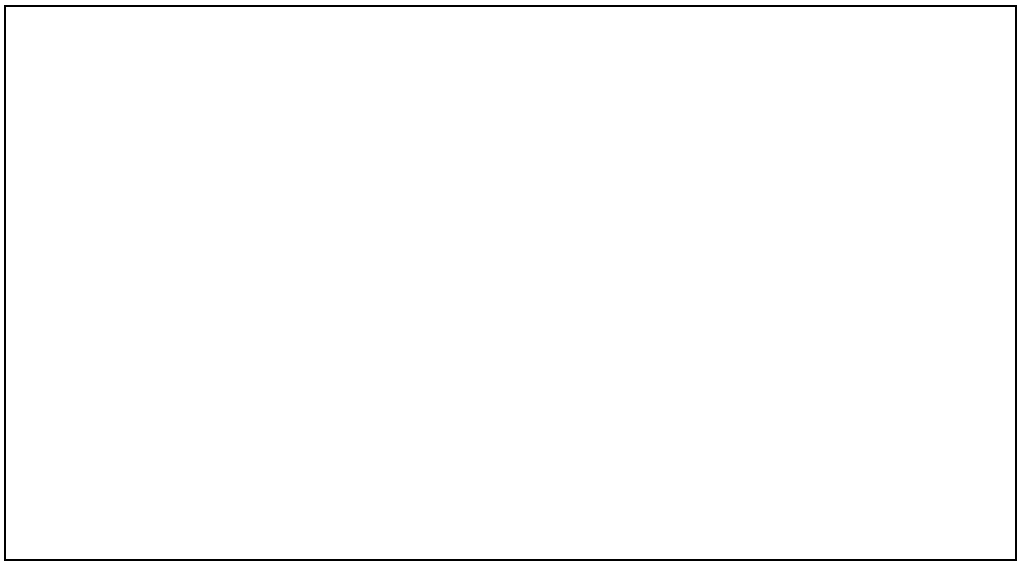

Figure 5.3: The mise-en-scène of Clarice Henry's public funeral shows her as strikingly reminiscent of Ophelia in John Everett Millais's painting. (Directed by Todd Haynes: 2007; Killer Films, John Wells Productions, John Goldwyn Productions, Endgame Entertainment, Dreammachine, Film & Entertainment VIP Medienfonds GmbH & Co. KG, Grey Water Park Productions, Rising Star, Wells Productions)

Following the funeral scene, we return to Quinn, which further solidifies the gendered link created by mental health discourse between Quinn and the Ophelia-esque character. Quinn is shown spinning a revolving mirrored table that is covered in pills, exclaiming joyously, 'look at all these medicines'. Upon asking what one of the pills does, he is told that it induces sleep, to which he replies disgustedly, 'who needs sleep? Sleep [is] for dreamers. I haven't slept in 30 days, man. [It] takes a lot of medicine to keep up this pace.' This is a reiteration of a familiar trope concerning addiction in the popular music biopic, that of becoming dependant on drugs in order to keep up with the fast-paced and demanding lifestyle of being a professional touring musician. Earlier in the scene, Quinn's manager had told him that he had been booked for 83 extra performances. Quinn responds with surprise and anxiety, stating 'man I can't do 83 more shows. It's going to fucking kill me doing 83 more shows. Who the fuck said I even wanted to be a millionaire?' From this claim, it is clear that Quinn's concern is that he doesn't have the stamina to perform so frequently, and that the amount of drugs needed to 'keep up the pace' may indeed be lethal. He expresses disgust at the notion of becoming a millionaire (and that the prospect of such an amount of money obligates him to do the shows), which seems to be antithetical towards an American success mythology that is heavily based upon capitalist ideals of success and prosperity. Julie Levinson discusses the American success myth as being based inherently on 'mythic oppositions' that are often in tension or negotiation with one another; oppositions such as 'character and personality ethics; material and spiritual fulfilment; conformity and rebellion' are all fundamental albeit sometimes contradictory features of the success myth.[404] Therefore, Quinn's disdain and anxiety of the monetary rewards of fame and success seem to undermine the success mythology, suggesting that material fulfilment would come at the expense of Quinn's spiritual satisfaction and wellbeing. Thus, the binary structure of the success myth is undermined by Quinn's rejection of the capitalist values inherent in the consummation of the ambiguous notion of 'success'.

[404] Levinson, J. (2012) *The American Success Myth on Film*. p. 17.

Soon after, Coco Rivington (Michelle Williams) arrives at the party. Coco is a character reminiscent of Edie Sedgwick, and is suggested to be a former lover of Quinn's in the film. Quinn and Rivington's relationship is presented as turbulent, with references in the film to their acrimonious split, and Rivington is now dating the guitarist from Quinn's band. When Rivington explains that she has been on edge recently because her cat has gone missing, Quinn responds, leaning wearily on the table of pills, 'She [Rivington] has the sweetest little pussy. If you don't count the teeth.' This misogynistic comment serves to further complicate the gender aspects of the representation of Quinn's mental disorder. Whilst the character's androgynous features, and the gender axis between Blanchett and Quinn all serve to highlight and unsettle the reductive binaries of gender, this misogynistic insult can be read as a by-product of the increasingly unstable and exhausted mindset that Quinn has obtained as the result of persistent drug abuse. Bingham contends that Quinn's androgyny serves to queer the relationship between Dylan and Sedgwick, in keeping with Haynes's filmmaking status as a 'Queer Cinema insurrectionist', and likens the interaction between the two characters to that of Virginia Woolf's feminist novel *Orlando*,[405] in which the male protagonist transforms into a woman.[406]

