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THE REMASCULATION FILM: THEMES AND VARIATIONS

by

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THE REMASCULATION FILM: THEMES AND VARIATIONS

Doctor of Philosophy
2012
Adam Patrick Miller
Communication and Culture: York and Ryerson Universities

Abstract:

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, a discourse of masculinity crisis precipitated the appearance of a number of what Susan Jeffords describes as "rearticulations of screen masculinity," which influenced the production of a group films whose narrative diegeses reaffirmed the heteronormative, hypermasculine façade onscreen. These films are identified and defined in this dissertation as remasculation pictures, or narratives that showcase the hero's oscillation between two oppositional expressions of screen masculinity. In the rhetoric of the remasculation film, the protagonist's emasculation initiates a quest to remasculate by reaffirming the dominance and authority of the hypermasculine archetype. Further, in a few key performances (*Red River* [1948], *The Searchers* [1956], *The Wings of Eagles* [1957]), John Wayne exemplifies the ultra-conservative values, imposing physicality, staunch heterosexuality, and capability of this heteronormative, hypermasculine archetype. However, Wayne's image has been employed only as an exemplification of this façade, since this project does not suggest that the remasculation hero's victory marks

his appropriation of Wayne's masculinity, only the archetype with which many of his performances have been associated.

The remasculation picture is part of a film cluster, and not a genre because films of this category are primarily linked by similarities in narrative structure and their glorification of this hypermasculine figure. Further, to illustrate some of the themes of the remasculation picture, this dissertation features three chapters that focus on as many distinct expressions of the remasculation formula. The first of these chapters draws on *Unforgiven* (1992) and *Law Abiding Citizen* (2010) to furnish a discussion of judicial emasculation and remasculatory vigilantism. The second case study chapter looks at remasculation through pugilism with an examination of *Payback* (1999) and *Get Carter* (2000), while the final section focuses only on *The Company Men* (2010) to illustrate emasculative redundancy and the reacquisition of purpose as the final variation discussed in this project.

While films of the remasculation cluster glorify the hypermasculine image, one cannot assume that the filmmakers responsible for their production aim to either disseminate ultra-conservative values or impose them on the audience. Similarly, the relative popularity of remasculation films does not necessarily indicate the presence of an audience seeking narrative diegeses showcasing the reaffirming triumph of the hypermasculine man. The continued production of the remasculation picture signifies only the

appearance of a trend in contemporary film that is attributable to the

destabilization of the normative masculine image at the end of the twentieth

century.

of what has been a difficult, but enlightening process. I hope to one day repay

your support as you pursue achievements that will likely dwarf my own.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

In Gavin O'Connor's *Warrior* (2011), Brendan Conlon (Joel Edgerton) slouches in the principal's office at North Hills Senior High School just outside Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Despite the large contused cheekbone and pronounced swelling around his eye, Conlon still manages a sheepish expression as Principal Zito reprimands him for the very incident that caused his injury. As a man in his late thirties, Conlon is not a student but the school's physics teacher, and he has just been suspended for his participation in a mixed marshal arts tournament. With two young daughters, a wife, and a mortgage, Conlon's job as a teacher cannot keep the bank from taking his home given the subprime mortgage crisis in 2008. As a result, he must revert to his pugilistic roots in order to supplement his income; humiliated by an insensitive loan officer at the bank in an earlier scene, Conlon maintains that bankruptcy is "not how he does things." In a tender parallel scene, Conlon's wife Tess (Jennifer Morrison) assures him that she would rather live in an affordable apartment than see her husband in the back of an ambulance, to which Conlon defiantly responds: "We're not giving up our house. That's our home. We're not going backwards." Though Conlon is disciplined in the principal's office like one of his own students, this tattered hero appears neither humiliated nor disempowered, but instead quite the opposite. "You're a god-damned teacher, you got no business in the ring with those animals," Principal Zito exhorts. In

one moment, Conlon is transformed from a shamed child to a stern, confident-looking man, his expression and posture befitting his response: "Actually, I used to be one of those animals." Despite his precarious financial situation, the impending loss of his job, and the concern of his family, Conlon has found power, authority, control and, most importantly, his masculine identity within a framework of pugilism. In a word, Conlon is *remasculated* in this scene.

Since the genesis of Hollywood cinema, representations of masculinity onscreen have existed in a state of constant change. In his book *Iron John: A Book About Men*, author Robert Bly presents a history of masculine constructions in the United States and cites the 1950s as a nodal point in this evolution. According to Bly, the fifties male "got to work early, labored responsibly, supported his wife and children, and admired discipline... [H]e was supposed to like football, be aggressive, stick up for the United States, never cry and always provide" (Bly 1). The ultra-conservatism of the 1950s male gave way to the one influenced by the Vietnam War and the women's movement. The man of the 1960s is one described as more thoughtful, "a nice boy who pleases not only his mother but also the young woman he is living with" (Bly 2). The 1970s, Bly continues, were defined by the appearance of softer men with gentler attitudes. These men were without the energy of their 1960s counterparts; they lacked resolve, principles, and were comparatively ineffectual. Writing in 1990, Bly grounds his assessment of the 1970s in

Richard Nixon's text: *Seize the Moment: America's Challenge in a One-Superpower Word,* in which Nixon argues that "[i]n the mid-1970s the United States began to lose its sense of purpose," as a general "malaise" characterized the nation's elite class and the American spirit seemed to have degraded (x).

However, Ronald Reagan's 1981 inauguration marked the emergence of what Jeffords calls the "hard-bodied" hero, the central figure first theorized in *The Remasculinization of America*, then more extensively later in *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era.* Reagan's ascension signaled the United States' embrace of a "hard-edged anti-Soviet philosophy backed by increased weapons production…[that would]…contribute to a revival of U.S. 'manliness'" (Jeffords, *Hard Bodies* 11). According to Jeffords, images of Reagan's media persona became cultural signifiers demarcating a masculine ideal, the essence of which permeated the screen presence of numerous action heroes whose films helped to classify masculinity during the 1980s. As both a "'real man' and a 'real president'… both a father and a king," Reagan's distinctive masculine style factored into the appearance of a form of screen masculinity that joined the principles of Bly's 1950s male (nobility, loyalty, ultra-conservative values, and confidence) with an extreme and over-developed physicality, a unique combination yielding an archetype defined later in this project as the hypermasculine man.

Jeffords posits that the hypermasculine heroes of the 1980s, like those featured in *Rambo: First Blood* (1982), *The Terminator* (1984), or *Rambo: First Blood Part 2* (1985), reflected Reagan's uniquely rebellious yet paradoxically celebrated masculinity with their sculpted physiques. According to Jeffords, this trend continued until at least 1993. Jeffords concludes her discussion here with the publication of 1994's *Hard Bodies*, although that project aimed to build on Jeffords' work concerning remasculinization in the 1980s by extrapolating her formula into the 1990s and 2000s, prefiguring what would subsequently come to be described as the remasculation film cluster.

In fact, Jeffords' discussion of masculinity just pre-dates the onset of two important socio-cultural transitions that both contributed to a corresponding shift in screen masculinity in the mid-1990s. First, the mid-to-late 1990s witnessed the arrival of a discourse of masculinity crisis in academia, one whose popularity influenced this topic's discussion in the context of popular culture. This notion of crisis is described by any onscreen moment in which an image of heteronormative masculinity is threatened or undermined. The "crisis" concerns the sense of confusion about what it means to be a man at the end of the twentieth century. Secondly, in addition to the varied anxieties associated with this confusion, the 1990s were also shaped by the presidency of William Jefferson Clinton, whose sordid tryst with a young White House intern transformed his image into a signifier of conflicted masculinity, epitomizing the

larger crisis of American manhood characteristic of that same period. The

second chapter in this project discusses a link between this discourse of

masculine crisis and representations of screen masculinity and performance

during the time period in which the remasculation film finds its roots.

Delimited by a pervasive discourse of crisis and the dubious behavior of

a troubled president, the 1990s ushered in a plethora of new screen

masculinities in mainstream Hollywood film. From images of gay masculinity,

to representations of the metrosexual, to expressions of hyperbolic or

caricatured masculinity, the range of onscreen manhood during this period

effectively extrapolated Jeffords' theory concerning the "rearticulation" of

masculinity at the end of the 1980s. In her view, American masculinity was

undergoing a period of redefinition and reconstruction; cinematic

representations of manhood were changing to reflect their socio-cultural

circumstances, conditions that Jeffords linked to contemporary images of

presidential masculinity. The third chapter in *The Remasculation Film: Themes and*

Variations suggests that the appearance of what Brenton Malin and Judith

Kegan Gardiner refer to as "alternative" masculinities influenced or perhaps

even precipitated the reaffirmation of a more conventional, heteronormative

form of manhood in a series of films to be later discussed as remasculation

pictures. In *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance*, sociologist Kai

Erikson suggests that the existence of social deviance often serves to reinforce

the community's value of the norm. The plethora of "alternative" screen

masculinities during the 1990s likely contributed to the reaffirmation of the

hypermasculine hero, an emblem for ultra-conservative values, independence,

and seemingly limitless capability.

Chapter Four aims to illustrate this hypermasculine hero through a

detailed examination of John Wayne's screen presence in *Red River* (1948), *The*

Wings of Eagles (1957), and *The Searchers* (1956), which offers a reasonably

diversified representation of his persona during the height of his popularity in

the 1940s and 1950s. Although selective, these three films comprise a useful

sample group featuring protagonists who exemplify the hypermasculine

archetype. While the fourth chapter aims to define the characteristics of the

remasculation hero, Chapter Five serves to outline the parameters of the

remasculation category. The remasculation *cluster* consists of a series of films

(all of which can be situated within the prescriptive guidelines of Rick Altman's

approach to the genre film) linked to one another by a formulaic narrative

structure. Traditionally manifesting as either a western, action-adventure, or

drama film, the remasculation picture features a leading man typically portrayed

by an actor whose previous roles have likewise characterized the persona of the

alpha male: assertive, confident, physical, active, and insensitive, as opposed to

passive, intellectual, or sentimental. In the context of the remasculation film,

this leading man experiences a preliminary moment of typically humiliating

emasculation. Deprived of his authority and the power attributed him by a somewhat clichéd and outdated gender politique, the protagonist engages in a struggle defined by his pursuit of remasculation. This emasculated hero achieves remasculation when he has reclaimed a form of masculinity epitomized most precisely by the hypermasculine archetype.

The remasculation film exists as part of a film cluster instead of as simply a new genre for two reasons. First, to imply that the existence of a series of remasculation films justifies the formation of a new genre would be to overstate the implications of a pattern involving the production of similar films during a roughly thirty-year period. Secondly, although these films exhibit certain generic conventions (similarities in narrative structure, character types, etc.), this group of films exists only as it has been defined here. While further research might lead this description of film clusters into a discussion of genre, the project at hand is concerned primarily with the larger socio-historical implications of these remasculation films as part of a *cluster*. Whether it is action-adventure, drama, or even comedy, the remasculation film features characteristics commonly associated with the genre film and a distinctive narrative formula defined by the loss and melodramatic reclamation of a specific form of neoconservative, hypermasculine, and heteronormative masculinity, all of which is discussed at length in Chapter Five. Further, each remasculation film is a conventional genre picture first and part of the

remasculation cluster secondly. The boundaries of the remasculation film are defined largely by narrative, while conventional genres are categorized according to a prescriptive set of criteria (setting, style, rhetoric).

While the fifth chapter of my thesis aims to define the remasculation film as part of a cluster, Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight each offer thematic examples of the remasculation picture and their associated analyses. In particular, Chapter Six provides a comparative evaluation of Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992) and Gary Gray's *Law Abiding Citizen* (2010). In these two films, both protagonists achieve remasculation through the forcible imposition of vigilante justice. Within the remasculation diegesis, the trope of social moral balance is invoked, one in which some grievous (perhaps criminal) wrong is set aright by the hero. As a retired assassin who describes himself as but a shadow of his former greatness, William Munny's (Eastwood) humiliation in *Unforgiven* is underscored by the relative hypermasculinity of Eastwood's offscreen celebrity persona. Clyde Sheldon (Gerard Butler), meanwhile, is emasculated by a brutal home invasion and betrayed by a dysfunctional judicial system in *Law Abiding Citizen*, and this character's remasculation accompanies his unchecked tirade of choreographed vigilantism, which also restores this notion of 'moral' balance. Brought to their knees by faulty judicial systems rendered ineffectual by bureaucratic impediments and corruption, both Munny and Sheldon are remasculated once they have appropriated a hypermasculine front,

8

a position of dominance and authority that is normalized within the rhetoric of the film.

My seventh chapter explores Brian Helgeland's *Payback* (1999) and Stephen Kay's remake of *Get Carter* (2000), illustrating two parallel examples of the remasculation film in which the leading men are emasculated through the subjugation of their substantial physical prowess. As expressions of what Susan Jeffords would refer to as "hard-bodied" heroes, Mel Gibson with his raw physical aggression as the henchman known as "Porter" and Sylvester Stallone's brutish and intimidating façade as "Carter" are challenged by apparently more powerful foes (Jeffords, *Hard Bodies* 2). Although Munny and Sheldon achieve remasculation through an indulgence of their hypermasculine desire to impose their own form of vigilante justice, Porter's and Carter's humiliating moments of emasculation demand similarly indulgent degradations into pugilism. Additionally, Porter and Carter are each driven by a seemingly innate desire to remasculate in order to rebuild a surrogate familial unit that has been lost or fragmented. A more recent example within a different genre, *The Company Men* (2010), is another remasculation film governed by the same narrative guidelines stipulated for the remasculation cluster, and it constitutes the focus of Chapter Eight. This film articulates the emasculation associated with workplace redundancy, capturing the plight of the modern bureaucrat and featuring unmistakably misogynistic undertones that are also sometimes typical

of films within the "cluster." The protagonist is remasculated when he is once again able to provide financially for his family through a re-acquaintance with the value of "good, old-fashioned" American labor.

This project aims to define the parameters of the remasculation film via a thorough discussion of five remasculation pictures, which raises two obvious questions: can an exclusive selection of films be representative of *all* the many themes and variations found within the remasculation cluster? and why *these* films in particular? The answer is four-fold. First, concentrating on only five films in order to demonstrate and evaluate both the glamorization of neoconservative hypermasculinity and the dramaturgical features of the remasculation diegesis reduces the scope of this project so that its focus can be oriented towards the theorization of remasculation cinema within the socio-cultural and historical circumstances of its genesis and evolution. Second, each of the three chapters in which these films are discussed focuses on a particular aspect of the hypermasculine archetype, one equated with the protagonist's remasculation within the rhetoric of each film, which provides the reader with a variety of case studies whose analysis yields a broader understanding of the assorted themes and variations of the remasculation picture. Third, in order to engage in a sufficiently penetrating analysis, the number of films investigated must be limited in a project of this scope; and although their content does not support a discussion of every possible variation of the remasculation picture,

10

these films do offer a promising start. In his book *Love and Death in the American Novel*, author Leslie Fiedler refers to those books that "pretend to be novels" but are, in fact, "secret scriptures," bestsellers whose popularity is largely unclaimed by their readership but runs rampant nonetheless (46). As the "secret scriptures" of modern Hollywood cinema, the films discussed later in this dissertation are by no means critically acclaimed, with the possible exception of Eastwood's *Unforgiven*. *Law Abiding Citizen, Payback*, *Get Carter*, and *The Company Men* all received critical reviews ranging from relatively poor to mediocre. Despite the fact that the majority of these films were ultimately very profitable, there remains a dearth of academic debate surrounding any of these films. Lastly, these five films were selected for their currency, their well-known casts, and their ease of access.

Chapter Two: Masculinity, Remasculation, and Film Performance

An unassuming man in his forties sits in an upholstered armchair in his living room, his feet up on a coffee table strewn with potato chip bags, banana peels, and empty beer bottles. The man's wife enters the front door of the suburban house and addresses the back of the man's head. "Whose car is that out front?" Carolyn Burnham (Annette Bening) asks with clear irritation. 'Mine,' Lester Burnham (Kevin Spacey) replies with a self-satisfied smirk, "1970 Pontiac Firebird, the car I've always wanted and now I have it. I rule," petulantly justifying the purchase of a car ridiculously incongruent to its forty-two year old driver but one that *New York Times* reviewer Janet Maslin characterized as appropriate for "his new career at a fast food restaurant" (par. 5). Dismissing his insolent reply, Carolyn inquires as to the whereabouts of their teenage daughter, Jane. "Jane not home," Lester responds, channeling Tarzan with a comically deep voice. Somehow buoyed, Lester joins his wife of many years on a nearby sofa and attempts to reclaim a flicker of physical intimacy in their relationship. Perhaps momentarily seduced by the spontaneity of Lester's advance, Carolyn's eyes close and her head drapes over the arm of the couch as her husband begins to softly kiss her neck while serenading her with a pleasant anecdote from their college years. As Carolyn's head rolls to the left, giving Lester access to the right side of her neck, her eyes flutter open and immediately fixate on a bottle of beer that Lester is still unconsciously

clutching in his hand as he props himself up on the sofa. "Lester, you're going to spill beer on the couch," Carolyn says, effectively ruining the moment. In a state of exasperated disbelief, Lester abruptly abandons his advance, stands up and responds, "so what, it's just a couch," pointing out its irrelevance relative to the importance of their reconciliation at a particularly volatile and unstable period in their marriage. "This is just stuff," Lester continues, "and it [has] become more important to you than living. Well honey, that's just nuts."