After taking offence at Quinn's comments, Rivington runs from the party, followed in hot pursuit by her new boyfriend/Quinn's guitar player. A birds-eye-view shot shows the pair running down a spiral staircase, and then the camera cuts to a low angle shot, looking up the stairs, where Quinn is standing. The camera begins to zoom in, but also gradually tilts off-centre, mimicking the effect of going up the spiral staircase. The staircase can therefore be seen as a metaphor for Quinn's state of mind, erratic and unusual, and his position at the top of the stairs is evocative of his pathology. Later at the party, Quinn begins to berate his guitar player over his affection for Rivington, using his own previous relationship with her as a way of goading him. Indeed, Quinn and Rivington's first encounter, earlier in the film, is the initial moment where the extent of Quinn's addiction is confronted in the narrative. Quinn sees Rivington in a surrealist hallucination sequence, where she begins to critique his new persona. Quinn attempts to

[405] Woolf, V. (1928) *Orlando*. London: Hogarth Press.
[406] Bingham. D. (2010) *Whose Lives are they Anyway?* p. 388-389.

apologise for the way their relationship ended, using his drug use as a defence: 'I can't recall San Francisco at all. No, I can't really remember El Paso…' Rivington does not acknowledge his apology, which angers Quinn, who then criticises Rivington for not living her life freely.

The reference to freedom could be seen as Quinn levying a quintessential American value in order to put Rivington down. In doing so, Quinn is justifying his antagonistic behaviour towards her, and the press, by aligning himself to one of the defining and foundational principles of American national identity: freedom. As a public figure and celebrity, this moment touches upon notions of freedom of speech and the political protest ideologies found in Quinn/Dylan's earlier music. It is suggested that Quinn's shift to new, electric music, is because he is distancing himself from his earlier protest songs, no longer believing that music can affect change. When Rivington first appears in his hallucination, she challenges this view by saying 'you might think that nothing can reach those tens of thousands living by the dollar. But you'd be wrong.' She also goes on to challenge his claim that he is free, laughing and stating 'so that's what you think you have over everyone? Freedom.' Quinn then sits down, looking weary, and meekly responds, 'I've just got to clean up a little bit. I'll be fine.' Therefore, Quinn's freedom is undermined by his dependence on illegal pills, suggesting that he is not actually living freely because he can't control his desire and need for drugs, his addiction is all-consuming. As the hallucination ends, Quinn loses sight of Rivington and begins to cough. The scene then abruptly shifts Quinn's location, as he is now shown in an interview with Keegan Jones in a car. Jones mentions that Quinn 'look[s] and sound[s] very tired, very ill. Is this your normal state?' It is from this point onwards that the detrimental impact of Quinn's addiction becomes increasingly evident.

Towards the end of the party scene, Quinn is shown behaving at his most erratic and belligerent, whilst growing increasingly weak in terms of his demeanour and state of mind. He says, 'I'm the asshole right, because I'm the only one with any balls?' This quote plays on the entendre of gendered terms, as Quinn refers to male genitalia idiomatically to suggest courage, whereas the emphasis on the term also reminds us of the presence of the female performer uttering the dialogue, thus re-centring the gender issues, discussed earlier, into the scene. After a female partygoer offers a re-

buke to Quinn's uncouth outbursts, he responds 'good and evil were created by people trapped in scenes', before vomiting into the lap of his guitar player. The words 'good' and 'evil' appear to induce Quinn's sickness, and thus the vomiting becomes a visual cue for the film's rejection of conventional binaries and instead emphasises the postmodern and post-structuralist philosophies of the film. Clearly incapacitated, Quinn is ushered into a car. As the car drives away, we hear the music from 'Cold Irons Bound' again, 'I'm beginning to hear voices, and there's no one around. Well I'm all used up, and the fields have turned brown', harking back to the earlier scene where Quinn was taking pills in the hotel. However, this time the music is not a cover version of the song, but is in fact the original Dylan track. Therefore, the different voices provided for the song(s) create an extra layer of meaningfulness to the representation of mental disorder because they quite literally allow us to hear voices.

Quinn's narrative first deals with national identity in an explicit way in a surrealist scene that resembles the eclectic and aesthetic form similar to that of a music video. The song 'Ballad of a Thin Man' becomes the soundtrack for the scene, in which, through a series of bizarre and incongruent images, the relationship between Quinn and Keegan Jones (a cypher for the press at large) is deconstructed and dismantled.[407] What makes this scene so relevant to Quinn's relationship to national identity is the inclusion in the surrealist scene of a number of Black Panther characters. First, we see a character in the familiar Black Panther regalia, a beret and sunglasses, massaging Quinn's manager, who is taking a bribe from Jones in exchange for information about Quinn's childhood. Then, the musical montage is interrupted in a self-reflexive, meta-textual moment as a Black Panther character is shown pressing the stop button on a music stereo, cutting off the non-diegetic music that was anchoring the montage. A quick close-up cut shows a chalkboard that reads 'we believe that black people will not be free until we are able to determine our own destiny.' A conversation then takes place between two Black Panthers. One of the Black Panthers, Bobby (Benz Antoine), is receiving a massage, creating a visual connection to the montage sequence, and the other is attempting to explain the symbolism of the song's

[407] Schlotterbeck, J. (2014) I'm Not There: Transcendent Thanatography. In: Brown, T. & Vidal, B. (eds.) *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*. London: Routledge. p. 237.

lyrics to him, and how that symbolism can be interpreted as, and appropriated by, the Black Panthers for political purposes. He states 'you got understand this song is saying a hell of a lot about society.' When Bobby says he doesn't understand, he asks the other character to play the song again. When he hits the play button on the stereo the music restarts, and the montage carries on. The final shot of the montage shows Quinn and his band on stage performing the end of 'Ballad of a Thin Man'. Quinn goes to the front of the stage at the end of the song and bows, acknowledging the hostile and disapproving reaction of the crowd by saying 'you know, what you're hearing is not English music, all right? You haven't heard American music before.' Whilst gesturing to the large American flag that occupies the back of the stage. The presence of the Black Panthers and Quinn's insistence that his music is American in this scene creates a strong connection between Quinn's music and the socio-political undercurrents of 1960s America, typified by the Black Panther's protests and rallies against institutional racism and racist activities. Whilst Quinn has already stated that he is disenfranchised with the idea that music can affect cultural and political change, the Black Panther's discussion about how the song can be interpreted suggests a bond between Quinn's nonconformist and outspoken nature and the militant political ideologies of the Black Panther party.

In a later scene, we hear a voice-over narrated by another of Haynes's Dylan personas, Arthur Rimbaud (played by Ben Whishaw); 'I know I have this sickness festering somewhere. I don't mean like Woody Guthrie, wasting away in some hospital.' Whilst he says this we see a shot of a motionless Quinn on the floor of his hotel room. A doctor is examining him, saying, 'his vitals are stable. What he needs is sleep.' Rimbaud's proclamation that he has a sickness festering somewhere, but not in the sense of 'wasting away in some hospital' is evocative of mental illness, and that this proclamation comes in voice-over form accompanied by images of the passed-out Quinn suggests that Rimbaud's illness is in fact festering in Quinn. Although Haynes's multiple Dylan figures inhabit largely separate storylines and historical periods, many of which never overlap, the moments in which there are intersections, such as the suggestion that Rimbaud's illness is shared with (or perhaps embodied by) Quinn, play a vital role in as-

serting to us that these 'many lives of Bob Dylan' are constituent parts of a wider whole, the essence, or maybe even psyche, of Dylan.

The brief interaction of Rimbaud and Quinn's storylines also raises an interesting juxtaposition between differing means of representing mental disorder in cultural terms. As noted earlier in this thesis, artists and writers such as William Blake, Edgar Allen Poe and indeed Rimbaud himself were known to frequently enter delirious or hallucinatory states through drug use or alcohol consumption, among other methods, in order to enhance their creative vision. As Burgoyne identifies, Rimbaud in particular was vocal about 'artistic hallucination as an imaginative resource', referring famously to this process as the 'systematic derangement of the senses'.[408] That the Rimbaud of *I'm Not There*, who isn't intended as a version of the poet himself but rather Dylan's desire at one point in his life to emulate the creativity and artistry of the great genius,[409] refers to a sickness that we may interpret from his description as a mental illness provides potential for this avenue to be explored. Indeed, the experimental nature of *I'm Not There* would seem to be the ideal platform for such exploration because, as Burgoyne aptly explains, '[artistic hallucination] is strongly associated with artistic periods such as Symbolism, Surrealism, and psychedelia that are far distant in tone and imagery from the verisimilitude that characterizes the classic artist biography in film.'[410]

I'm Not There's meditation on the creative possibilities of the biopic genre therefore appears to suit the tone of surrealist artistic hallucination that Burgoyne refers to. Although the representation of Quinn's disorder alludes to realist themes common to the popular music biopic, such as addiction and the pathologisation of celebrity, there are also some key moments in which surreal avant-garde gestures are made towards the idea of artistic hallucination in his storyline. As mentioned earlier, when Quinn first encounters Coco Rivington, it is during a hallucination sequence in which he chases the elusive Rivington as she dances through winding bushes and trees before losing her. Now alone, Quinn has to sit down and cough uncontrollably, emphasising his poor health. Earlier in the film, Quinn appears to

[408] Burgoyne, R. (2014) Gainsbourg: Puppetry in the Musical Biopic. p. 261.
[409] Bingham, D. (2010) Living Stories: Performance in the Contemporary Biopic. p. 91.
[410] Burgoyne, R. (ibid).

have gone missing after a heavy night of partying and drug use with The Beatles, before appearing in a puff of smoke, rolling down a small hill, with the British rock band. In a performance at a jazz festival, Quinn and his band appear on stage firing machine guns into the crowd. However, the crowd do not react, indeed they appear not to notice, and a jump cut now showing the band playing their incendiary electric rock music at deafening volume reveals the metaphorical use of the guns as portraying Quinn's new-found disdain for folk music and its fans. As previously discussed, the aesthetic of the almost music-video like 'Ballad of a Thin Man' sequence in which Quinn berates and imprisons Keegan Jones is highly surrealist, indeed in may be the most sustained surrealist portion of the entire film. In the scene where Rimbaud narrates over the unconscious Quinn towards the end of the film a cut shot shows an image of Quinn's almost lifeless body floating in the air attached to a string, as if he were a balloon, making an explicit intertextual reference to Federico Fellini's avant-garde masterpiece *8½*.[411]