This scene from director Sam Mendes's *American Beauty* (1999) provides a useful allegory that illustrates the relationship between masculinity and male disempowerment in modern Hollywood cinema. *American Beauty* is concerned not only with defining the male identity or what it means to be a man, but also by extension with what it means to be emasculated at the end of the twentieth century. Routinely humiliated and subjugated by his superior at work, and by both his wife and daughter at home, Lester measures his masculinity in terms of what he feels he has lost as he has gotten older. In the film's opening monologue Lester says, "both my wife and daughter think I am this gigantic loser and they're right, I have lost something. I'm not exactly sure what it is, but I know I didn't always feel this sedated. But you know what? It's never too late to get it back." For Lester, the idea of masculinity refers not to a specific biological characteristic but to a disposition or an identity, something used to assign value or indicate its absence: "Masculinity is something to have

or to lack" (Peberdy 3). Lester begins *American Beauty* as a self-proclaimed 'loser,' an individual undeserving of his family's respect, but his redemption or remasculation is signified by the exercise of masculinity through the authoritative reclamation of power. From blackmailing his corrupt boss and claiming a healthy severance package to exposing his wife's affair and even improving his physical fitness to garner the attentions of a young woman (Mena Suvari), Lester becomes a "man" once again when he "get[s] it back."

The elusive "it" to which Lester refers is a kind of normalized and (in the context of this particular film) idealized masculinity as subtly portrayed through Spacey's hand gestures, facial expressions, and vocal intonations. In this scene depicting a moment of failed intimacy, Spacey reveals the nuanced complexity of masculinity performed onscreen, the effectiveness of which is enhanced by the audience knowing more than Lester about his wife and the extent of her marital infidelities, but not so much as to be sure whether Lester's desire to have sex with her signifies his intent to repair their marriage or to simply re-conquer his sexual partner in some primitive attempt at self-gratification. From Spacey's smug facial expression and his gentle caress of Bening's neck during the moment of seduction to the full-body deflation that follows its obliteration, the oscillation between masculinity found or momentarily recaptured and ultimately defeated emphasizes the notion of masculinity as performance.

14

In Donna Peberdy's *Masculinity and Film Performance*, the author discusses the onscreen presentation of what the she calls "male angst" and understands masculinity to be "an image to be performed or acted out" (4). Peberdy considers a number of instances where the performances of this masculine angst are noticeable, both "discursively and as representations" (4). Further, Peberdy argues, the two should definitely not be confused, since both representation and discourse become amalgamated onscreen in the performance of masculinity as a socio-culturally defined role. As a social role, the image of the modern man is "constructed and maintained by a multitude of media forms that are then taken up in screen enactments" (4). Lester rolls out of an empty bed at the beginning of *American Beauty*, but as the film progresses the narrative begins to focus more on the complex and varied dimensions of his masculine role; he is a husband, a father, a neighbor, an employee, a drug user, and a borderline pedophile. *American Beauty* explores the nature of masculinity as a socially determined function in the context of both the Reagan-era 1980s and the economic instability of the 1990s.

American Beauty's Lester Burnham exemplifies the "modern man in crisis" as the term has been widely used in various academic and popular forums since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Spacey is certainly not alone in his portrayal of this masculinity problem. Actor Michael Douglas plays a similarly impotent, disempowered and unemployed defense worker frustrated

with modern society's flaws while looking to reassert his authority as William

Foster in *Falling Down* (1993), and again as a computer specialist wrongfully

sued for sexual harassment by his boss and ex-lover (Demi Moore) in *Disclosure*

(1994). Often oscillating between crushing moments of emasculation and

triumphant instances of remasculation, films like *American Beauty* underscore

the problem of how to define masculinity at this point in history and why it is

important to recognize masculinity as both a performance and the product of

its intersection with the prevalent socio-cultural discourses affecting men. As

Peberdy argues, "Western mass media, in the form of men's and women's

magazines, newspaper headlines and editorials, novels, self-help books,

advertising campaigns, music, television and film, have collectively formed an

expressive field" (Peberdy 4). Furthermore, it is through this "expressive field"

that the contemporary male's emasculation and corresponding remasculation

have been distributed and subsequently normalized in the context of the

remasculation picture.

This popular conception of a crisis of masculinity is just a description of

any onscreen instance where the *normalized* definition of masculinity (i.e., one

who is heterosexual, white, and likely Christian) is challenged, undermined, or

even simply expressed onscreen. Michael Kimmel endeavors to explore this

crisis by way of historical categorization, defining masculinity as an expression

of either pro-feminism, anti-feminism, or pro-maleness. In addition, Kimmel

16

regards man's transition between these conflicting ideologies as influenced by major shifts in economic and political relations – shifts which precipitated equally significant changes in domestic relations and, by association, relations between the sexes. Kimmel argues that men went through similar periods of crisis during the Restoration in England between 1688 and 1714 and in the United States between 1880 and 1914. These two periods, Kimmel adds, are in effect precursors to the contemporary crisis of masculinity. In her book *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a 'Post Feminist' Age*, Tania Modleski suggests that the notion of the male crisis was formulated and subsequently perpetuated by the persistent reconstitution of this particular theme within the popular narratives of contemporary media. She writes that "while male subjectivity may be 'in crisis,' male power is actually consolidated through cycles of crisis and resolution, whereby men deal with the threat of female power by absorbing, appropriating, or incorporating it" (Modleski 7). Feminist author Abigail Solomon-Godeau reinforces Modleski's primary contention and describes the declining status of the male (and his associated 'crisis') as directly linked to the evolution of modern visual culture; the image of the phallus (while still an obvious signifier of masculinity) is becoming ever less related to the incontrovertible sense of authority and cultural influence.

The anxiety of the "male crisis" serves as the foundation for the remasculation film, whose increasing popularity since the mid-1980s may be the

outcome of intensifying academic debate on the issue. According to Modleski,

Solomon-Godeau, and Susan Faludi, this dialogue culminated at the end of the

1990s. In her aptly titled 1991 text *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*,

Faludi argued that a shift in the way gender relations were considered instigated

an era of widespread resistance to the principles of feminism. Faludi further

suggested that the North American media were responsible for perpetuating

distortive representations of progressive women as figures of oblivious

vulnerability, portraying feminism as an errant ideology responsible for

destabilizing the modern conception of womanhood at the end of the

twentieth century.   Although Faludi acknowledged that this kind of pervasive

and subliminal resistance to the progress of the feminist ideology was by no

means a revolutionary concept, her subsequent text *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the

Modern Man* in 1999 claims the North American masculinity crisis had evolved

since her previous text. The same media which earlier had subverted images of

modern womanhood became fixated on and subsequently inflated the

masculinity crisis, celebrating masculinity defined by a man in complete control

of his environment: "A man is expected to prove himself not by being part of

society but by being untouched by it, soaring above it. He is to travel

unfettered, beyond society's clutches alone – making or breaking whatever or

whoever crosses his path" (Faludi 10). Without a clear standard of

contemporary masculinity, Faludi argues, modern men have begun to identify

with superficial signifiers of a previous and more easily recognizable expression of manhood - from John Wayne's onscreen confidence, swagger, and seeming infallibility to Sylvester Stallone's physical bulk. Faludi contends that the mass media has contributed to a mythologized notion of what it means to be a man at the turn of the twenty-first century and, as a result, has actually exacerbated this masculinity crisis in an attempt to counteract its effects. Yet as Peberdy notes, Faludi's suggestion that modern men have come to define their masculinity in the midst of this crisis through the appropriation of specific signifiers derived from fragments of popular culture circumvents the more interesting question: *why* are modern men latching onto these specific onscreen expressions of masculinity (the John Waynes, the Sylvester Stallones, etc.) to demarcate their manhood?

Peberdy observes that seeking the answer involves redefining the question somewhat. Are all modern men in fact appropriating masculine signifiers from the media (specifically, from the screen) in an effort to define their manhood? The answer, of course, is no. That which is in crisis is not masculinity itself, but the popular conception of a normative and somewhat antiquated form of masculinity. In an era featuring television programs like *Will & Grace* (1998), *Metrosexuality* (1999), *Queer as Folk* (2000), and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003) and films such as *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994), *Too Wong Foo Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar* (1995), and *The*

19

Birdcage (1996), masculinity as a descriptive term has broadened to include men who are not necessarily white, Christian, or heterosexual and who do not reflexively strive to emulate Rambo's hypermasculine onscreen persona. Warren Farrell's text *The Myth of Male Power: Why Men Are the Disposable Sex* posits that the crisis is not only real but indeed almost tangible in the increasingly perfunctory presentation of the wounded male, a cultural signifier theorized at length in Peter Lehman's *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture* (141). Farrell suggests that the recurrence of the wounded male image in contemporary media is an expression or, more precisely, a personification of a non-specific anxiety concerning a burgeoning threat to normative masculinity at the beginning of the twentieth century. Peberdy agrees that normative masculinity is in crisis but goes beyond the assumptions of Farrell, Lehman, and Sally Robinson in her text *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* by suggesting that understanding the masculinity crisis means considering the "instability of the male *image* evident in the overwhelming permeation of a discourse of masculinity crisis during the 1990s and 2000s" (7). This instability reinforces masculinity as a performance and may account for the appearance of the remasculation film as a narrative structure characterized by its unconscious concern with defining a masculine ideal. Since all the theorists cited situate the genesis of the masculinity crisis at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s and also suggest that it is defined by the instability of the normative

masculine ideal, the appearance of the remasculation film at this time is unsurprising given its concern with defining manhood using ornamental signifiers of masculinity obtained from previous images of iconic manliness.

The bulk of the discourse concerning the problem of normative masculinity at the end of the twentieth century seems preoccupied with defining exactly what the crisis is, why it occurred and why it continues to persist. Many texts, such as Faludi's *Stiffed*, actually go so far as to posit a potential resolution to the masculinity crisis. If we are to define the term "masculinity crisis" as a momentary, onscreen expression of male instability, fallibility, vulnerability, or general emasculation, then the remasculation film offers an indulgent and overly-simplistic crisis resolution, one formulaic narrative at a time. Commonly featuring a protagonist who reclaims control of his environment and reasserts his manhood through the appropriation of these ornamental signifiers of masculine authority, remasculation films articulate the disempowerment of the masculinity crisis but then resolve this seemingly unresolvable conflict by embracing an expression of normative masculinity. The repetitive oscillation between crisis and resolution, therefore, makes evident not only the anxiety associated with defining normative manhood in a modern context, but also the relief of embracing an earlier, more familiar, and easily identifiable form of masculinity.

While the rhetoric of the remasculation film is dependent upon the male

lead's convincing presentation of the man in crisis as a recognizable cultural

image, its viability also hinges on the actor's ability to persuasively perform

normative masculinity as an antithetical response or resolution to this initial

image of crisis. The expression of this normalized and idealized form of

onscreen masculinity is of course affected by the talents of the North American

actors who portray these emasculated men, but their off-screen 'performances'

and roles in other films also influence both the way these actors express

masculinity onscreen and the way they are received by the audience. This

project is mainly concerned with the intersection between masculinity and

onscreen performance, and, more specifically, with the relationship between

emasculation, remasculation, and performance. To date there has been little in

the way of published academic work addressing this particular question. James

Naremore's text *Acting in the Cinema* provides a useful engagement with the

concept of performance but does so in reference to specific actors like Lillian

Gish, Charles Chaplin, Marlene Dietrich, Katharine Hepburn, and others. In

fact, there is a wealth of studies concerning the specific performative styles of

certain actors. In Steven Cohan's *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the

Fifties*, Robert Sklar's *City Boys: Cagney, Bogart, Garfield*, and Dennis Bingham's

*Acting Male: Masculinities in the Films of James Stewart, Jack Nicholson, and Clint

Eastwood*, the authors discuss the many parallels that exist between performing

masculinity and celebrity as well as the notion of gender identity as a social

construction that is itself a kind of performance, but only in relation to the case

studies afforded by an examination of specific performance careers.

The term "performance" is difficult to define because its many

demarcations are so varied and contrasting. While the term may simply

describe the actor's behavior onscreen, masculine performance must be

considered as an intersection of the actor's ability, his physical appearance, and

his narrative context. In his text *Film Performance: From Achievement to

Appreciation*, Andrew Klevan regards performance as an "internal element of

style in synthesis with other aspects of film style" (2). Paul McDonald adds

that the value of performance analysis is its disinterest in the performer's

intention: "it does not matter how the details got there, only that they are there

and seem significant" (32). Yet in order for the details of the actor's

performance to become important or meaningful, their exhibition must take

place in front of an audience. Without an audience, the performance holds

little benefit for the performer, since the actions, expressions, and nuances of

the actor's labors remain unacknowledged and invalidated. Peberdy argues that

performance must be considered as an event, one that involves not only an

actor and an audience, but also a time and place, factors that (when considered

in relation to film) affect the audience's engagement and experience with the

events onscreen (Peberdy 20). Additionally, performance must also be

understood as premeditated action that is often rehearsed, choreographed, and then presented for an audience's reception. Yet the fact of the camera apparatus sets film performance apart from live performance. The apparatus captures the choreographed events and renders only certain aspects of the performance (aspects detectable by devices such as sound, color, action, and behavior, any features that register within the apparatus's visual field) into a celluloid or digital medium. In this day and age, presaged by Walter Benjamin as an "age of mechanical reproduction," (550) onscreen performances are preserved and almost infinitely reproducible with an unwavering consistency, facilitating the widespread dissemination of carefully orchestrated portrayals of onscreen masculinity.

As an academic discipline, film performance receives less scholarly attention than it is due, especially considering the significance of its role in the construction of masculinity onscreen. Much of contemporary performance theory is derived from Sociology and Cultural Studies, particularly Erving Goffman's text, *The Presentation of the Self,* in which the author suggests that performance includes any situation involving an individual's sustained presence before a group of onlookers. The study of performance also draws from the field of Linguistics and Ferdinand de Saussure's assertion that language is not simply a medium for information exchange but also a vehicle for performance (obviously a crucial dimension of the *onscreen* presence). Yet in the early 1980s,

a number of feminist scholars (perhaps inadvertently) intensified the discussion of performance and masculinity by concentrating on the concept of gender as a masquerade with regard to representational femininity. Joan Riviere's essay "Womanliness as a Masquerade" and Jacques Lacan's article on "The Meaning of the Phallus," for instance, were starting points for the work of film scholars like Mary Anne Doane, especially on the relationship between the performative masquerade and female spectatorship. In several of Riviere's case studies, the author noted that image of the successful woman overpowering a representation of male power (or the phallus) is an indiscretion often immediately offset by an appropriation of an overly feminine persona so as to moderate her threat to male authority. Doane builds upon this notion by observing that women often wear or "perform" superficial signifiers of femininity as a façade, a front constructed and maintained for the benefit of an audience, an idea with particular resonance in a study of screen performance.

Chris Holmlund extrapolates Lacan, Riviere, and Doane's work in her article, "Masculinity as Multiple Masquerade: the 'Mature' Stallone and the Stallone Clone," arguing that masculinity and femininity are equivalently superficial and performative, especially onscreen, but that the "male masquerade is more intimately tied to power structures than female masquerade is: 'the trappings of authority, hierarchy, order, position make the man'" (Holmlund 213). Judith Kegan Gardiner likewise claims that men are *no less*

gendered than women, [and] masculinity is *no less* a social construction or performative masquerade than is femininity" (Gardiner 61). Although Lacan, Riviere, Doane, Holmund and Laura Mulvey, with her discussion of spectatorship, could collectively offer a strong foundation for a psychoanalytic discussion of the remasculation film and the potential disposition and/or demographic composition of its audience, this project maintains its focus on the performance of masculinity onscreen (with special attention to the oscillation between states of emasculation and remasculation) in a series of films mainly identified and categorized according to narrative similarities.

A movement away from a psychoanalytic discussion of onscreen performance, masculinity, and the remasculation film constitutes a corresponding embrace of performing gender onscreen and involves, in the case of the remasculation film, an examination of normative masculinity and the crisis with which it first became associated during the 1980s. In her discussion of gender and its relationship to performance, queer theorist Judith Butler writes: "if gender is performative, then it follows that the reality of gender is itself produced as an effect of the performance. Although there are norms that govern what will and will not be real, and what will and will not be intelligible, they are called into question and reiterated at the moment in which performativity begins its citational practice. One surely cites norms that already exist, but these norms can be significantly deterritorialized through the

citation… they can also be exposed as non-natural and nonnecessary when they take place in a context and through a form of embodying that defies normative expectation" (218). Butler examines the epistemological and conceptual underpinnings of performance and implicates their role in the creation of both everyday reality and on- or off-screen fiction intended for the entertainment of an audience. Furthermore, she views the gender norm as a concept that is not only actualized by its performance, but also maintained and its validity reinforced by repetition in context. Out of its context, however, this particular conception of gender is labeled as normative in relation to contextual circumstances typically featuring a diverse range of performative gender expressions. Eve Sedgwick similarly theorizes gender and identity within the context of performance as a reaction (in part) to the hegemonic control of gender as a rigidly defined and specifically *binary* concept, but mainly vis-à-vis the imposition of *normative* concepts of masculinity and femininity. Although Butler and Sedgwick both offer useful deconstructions of gender normativity and similarly theorize it as a kind of performance, their concern with this topic remains firmly rooted in queer theory. While this critical perspective is undeniably relevant to a discussion of onscreen masculinity in the remasculation film, my research is primarily concerned with the repetitive reconstitution of heteronormative masculinity within those films belonging to the remasculation group, or "cluster," as will be described imminently.