What is interesting about these surreal or absurd moments is that they are all suggestive of the sense of delirium common in conceptions of the artist as a visionary, in touch with something hyper-real or ethereal, and yet none of these sequences show Quinn as having any kind of creative epiphany at all. Indeed their function appears more to be to undermine this romanticised idea of creative genius. In Quinn's final dialogue in the film he states 'people actually think I have some kind of fantastic imagination. It gets very lonesome.' These scenes have therefore, rather than visualise the creative potential of hallucination, emphasised Quinn's agitation and isolation as well as stressing the detrimental effects of his excessive drug use, creating an ambiguous juxtaposition between the theme of addiction that is frequently based in realist modes of representation and an aesthetic style more commonly associated with artistic enlightenment and delirium.

Conclusion

Towards the end of the film, as Rimbaud's voice-over is heard over the image of the unconscious Quinn, We see Quinn's band and manager looking worried as he is inspected by the doctor. His manager states, 'I

[411] *8½*. (1963) Federico Fellini (dir.), Italy/France.

don't think he can get back on stage. He's gotten inside so many psyches, and death is just such a part of the American scene right now.' Quinn's guitar player comments on his drug use, claiming 'it's the red [pills] that make him mean', and Quinn's friend Alan Ginsberg (David Cross) adds, 'he's already gone.' That the audience see this scene primarily from the point of view of Quinn, whom we know to be unconscious, serves to confirm Quinn's manager's claim that Quinn has infiltrated people's psyches, we literally see as if we were Quinn. Ginsberg's claim that Quinn has already gone reminds us that Quinn's demise was inevitable, having already seen his lifeless body at the beginning of the film. Whilst Quinn earlier denounced good and evil as a binary 'invented by people trapped in scenes', his manager's claim that 'death is just part of the American scene' means that in death Quinn is finally unable to resist and reject definition, his postmodern identity is untenable in death. His death and his pathology therefore become a pastiche of the Hollywood biopic's hagiographic qualities, in which the quintessentially American values of redemption and forgiveness are achieved either through recovery from illness or a tragic early death.

I'm Not There is a rich text that offers plentiful analyses concerning the biopic genre and its creative and unorthodox possibilities. Though my analysis here has primarily focussed upon Jude Quinn, this chapter has illustrated that relevant and fascinating connections can be made between all of the film's various Dylan guises, constructing a broader sense of the vicissitudes of Dylan's psyche from the various incarnations of his music and 'many lives'. This chapter has explored the film's postmodern approach to the telling of a life in the biopic, describing some of the many creative strategies the film employs in order to create an original narrative of a historical figure's life and challenge the conventions of the popular music biopic, and indeed the biopic in general. Building from this discussion, I explained how the representation of Quinn's mental disorder utilised aesthetics and tropes associated with cultural ideas of female suffering in order to subvert and contravene traditional gendered perspectives of mental illness, as well as create an explicit tension between performer and biographical subject. In keeping with the film's fondness for juxtaposition and contradiction, the final portion of this chapter explored the ambiguous tension between romanticised cultural ideas of artistry and delirious hallucination with more medi-

calised sombre discourses relating addiction to isolation, suffering and death. All in all, *I'm Not There* challenges a broad range of expectations and conventions of the biopic genre, and in this regard the genre's recent fascination with pathology and mental illness is no exception to this treatment in the film. Many of the core ideas and patterns of representation explored in the previous chapters of this thesis can be seen to be contravened, rejected, re-appropriated or rendered ambiguous all within the textual parameters of a single film that seems determined to defy the established traditions underpinning the contemporary biopic.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis I explained at length the limitations of current scholarship considering the depiction of mental illness in cinema. Authors frequently interpret textual readings in line with particular critical agendas based on accuracy, fidelity and stigma. As highlighted in my discussion, to scrutinise the portrayal and performance of mental illness in terms of its adherence to, or deviation from, symptomological criteria overlooks the important cultural functions of such representations. That is to say, if analyses of images of mental illness seek only to identify aspects of representation that meet the author's understanding of what is 'honest' or 'real' about a particular condition and its symptom(s), and then decry them as propagating stigmatic ideas, the wider implications of these representations and the narratives that they inhabit fall by the wayside of critical discourse. In the introduction to the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, one of the limitations of the manual's use is listed as follows:

> In DSM-IV, there is no assumption that each category of mental disorder is a completely discrete entity with absolute boundaries dividing it from other mental disorders or from no mental disorder. There is also no assumption that all individuals described as having the same mental disorder are alike in all important ways. The clinician using DSM-IV should therefore consider that individuals sharing a diagnosis are likely to be heterogeneous even in regard to the defining features of the diagnosis…In recognition of the heterogeneity of clinical presentations, DSM-IV often includes polythetic criteria sets, in which the individual need only present with a subset of items from a longer list (e.g., the diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder requires only five out of nine items).[412]

Given the acknowledged diversity among those afflicted with a mental disorder here, the notion of cinematic representation as being capable of accu-

[412] American Psychiatric Association. (1994) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. 4th Edition. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing. p. xxii

rately or truthfully recounting the experience of mental disorder is clearly open to subjective interpretations. That two patients afflicted with the same disorder could possess a number of largely different symptoms from one another indicates the importance of individual lived experience, and as such highlights the manner in which it is possible for film representation to articulate and signify particular disorders in a variety of different ways.

As diagnoses and experiences vary according to the diversity of symptoms and causes of mental disorder, discourses of accuracy and fidelity tend to fall into reductive binary notions of 'positive' and 'negative'. Stephen Harper cogently demonstrates this point, arguing that one objection that can be made in reference to many recent depictions of mental illness in film and media is that these images tend to be *overly* positive, presenting a sanitised version of mental disorder that glosses over the intricacies and hardships inherent within the experience of mental illness.[413] Therefore, debates around accuracy and authenticity ultimately do not account for the subjectivities that inform them, consequently falling back on binaries that do little to interrogate the broader significance of the images and representations at hand. As such, this thesis has shown how new research questions can be asked and addressed in regards to mental health representation in cinema.

By engaging with research and ideas from the fields of psychiatry and psychology, and incorporating this material into a project primarily based in film studies methodologies, this thesis has achieved an interdisciplinary scope in its interpretation of the cultural functions of portrayals of mental disorder in the contemporary American biopic. Therefore, the research undertaken here has made a critical intervention into debates about the significance of representation and the wider cultural issues that such representations intersect with. Stephen Harper and Simon Cross, who have both written about the need for fresh approaches to the consideration of mental disorder in film and media studies, stress the need for such inquiries to account for culturally specific forms.[414] This serves as the motivation and justifica-

[413] Harper, S. (2008) Understanding Mental Distress in Film and Media: A New Agenda? *The Journal of the Royal Society for the Promotion of Health*. Vol. 128(4), p. 172.
[414] Harper, S. (2005) Media, Madness and Misrepresentation: Critical Reflections on Anti-Stigma Discourse. *European Journal of Communication*. Vol. 20(4), p. 463; Cross, S. (2004) Visualizing Madness: Mental Illness and Public Representation. *Television New Media*. Vol. 5(3), p. 202.

tion for the genre studies approach that I have undertaken here. By focussing upon the biopic film genre, which has its own difficult relationship to notions of authenticity and historical veracity, this project has made strides towards answering the call made by Harper and Cross to move beyond reductive debates concerning the accuracy of representation and instead explore the presence and functions of such depictions of mental disorder within a particular cultural form.

That the biopic is currently in the midst of a fertile production cycle, particularly in Hollywood, and the topic of mental disorder has obviously appealed to screenwriters and filmmakers for some years now, the overlap between the two is hardly surprising. Thus, the analyses and research presented in this project provides both a necessary and timely consideration of one of the most ubiquitous film forms in the contemporary context. Where George Custen's argument that the Hollywood biopic during the studio era presented a largely monochromatic version of American public history, my readings of case studies have shown that the contemporary American biopic is far more diverse in its engagement with, and presentation of, American history. Instead, my interpretations of the biopic's representation of mental disorder indicate that the genre is a fruitful site for the negotiation and contestation of American national identity, national/cultural narratives and history.

Film distributor and author David Coleman contends that in the wake of 9/11 and the subsequent war on terror, as well the economic impact of the recession upon struggling families, America has progressed in its view of the mentally ill. Veterans afflicted with PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), mass shootings, and reforms in healthcare treatment to prevent the discrimination and denial of treatment to the mentally ill all seem to indicate this.[415] This may go some way to explaining the contemporary biopic's fascination with mental health issues. As the nation's views on mental disorder change and grow, we can see the use of mental disorder as a lens through which contemporary Hollywood films, especially the biopic, can embrace and interrogate this change in perception and its wider implications and intersections. One of the major contentions of this thesis has been that the nar-

[415] Coleman, D. (2014) *The Bipolar Express: Manic Depression and the Movies*. Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield. p. 288.

rative recounting in the biographical film of the subject's experience of mental disorder has subtextual significance in terms of engaging with broader cultural narratives. That is, I have argued that biopics about mental health issues are not simply individual stories about mental illness, but in fact intersect with important aspects of individual identity that are also significant in the (de)construction of American national identity. This ties in with Belén Vidal's assertion that the biopic is expected to produce 'a full explanation of a life that is congruent with other narratives in a culture'[416] as well as to 'feed fantasies of national identity to the international film scene'.[417] As touched upon in my introduction, and at various other stages in my thesis, the contemporary American biopic has largely become a platform in which the foundational narratives and mythologies of the American nation have come under scrutiny, and mental illness is one of the important means of articulating these criticisms and counternarratives. Much attention here has been placed upon the key attributes that Robert Burgoyne highlights as central to the construction of national narrative and identity: gender, ethnicity and race.[418] However, another important contribution of this thesis is that critical ideas presented in the textual analyses also consider a range of other key aspects and ideologies of national and cultural identity in contemporary America, including class, family, sexuality, celebrity culture, religious identity and regionality. Consideration of these additional discourses has allowed for a more varied and nuanced approach to understanding the complex relationship between mental health representation and national identity.