In order to properly address masculinity *only* as it appears onscreen in the context of the of the remasculation film –accounting for the limited dimensionality of masculinity observed rather than personally engaged - Peberdy aptly invokes Erving Goffman's discussion of the performative "front." Peberdy writes, "The front involves a setting that often must be established before the performance can take place, such as the hospital for a doctor or the school for a teacher" (22). Additionally, the performer is often equipped with a number of denotative signifiers (age, sex, race, size, posture, mannerism, etc.) designed to provoke or at least influence the formulation of certain connotative associations (Barthes 129). In *American Beauty*, we find Lester in the living room of his middle-class home, a fairly bland and non-descript house situated in an anonymous suburban neighborhood. This contextual front not only establishes the mediocrity of Lester's way of life but also implies the undesirability of a normative existence in the American middle class. A middle-aged man, Lester is at home wearing sweatpants and a T-shirt in the middle of the day while playing with a remote-control toy car when his incredulous wife returns home from work. Lester's disposition, manner of dress, and behavior signal his newfound sense of freedom in unemployment, as well as an impractical fixation on reconstituting a more youthful, capable, and empowered version of himself.

Spacey's deliberate swagger and confident expression mark a moment of empowerment as he raises his fist in triumph, boldly owning his decision to trade in the family sedan for a thirty-year-old muscle car. Dismissing his wife's concerns, Lester begins to seduce her on a nearby couch. The visual composition here reflects the authoritative and empowered masculine front with which Lester begins this scene; in this intimate moment, he physically possesses his wife and occupies her personal space, compelling her to assume a position of submission or helplessness on the couch beneath him. Yet the normative power dynamic established in this exchange is quickly inverted when Carolyn undermines Lester's romantic advance by fretting over an impending spill. This encounter is an expression of performed emasculation, one whose effectiveness and clarity rests on the aforementioned fronts: Lester is at home in the middle of the day, but he is at home by choice; Lester recently purchased a car, but it was the car of his adolescent dreams, obtained in bold defiance of his wife's common sense. Before advancing on his wife, Lester has temporarily restored control over his circumstances and this sense of empowerment is reflected in the visual composition of his personal and, to a lesser extent, contextual front. Carolyn's alarm over a potential stain on the family couch immediately deflates Lester's confidence and Spacey *performs* his character's emasculation. Any sense of value Lester may have derived from his recent personal triumphs are promptly offset by Carolyn's concern for the upholstery

29

and her concomitant indifference to her husband's sexual advance. Lester's shoulders slump, his eyelids droop, and he begins to whine about the state of Carolyn's priorities – in effect, retreating back into the sad and ineffectual man once described as having "lost something" in the film's opening monologue.

In this scene, Spacey portrays forms of masculinity that are diametrically opposed to one another; his seamless transition between the two occasions a consideration of normative masculinity and how to define it at the end of the 1990s. Goffman suggests that the social actor has the ability to behave in a manner that either rejects or embraces normativity. In Lester's case, behaviors that generate a positive result for him are typically associated with an assertive, authoritative, uncompromising, and primitive form of masculinity. In an earlier scene, Lester's position at an advertising trade magazine company has been downsized and his self-important, noticeably younger employer succumbs to Lester's cunning as the 'ordinary guy with nothing to lose' brazenly threatens to expose corruption within the company unless he is awarded a generous severance package: "In each case, an outrageously depersonalizing, meaningless, and/or coercive job triggers or merely augments an extreme acting out of individual pathologies related to confusingly repressive demands of masculine performance. Regardless of how crazy, damaging, or counterproductive these forms of 'rebellion' might seem, the discourse in [the] film situates socially obnoxious behavior as a necessary, if not unequivocally

liberatory, strategy by which to confront authority and thereby achieve a measure of self-cognizance and personal renewal" (Arthur 51). Goffman notes that social actors are seldom given an opportunity to alter an established front, but the performer's desire to do just that is akin to a form of rebellion, a conscious resistance to any contextually appropriate behavior. Lester's wife, daughter, neighbor, and employer recognize his behavior as a rejection of all that is deemed appropriate for a man of his age and socio-economic circumstances and therefore implicitly label him as a deviant of sorts.

As a middle-aged married man with modest means, Lester begins the film as the epitome of a common American stereotype, yet his resistance to the limitations associated with this social role defines the remasculation performance. As Lester leaves his employer's office for the last time, nothing about his appearance, posture, mannerisms, or facial expressions reflect the stereotypical image of a man recently displaced from his job. Aside from a box filled with his personal effects, Lester rounds a corner in his office with a look of delight and triumphantly, though covertly, pumps his fist while hissing only the word "yes!" as the film's soundtrack swells momentarily. In an effort to "jettison encrusted social routines," Lester's mediocre façade of suburban compliance is cast aside in favor of a hypermasculine front, one defined by a kind of defiant honesty, uncompromising resolve, and authoritative capability (Arthur 51). Furthermore, just as social actors are limited in their performance

of gender by the restrictive parameters of their assigned fronts, the screen actor is similarly constrained by the expectations of his social role in the context of the film's narrative. In the remasculation film particularly, the actor is burdened with the challenging representational task of oscillating between an obedient, submissive, or complacent form of masculinity (deemed appropriate within the contextual rhetoric of the film's plotline) and a hypermasculine front whose superiority and desirability is often inferred. In addition, the actor must represent this crisis of masculinity, or the persistent onscreen tension between two contrasting expressions of masculinity, using only a limited selection of visual and behavioral tools to secure the credibility of his portrayal within the rhetoric of the film.

The masculine performance results from an intersection between the actor's personal front (facial expression, behavior, mannerisms, etc.), his contextual front (his environment, social circumstances, and geographical location), and the actor's celebrity persona, which (depending on the viewer's familiarity with the performer's previous work) can at least inform one's current perception of and engagement with the actor's onscreen character. Biographer Robin Tamblyn characterizes Spacey's onscreen presence as both versatile and enigmatic, a façade systematically bolstered by a slew of previous roles in which he often portrayed men whose inner turmoil stemmed from a crisis of masculine identity. As Roger 'Verbal' Kint/Keyser Söze in *The Usual*

Suspects (1995), for example, Spacey literally embodies two antithetical men: the disabled, sniveling, and submissive Verbal and a ruthless, authoritative, and uncompromising villain, truly the devil incarnate. Two years later, Spacey took on a similarly enigmatic role as Georgian socialite Jim Williams in the film *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (1997), a man whose veneer of conservative values, impeccable etiquette, and unparalleled sense of taste conflicted with his secret life as a homosexual engaged in a scandalous affair with a much younger man. Having portrayed conflicted men in films released prior to *American Beauty*, Spacey's rendition of Lester Burnham is largely an extension of his earlier character work. Additionally, Tamblyn suggests that Spacey's unwillingness to publicize details about his life off-screen enhances his ability to credibly represent different forms of masculinity *on*screen; the less the audience knows about Spacey's personal life, the easier it is to identify or connect with Spacey's onscreen front as opposed to his celebrity persona, which is itself just another kind of social construction shaped by his representation in the media.

In his book *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, Richard Dyer suggests that a celebrity, or "star," is a socially constructed image assembled from a variety of media ranging from advertising to films. Like the environment in which the performer is featured, the dialogue he is commissioned to deliver, and the wardrobe he is directed to wear, the actor's celebrity persona is but

another of Goffman's fronts, although this façade cannot be concealed, altered, or removed from the onscreen performance. As Dyer suggests, any preconceived notions that the viewer may associate with the actor's celebrity undoubtedly inform his or her engagement with the performer's onscreen character. Furthermore, the extent to which each member of the audience is influenced by his or her knowledge of the actor's media exposure and previous roles in other films is specific to the individual, rendering each viewer's impression of that character completely unique. In the remasculation film, the protagonist's emasculation is often abrupt and unexpected, but the shock of this moment is heightened if an actor whose previous roles and celebrity persona have contributed to the formation of a hypermasculine stereotype performs emasculation onscreen. In her discussion of typecasting, Pamela Wojcik suggests that typecasting is "a sign of an actor's limitation, a concession to commercialism, and the antithesis of art and originality. We also expect actors to stick to type and often reject actors' efforts to play against type" (165). When a remasculation hero performs a moment of emasculation onscreen, the actor must subsequently appropriate a façade of disempowered and fragile masculinity that is not usually affiliated with a potentially ultra-masculine off-screen persona. This incongruity is typically not corrected until the protagonist experiences a moment of redemption, one in which his masculinity is once again realigned with the particular masculine stereotype commonly associated

with the actor *playing* the character. In *The Matter of Images*, Dyer argues that: "Stereotypes are…highly charged with the feelings that are attached to them. They are the fortress of our tradition, and behind its defenses we can continue to feel ourselves safe in the position we occupy" (11). In the rhetoric of the remasculation film, redemption accompanies the restoration of normative masculinity. Notably, this particular expression of onscreen manliness may potentially be used to reinforce the crumbling "fortress" of ultra-conservative values in a modern socio-cultural context.

If performance is the result of an intersection between varying fronts or constructed facades, then masculinity in film is the product of a similar construction consisting of the actor's physical appearance, off-screen persona, and capability as a performer. In the remasculation narrative, the actor's abilities must permit the credible representation of two antithetical expressions of masculinity. Since it is difficult and largely impractical to alter the actor's physical appearance during the moment of emasculation (which is often very abrupt and ephemeral) and essentially impossible to separate the actor from his media representation, the performer *must* alter the parameters of his personal front in a plausible manner so as to effectively showcase this crucial moment of disempowerment. Moreover, in the normative rhetoric of the remasculation film, emasculation is presented as an undesirable, unnatural, and perhaps most importantly, temporary state of being for not only the protagonist, but also the

actor, whose celebrity status typically contrasts the vulnerability of his onscreen front. In short, most onscreen representations of emasculation are linked with a loss of masculine identity. The beginning of *American Beauty* is punctuated by a number of scenes in which the complacent man is subjected to a series of public indignities and personal humiliations, as we witness Lester passing each day without the respect of his family or his employer. His downtrodden character makes consistent reference to a sense of loss that he aims to correct so as to restore a normative conception of order in his life. While moments of onscreen emasculation tend to be steeped in pathos, the character's arrival at the moment of remasculation is conventionally affiliated with the resolution of the narrative's major conflict, which is in turn almost always intertwined with the protagonist's masculine identity crisis. From asserting himself as an authority figure inside his home to blackmailing his employer outside of it, Lester exacts control over all areas of his life and adopts a distinctly hypermasculine persona. In the context of the remasculation film, the protagonist's redemption moment is defined by the appropriation of this hypermasculine façade, which is a constructed front characterized by (among other traits) ultra-conservative values, an uncompromising sense of personal ethics, an authoritative and in some cases misogynistic demeanor, and a composed self-reliance and capability. While there are many American actors who exemplify this kind of onscreen manliness, one of its first and most

enduring presentations was John Wayne in a number of his performances throughout the 1940s and 1950s. While this chapter's concern has been localized to a discussion of masculinity and film performance in regard to the oscillating structure of the remasculation film, the next section will explore and subsequently define hypermasculinity as both a distinctive expression of onscreen masculinity and the structural crux of this particular group of films. Specifically, the following chapter will attempt to explain why Wayne, of all the potential expressions of onscreen manliness in the history of Hollywood, most typifies the hypermasculine archetype that the contemporary remasculation hero strives to emulate in a seemingly inadvertent quest to restore normative values onscreen.

Chapter Three: Susan Jeffords and Beyond: Positioning the

Remasculation Film

In Susan Jeffords' book *The Remasculinization of America*, she argues that

the Vietnam War became a popular subject in Hollywood throughout the

1980s and its recognition signified not only an acknowledgement of the war

and those affected by it but also the "expansion and specification of altered

gender relations in which an apparent liberation of gender roles has given way

to a redefined masculinity that presents itself as separate from and independent

of an opposed feminine" (168). This transition or shift in the way the Vietnam

War affected representations of masculinity was a manifestation of what

Jeffords has described as America's remasculinization. Jeffords implies that

this notion of regenerating or rebuilding masculinity is built upon a

mythologized construction of masculine bonding as an innate connection

between men that remains foreign to the feminine. In Jeffords' theoretical

framework, the masculine is treated as a separate sphere, a realm in which

masculinity is both defined and performed. Further, the onscreen masculine

front appears unified and undifferentiated by class, race, ethnicity, or age in

Jeffords' model. The representation of the Vietnam War in the media during

this period produced what Jeffords refers to as an "arena of masculine self-

sufficiency, but [only] as long as th[e] project was defined solely in terms of the

Vietnam War" (168). In films like *Rambo: First Blood* (1982), the hero's highly

coordinated but rage-driven siege against a small-town police force is justified onscreen by the hero's unappreciated sacrifice in the war. For Jeffords, the white male Vietnam veteran was used as a signifier for the emasculated American man, one who "had been falsely scorned by society and unjustly victimized by his own government. It is this portrayal of veterans' experiences as 'class' victimization that enabled masculinity to place itself in the category of a social group in need of special consideration" (Jeffords, *Remasculinization* 169). This notion aligns with Michael Kimmel, Tania Modleski, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, and Donna Perberdy's varying conceptualizations of the North American masculinity crisis discussed in the preceding chapter.

The kind of masculinity performed in films like *Rambo* exemplified a trend amongst action-drama films of the 1980s in which there existed onscreen an amalgamation of this "separate" masculine world and its antithetically feminized counterpart, a reality normalized within the rhetoric of the film. These films became a vehicle for a new kind of masculinity and seemed addressed "to American society in which, as John Wheeler declared, 'masculinity had gone out of fashion'" (Jeffords, *Remasculinization* 168). Jeffords refers to a number of films in which the emasculated Vietnam veteran is initially depicted within his own marginalized sphere only to then reconcile this realm with normative civilian culture (*The Deer Hunter* [1978], *Missing in Action* [1984], and *Full Metal Jacket*, [1987]). Yet Jeffords situates *Rambo: First Blood,*

Rambo: First Blood Part II (1985), and the ensuing sequels as the springboard for a widespread remasculinization of American culture. She argues that this shift was reinforced by the popularity of figures like Ronald Reagan and Oliver North, men whose political careers were largely defined by their "open disregard for government legislation and legal decisions and [who] favor images of strength and firmness with an independence that smacks of Rambo and confirms their faith in a separate culture based on a mythos of masculinity" (169). The remasculinization of America was further solidified by the subsequent appearance of situational television programs in which the father played the main parental role (*Who's the Boss?* [1984], *My Two Dads* [1987], and *Full House* [1987]). Jeffords' conception of remasculinization, therefore, is defined by the convergence of the "separate" world dominated by the troubled Vietnam veteran embodied by characters like Rambo, and the civilian realm, which Jeffords suggests has become largely dominated by the feminine. More specifically, she posits a shift that occurred "between 1979 to 1987—from an ambivalent gender construction to a reaffirmed and confident masculinity that defines itself in opposition to an enemy feminine" (171). Further, Jeffords quotes the final lines of a marine in *Full Metal Jacket* as he summarizes his experience in Vietnam by saying: "'I'm in a world of shit but I'm alive. And I'm not afraid,'" as if alluding to a form of masculinity that is itself "not afraid" to assert itself after a lengthy period of oppression. While *Rambo: First Blood*

was the beginning point for this masculine regeneration, Jeffords argues that this process concluded with a specific moment in *Full Metal Jacket*.

In this pivotal scene of the movie, the members of a marine platoon in Vietnam stand over a wounded, Vietnamese sniper. They are fixated on the villain's age and sex, as they are surprised to learn that she is a young girl of no more than fifteen. Having single-handedly killed another squad in the hours leading up to her encounter with the character nicknamed Joker and his team, the fallen sniper boldly stares up at the men whose comrades she murdered without prejudice, acting both defiant and indignant: "She sees me," Joker begins, "She recognizes me—I am the one who will end her life." Moments later, the Joker raises his rifle and fires a shot directly at the girl's head. In an instant of brutality, Jeffords notes, masculinity reasserts itself as the dominant gender. Prior to this key moment, the young Asian sniper killed American soldiers indiscriminately from afar, hidden from sight and in a position of immense power. With every kill, she effectively castrated each victim, removing each man's ability to even defend himself. Once the young assassin is finally incapacitated, the remasculinization of the American serviceman is signified with a poignant visual tableau, as the able-bodied men stand above the crippled woman and end her life: "the film shuts down the novel's ambiguity and reinstates a clarified rejection of the feminine and restitution of the masculine" (Jeffords, *Remasculinization* 173). In this moment, the soldiers assert

41

their masculinity, but they do so at the direct expense of the feminine, a gesture that implicates the woman as a figure of masculine oppression or, more appropriately, emasculation.

In *The Remasculinization of America*, Jeffords argues that action films released during the presidency of Ronald Reagan featured the image of the hard-bodied hero, a physical titan introduced in contrast with the soft-bodied heroes of Jimmy Carter's administration. Five years later, Jeffords published a second book called *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*, in which she expands her discussion of remasculinization into the early 1990s. Jeffords notes that during the roughly five-year period between publications, another shift in the representation of onscreen masculinity occurs, one far subtler than the transition she situates at the beginning of the 1980s: "[the] early 1990s saw a reevaluation of that hard body, not for a return to the Carter soft body but for a rearticulation of masculine strength and power through internal, personal, and family oriented values" (Jeffords, *Hard Bodies* 13). Drawing on the work of Lauren Berlant and her discussion of "national fantasy," Jeffords posits a connection between the masculine image of an American president and the rhetoric of what Berlant refers to as "local" culture. While the president represents a nation in its entirety, his presence is articulated within the media in distinctively masculine terms. Therefore, the nation's identity is constructed in relation to the presidential images of masculine power and authority associated

with the State leader. This national fantasy, as described by Berlant, explains

both the nature and dissemination of local culture or, more specifically, how

the media-driven portrayal of Ronald Reagan or George Bush might influence

trends in onscreen manliness.

During the late 1980s, popular culture became the mechanism for not

only defining but also reinforcing the link between the State and its people:

"the reformulation of the relationship between the people and the nation, as

configured in the popular discourses of militarism, patriotism, individualism,

family values, and religious beliefs, was accomplished largely through the

rearticulation of both the individual and the nation in terms of masculine

identities" (Jeffords, *Hard Bodies* 13). Yet in 1989, newly elected Republican

candidate George Bush Sr. began his inaugural address to the nation by

distancing his political agenda from that of his predecessor, whose economic

policy Bush had once famously referred to as "voodoo" economics. In what

seemed like an attempt to establish his own mark on the presidency, Bush's

first two years in office were perceived as a "sort of schizophrenia as Bush tried

to balance his Reagan inheritance with his own interests" (Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*

91). Drawing on Berlant's text once again, Jeffords introduces a number of

films whose subject matter and presentations of masculinity reflect the

fragmented image of an American president trying to define his own leadership

style without rejecting the popular policies of his predecessor. Jeffords even

suggests that the plot of *Twins* (1988) personifies the unique masculinities of both Reagan and Bush in relation to one another.

As the president focused on the preservation of the traditional American family, Reagan's wholesome yet authoritative presence is articulated via Julius's character, the Adonic older brother played by Arnold Schwarzenegger. Vincent, the younger of the twins played by Danny DeVito, is the younger, inferior, and socially deviant brother, and his criminality reflects Bush's confrontational style, his involvement in the Iran-Contra affair, and his role in the Gulf War. Despite the fact that *Twins* was released in 1988 (a full year before Bush even took office), Jeffords implies that Julius and Vincent personified the distinctive masculinities of Reagan and Bush during their respective presidencies. In fact, Jeffords takes an allegorical approach to many films during this period (*Rain Man* [1988], *Parenthood* [1989], and *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* [1990]) and posits similar links between what she calls "dual or ambivalent masculinities," and the antithetical images of presidential masculinity during this period of transitioning leadership (Jeffords, *Hard Bodies* 95). Implicitly, Jeffords is invoking Kracauer's thoughts on the relationship between the films of a nation and the nation itself. In *From Caligari to Hitler*, Kracauer suggests that popular films generally reflect the nuances of the socio-historical circumstances of production and therefore satisfy "existing mass desires" as a consequence (5). Jeffords' choice of the term remasculinization is

therefore slightly misleading insofar as her use of this word implies a nonspecific *rearticulation* of masculinity rather than the onscreen rejuvenation, reconstruction, or reclamation of a forgotten or discarded manliness. In her extensive discussion of the 1980s, for example, Jeffords argues that the appearance of the hard-bodied hero is a rearticulation of onscreen masculinity that stands in direct opposition to the "soft" masculinity of the 1970s, when James Carter was in office. Jeffords extends her argument into the early part of the 1990s with her suggestion that the leading men of this decade feature a complex mixture of hard-bodied hypermasculinity and the kind of dedication to the family commonly associated with the softer man. Regardless, Jeffords' use of the word remasculinization does not refer to the reclamation of onscreen manhood but rather to the periodic redefinition of masculinity in Hollywood.

While Jeffords posits a cyclical rearticulation of masculinity as a function of Berlant's conception of national fantasy and its effect on local culture, it is the aim of this project to consider this idea in conjunction with Kimmel, Modleski, Solomon-Godeau, and Peberdy's thoughts on the crisis of masculinity discussed at length in the previous chapter. Jeffords identifies transitions in onscreen masculinity as recurring trends that change approximately every ten years depending on who is president of the United States and for how long. Yet the chronology of her model concluded in 1994,

just as the discourse of an evolving crisis of American masculinity was beginning to take shape; at the center of this crisis was "the instability of the male image" at the end of the twentieth century. This project argues that this period of "instability" contributed to or influenced the fragmentation of screen masculinity, or what Jeffords might have described as the simultaneous appearance of divergent and, in some cases, conflicting "rearticulations" of masculinity onscreen. While Ronald Reagan's distinctive masculine persona influenced the appearance of the hard-bodied hero in the 1980s, the 1990s were characterized by this masculinity crisis, and Hollywood began to produce a number of films that featured leading men performing masculinities mostly usefully described as anti-normative.

In the mid 1990s, films like *The Crying Game* (1992), *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994), *Too Wong Foo Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar* (1995), and *The Birdcage* (1996) marked the arrival of marginal masculinities that did not necessarily signify a blanket crisis of masculinity, but simply a crisis of hetero*normative* masculinity.[1] While Dustin Hoffman's performance in *Tootsie* (1982) could be considered a precursor to what gender theorist Judith Kegan Gardiner calls "alternative" masculinities, his role in that film demanded the appropriation of a feminine façade but only temporarily

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[1] For more on heteronormativity, see Warner.

and, perhaps most importantly, only out of necessity (146). Gardiner's

"alternative" masculinity is a blanket term referring to those presentations of

screen masculinity that manifest as "deviant" or counter-hegemonic, which

signifies the performance of virtually any male actor whose character is not

defined by the principles of heteronormativity.[2] As a difficult actor desperate

for a part on a popular soap opera, Michael Dorsey (Hoffman) becomes

Dorothy Michaels simply because the role demands it but not because he

enjoys wearing women's clothing. Although Dorsey is not a homosexual, an

enthusiasm for cross-dressing would likely have resituated Hoffman's

performance as an alternative or anti-normative expression of masculinity. Yet

because Dorsey's disguise was a "necessary evil" crucial to the satisfaction of a

self-serving agenda, Hoffman's performance remains comfortably within the

parameters of heteronormative, though "soft," masculinity. Despite evidence

of the proliferation of anti-normative masculinity within these selected

examples from the early 1990s, *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993) was released during the

same period and also presented a male lead assuming femininity but remaining

a heteronormative male. Like Hoffman in *Tootsie*, Robin Williams's character

resorts to cross-dressing out of a desperate desire to spend time with his

children and estranged wife, a goal that can be achieved only by masquerading

as an elderly, female housekeeper. If the 1990s were characterized by a

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[2] For a related discussion of compulsory heterosexuality, see Rich.

masculinity crisis as Peberdy and Kimmel suggest, then the instability of the heteronormative image of the onscreen male is reflected in the many divergent rearticulations of masculinity. From Nathan Lane's portrayal of a flamboyantly homosexual cabaret singer in *The Birdcage* to Robin Williams' rendition of a mature Englishwoman in *Mrs. Doubtfire*, the 1990s featured numerous rearticulations of screen masculinity ranging from heteronormative to marginal.

In her chapter "The Might of the Metrosexual: How a Mere Marketing Tool Challenges Hegemonic Masculinity," Margaret Ervin discusses the appearance of a slightly different articulation of screen masculinity that also manifested in the 1990s: "The term *metrosexual* denotes a straight man with some stereotypically feminine traits, such as taste in grooming and culture. Though the term was first used with intended irony in the 1990s, it subsequently was taken up quite seriously in the popular press, both by those sympathetic to the concept and by those who saw metrosexuality as a threat to the natural order" (58). Those who Ervin describes as "sympathetic" believed that onscreen expressions of metrosexuality would constitute the future of masculinity and signaled an inevitable amalgamation of conventionally straight and gay masculinities. Yet those who felt that metrosexuality posed a threat interpreted the arrival of metrosexuality as a precursor to the destruction of heteronormative ultra-masculinity. Ervin suggests that out of the chaos of the masculinity crisis of the 1990s, an opportunity for exploitation materialized.

Within a cultural atmosphere defined by the diversification of masculine images, the growing interest in the homosexual leading man supported the presentation of this metrosexual amalgam: an expression of masculinity defined by an attraction to the varying facets of consumer culture, ties to the urban, a "heightened aesthetic sense," and an unapologetic engagement with his femininity—all without the stereotypical presumption of homosexuality (Flocker iii). While it was true that the appearance of the metrosexual figure initially claimed a significant cultural following, Ervin makes the point that the idea of a manhood that unifies the stereotypical features of heteronormative and gay masculinity threatened the hegemonic stability of the hypermasculine figure. As a consequence, Ervin notes, the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s marked the commencement of an "anti-metrosexual" movement, which gestured nostalgically to a mythologized past when "men were men" (62). In particular, Ervin refers to a Dodge truck commercial that featured a gruff voice-over that implied women's preference for regular men who buy trucks, as opposed to those "fashion-conscious metrosexual guys" (62). Without being overtly anti-homosexual or anti-metrosexual, media texts that feature this evident glorification of the hypermasculine archetype of yesteryear complemented the appearance of the remasculation film, which was in many ways designed to reestablish the desirability of a heteronormative masculine standard.

In *Performance Anxieties: Re-Producing Masculinity*, author David Buchbinder suggests that anti-gay or anti-metrosexual images or signifiers that manifest in popular culture are often disguised glorifications of a normalized masculine image. In fact, heteronormativity is routinely reinforced by an implicit stigmatization of the other. According to the marketing team at Dodge Vehicles in 1997, for instance, *real* men drive Dodge trucks, as opposed to those metrosexual men whose stereotypically varied interests allegedly render their expression of masculinity *in*authentic and therefore less desirable by comparison.

The rise of metrosexuality in the 1990s marked a historical shift in the codification of the male body. In *Performing American Masculinities: The 21ˢᵗ-Century Man in Popular Culture*, sociologist Margaret Ervin theorizes that the appearance of the metrosexual in the 1990s was an indication of the mounting cultural pressure on men to look youthful and physically fit in order to remain employed in the modern workforce: "metrosexuality is thus a bellwether for the changing socioeconomic position of traditionally privileged, straight, white men" (59). Amongst the many "rearticulations" of masculinity that appeared in the 1990s, the arrival of the metrosexual threatened the once indestructible image of the heteronormative man and precipitated a knee-jerk response in the form of what author Brenda Longfellow refers to as "hyperbolic masculinity." In her study of a film called *Project Grizzly* (1996), Longfellow theorizes the

masculinity of the main character, a biologist with an almost obsessive desire to reenact a close encounter with a grizzly bear: "to that end he designs a series of high-tech suits variously named Ursus Mark I, II, III, constructed out of titanium, chain mail, and Japanese rubber that he tests in all manner of ways, including throwing himself off the Niagara Escarpment, stepping in front of an 18-ton truck going 50 kilometres an hour, and being rammed with a 300-pound log" (198). In this film, the protagonist exhibits a hypermasculine persona that has been caricaturized to the point of absurdity. Although aggression and overemphasized physicality are both common hypermasculine attributes, the main character's desire to engage a grizzly bear in a physical confrontation (not to mention the risks associated with testing his equipment), constitutes an expression of hyperbolic masculinity, or hypermasculinity sensationalized. The appearance of metrosexual and homosexual men onscreen destabilized the image of the heteronormative male and subsequently facilitated the production of a number of films whose diegesis was designed to not only reintroduce the hypermasculine archetype to American audiences but also to reaffirm the normativity of this familiar onscreen image.

This pattern of rearticulation continued to diversify into the 2000s, offering the Hollywood audience a range of masculinities that exist together on a spectrum. While the transgendered man, for instance, was a popular trend in films in the early-to-mid 1990s, this archetype was followed by the resurgence

51

of the hypermasculine man, one whose aforementioned characteristics have

been theorized relative to Wayne's distinctive onscreen presence. While earlier

examples do exist almost in isolation (*Unforgiven* [1992]), the remasculated,

hypermasculine figure accompanies the rise of what will be described as a

"cluster" of remasculation films in the following chapter. From Mel Gibson in

Payback (1999), to Sylvester Stallone in *Get Carter* (2000), the late 1990s marked

the genesis for the remasculation film and a definitive validation of a particular

form of white, Christian, heterosexual, hard-bodied yet emotionally-invested

masculinity. Amidst a series of films featuring metrosexual or gay men, the

remasculation film reasserted a familiar form of masculinity commonly paired

with iconic images of American cinematic history. In an era defined by a crisis

of masculinity, the remasculation film featured a predictable narrative formula

in which the leading man's triumph accompanied a masculine transformation

of sorts, whereby his remasculation or redemption was a rejection or

transcendence of whatever alternative masculine façade defined him at the

beginning of the film. This rejection of the alternative masculinity is a common

feature of the remasculation picture and could implicate this group of films as

implicitly anti-marginal. In fact, *any* form of masculinity other than the

heteronormative is typically devalued or undermined in the rhetoric of the

remasculation film, which suggests that the remasculation film not only

reaffirms the value of the hypermasculine but also reinforces its hegemonic

dominance relative to alternative masculinities.

Presidential Masculinity and the Remasculated Hero

In *Hard Bodies*, Jeffords provides a series of case studies that collectively

illustrate Kracauer's argument concerning the link between presidential

masculinity and its indirect and augmented manifestations onscreen. With the

exception of *Unforgiven*, which was released during George H. W. Bush's

presidency, three of the remasculation films discussed in this project coincide

with William J. Clinton's tenure as the American leader (*American Beauty*,

Payback, *Get Carter*), while the remaining two films were scripted and filmed

during the younger George W. Bush's presidency (*Law Abiding Citizen* and *The

Company Men*), though *The Company Men* was actually released to theatres in

2010. While the foundation of Jeffords' argument is built upon the intersection

between presidential masculinity, national fantasy, and local culture, the

discussion of American presidents in this project is intended to extend Jeffords'

approach to the remasculation film (insofar as the remasculation film is home

to another of her "rearticulations" of screen masculinity), and to illustrate the

influence of this discourse of masculinity crisis on the construction of the

hypermasculine and remasculated hero theorized in the previous chapter.

From 1993 to 2001, Clinton's two terms as president of the United

States were characterized by "more peace and economic well being than at any

time in [the nation's] history. [Clinton] was the first Democratic president since

Franklin D. Roosevelt to win a second term. He could point to the lowest

unemployment rate in modern times, the lowest inflation in 30 years, the

highest home ownership in the country's history, dropping crime rates in many

places, and reduced welfare rolls" ("William J. Clinton"). Despite this

ostensibly nonpartisan yet resounding endorsement of Clinton's abilities as a

leader, this period of relative stability after the Gulf War seemed to highlight

the variability and oscillating fluidity of the masculine image, as American

audiences at the end of the twentieth century were saturated with varying

"rearticulations" of masculinity ranging from drag queens to hypermasculine

henchmen.

In *Iron John: A Book About Men*, poet and critic Robert Bly discusses an

oscillation between what he calls simply "strong" and "weak" masculinity in

popular culture at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the

twenty-first: "We are living at an important and fruitful moment now, for it is

clear to men that the images of adult manhood given by the popular culture are

worn out; a man can no longer depend on them" (Preface, ix). In his chapter

"Bill Clinton and the Crisis of Masculinity," Brenton Malin suggests that the

former president unwittingly became a cultural signifier for this masculinity

crisis during a televised address in which he apologized for his inappropriate relationship with Monica Lewinsky, a twenty-two-year-old White House intern. Appearing both distraught and sincere, Clinton epitomized the conflicted man, torn between an immense duty to his constituency and the allure of an illicit sexual conquest. Clinton's inner turmoil reflected the many rearticulations of onscreen masculinity throughout the mid-to-late 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s:

> His self-proclaimed "broken spirit" and "still strong heart" served as a testament to the conflicted ideas and identities that had followed Clinton throughout his presidency. Broken yet strong, sensitive but tough, Clinton was the model of a conflicted masculinity characteristic of the 1990s. Sensitive to our pain, but tough on crime; wealthy graduate of Yale, but down-home Arkansas boy; Clinton's persona remained a bundle of conflicts that variously embraced and overturned different stereotypes of American masculinity. Clinton's masculinity was thoroughly conflicted—embracing a kind of new, sensitive, nontraditional masculinity at the same time that it sought to demonstrate a powerful, thoroughly established sense of 'real American manhood,' the sort conventionally depicted in advertisements for pickup trucks by Ford, Dodge, and Chevy (Malin 7).

While gender theorists like Kimmel, Modleski, Solomon-Godeau, and Perberdy have made significant contributions to this discourse of masculinity crisis (discussed at length in the previous chapter), Malin's discussion of Clinton and his effect on images of manhood in popular culture effectively destigmatizes this notion of "crisis" and reveals how its arrival "might challenge traditional masculine values and open up discussions of alternative views of masculinity" (9). Just as Jeffords suggests that Reagan's aggressive foreign policy and his gregarious and occasionally theatrical persona was reflected in a number of action films featuring a hard-bodied hero, Clinton's conflicted masculinity likely influenced numerous and varied rearticulations of onscreen manhood, some of which have been touched upon in the preceding sections.

Clinton's tumultuous, dichotomous, and some say duplicitous masculinity only added to the discourse of crisis during the 1990s, but the 2000s welcomed a new president and a new model of American machismo. Just eight months after his inauguration, President George W. Bush was forced to contend with arguably the most catastrophic act of terrorism committed on American soil in the nation's history. On September 11, 2001, the World Trade Center and the Pentagon both suffered catastrophic attacks at the hands of Al-Qaeda fanatics piloting commercial airplanes populated with American civilians. Between those killed in the wreckage of either the World Trade Center or the Pentagon and those who perished on one of the three planes that

crashed, nearly three thousand Americans lost their lives that day. While President Bush originally took office with a specific agenda, many of his plans were disrupted by a national demand for retribution. From reforming the American military to giving the Department of Homeland security more power, Bush's presidency was defined by the fulfillment of a publically ordained quest to capture Osama bin Laden, the founder of Al-Qaeda, and bring him to justice. In *Masculinities*, R.W. Connell suggests that Clinton's administration marked a "softening of hegemonic masculinity," a lengthy, gradual, in some ways degenerative process that subsequently set the stage for a rejuvenation of the "harder masculinities" epitomized by Bush's hypermasculine (though sometimes impulsive and misguided), presidential style. Clinton presided over an extensive period of successful diplomacy and renewed peace, but the attacks of September 11 left the nation feeling what Connell characterizes as vulnerable and violated: "George W. Bush's willingness to buck the United Nations and the rest of the world in pursuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq seems to make him a strong example of [the hypermasculine] vision of manhood. Like Tony Soprano and Vic Mackey, George W. Bush seems a unilateralist who flaunts his own toughness at every opportunity" (186). While Clinton's legacy was defined by an extended period of national tranquility punctuated by the incident with Ms. Lewinksy, Malin suggests that the nation's scarred ego and shaken sense of

security demanded that the newly appointed President Bush quickly evolve into a man of action after the events of September 11.