In the first chapter I illustrated how three different films, each of which can be located within the neoclassical 'great man' tradition, interrogated the largely overly hagiographic traditions of the subgenre by using mental illness as a device to scrutinise the representation of notable 'idols of production' as saintly geniuses or remarkable patriots. From *A Beautiful Mind*'s heteronormative 'love-conquers-all' veneration of John Nash's triumph over schizophrenia that elides the real Nash's homosexual activities, Howard

[416] Vidal, B. (2014) Introduction: The Biopic and its Critical Contexts. In: Brown, T. & Vidal, B. (eds.) *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*. London: Routledge. p. 9.
[417] ibid. p. 2.
[418] Burgoyne, R. (2010) *Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at U.S. History*. Revised Edition: Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. p. 6.

Hughes's suffering on account of an obsessive need to develop and hone new technological advances in aviation, to Kinsey's direct provocation of conservative, religiously influenced, attitudes towards human sexual behaviour and alternative sexualities, the contemporary 'great man' biopic's depictions of mental disorder were shown to de-familiarise and challenge the rigour of key cultural narratives associated with patriotism and American national identity.

My analysis of the sports biopic in chapter 2 centred upon core values associated with the American family, one of the cornerstones of mainstream notions of American national identity. Here issues such as sibling rivalry, infantilisation and interraciality all feature prominently in case studies that elucidate and disrupt traditional ideas of nuclear family values, often unearthing the inherent pathologies that underpin the construction of identity within holistic family unit structures.

My opening case study chapter highlighted a reframing of the 'great man', in which his inherent 'greatness' is either somewhat or wholly undermined by the subject's mental disorder, suggesting a lack of confidence in the patriarchal narratives that historically made him 'great'. In a similar vein, my consideration of the female biopic in chapter 3, which both Dennis Bingham and Bronwyn Polaschek view as a divergent and distinct (sub)genre,[419] demonstrated the genre's subversion of familiar tropes traditionally deployed to render women as melancholic or monstrous. Though statistics from SAVE (Suicide Awareness Voices of Education) indicate that four times as many men commit suicide in America per year as women, and that males constitute 79% of all suicides in America,[420] film representation of mental disorder and suicide seems intractably associated to melancholic women. Although SAVE also indicate that females experience depression at twice the rate of men, and attempt suicide three times as often,[421] this gender disparity in cinema exemplifies how representation often defies or chal-

[419] Bingham, D. (2010) *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?: The Biopic As Contemporary Film Genre*. London: Rutgers University Press. p. 23; Polaschek, B. (2013) *The Postfeminist Biopic: Narrating the Lives of Plath, Kahlo, Woolf and Austen*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 2.
[420] Author Unknown. (2015) *Suicide Facts*. Internet: Available at < http://www.save.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.viewPage&page_id=705D5DF4-055B-F1EC-3F66462866FCB4E6 > [Accessed 23/02/2016]
[421] ibid.

lenges cultural norms and conventions. This chapter demonstrated how themes and issues such as suicide, institutionalisation, sexuality and the visual tropes associated with the 'fallen woman' archetype have all become part of the contemporary female biopic's rhetoric for confronting women's diminished social position within patriarchal culture. By subverting and re-appropriating many historical conventions used to portray female subjects as passive victims affected by mental disorder, the narratives explored in my thesis all contribute towards indicting the inherently patriarchal nature of the social structures, including psychiatry and mental health discourse, that have maintained and discriminated against women and their place in society.

Currently, the American political landscape appears to be in a heightened state of uncertainty and unrest. The 2016 presidential race has seen some of the fiercest debates in modern memory, with polarising political figures such as Donald Trump winning much favour on the right and Bernie Sanders's growing political presence on the left typifying the level of diversity and uncertainty within contemporary American politics. Equally, the ongoing debates and protests regarding race from campaigns such as Black Lives Matter exemplify the destabilising of a unified sense of national identity. Racial issues are at the forefront of American cultural consciousness, interconnecting with numerous aspects of American history and institutions including slavery, religion, gun control, and regionality. Several of these issues were addressed in regards to mental health discourse in chapter 4, which focused upon the popular music biopic. The broad reaching scope of this chapter included reference to psychological and sociological studies that indicate experiences of racial discrimination can have an adverse impact upon an individual's mental health. Several of these studies suggest that African Americans are less likely to seek mental health treatment than other demographics, in large part due to widespread notions that the suggestion that mental illness is genetic resembles the pejorative discourses historically used to justify and maintain black American's low social position. The analyses in this chapter touched upon notions of race and regionality in regards to the American South, social mobility in narratives of celebrity and musical touring (especially the symbolic significance of 'life on the road'), addiction as a means of critiquing the unprecedented level of celebrity

commodification in the American star system, and the narrative importance of Christianity as a means of redeeming the mental health issues of Ray Charles and Johnny Cash. The representation of Nathaniel Ayers's schizophrenia was also included as a means of problematising some of these common tropes, such as presenting a lack of faith in the Christian redemption myth and using Ayers's homelessness as a means of contradicting the 'rags-to-riches' nature of popular music biopics that often depict social mobility as a linear narrative.