Although Clinton's uncertain and conflicted identity complemented the discourse of masculinity crisis during his time in office, one cannot reasonably attribute the proliferation of this topic in academia to a single, unique presidential persona, yet this is precisely the approach that Jeffords takes to her examination of numerous films throughout the 1980s *with respect to* the image of Ronald Reagan. Despite this weakness, there is no doubt that Jeffords' approach to the topic of remasculinization sheds some light on Clinton's direct influence on the notion of "crisis" in the 1990s and its indirect effect on the appearance of the remasculation film. Clinton's era was characterized by a plethora of burgeoning screen masculinities and (perhaps most distinctively) the rise of alternative conceptions of manhood. In *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance*, sociologist Kai Erikson describes the concept of social deviance as a cultural designation that is an essential part of community definition. According to Erikson, a community is only meaningful if its members have the ability to distinguish themselves from those individuals classified as marginal or members of a disenfranchised "other." Further, those who are ostracized for exhibiting aberrant behavior reinforce the desirability the norm. The popular conception of normalcy, therefore, is shaped by the other and vice versa. In the "community" of divergent masculinities

characteristic of the 1990s, the heteronormative, pro-hegemonic hypermasculine archetype still existed but was akin to a single familiar voice among many newer and diverse voices, each with a different pitch and distinctive timbre.

Throughout the 1990s, the diegesis of the remasculation film served as a vehicle for the affirmation of the hypermasculine archetype. With a telltale narrative structure (to be fully explored later in this project), the remasculation picture's quest or major conflict is routinely coupled with the leading man's sense of masculine identity, and the plot's resolution is typically accompanied by the character's remasculation or his appropriation of a hypermasculine front. While the diversification of screen masculinities in the 1990s provoked a reaffirmation of heteronormative masculinity within the rhetoric of remasculation film, the 2000s were characterized by a hypermasculine president challenged by the pervasive threat of terrorist action. With an assortment of hypermasculine traits of his own, Bush's aggressive and (some critics say) impulsive response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 contributed to the proliferation of hypermasculine culture. Just as Jeffords suggests that Reagan's rebellious and confrontational masculinity was reflected in the appearance of the hard-bodied hero in the 1980s, Clinton's conflicted persona complemented the discourse of masculinity crisis in the 1990s, during which time socio-cultural circumstances were conducive to the rearticulation of many

different forms of onscreen manliness. Amongst these many "rearticulations" of screen masculinity was the hypermasculine male, an idealized personification of manhood characterized by heteronormative, ultra-conservative, and family-oriented values. Further, the diegesis of the remasculation film is designed to reaffirm normative masculinity through a glorification of the hypermasculine, since the remasculation hero's triumph often accompanies a moment of transformation in which the character's alternative masculinity is replaced with a hypermasculine façade.

Chapter Four: Defining Hypo and Hypermasculinity

As John Wayne limps across the deck of an aircraft carrier in John Ford's *The Wings of Eagles* (1957), his steps are small and awkward, and he appears to be in horrific pain. In a naval uniform as crumpled as its wearer seems, the former pilot leans on two canes as he shuffles toward

John Wayne as Frank 'Spig' Wead in *The Wings of Eagles* (John Ford, MGM, 1957). Digital frame enlargement.

a small metal chair attached to a zip-line that will transport him to an awaiting destroyer keeping pace. With fixed elbows and lifeless legs, Frank "Spig" Wead makes his way to the chair as two rows of naval officers stand at attention, paying tribute to this hero as he leaves his post for the last time. After extending two forlorn looks to the surrounding onlookers, Wead surrenders himself to the crewmen manning the chair, who take his canes, lower him into the chair, and force a lifejacket over his head in a manner evoking a mother handling her toddler. Like a helpless child, Wead is transported over a violent ocean to the destroyer below as the officers watching from all over the ship look on somberly, full of respect and admiration for a noble solider who sacrificed for his country.

Fast-forward thirty-two years. In a scene whose visual composition is similar to Wead's departure from the flight deck in *Eagles*, Tom Cruise plays Vietnam veteran Ron Kovic shortly after he returns from the war in Oliver Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989). Paralyzed from the waist down, Kovic is also fitted with two canes, and he struggles to walk in front of an audience in the rehabilitation wing of a Veteran's Hospital. His elbows fixed and his legs stiff, lifeless, and bound by heavy braces, Kovic is sweating from the forehead as his eyes search wildly for the approval of the onlookers that surround him. Yet a series of hesitant smiles from Kovic's audience suggest that the wounded soldier is dragging his legs in a vain attempt to convince others of his ability to walk, as if he might be able to convince himself of the same falsity.

Unlike Frank Wead, Cruise's character is not wearing a uniform. He is struggling across the filthy floor of a Veteran's Hospital rather than over the flight deck of an aircraft carrier. While their basic elements are similar, the differences between these two scenes help reveal how onscreen masculinity has changed in Hollywood during the past fifty years. Wayne and Cruise portray wounded soldiers after different wars, yet Wead's disability is a heroic expression of his patriotism and sacrifice while Kovic's injury sets the tone for a life defined by pathos. The films offer characters in comparable circumstances, but Wead's onlookers stand at attention and offer him a stern but respectful gaze while saluting his departure, whereas Kovic evokes only a

tepid response from his audience. While it is important to acknowledge

historical differences—the men are wounded under dissimilar circumstances,

and the socio-historical circumstances of the late-1950s, post World War II era

would have been different from those of the post-Vietnam era of the late

1980s—these two scenes point to a fundamental depletion of normative

onscreen masculinity in Hollywood film that occurs in the post 1950s era.

An Overview

This chapter is concerned with defining hypermasculinity and

conceptualizing the antithetical notion that will later be referred to as

hypomasculinity. To illustrate both the meaning and importance of these two

key terms, it will be useful to discuss their onscreen portrayal in two films

featuring parallel scenes, such as those featured in *Eagles* and *Born*. An

examination of two scenes that are somewhat narratively and visually analogous

serves to isolate the key differences between these two opposing expressions of

screen masculinity. Further, this chapter argues that Wayne's particular

manifestation of onscreen manliness constitutes the ideal exemplification of the

hypermasculine archetype, established in conjunction with other actors whose

popularity coincided with Wayne's: "Significantly enough, top male stars like

Bogart, Cooper… and Wayne had hit their forties [in the postwar era] as well,

but their careers still were going strong and would continue to flourish" (Schatz

363). If with such performers as Victor Mature, Charlton Heston, Humphrey Bogart, Kirk Douglas, Burt Lancaster, Rory Calhoun, and others, Hollywood audiences of the 1950s were continuously exposed to the specific form of hypermasculinity with which this project is concerned, it is most usefully epitomized by Wayne's performances as Frank "Spig" Wead in *The Wings of Eagles*, or as Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers* (1956), and, to a lesser extent, Sheriff John T. Chance in *Rio Bravo* (1959), or Captain Rockwell Torrey in *In Harm's Way* (1965). While other actors exhibited what Goffman would call the hypermasculine front during Wayne's era, his onscreen persona as exhibited in these roles typifies the hypermasculine facade precisely.   In light of the frequency with which Wayne's onscreen image is referred to as a touchstone for the iconically ultra-masculine in contemporary media and film, Wayne is the obvious choice for the kind of examination that this project aims to undertake; in order to understand hypermasculinity, we must examine its most iconic and enduring portrayal in a few key performances. Similarly, a discussion of Tom Cruise's role in *Born* yields a similar opportunity to explore the hypomasculine man "in crisis" as a more typical manifestation of screen masculinity at the end of the twentieth century.

In the remasculation film, the protagonist experiences a metamorphosis in which one form of masculinity is replaced with another. Typically, the hero experiences a moment of emasculation that may have occurred either within

the narrative or prior to its commencement, and this experience precipitates the character's appropriation of a hypomasculine front. In the rhetoric of these films, the hypomasculine façade is often associated with the undesirable and the pathetic, and it is subsequently supplanted with an antithetically hypermasculine front as a direct result of the main character's remasculation. Further, this moment of remasculation is often linked with the resolution of the film's major narrative conflict and, by association, the hero's masculinity crisis. It is the aim of the following sections to define both hyper and hypomasculinity through the use of example and then to construct a terminological foundation for a discussion of the remasculation film later in this project. Further, this chapter explores some of Wayne's and Cruise's onscreen roles but only insofar as a discussion of their distinctive screen personas will elucidate the characteristics of the hyper and hypomasculine front, respectively.

Hypermasculinity

In his book *From Caligari to Hitler*, Siegfried Kracauer suggests that trends in film are typically representative of the general mindset of a nation at a given point in history. More specifically, he claims that "the films of a nation reflect its mentality in a more direct way than any other artistic media for two reasons: First, films are never the product of an individual…. Second, films address

themselves, and appeal, to the anonymous multitude. Popular films—or, to be more precise, popular screen motifs—can therefore be supposed to satisfy existing mass desires…. To be sure, American audiences receive what Hollywood wants them to want; but in the long run public desires determine the nature of Hollywood films" (5). If the motion picture reflects our understanding of reality, then our understanding of masculinity is also informed by its representation in film. Yet what is meant by the term "masculinity" as it is used it here? In the context of this project, masculinity refers to representations of the male gender onscreen through the conventional depiction of certain characteristics: confidence, assertiveness, ingenuity, dominance, efficacy, and self-sacrifice in conjunction with physical strength, sexual potency, and virility. While the previous chapters explored masculinity as a social front that is performed by an actor, this section aims to build on that foundation by defining hypermasculinity as a form of onscreen manliness whose normativity is glamourized within the rhetoric of the remasculation film. In addition, the realization of the protagonist's quest, his redemption, and his triumph are commonly synonymous with the character's appropriation of a hypermasculine front.

John Wayne as the Hypermasculine Archetype

Hypermasculinity can be thought of as a magnification,

sensationalization, or intensification of masculine conventions. "The star

image of John Wayne… represented the epitome of the American masculinity

during the 1950s" (Benshoff & Griffin 254). Wayne's onscreen

hypermasculinity can be idealized within a particular socio-political context, one

that acutely reflects the redomestication and repositioning of gender identities[3]

in American society after the resolution of World War II. In his book *Masculine*

Interests: Homoerotics in Hollywood Films, Robert Lang argues that Wayne's

distinctive and ultra-masculine onscreen façade during the 1940s and 1950s was

more than simply the trademark of a popular actor but was actually an iconic

representation of "the days when men 'believed in' the image of themselves as

'men,' and when a man could direct what he believed (or at least what other

men believed) was an innate, 'natural' masculinity" (146). Further, according to

Lang the death of this kind of masculinity occurred during the 1960s: "That

paradoxical image of an authentically inhabited, traditional, 'rugged'

masculinity… is pretty much bankrupt by 1969" (146). Since the height of

Wayne's popularity in the 1940s and 1950s, Hollywood audiences have

witnessed a change in onscreen masculinity, a gradual and transformative

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[3] For contextual information on transitioning gender roles during and following the war, see
Goldstein.

erosion of a normative (and what has become an anachronistic) hypermasculinity.

The Role of Celebrity in the Construction of the Hypermasculine Archetype

Like the leading men discussed later in this project, Wayne's screen masculinity during the height of his popularity in the 1940s and 1950s was a product of the many hypermasculine roles he had already portrayed as well as the audience's impression of or engagement with his offscreen representation in the media. In his chapter entitled "The Mass Media Star," Emmanuel Levy writes: "In the last decade of his life, Wayne was much more than a movie star, he was a folk hero. What contributed to his already immense popularity was his transformation into cultural icon, using various mass media to disseminate his image" (238). Barry King suggests that prior to the dissolution of the studio system, celebrity performers were actually fixed images that prevailed over their characters, but after the fall of the studio system a male character was described as an amalgamation of the actor's star persona and the fictional character he or she portrayed, an effect that aided in the construction of the actor's celebrity persona and the onscreen character simultaneously. In his discussion of Wayne's onscreen presence, Russell Meeuf writes:

> Wayne's large yet graceful body with its unique swagger—think of
>
> Wayne effortlessly parting the herd of cattle in *Red River* (Howard

68

Hawks, 1948)… or Wayne prowling the dusty streets in *Rio Bravo*

(Howard Hawks, 1959) expresses the key elements of his masculinity—

his tenacity, his strength, his narrow moral code. Thus the discourses

surrounding Wayne in the fifties obsess over his massive frame and fluid

movement, indicating the importance of Wayne's body to his stardom in

contrast to other white, male stars of the period like Cary Grant or

Jimmy Stewart. (92)

However, unlike Grant or Stewart, Wayne remains a hypermasculine iconoclast,

an unshakable standard of classic or authentic masculinity. While there are

innumerable film and television references to Stewart's bumbling awkwardness

or Grant's charm and physical beauty, Wayne's status as a figure of pure

machismo endures long after his death in 1979.

Hypermasculinity in *The Searchers*

Wayne's onscreen masculinity during the height of his career in the

1940s and 1950s was a distinctive permutation of his celebrity persona, as

discussed above, as well as the agrarian roles in which he was typically cast. In

The Searchers, Wayne plays Edwards, who returns to his family as a retired

Confederate soldier. Shortly afterward, he is lured away from the ranch by a

group of Comanche Indians who proceed to murder his brother, his brother's

wife, and their son, and then abduct his two nieces, Debbie and Lucy.

Returning to find the ranch engulfed in flames, Ethan vows to track down the Comanches responsible and to rescue his nieces. In this film, Ford exposes ideological tensions in an ongoing struggle between what Gaylyn Studlar refers to as "forgiving femininity and vengeful masculinity" (Studlar 172). Edwards' resistance to the comforts of domesticity and his unwillingness to articulate his romantic feelings for Martha Edwards (his brother's wife) demonstrate a conservative masculinity and an idealistic sense of morality for which Wayne the actor became known as his career progressed. Wayne's agrarian masculinity was typified in this role because he clearly exhibited a connection to the land: his home was a cattle ranch isolated within the American frontier and he appeared to be more at home in saddle on the open range than he did under a familiar roof surrounded by family.

In *The Searchers,* Wayne embodies the American myth of a rural pioneer who is completely independent and uncorrupted by the indulgences of modern urban living. Ethan is a fierce soldier in peacetime, either unwilling to start a family or incapable of the kind of intimacy that a family would demand. He is out of place, clumsy, and awkward as he lurches around the breakfast table among his brother's family and wife, with whom he is clearly enamored. Within such a domestic environment, he seems out of his element but still moves purposefully, as if anxious to engage the exterior landscape where he is more active and capable than anyone in either environment. Further, Edward's

presence seems transient until the attack on his brother's home and the kidnapping of his niece, which possibly implicates his discomfort with the inherent normalcy of the domestic. During the late 1940s and throughout the 50s, Wayne's masculinity was characterized by his competence in the wilderness in contrast to his relative ineptness within the domestic space, and this attribute has become a distinctive feature of the hypermasculine archetype in modern Hollywood film. As the persistent tracker in *The Searchers*, Wayne portrays a man who can conquer all but an unrequited love for his brother's wife and a seething hatred for Comanche Indians, while Frank 'Spig' Wead's love for the Navy in *Eagles* similarly supersedes the needs of his family.   Although Wayne's agrarian masculinity was cultivated during his portrayal of various archetypes from the conventional western, his competency outdoors and corresponding aversion to domesticity permeated many of his later characters in films that were not archetypes of the western such as *Jet Pilot* (1957), *The Longest Day* (1962), and *In Harm's Way*.

<center>Wayne in *The Wings of Eagles*</center>

The critical reception of *The Wings of Eagles* in 1957 was largely positive. One reviewer from the *New York Times* said: "John [Ford] is paying affectionate tribute to two of his dearest friends in his new film, *The Wings of Eagles*, which came to the Music Hall yesterday. One is the United States Navy, the other is

the late Comdr. Frank (Spig) Wead, Navy flier and Hollywood scriptwriter who

teamed with Mr. Ford on a couple of films. Like many affectionate tributes,

this one comes more from the heart than from the head—or, at least, from that

cerebral area where great motion pictures are conceived" (Crowther par. 2).

Further, Meeuf argues that Wayne's portrayal of the Navy flier bolstered

patriotism while reinforcing the capability of America's military forces for an

audience already convinced of their prowess and efficiency. Wead's dedication

to both his country and the Navy left him wounded, unfit for active duty, *but*

with his masculinity intact. Wayne's performance in *The Wings of Eagles* epitomized

onscreen hypermasculinity in the 1950s, which was a specific kind of

masculinity that has since undergone a transformative erosion consisting of a

loss of specifically heteronormative and hypermasculine manliness among

Hollywood's leading men and the corresponding appearance of what one might

call hypomasculinity, in Hollywood film.[4] While this process of erosion

features a number of nodal points that can be used to establish the dimensions

of this chronological shift in onscreen masculinity (Steve McQueen's

performance in *Bullitt* [1968], Clint Eastwood's performance in *Dirty Harry*

[1971], Burt Reynolds in *The Longest Yard* [1974], or Martin Sheen in *Apocalypse*

Now [1979], to name a few), this project is concerned with the end result of that

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[4] For a parallel reading of the term "hypomasculine," see Malin.

transformative erosion as it manifests within the narrative structure of films released during the remasculation era in Hollywood. The erosion of heteronormative masculinity that began in the 1940s and 1950s has resulted in the appearance of hypomasculine leading men, whose representations of onscreen masculinity have been become crucial to the remasculation formula.

Signifying Hypermasculinity: Wayne as a Cultural Reference Point

Since many of Wayne's performances throughout the 1940s and 50s exemplify the heteronormative and hypermasculine facade, his iconic image is often used to signify or invoke the ultra-masculine. Exactly thirty years after *Eagles'* release, in a scene from Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), a platoon of new recruits stands at attention while an overzealous drill sergeant indulges in an abusive tirade at their expense. His shocking candor reveals a disdain for homosexuality, disorder, liberal values, and frivolity. Gunnery Sergeant Hartman's melodramatic allusion to Wayne's onscreen hypermasculinity reflects the subtle nuances of Wayne's onscreen persona. Yet Hartman's reference to Wayne features none of Wayne's trademark politeness, nobility, consciousness of propriety, distinctive aversion to onscreen profanity, or his unfailing directness with language. Hartman's (perhaps unknowing) homage to Wayne's machismo is but a crude approximation of Wayne's onscreen presence, a dilution perpetuated through a persistently over-simplified and inaccurate representation in contemporary media. Although both Wayne

(in his many onscreen roles) and Kubrick's drill sergeant share right-wing values, Wayne's distinctive screen masculinity is the product of more than a confident tone and a conservative outlook. Kubrick's drill sergeant simultaneously reinforces the irreproducibility of Wayne's onscreen persona and furthers the stability of Wayne's status as a cultural icon. This reading is validated when a recruit (Matthew Modine) mocks the sergeant with the words, "Is that you, John Wayne, is this me?" Delivered in Wayne's distinctively hollow drawl, the line has two consequences: first, the phrase challenges the sergeant's bravado, and second, it suggests that the drill sergeant has done a disservice to Wayne's iconic image by associating his vulgar political views with it. Modine's mockery elevates Wayne's screen masculinity to a place beyond imitation or reproduction, a further testament to its cultural significance.

In *Die Hard* (1988), the Austrian villain Hans Gruber (Alan Rickman), in confronting veteran New York City police officer John McLean (Bruce Willis), defiantly suggests that "this time, John Wayne does not walk off into the sunset with Grace Kelly," communicating a disdain for the formulaic heroism of Hollywood cinema while at the same opening himself to mockery for his fragile knowledge of American popular culture (Wayne never co-starred with Kelly). Gruber also acknowledges an iconic form of distinctly American masculinity and infers McLean's inadequacy by suggesting that his masculine bravado does not rival Wayne's. The foreign villain uses Wayne's image to identify McLean's

74

domestic hypermasculinity, yet he ironically foreshadows his own demise by warning that Wayne's form of masculinity is not synonymous with triumph, although the rhetoric of the film suggests that it is.

In *Donnie Brasco* (1997), a late 1970s mob boss Sonny Black (Michael Madsen) asks his subordinate Lefty (Al Pacino), in reference to himself, "How can John Wayne die?," suggesting that Sonny believes the durability of Wayne's image to supersede the limitations of his own mortality. In *Patriot Games* (1992), Dr. Jack Ryan (Harrison Ford) single-handedly thwarts a terrorist attack against the British Royal Family. In a discussion afterwards, Lieutenant Commander Robby Jackson (Samuel Jackson) attempts to understand his friend's bravery: "So, you just waded on in, like John Wayne. Why'd you do it? What were you thinking, man?" to which Ryan responds, "It just pissed me off, I couldn't just stand there and watch him shoot those people right in front of me. Just made me mad." These modern film references to Wayne must not be considered as specific gestures to a popular postwar actor but rather intentional invocations of hypermasculinity at its utmost. There is no doubt that Wayne has become a popular signifier for the hypermasculine archetype in contemporary culture: "In the United States, mainstream culture support[ed] and idealiz[ed] hypermasculinity in entertainment media, particularly in film. After World War II, the rugged John Wayne replaced the early movie idols Johnny Weissmuller, Rudy Valentino, and Errol Flynn (Oppliger 55).

Throughout and following World War II, John Wayne the actor was frequently

seen in the media articulating his uncompromising support for the war effort,

despite the fact that there was some suggestion that he did not actively seek

conscription similar to a number of other American celebrities during this

period including Elvis Presley, Hugh Hefner, Jack Palance, and Tony Curtis

[see Garry Wills's *John Wayne's America*]). In 1953, Wayne was the face of a

national campaign to promote the sale of U.S. War Bonds. He was featured on

the cover of *Life Magazine* on three separate occasions: in 1965, 1969, and 1972,

each time dressed as a cowboy and posed against a rugged rural backdrop.

During an interview, Wayne was quoted as saying, "Nobody seems to like my

acting but the people" (Jackson 24). While Wayne may have failed to regard

himself as a gifted performer, even he recognized his status as a burgeoning

pop-culture icon.

The Hypermasculine Archetype and the Hypomasculine Male

In Hollywood, the 1950s ushered in a number of what Kristen Hatch

refers to as "new faces of masculinity," ranging from Montgomery Clift's

performance in *A Place in the Sun* (1951) to Marlon Brando's portrayal of

Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951); Wayne's performance in

Eagles was the last truly exemplary expression of classic hypermasculinity before

Wayne began taking roles that reflected his waning status as a leading man. As

hypomasculine actors, Montgomery Clift and James Stewart exemplified a much softer form of masculinity; both of these performers were comparatively urban and could not be plausibly cast as the *conventional* hero in a western during this period in which there was an almost formulaic adherence to the typical parameters of any given genre. Although Clift starred opposite Wayne in Howard Hawks' *Red River* (1948), the juxtaposition between these two actors only reinforced the contrast between Wayne's agrarian, conservative masculinity and Clift's comparatively urban, youthful, and more liberal form of masculinity: "'The effect was electric,' commented biographer Robert LaGuardia. Throughout the film Clift plays his scenes with a cool aloofness which contrasts wonderfully to Wayne's passionate intensity and still conveys a strength of character" (Roberts & Olson 299). At this time (and prior to Clift's unfortunate car accident later in his career), part of Clift's masculinity onscreen was a function of his unquestionable physical beauty, one which exuded the kind of sexual potency and agency commonly associated with more contemporary actors (such as the onscreen personas of performers like George Clooney, Brad Pitt, or Tom Cruise). Clift possessed what Graham McCann refers to in his book *Rebel Males: Clift, Brando and Dean* as "an odd physical fragility which contradicted his conventional masculine beauty" (75). Further, Clift's good looks were often defined in traditionally feminine terms such as "beautiful" or "gorgeous," and a number of fan magazines referred to him as

"the most beautiful man in the movies," or "the male Garbo" (Farmer 231). In contrast, Wayne's manliness stemmed from a rugged (but not "pretty") exterior, one that reflected the underlying wisdom and sentimentality of his characters in *The Searchers* and *The Wings of Eagles*, for example. While Wayne epitomized the heteronormative and hypermasculine male, performers like Clift signified the genesis of a shift in the presentation of manliness onscreen. In particular, Clift's onscreen presence helped establish a foundation for the many alternative rearticulations of screen masculinity that would flourish decades later in the 1990s, amidst a swirling discourse of masculinity crisis that was widespread during this period.

Hypomasculinity: Oliver Stone's *Born On the Fourth of July*

Hollywood's remasculation era has been characterized by a series of films featuring male protagonists who are military men (or exhibit many of the physical and emotional characteristics of such) and who have experienced a signal moment of emasculation. It is this moment that becomes the precursor to a remasculation narrative in which the male protagonist recovers his lost masculinity through the restoration of a perceived moral imbalance within his social environment. To examine a film comparable to *The Wings of Eagles* within the boundaries of the remasculation era, we can turn to Oliver Stone's *Born on the Fourth July* (1989), which offers the audience a similar narrative

structure. In his discussion of war as represented in film, Robert Burgoyne refers to Susan Jeffords' description of America's "remasculinization," in which the iconography of nationalism is quite obviously linked to the symbolism of gender (Burgoyne 57). While Jeffords uses the term "remasculinization" to refer broadly to the reconstitution of a national identity within the United States through the onscreen representations of "hard-bodied"[5] masculinity, my application of the word "remasculation" refers to the protagonist's reclamation of personal agency, authority, and control. As a character that is neither hard-bodied nor triumphant, Ron Kovic's return from war is not heroic but inherently pathetic, and his injury serves as a testament to his own ignorance and gullibility in being drawn to a war by the same type of propaganda and glorified masculinity that was epitomized by Wayne's performance in *The Wings of Eagles.*

Kovic returns wounded from the anonymous, sundrenched beachhead in Vietnam to the safety of a veteran's hospital, but his injury is not associated with the nobility of sacrifice and patriotism as it was for Wayne's character in *The Wings of Eagles.* The glory of war is diffused by the reality of life *after* war. In a room with dozens of other wounded veterans, surrounded by rats and filthy conditions, Kovic's eyes and expression are as youthful and frightened as

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[5] For more on the idea of the "hard-bodied" hero onscreen, see Malin.

ever and his legs are bound together with polyester straps and metallic braces: "Physical abuse, a negligent medical staff, the omnipresence of death and putrefaction—all are conveyed in a urine-yellow color and in a series of shock cuts that contrast vividly with the filtered luminescence of the boyhood scenes" (Burgoyne 65). Pale and gaunt, Tom Cruise as the disabled war veteran is clearly no John Wayne, as Ford's representation of disability was clearly meant to glorify the American war while Kovic's return is characterized by a series of indignities and a noted absence of glory. As Wayne staggers across the flight deck in *The Wings of Eagles*, the sun is shining, he is proudly wearing his uniform, and his troops are there to acknowledge his achievement and his sacrifice. Yet as Cruise straps his legs together and drags his lifeless lower half across a dirty floor, Kovic's physical therapist has only hollow accolades and disingenuous encouragement to offer. In *The Wings of Eagles*, Wayne's character suffered a disability, but this wound only enhances his status amongst his comrades, while Cruise's Kovic is stricken with a similarly debilitating injury in *Born On the Fourth of July* and garners only the pity of his friends and family. Two conclusions emerge here: first, as a modern example of onscreen masculinity, Cruise portrays a vulnerable, fallible, and fragile masculinity and is therefore more plausible as the emasculated male compared to an actor like Wayne, whose invincibility onscreen is little more than one aspect or dimension of his masculine persona. Secondly, in order to advance the formulaic narrative

structure of the remasculation film, the male protagonist must possess hypomasculine characteristics in order to plausibly suffer emasculation and therefore undergo the formulaic emasculation-remasculation narrative.

Hypomasculinity Embodied by the Contemporary Leading Man

Of all the contemporary examples of masculinity why does Tom Cruise typify the archetypal, remasculated male? Rising quickly to stardom just four years after Wayne's death, Mark Simpson suggests that, "Tom Cruise was the perfect cinematic embodiment of the new male narcissism that emerged in the mid-1980s. *Top Gun* (1986), the film that introduced him as a star to the cinema-going public, made him just as surely as *Top Gun* was made for him. His all-American brand of boyish, bodily sexiness, a cinnamon-flavoured studliness—a pure and wholesome indulgence—made him the American Dream dish of the 1980s" (230). With a kind of masculine prettiness evocative of Montgomery Clift combined with a youthful vulnerability performed most effectively in *Risky Business* (1983), Cruise played a role for which Wayne would have been clearly unsuited. An American audience would never see John Wayne dancing in his socks and underwear as Cruise does in his famous scene in *Business*, given that Wayne's "conservative public values" and "rugged individualism" negated such a depiction.

The rugged, virile, and hypermasculine archetypes of the 1950s were not easily emasculated, and the sensationalism of their celebrity only made the representation of the kind vulnerability found in *Born on the Fourth of July* that much more implausible for iconic figures like Wayne. Cruise exemplifies contemporary Hollywood masculinity in a manner that combines the visual appeal of Montgomery Clift, with a soft, boyish vulnerability that lends itself to the remasculation formula. Mark Simpson continues, "more than just a pretty face, he was the contradiction of 1980s masculinity made appetizing flesh. Stocky and square-jawed he gives a semblance of no-nonsense masculine virtues, while his round face, baby blue eyes and surprisingly high-pitched voice send out an ambiguous undertow…. [I]t is as if Montgomery Clift or James Dean were playing John Wayne—a very *gay* machismo, contrived and paradoxical" (230). Cruise's performance in films like *Born on the Fourth of July* and *Top Gun* present a form of masculinity that complements a narrative structure specifically characteristic of the remasculation cluster. *Risky Business, Born on the Fourth of July,* and *Top Gun* all typify the narrative structure of the remasculation formula, but none of the lead roles in these films could have been played by Wayne because his "rugged individualism" and "'conservative' public values" are incongruent with the parameters of the remasculation hero.

Hollywood's current leading man fits a specific morphological profile who typically (though not always) has a tall stature, an often impressive

physique, an active and capable temperament, and good facial symmetry; he

usually *appears* to be of an age between twenty and forty-five, despite the actor's

true biological age. In the 1950s, Clift's onscreen masculinity was a precursor

to that of his more modern counterparts, since much of his onscreen presence

was a product of his aesthetic appeal. In contrast, Wayne's onscreen

masculinity during the 1950s was far more complex, emerging as the combined

product of his celebrity persona, the narrative composition of the characters he

portrayed, and his physical appearance. Maureen O'Hara characterized

Wayne's "je ne sais quoi" as his being "gruff as a bear, soft as a marshmallow,

steady and reliable as a rock," while Katherine Hepburn described him as

"gentle. He's a monster. He's a man" (Stacy ix). Countryman characterizes

Wayne's dichotomous representation of masculinity well when he says,

"Wayne's enduring image appears simple. In both his films and his life, he

provided an icon of strong American masculinity, rugged individualism,

contained capacity for violence, and unashamedly 'conservative' public values"

(1). Thus Wayne's onscreen representation of masculinity typified a kind of

conservative, agrarian assertiveness that disguised a "soft" masculinity seldom

(if at all) exposed; it is this specific representation of "tough" masculinity

classified in this project as the hypermasculine ideal. Wayne and Cruise are

both associated with different expressions of onscreen masculinity that to some

extent account for the opposing representations of the wounded war hero in

these two films. Further, we must consider these films as only two nodal

points within an extensive and gradual erosion of the heteronormative,

hypermasculine model of masculinity beginning in the mid 1950s during the

Korean War, evolving through the Vietnam War, and finally taking shape in the

mid 1980s during the Reagan administration.

Mel Gibson as Porter in *Payback* (Brian Helgeland, Icon, 1999).
Digital frame enlargement.

Chapter Five: Situating the Remasculation Film

In suggesting that the remasculation film is part of a pattern initiated in the mid 1980s, this project aims to identify the distinctive remasculation formula in a sufficient number of post-1985 films to justify the formation of a separate category or "cluster." and to suggest that the very existence combined with the growing popularity of the remasculation film (read the increasing frequency with which Hollywood has *produced* these particular films) is evidence of an audience that responds to the remasculation films. Further, while a genre filmmaker presumes the existence of an audience with genre-specific expectations, the appearance of the remasculation cluster only signifies a recent trend in Hollywood cinema and does not necessarily indicate that filmmakers are deliberately producing remasculation films or that there is even an audience consciously and actively seeking them out. While these remasculation films do indeed have an audience, it is largely an unsuspecting audience, since the viewer is more likely drawn to the theatre by his or her familiarity with the film's genre

than its status as a remasculation film. Although the term "cluster" is rarely

applied to film, it is often employed in the fields of economics and finance.

Michael Porter defines a cluster as "a geographically proximate group of

interconnected companies and associated institutions in a particular field, linked

by commonalities and complementarities" (79). Although taken out of its

original context, Porter's term can be usefully repurposed to describe an

analogous relationship within the scope of remasculation cinema. The

difference between a film cluster and a film genre concerns the criteria by

which the films are grouped. While films of the same genre often exhibit

similarities in setting, theme, mood, character types, and narrative, films

belonging specifically to the remasculation cluster are mainly linked by similar

narrative structures and feature comparable variations of the hypermasculine

archetype. Further, films identified as belonging to the remasculation cluster

are often from different genres, although the majority are either

action/adventure or dramas.

Why Discuss Genre?

An effective definition is one that uses familiar terminology to describe

an unfamiliar concept. As an unfamiliar term, the film cluster is similar to a

genre insofar as it is a category of films, but quite different in that there are

fewer criteria linking cluster films to one another than there are between films

of the same genre. Further, an abundance of critical theory on the concept of genre suggests a familiarity with the term genre in the field of cinema studies. Therefore, in order to define a foreign concept like the remasculation cluster, the familiar and related concept of genre and its characteristics must be invoked to aid in the construction of a definition; each reference to genre theory made in this chapter is therefore intended only to illustrate either a similarity or divergence between the two systems of classification. Furthermore, a discussion of genre is important for three reasons. First, while the remasculation film is not part of a conventional genre but rather a cluster, an examination of genre theory is crucial in order to justify the remasculation cluster's exclusion from the definition of genre. Second, the identification of a film's genre informs the logistics of its production and films of the same genre are typically marketed in a manner that is recognizable to the viewer, one who may have seen an earlier film from the same genre and subsequently bases all future film-going decisions on that prior experience. In these two ways, the principles of the remasculation cluster resemble the conventions of genre, and an examination of both production logistics and marketing strategies as they relate to genre would be helpful in our examination of the "cluster" and its borders as well. Third, an understanding of genre similarly informs a discussion of audience reception in relation to a particular genre film, which subsequently informs a parallel discussion regarding the connection between

the selectivity of remasculation cluster and *its* audience. As a part of a film cluster, each remasculation film is also part of a conventional genre (action-adventure, drama, western, etc.); in other words, those films within the remasculation category are from different genres and therefore undergo different production processes. Although remasculation films parallel one another narratively, they are *not* all linked by commonalities in setting or wardrobe and are therefore usually dissimilar in terms of production, indicating that the remasculation cannot claim generic status. Further, while remasculation films are not overtly marketed as such, they are typically presented to a prospective audience as a conventional genre film *that is also part of the remasculation cluster.*

Taglines: Codifying the Remasculation Film

In her article "Selling Mildred Pierce: A Case Study in Movie Promotion," Mary Beth Haralovich attributes the success of *Mildred Pierce* (1945) to both its notable cast and the provocative manner in which this racy film starring Joan Crawford and Jack Carson was marketed to the audience. The tagline featured on the theatrical poster for this film read: "The kind of woman most men want, but shouldn't have," implying an affiliation with film

noir[6] yet also capturing the tone or sentiment of the film in a single sentence both pithy and informative enough to foster the viewer's expectation of sexual innuendo and scandal onscreen. "Poster art was crucial to ad campaigns, and in fact newspaper advertising based on posters was a primary use (if not *the* use) of pressbook materials…. [P]oster ads transmitted the essential attributes of the film, generating viewer expectations and forming what Barbara Klinger has termed 'a tentative contract between producer and consumer.' Posters identified the genre of the film and placed its stars/characters at a point of narrative suspense" (Haralovich 197). Therefore, the formulaic emasculation/remasculation narrative of those films that are a part of this film cluster is almost always alluded to in the film's tagline.