In the final chapter I considered a sole case study, *I'm Not There*, a film that presents a number of challenges to the conventional paradigms of the Hollywood biopic. The film's portrayal of Bob Dylan through the use of several surrogate Dylan-esque personas presents a postmodern approach to biographical filmmaking by foregrounding the separation of representation, history and genre. Building on Todd Haynes's previous creative excursions into experimental and provocative approaches to narrating the lives of public figures, *I'm Not There* is something of a landmark moment for the biopic genre. Although the film confronts a number of the genre's common themes and narrative approaches, of particular significance to this thesis was the character of Jude Quinn, a character that can be read as mentally ill. Through textual analysis of the Quinn storyline in the film, as well as some other important intersections with other Dylan personas, this chapter considered the tensions between female performer and male character as a means of confronting typically gendered attitudes and portrayals of mental illness. This chapter also pointed towards the alternative, often overlooked, discourse of delirium and artistic hallucination, which until very recently, in an age of increasing medicalization, was a common feature of artist biographies. Overall, this chapter illustrated how other critical stances can be taken towards the consideration of mental illness and its intersections with wider aspects of culture and identity, underpinning one of the central arguments of my thesis; that mental illness in the contemporary American biopic destabilises monolithic notions, narratives, and mythologies of national identity by opening them to scrutiny and presenting counternarratives that unsettle their foundations.

In some case studies particular myths were largely reaffirmed (for instance, *A Beautiful Mind* ends on a largely sentimental note that assures us

of John Nash's exceptional recovery and happy home life, and *Ray* and *Walk the Line* both conclude with recovery from addiction and Christian redemption), but these affirmations almost universally come after stern scrutiny in which the subject, and thereby larger cultural discourses, is challenged and interrogated by their experience with mental disorder. In many other cases, ideologies and narratives of national identity were totally disavowed (take Aileen Wuornos's mockery of cultural platitudes in *Monster* or *Foxcatcher*'s presentation of family dysfunction for example), showing that mental illness in the biopic has a plurality of critical implications for considerations of national identity. This thesis has explored the use of mental illness as a narrative device to challenge conventional cultural narratives and present critical counternarratives of national identity within the structure of ostensibly 'true stories', showing the instability and ever-shifting notions of what American national identity is and is not.

Though wide reaching and expansive in its scope, inevitably there have been omissions and avenues unexplored in this thesis. In its nascent stages, it was intended that a part of this thesis would explore the role of psychiatric professionals who had consulted with the film industry during production. This was aimed at elucidating and contributing to the ever-growing collaboration between film studies, psychiatry and film production, fostering a greater sense of discursivity and interdisciplinary exchange. However, this proved to be beyond the capacity and remit of this particular project, but remains a fascinating area for further research. Equally, as is likely to be the case with any research project exploring a contemporary film and media trend, during the research and writing of this thesis new films were released that could have been included under different circumstances. In my chapter on popular music biopics (chapter 4) I alluded to the release of *Love & Mercy* and *Miles Ahead* as two instances of films that, at the time of writing, were as yet unreleased. So too, examples like *Pawn Sacrifice*,[422] which blends aspects of the 'great man' and sports biopic in its focus upon chess prodigy Bobby Fischer (Tobey Maguire) and his showdown with a Soviet chess grandmaster in the early 1970s (almost inevitably emphasising Fisch-

[422] *Pawn Sacrifice*. (2014) Edward Zwick (dir.) USA.

er's paranoia and psychosis during the time), and *12 Years a Slave*,[423] which has significance both in terms of racial issues and key tropes of the women's biopic (although centred upon a male protagonist, Solomon Northup [Chiwetel Ejiofor], the relevance here is that several female characters are presented as melancholic), would have been useful additions to this thesis, but owing to time and space constraints they were sadly omitted from the project. However, this thesis, with an already large corpus of case studies, also indicates the abundance of relevant examples in this film cycle that suggests the potential for future research to apply and expand upon its central ideas and arguments. What this thesis has achieved is a scholarly intervention into critical discourses and understandings of the biopic genre in its modern form and has explored and revealed new avenues of inquiry into the depiction of mental disorder in film. I have demonstrated that the depiction of mental disorder can be read as a parable in which the central cultural narratives of American history and national identity are examined and revised through the lens of contemporary film representations, alluding to a sense of American national identity in the contemporary context as being in a state of flux; mediated, negotiated, and scrutinised through the biopic film genre.

[423] *12 Years a Slave*. (2013) Steve McQueen (dir.) USA/UK.

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- **8 Mile**. (2002) Curtis Hanson (dir.) USA.
- **8½**. (1963) Federico Fellini (dir.) Italy/France.
- **A Beautiful Mind**. (2001) Ron Howard (dir.) USA.
- **Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer**. (1992) Nick Broomfield (dir.) UK.
- **Aileen: The Life and Death of a Serial Killer**. (2003) Nick Broomfield & Joan Churchill (dirs.) UK/USA.
- **Ali**. (2001) Michael Mann (dir.) USA.
- **Almost Famous**. (2000) Cameron Crowe (dir.) USA.
- **American Psycho**. (2000) Mary Harron (dir.) USA.
- **An Angel at My Table**. (1990) Jane Campion (dir.) Australia/New Zealand/UK/USA.
- **As Good as it Gets**. (1997) James L. Brooks (dir.) USA.
- **Black Swan**. (2010) Darren Aronofsky (dir.) USA.
- **Breakfast at Tiffany's**. (1961) Blake Edwards (dir.) USA.
- **Bronson**. (2008) Nicolas Winding Refn (dir.) UK.
- **Casino**. (1995) Martin Scorsese (dir.) USA/France.
- **Chopper**. (2000) Andrew Dominik (dir.) Australia.
- **Cinderella Man**. (2005) Ron Howard (dir.) USA.
- **Citizen Kane**. (1941) Orson Welles (dir.) USA.
- **Control**. (2007) Anton Corbijn (dir.) USA/UK/Australia/Japan.
- **Crazy Heart**. (2009) Scott Cooper (dir.) USA.
- **Factory Girl**. (2006) George Hickenlooper (dir.) USA.
- **Fear Strikes Out**. (1957) Robert Mulligan (dir.) USA.