In Brian Helgeland's *Payback* (1999), the promotional theatre poster features a threatening image of this remasculation film's main protagonist, Porter (Mel Gibson). The tagline for this film (featured directly below Gibson's sneer) is "Get ready to root for the bad guy." Successfully articulating the rhetoric of the remasculation film, the tagline likens Porter to an underdog, which simultaneously implicates his prior emasculation and infers his potential for pugilistic resurrection. The taglines for Gary Gray's *Law Abiding Citizen* (2009) are "The system must pay" and "Justice at any cost," again alluding to

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[6] For additional information on the features of film noir and the "femme fatale" archetype, see Doane.

both the protagonist's emasculation at the hands of the judicial system and his subsequent remasculation via the temptation of vigilantism. Even in a remasculation film without any definitive ties to the action-adventure genre, the remasculation sentiment (that is: the hypomasculine desire to forcibly assert one's masculinity through reclamation) seems clearly articulated in the film's tagline. The tagline for John Wells' *The Company Men* (2010) reads, "Big business just cut the wrong guys," implying both the protagonist's emasculation and corresponding remasculation through some form of white collar, non-violent revenge.

The formation of this "group" referred to as a remasculation cluster reemphasizes the role of the audience in the creation of a variety of cinematic categories ranging from genre to sub-genre, meta-genre, group, or cluster. The declining role of the studio system in the definition of film categories must consequently give way to the evolving disposition of the audience, who as Thomas Sobchack contends, has an equally significant role in the definition of genre as do the industry critics, a sentiment that is equally applicable to this dissertation's definition of the cluster. In other words, film classification is increasingly becoming limited to the beholder's eye, whose creation of meaning depends upon the amalgamation of his or her preconceived notions and the film's embedded content. One can situate the remasculation film as part of a cluster precisely because the *repeated* appearance of this distinctive narrative

90

formula has become increasingly symptomatic of the filmmaker's assumption, perception, or prediction of audience desire.

The Profitability of the Remasculation Cluster

With a production budget of more than 47 million dollars, Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992) was primarily marketed as a western but also exhibits the telltale signs of a remasculation feature. Internationally, the film grossed more than $159,000,000 and yielded Warner Brothers a 238% profit (boxofficemojo.com). Similarly, *Law Abiding Citizen* had a 50 million budget with an international gross of $126,690,726, earning Overture Films a 153% percent profit (boxofficemojo.com). Both films enjoyed the bulk of their success in North America, which suggests that it is mainly the American audience that identifies with films of the remasculation cluster. While not all of the remasculation films discussed in this dissertation experienced the success of *Unforgiven* or *Law Abiding Citizen*, the remasculation narrative is not the sole determinant of a film's popularity; variations in casting and directorial skill would have also affected the film's critical reception and corresponding box office sales.[7] In numerous cases, however, the modern remasculation film has repeatedly proven itself to be a profitable formula. Drawing on these data, it is

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[7] For speculation on the formula for box offices success, see Nelmes.

logical to assume that the box-office popularity of these remasculation films indicates a positive audience response (though, admittedly, not in *every* case).

This approach to the remasculation film assumes that every aspect of the film in question (lights, camera angles, casting, setting, pace, etc.) is deliberate on the part of the filmmaker. While the conventional genre categories derived from the organizational practices of the studio system (western, science fiction, etc.) remain crucial systems of classification, these genres coexist with film clusters that are able to cross these boundaries under the umbrella of a topical pattern such as remasculation. Furthermore, in our study of contemporary film, we (as film theorists) must endeavor to approach cinema as an expression of social consciousness[8] and extend our treatment of genre beyond a taxonomical system reflecting commonalities in both setting and character personae to one that identifies the features of a corresponding social response to a given socio-historical stimulus.

<center>What Is Genre?</center>

In order to understand why the remasculation film is part of a cluster and does not qualify as a new genre, it is important to understand how genre is defined. In the third edition of Barry Keith Grant's *Film Genre Reader*, Thomas

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[8] For further information on the relationship of film and the social unconscious, see Jan Campbell.

Sobchack invokes the glossary definition of genre as posited by Harry M. Geduld and Ronald Gottesman, who suggest that the term refers to a "category, kind, or form distinguished by subject matter, theme, or technique" (103). In addressing problems associated with the delicacy of film categorization, Sobchack sidesteps this issue by assuming that all genres must be engaged and evaluated collectively, as they all stem from a common origin and basic form. This approach to genre theory permits a level of accessibility to the traditional content of rigidly defined categories solidified through the work of established genre theorists like Rick Altman: "Genre isn't a word that pops up in every conversation about films—or every review—but the idea is second nature to the movies and our awareness of them. Movies belong to genres much the way people belong to families or ethnic groups" (13). This preoccupation with categorization limits the taxonomical approach to cinema by defining each film visually through the implementation of a detailed content analysis. Sobchack brings genre theory back to its roots partly in order to reassert a foundation for the creation of new genres, ones that may cut across conventional genre boundaries. On a broader scale, Altman suggests that genre is defined through the audience reception and the response of industry critics, implying that the categorization process is subject to the viewer's individual interpretation, which indicates that the creation of genre is actually the creation of meaning through classification; the same approach is applicable to those

films within the remasculation cluster.[9] Furthermore, this system of

classification is imposed by the audience, which is changing as its socio-cultural

circumstances evolve (or regress, as the case may be).

In his discussion of Hollywood genres, Thomas Schatz concludes that a

genre approach constitutes a systematic and otherwise natural strategy to

understanding Hollywood cinema. Yet the formation of this system of

classification was influenced by the Hollywood studio system (in place

throughout the 1930s to the 1960s), in which genre functioned as a way of

facilitating production and accommodating innovations such that the

production of structurally similar films could be completed faster and at a lower

cost to the studio. Production personnel working within the parameters of a

particular genre would be more familiar with the nuances, traditions, and

expectations of the convention, which would ultimately facilitate the entire

production process. Yet with the dissolution of the studio system at the end of

the 1960s, the contemporary Hollywood audience has become accustomed to

the independent film or those films that are the enfranchised products of

various production companies. Conventional genre theory was thus influenced

by a system no longer in place, and it becomes important to consider

Sobchack's point that all genre films stem from a common origin and basic

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[9] For a more thorough study of film reception in this context, see Staiger.

form. With this thought in mind, the formation of the genre film and, for that matter, the cluster film in contemporary Hollywood cinema can be seen as the direct result of the symbiotic relationship that exists between film and its audience.[10]

In his ongoing attempts to correct a number of oversights in the formulation of genre theory, Altman draws attention to the fact that there are always two possible readings of "generic corpus on [the] critical scene," meaning that it is often possible for a film to be "simultaneously included in a particular generic corpus and excluded from that same corpus" (28). This means that the critic defines a particular genre according the films he or she arbitrarily identifies as the most pertinent examples. Altman suggests that a significant part of how the audience defines film genres is dependent upon its allegiance to what he refers to as "Hollywood's ideological effect," which essentially inhibits the natural interpretive process. Further, this effect is *not limited to the genre* but is also applicable to those films situated in the remasculation cluster, as evidenced by the promotional material (taglines, theatrical trailers), which clearly featured the distinctive rhetoric of the remasculation narrative. While Hollywood's "ideological effect" permeates the rhetoric of any conventional genre film, the same is true of those films within the remasculation cluster.

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[10] For a more analytical examination of the audience during World War II, see Handel.

As viewers, we are vulnerable to accepting Hollywood's presentation of a given cinematic text as belonging to a specific genre or film cluster and subsequently to imposing a series of predetermined expectations on the film based upon its prescribed category. In the case of the remasculation film, for instance, the seasoned viewer has typically been conditioned to recognize the narrative cues associated with the remasculation film and interprets those cues through an engagement with the film's trailer or tagline, either of which will typically allude to an impending satisfaction of the protagonist's desire for revenge or redemption so as to reverse a previous emasculative trauma. Further, it is important to note—as Alan Williams does in his article "Is a Radical Genre Criticism Possible?"—that as a concept, genre is *not* exclusively Hollywood's construction; this is also true of the remasculation cluster. Hollywood's somewhat formulaic and idealistic presentation of genre has encouraged audiences to reflexively define genre ahistorically, such that our understanding of each genre is derived from what Altman calls the semiotic and semantic presentation of each category, which is applicable to the cluster as well. Arriving at the theatre with certain preconceived notions about the setting, themes, narrative, and character types commonly associated with a western, for example, the viewer recognizes a genre film with the help of his or her expectations. The viewer recognizes a western if it is presented *as* a western, despite the fact that the film itself may contain features and

characteristics that could easily be used to justify either its simultaneous inclusion within or exclusion from the genre category in question, and notwithstanding the possibility that it makes no reference at all to earlier, ostensibly seminal, western films. To extend this argument, a similar logic must apply to the remasculation picture, for although those films included within this cluster can be first categorized into a conventional genre according to explicit characteristics like setting, cast, or wardrobe, it is the discerning viewer who has the ability to recognize the distinctively formulaic narrative structure of the remasculation film and consequently identify the picture as a drama, comedy, or action film that is *also* a member of the remasculation cluster.

The genre and the remasculation cluster are similar in that they are not simply groups of films that are empirically classified and organized based upon the presence or relative absence of certain features. Such a taxonomical approach imposes unproductive limitations on our conception of genre and the remasculation cluster and ultimately forces the critic to substitute a content analysis for an interpretative examination of the film's entirety. As André Bazin reasoned, one could argue the exclusion of a film like *The Overlanders* (1946) from the genre of the western simply because it is set in Central Australia rather than the Southwestern United States, despite the presence of "galloping horses," "fights," "adventure," and "the continuous movement of the characters, carried almost to a pitch of frenzy" (141). Contemporary

systems of classification are not simply made up of films that the critic identifies as being part of a specific genre; rather, these genres are defined by the viewer's acquaintance with what Stephen Neale refers to as "systems of expectation and hypothesis" (181), whereby we are able to situate the genre of a film based upon an expectation of what is to follow; the same is true of the remasculation cluster. If, for instance, a character appears onscreen wearing a holster and cowboy hat while mounted on a horse against the familiar backdrop of the Southwestern United States, the viewer can instantly make varying hypotheses about the film based upon his or her biographical engagement with the way narrative events occurred in other films that featured cowboys and horses set in the same environment.

Altman contends that genres are defined by the film industry and then recognized by the mass audience, suggesting that the audience has been conditioned to have a series of expectations that are automatically associated with each genre classification (see Buscombe, Grant, Neale, and Tudor). Genre theorists assume a "quasi-magical" correspondence between the industry's objectives with any given film and the audience's accompanying response. Genre filmmakers implicitly ask their audiences if they want to believe in the reality of the film, and the audience responds positively by way of its participation. Perhaps most importantly, in *The World in a Frame: What We See in Films*, Leo Braudy suggests that the genre film reinforces what both the

individual and the audience as a community collectively believe. Thus Altman concludes that if the text, which is thought to be defined by the industry, is not recognized by a mass audience then it cannot be a genre film. Consisting mainly of a specific narrative formula that is persistently reasserted within the context of conventional genre films, the repetitive structure of the remasculation film is clearly defined by the industry and accepted by the audience, as Altman demands. However, to refer to the remasculation film as an example of a new genre would be counterproductive according to Altman and virtually all genre theorists because it would lead to the unending subdivision of genre to the point where it would no longer constitute a useful system of classification. The remasculation film exists within conventional film genres and can be grouped or categorized according to commonalities in narrative structure alone. The remasculation film *cannot* be interpreted as a genre film simply because the narrative parameters associated with the remasculation cluster are very specific and exclusive yet permeate conventional genre boundaries indiscriminately. To label the cluster as a genre would be to invalidate conventional genre boundaries as they have been defined here, which would subsequently confuse the dominant taxonomical approach to film rather than enhance our understanding of film classification procedures.

Common elements, features, and characteristics link those films that can be grouped by a similar (and occasionally identical) narrative structure, the

specifics of which will be discussed later in conjunction with Altman's prescriptive list of genre essentials. For now, the remasculation film is almost entirely defined by both its narrative composition and the extent to which it traverses traditional genre boundaries and as well as its glorification of the hypermasculine figure. *Unforgiven* features all of the characteristics typically associated with a western, while Sam Mendes' *American Beauty* (1999) fits the description of a family drama. *Payback* (1999) features enough physical action and had a large enough gross ($81,517,441) to be classified as an action/adventure blockbuster, while *Brazil* (1985) has been characterized as a fantasy because of its unusual, dream-like visuals and dystopian plotline. Martin Scorsese's *The King of Comedy* (1982) features Jerry Lewis and has subsequently been defined as a comedy with dramatic undertones. According to existing genre theory, all of these films feature narrative, visual, stylistic, and geographical characteristics that squarely situate them into one of these five separate categories (western, drama, action/adventure, fantasy, and comedy, respectively), yet they are all examples of the remasculation film.

<div align="center">Some Characteristics of the Remasculation Film</div>

Thomas Schatz emphasizes that genres are "the product of the audience and studio interaction" and "not the result of some arbitrary critical or historical organization" (16). Film theorists do not construct or define the

parameters of any given genre but rather identify these categories as byproducts of an interaction between audience and industry. While the existence of this group of films identified as part of a remasculation category *could* implicate the existence of a new film genre, I am not suggesting that it necessarily does. Instead, the fact that one could *potentially* interpret the existence of the remasculation group as a new genre according to Altman, Buscombe, and Schatz's criteria would serve only to challenge the parameters of the canonical film genres, which is not the objective of this dissertation. As an alternative, to suggest that these films are part of a sub-genre would be overly restrictive since the remasculation category's existence would be limited to only those films within one conventional genre.

Since there are remasculation films that are *also* westerns, dramas, action-adventures, or comedies, it is improper to suggest that the remasculation film exists only as a sub-category of one of these traditional genres. Further, the term meta-genre is similarly inappropriate, for although the root "meta" can refer to the simultaneous occupation of two spaces, a remasculation meta-genre would exist above the pre-existing and conventional genres and would have to encapsulate *all* of those films subsumed under a specific topic (the war film, for example). Further, the root of the term "inter-genre" describes a film that conforms to the parameters of two genres, which also does not accurately characterize the remasculation film. The remasculation film is always a

conventional genre film (western, drama, action-adventure) *and* part of a distinctive category unlike any conventional genre. Further, it is potentially irresponsible (and somewhat audacious) to presume that this pattern of films represents a separate genre because their categorization is based, almost exclusively, on their formulaic narrative structure.

Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) and John Wells' *The Company Men* (2011) are broadly classified as action/adventure and drama, respectively. Neither film is linked narratively, as the Tarantino picture is set in Germany during World War II, while *The Company Men* takes place in an anonymous Boston suburb shortly after the economic downturn in the United States at the end of 2008. *Inglourious Basterds* features action sequences characterized by brutal, physical violence, while Wells' film explores the dehumanizing processes of corporate America, featuring only high drama against the familiar backdrop of a dehumanizing bureaucracy. Yet despite their genre dissimilarities, both films are examples of the remasculation film, which is mainly defined by both the film's narrative structure and its use of the hypermasculine hero and, to a lesser extent, the celebrity status of the actor cast in the leading role.

The remasculation film is characterized by a formulaic narrative structure typically featuring an emasculation moment, a quest segment, and a corresponding remasculation event, which returns the affected character to a

previous state of "hypermasculinity," which often defined the character at an earlier stage of his development. Films like *Inglourious Basterds* and *The Company Men* do not share conventional genre ties, yet both films feature a group of men whose leader is portrayed by a particularly hypermasculine Hollywood personality (Brad Pitt and Ben Affleck, respectively). Having recently played the assertive and confident outlaw Jesse James in the historical biopic *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007) and the Greek hero Achilles in *Troy* (2004), Pitt now plays Lieutenant Aldo Raine, the leader of a rogue battalion of Jewish-American soldiers known as "The Basterds," whose sole occupation is murdering Nazi soldiers. Ben Affleck has played similarly assertive, hypermasculine heroes such as Captain Rafe McCawley in *Pearl Harbor* (2001), Matt Murdock in *Daredevil* (2003), and Doug MacRay in *The Town* (2010). Both actors have regularly portrayed characters whose choreographed and infallible masculinity seems impervious to emasculation, yet the depiction of just such an emasculatory moment in films like *Inglourious Basterds* and *The Company Men*, for example, is incongruous or contrary to the actor's representation in the majority of his other films. This incongruity is disconcerting for that specific subgroup within the male audience (identified earlier) that looks to modern representations of onscreen masculinity for a kind of pornographic, chauvinistic, and therefore unrealistic empowerment through the character's triumphant remasculation.