- **Foxcatcher**. (2014) Bennett Miller (dir.) USA.
- **Frances**. (1982) Graeme Clifford (dir.) USA.
- **Gainsbourg**. (2010) Joann Sfar (dir.), France.
- **Girl, Interrupted**. (1999) James Mangold (dir.) USA.
- **Goodfellas**. (1990) Martin Scorsese (dir.) USA.
- **I Shot Andy Warhol**. (1996) Mary Harron (dir.) USA/UK.
- **I'll Cry Tomorrow**. (1955) Daniel Mann (dir.) USA.
- **I'm Not There**. (2007) Todd Haynes (dir.) USA/Canada/Germany.
- **Iris**. (2001) Richard Eyre (dir.) USA/UK.
- **King Kong**. (1976) John Guillermin (dir.) USA.
- **Kinsey**. (2004) Bill Condon (dir.) USA/Germany.
- **La Vie en Rose**. (2007) Olivier Dahan (dir.) France/UK/Czech Republic.
- **Last Days**. (2005) Gus Van Sant (dir.) USA.
- **Lincoln**. (2012) Steven Spielberg (dir.) USA.
- **Love & Mercy**. (2014) Bill Pohlad (dir.) USA.
- **Man on the Moon**. (1999) Milos Forman (dir.) USA/UK/Germany/Japan.
- **Miles Ahead**. (2015) Don Cheadle (dir.) USA.
- **Mississippi Burning**. (1988) Alan Parker (dir.) USA.
- **Monster**. (2003) Pattie Jenkins (dir.) USA.
- **My Left Foot**. (1989) Jim Sheridan (dir.) Ireland/UK.
- **Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid**. (1973) Sam Peckinpah (dir.) USA.
- **Pawn Sacrifice**. (2014) Edward Zwick (dir.) USA.
- **Prozac Nation**. (2001) Erik Skjoldbjærg (dir.) USA/Germany/Canada.
- **Raging Bull**. (1980) Martin Scorsese (dir.) USA.
- **Rain Man**. (1988) Barry Levinson (dir.) USA.
- **Ray**. Taylor Hackford (dir.) USA.
- **Rocky**. (1976) John G. Avildsen (dir.) USA.
- **Scarface**. (1932) Howard Hawks and Richard Rosson (dirs.) USA.
- **Schindler's List**. (1993) Steven Spielberg (dir.) USA.
- **Shine**. (1996) Scott Hicks (dir.) Australia.
- **Sid and Nancy**. (1986) Alex Cox (dir.) UK.
- **Silver Linings Playbook**. (2012) David O. Russell (dir.) USA.
- **Still Alice**. (2014) Richard Glatzer & Wash Westmoreland (dirs.) USA/France.

- **Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story**. (1988) Todd Haynes (dir.) USA.
- **Sylvia**. (2003) Christine Jeffs (dir.) UK.
- **The Aviator**. (2004) Martin Scorsese (dir.) USA/Germany/Canada.
- **The Blind Side**. (2009) John Lee Hancock (dir.) USA.
- **The Fighter**. (2010) David O. Russell (dir.) USA.
- **The Greatest**. (1977) Tom Gries (dir.) USA/UK.
- **The Hours**. (2002) Stephen Daldry (dir.) USA/UK.
- **The Hurricane**. (1999) Norman Jewison (dir.) USA.
- **The Manchurian Candidate**. (1962) John Frankenheimer (dir.) USA.
- **The Outlaw**. (1943) Howard Hughes & Howard Hawks (uncredited) (dirs.) USA.
- **The Pianist**. (2002) Roman Polanski (dir.) France/Germany/Poland/UK.
- **The Reader**. (2008) Stephen Daldry (dir.) USA/Germany.
- **The Snake Pit**. (1948) Anatole Litvak (dir.) USA.
- **The Soloist**. (2009) Joe Wright (dir.) USA/UK/France.
- **Titanic**. (1997) James Cameron (dir.) USA.
- **The Wolf of Wall Street**. (2013) Martin Scorsese (dir.) USA.
- **Thelma & Louise**. (1991) Ridley Scott (dir.) USA/France.
- **Velvet Goldmine**. (1998) Todd Haynes (dir.) USA/UK.
- **Walk the Line**. (2005) James Mangold (dir.) USA.
- **Wall Street**. (1987) Oliver Stone (dir.) USA.
- **Young Mr. Lincoln**. (1939) John Ford (dir.) USA.

Teleography

- **Extras**. “Kate Winslet”. Series 1: Episode 3. Written and directed by Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant. BBC. October 2005.