Peter Lehman identifies the presence of what he refers to as "male hysteria"[11] and masochism in recent Hollywood film and focuses on the onscreen representation of a "crisis" figured in film that generates a conflict between a feminized wound or trauma (that must not be spoken of) and a "naturalized, even biological impulse toward the expression of male rage that would align the protagonists with the 'primitive' mountain men" (140). Lehman's discussion of this feminized trauma describes the emasculation moment, which functions as one of a few foundational characteristics associated with the remasculation group. During this emasculatory event, the male protagonist experiences an abrupt loss of power or agency that fragments what Lehman would describe as the "primitive" male façade.

The narrative characteristics of this emasculation moment, however, can be vary drastically: Aldo Raine and his men begin the film as collaborative personifications of the marginalized other, victimized by different yet parallel systems of oppression. *The Company Men* tells the story of three men (played by Ben Affleck, Chris Cooper, and Tommy Lee Jones) who find themselves suddenly unemployed, without purpose, and, in some cases, unable to financially support their families. Both films feature a group of male protagonists who are either emasculated during the course of the film (as is the

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[11] For more on the idea of "male hysteria," see Mitchell.

case in *The Company Men*) or prior to the narrative's commencement (*Inglourious*), and their trauma results in the protagonist's feminization and corresponding humiliation. The members of the lawless platoon featured in *Inglourious Basterds* function as useful examples of emasculated or (to borrow Lehman's term) "wounded" men because they are all representatives of abused minorities, whose widely-acknowledged victimization has been historically associated with some of the most humiliating and degrading castration experiences imaginable. While there are a number of films featuring an already-wounded protagonist, this kind of character must experience a clear moment of remasculation in order to ensure that the film qualifies as a remasculation picture within the broader parameters of this cluster.

In her discussion of onscreen masculinity in *Regarding Henry* (1991) and *Forrest Gump* (1994), Martti Lahti refers to the political importance of these two films and how they have both contributed to the increasing cultural visibility of "bourgeois whiteness as a locus of sympathetic identification" (231). Lahti refers to a trend in film where figures like the white male (a character type commonly associated with automatic privilege, economic agency, and political power) experience a momentary disempowerment, one in which the automatic entitlement and advantage that the white male enjoys is abruptly replaced by victimhood. Historically, the white male has rarely been worthy of viewer sympathy, yet films like *Regarding Henry* and *Forrest Gump* present the white male

as a victim deserving pity. Further, Lahti's conception of white male

victimhood aligns with the onscreen expression of all male protagonists

featured within the context of the formulaic remasculation narrative.

Chapter Six: Judicial Emasculation and Remasculatory Vigilantism

Wearing a rumpled, three-quarter length spring rain jacket and a dress shirt that is both improperly buttoned and untucked, Clyde Sheldon (Gerard Butler)

Clint Eastwood as William Munny in *Unforgiven* (Clint Eastwood, Malpaso, 1992). Digital frame enlargement.

stands in a stone archway outside of the Philadelphia courthouse in what appears to be late November or early December. Surrounded by pedestrians who have dressed for the weather with heavy coats, winter hats, and scarves, this man is visibly distraught and seems unconcerned with both the outside temperature and his failure to dress for it. With a horrified facial expression, Sheldon appears disenfranchised from his environment as the only figure standing perfectly still in a crowd of disinterested pedestrians moving on and off-camera behind him. Sheldon's bedraggled clothing complements a defeated facial expression featured prominently in a medium angle shot that seems intended to contrast the clarity of his face with the blurry confusion on the sidewalk. It is this moment in Gary Gray's *Law Abiding Citizen* (2009) that typifies the specific visual morphology of the emasculation moment as the first part of the remasculation formula. In the moments leading up to this scene, Sheldon learned that the assailant who broke into his home and raped and

murdered both his wife and daughter has made an arrangement with the Assistant District Attorney for a reduced sentence in exchange for testimony against his partner. Stunned, physically exhausted, and overwhelmed with grief, Sheldon is geographically separated from the press conference taking place across a courtyard, where all of this information is being announced. From Sheldon's point of view it *appears* that Assistant District Attorney Nick Rice (Jamie Foxx) is congratulating the attacker with a highly publicized handshake. The physical space between the press conference just outside the courthouse and the man whom justice seems to have overlooked reinforces the poignancy of this emasculatory incident as Sheldon is quite literally removed from judicial process and rendered a helpless observer under a lonely archway. Pale, disheveled, and emotionally fragile, Sheldon is the victim of two horrific crimes: the home invasion and forcible confinement. In this scene, he becomes the victim, too, of a failed judicial system designed to protect those in situations like his.

Sheldon's disappointment, betrayal, and disbelief are easily identifiable as he helplessly observes his attacker's publicized emancipation. Yet Sheldon's emasculation cannot be derived only from visual cues within the scene. To invoke Goffman's conception of the social front, emasculation is a performative façade, a collaborative construction in which the actor's skill as a performer intersects with his celebrity persona to produce a distinctive

expression of masculinity onscreen. As yet another front, the celebrity's persona is also a social construction, but this façade is typically built using images from the actor's representation in the media and his previous onscreen roles. In his book *Stars*, Richard Dyer suggests that celebrities are not "real people," but images that are produced by the media. Looking at the careers of celebrities like Marlon Brando, Dyer argues this actor's "celebrity" was, and continues to be, the product of his representation in many different media forms. From the construction of this actor's image in the films' promotional material or the performances themselves, to even the criticisms and commentaries that followed, Dyer argues that each viewer experiences Brando differently because of his or her engagement with this media representation. While Sheldon's emasculation is performed using visual cues like wardrobe, setting, and the actor's facial morphology, the viewer's impression of this onscreen front is likely informed by his or her familiarity with Butler's celebrity persona.

The character's "visual morphology" is a complex arrangement of five different aspects of the character's appearance and behavior within the scene: facial morphology typified by an expression of emotion, accompanying mannerisms and gestures, posture and physical stance, aligned and motivated actions or behavior, and manner of dress and presentation of self. An emasculated male character registers within all five of these categories so as to

signify a vulnerable, humiliated, and disempowered emotional state. The unshaven man with a tear-stained face, rumpled hair, and disheveled clothes standing limply at a distance typifies the visual morphology of emasculation when seen in the context of the relatively stable and stalwart masculinity the actor portrays in other roles familiar to his viewership.[12] As the noble warrior, King, and leader of the Spartans in *300* (2006), or as an ex-con fighting for his freedom in a futuristic combat video game in *Gamer* (2009), Butler is increasingly becoming a symbol of flawless, smoothly choreographed, and largely physical hypermasculinity typified in many ways by Wayne's performances in films like *Rio Bravo* (1959) or *The Searchers* (1956).[13] In many of Butler's hypermasculine roles, for instance, there is an attempt to amalgamate the essence of Wayne's confidence, conservative family values, inherent patriotism, and fluidly choreographed capability with Susan Jeffords's "hard-bodied" male hero archetype established in the 1980s. In fact, actors like Butler who feature stereotypically masculine body types (muscular form, broad shoulders etc.) and facial characteristics (angular jaw, heavy beard) are often presented as ultra-masculine remodelings of an earlier form of onscreen manhood normalized during the 1940s and 50s. However, unlike the

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[12] For an interesting examination of the role of celebrity in contemporary culture, see Marshall.

[13] For additional information on John Wayne and his roles in the films of director John Ford, see Luhr.

masculinity of this period, more modern leading men of the 1990s and 2000s often feature a kind of vulnerability or weakness that the screen heroes of Wayne's era were largely without. Jeffords argues that normative screen masculinity during the early 1990s was the product of an amalgamation between "two predominant models—the hard body and the 'sensitive family man,' [which are] overlapping components of the Reagan Revolution, comprising on the one hand a strong militaristic foreign-policy position and on the other hand a domestic regime of an economy and a set of social values dependent on the certainty of fatherhood" (Jeffords, *Hard Bodies* 13). The third chapter of this project suggests the appearance of what gender theorist Judith Kegan Gardiner calls "alternative" masculinities likely influenced the production of a series of remasculation films in the 1990s that reasserted and glamorized the heteronormative male. But this remasculation hero is not a direct reproduction of the archetype established in the 1940s and 50s; he is a versatile figure whose narrative context demands an oscillation between indestructible masculinity and plausible emasculation.

The narrative structure of *Unforgiven* (1992) demands the credible emasculation of a sick outlaw by the name of William Munny (Clint Eastwood). As an aged, disheveled, and frail shadow of a once ruthless renegade, Munny sits quietly in the bar of a small brothel in Wyoming, unaware that his presence and unlawful possession of a firearm are responsible for the unexpected

attention of the town sheriff, Little Bill (Gene Hackman). In a tense exchange, Little Bill demands that the stranger surrender his firearm, despite the outlaw's contention that he is unarmed and innocent. Supposedly embodying the law and the American wholesomeness of "justice" in its most liberal sense, Little Bill and his crew of deputies surround and loom over the seated stranger, who sits hunched over a small, round table before an untouched glass of whisky. The outlaw is soaking wet from the rain, and appears to be both extremely ill and in considerable pain. The sheriff stands confidently with his jacket open to reveal his sidearm at the ready, and seems obligated to address the stranger's profile. Refusing to look Little Bill in the eye, the outlaw communicates with his timid wayward glances a clear desire to diffuse the tension of the situation without losing the firearm he does, in fact, possess. While the details of this scene differ somewhat from the corresponding scene in *Law Abiding Citizen*, its composition is paralleled in the later film, as both Clyde Sheldon and William Munny find themselves at the mercy of a corrupt judicial system or its agent and appear noticeably incongruent to and isolated from the context of their immediate environments. While *Unforgiven* exhibits the conventional features of a western (atmosphere, location, temporal period) and *Law Abiding Citizen* qualifies as an action film (one brimming with "sky-high orange fire-balls; vehicles, and bodies pitching, often in slow motion, through plate-glass windows… death-defying stunts" [Langford 233]), both films share a narrative

structure that is similarly formulaic and consisting of a main protagonist whose emasculation precipitates a triumphant moment of remasculation.

The law treats Clyde Sheldon with indifference, but Little Bill physically accosts William Munny and proceeds to brutalize the sick and defenseless man for the entertainment of the saloon's patrons and the accolades of a writer authoring his biography. Munny literally slithers out of the saloon on his stomach and elbows, having been stripped of his firearm and beaten severely. Commanding the pitied and perhaps awestruck attention of the entire saloon, Munny is physically broken, bleeding, and sick, while the assault leaves him with only enough physical strength to collapse into the relative safety of the muddy street outside. The onscreen representation of Munny's emasculation parallels Clyde Sheldon's emblematic castration during the courtyard scene, as the five different aspects of Munny's visual morphology during this emasculative confrontation clearly signify not only his disempowerment, but also his humiliation. Munny's facial morphology during the emasculation scene indicates disempowerment and a lack of confidence, as his inability to meet Little Bill's gaze reveals an almost feminine passivity. His mannerisms are insular and non-confrontational as he clasps the front of his jacket together with a bony hand for warmth, either unwilling or unable to make any sudden or threatening movements in light of his disadvantaged position. His posture is similarly non-threatening and non-combative as he is hunched forward in a

seated position with his arms folded across his body and his legs together in front of him beneath the table. As Little Bill proceeds to physically assault him in front of what seems like the entire town, Munny's actions denote a character that is either incapable or simply unwilling to assert his masculinity in the context of a clear challenge. Lastly, Munny's manner of dress does not correspond to the attire of those within his immediate environment, as the interior of the saloon appears quite warm as many of its patrons are without overcoats or hats. Yet Munny's coat is closed and wet from the rain, reinforcing his relative incongruity and marginalization within the context of the scene. Although Munny's treatment and corresponding behavior in this scene is certainly disempowering, degrading, and humiliating, only an actor as stereotypically hypermasculine as Eastwood can imbue this character's victimization with the symbolism that indicates castration. For, as Dyer notes, the viewer cannot fully compartmentalize his or her impression of the performance from knowledge of the actor's star persona, since one informs the other.

Eastwood has an extensive dossier of more than fifty hypermasculine roles ranging from the ruthless outlaw to the rigid and principled military man, onscreen heroes that have repeatedly emulated both Wayne's conservative values and his brusque corporeality. As inmate Frank Morris in *Escape from Alcatraz* (1979), or Lieutenant Speer in *City Heat* (1984), or even Inspector

"Dirty" Harry Callahan in *The Dead Pool* (1988), Eastwood has been continually

presented to American audiences in the form of capable, physical, assertive,

intimidating characters that exude conservative values designed to offer the

male audience a morally and ethically ideal exemplar of idealized masculinity:[14]

"Eastwood grapples with this involvement of masculinity in and through many

of the great symbols of American life, including cowboys, boxing, police

dramas, and ultimately war – perhaps the single greatest symbol of what it

means (or is supposed to mean) to be a man" (Cornell 3). Many of Eastwood's

films throughout the 1970s and 1980s reinforced traditional American values

centered around sensationalized conceptions of the heroic, patriotic, and

militant family man, struggling for the preservation of conservative American

life. Eastwood's William Munny conflicts with the popular conception of this

actor as a touchstone for a kind of fortitudinous, confident, and invincibly

strong masculinity. Therefore, the unadulterated brutalization of the Munny

(and simultaneously of Eastwood) seems jarring because Eastwood typically

plays the heroic physical aggressor rather than the submissive victim seeking

the safety of a muddy street. In effect, Munny's defeat is Frank Morris's defeat

in *Escape from Alcatraz* or Lieutenant Speer's downfall in *City Heat* or whichever

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[14] For an interesting inquiry into Clint Eastwood's career and his distinctive form of
onscreen masculinity, see Cornell.

expression of Eastwood's onscreen hypermasculinity the viewer has internalized as a classically and distinctively "Clint Eastwood" character.

In his book *Acting in the Cinema*, James Naremore discusses the relationship between the actor and the portrayed character. Naremore cites the work of Russian actor and theatre director Constantin Stanislavsky, whose approach to film acting is a distinctive technique that Naremore argues the majority of American actors have appropriated and implemented in modern film: "The hallmark of such an attitude is the belief that good acting is 'true to life' and at the same time expressive of the actor's authentic, 'organic' self – hence the typical movie advertisement: 'Clint Eastwood *is* Dirty Harry'" (6). Critical to what Naremore calls the "Stanislavskian aesthetic" is the performer's simultaneous allegiance to a kind of two-tiered naturalism, where the performance is perceived as a "natural" or "authentic" representation of both the character and the actor. The majority (though not all) of Eastwood's roles have been defined by the infallibility, physicality, agency, and invincibility of the hypermasculine character. Therefore, a scene in which a sick and enfeebled Eastwood is beaten in front of an audience and then permitted to crawl out into a muddy street is jarring because it is perhaps a natural or "authentic" representation of Munny, but an *unnatural* representation of Eastwood, whose star persona is associated with competence, assertiveness, confrontation, and intimidation.

Emasculating "Justice" and the Creation of the Un-heroic Bystander

In *Unforgiven* and *Law Abiding Citizen*, justice is presented as a dysfunctional social organization designed to oppress and emasculate the male hero by removing his ability to indulge in personal retaliation so as to maintain some semblance of social order and civility in a circumstance where brute force, aggression, and will have superseded cooperation. In man's endeavor to promote order through the imposition of law, he has inadvertently civilized the innate savagery out of man, and this erosion of the primal has become a part of the onscreen personas of Hollywood's leading men since Wayne's heyday in the 1950s. In both of these films, the judicial system is the personification of dysfunction, disorder, and corruption, and either directly or indirectly causes William Munny and Clyde Sheldon's emasculation.   As a distinctive concept in both remasculation films, justice and Hollywood's representation of the judicial process must be appropriately contextualized as an ideological concept designed to protect the interests of the majority while removing (or emasculating) the ultra-competent male.

To examine justice as an ideological concept, we must consider its relationship to modern, patriarchal society. Paul Bergman and Michael Asimow discuss the representation of justice in Hollywood cinema[15] and identify a

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[15] For a comprehensive discussion of the judicial process and its representation in Hollywood film, see Masson and O'Connor.

pattern of courtroom sensationalization in which the lawyer (typically a defense attorney) is posited as a superhero figure struggling for the preservation of judicial balance: "Though lawyers are rarely action heroes, they can display great physical courage by facing down mobs, as they do in *Young Mr. Lincoln* and *To Kill a Mockingbird.* But heroism can also consist of standing up for what you believe, even if everyone around you disagrees, as exemplified in *12 Angry Men*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Inherit the Wind, Judgment at Nuremberg,* and *The Accused*" (Bergman and Asimow 1). The onscreen representation of the judicial process is associated with balance because the notion of justice is predicated upon the idea that modern bureaucracy is capable of maintaining a sense of civil morality through the imposition of a legislative code: "…law can be a highly significant boundary mechanism for civil society, crystallizing universalistic solidarity by clarifying its application to particular and contingent situations. Through its substantive, hands-on, case-by-case stipulations, the law can become a powerful conduit for civil morality in the universalizing sense" (Alexander 153). In a modern context, those individuals deemed more vulnerable are protected from those who would impose themselves physically through the maintenance of a system that punishes this particular kind of social deviance with imprisonment and ensuing social marginalization.

Justice seen in this light is in some important ways inherently performative, executed as a warning to potential deviants who flirt with social

118

proprieties and conventions.[16] In his analysis of the performative role of law

enforcement in the American criminal justice system, Thomas Francis Adams

suggests that the modern police officer functions just as pertinently as a symbol

of the law as he does as its enforcer. Police officers "walk the beat," ride on

horseback, and march in parades as much to be seen as to ready themselves for

action. Furthermore, Adams emphasizes the bureaucracy of the modern police

system and implicates the comfort to be found in the banality of the typical

police procedure. As a fixture in modern, typically urban society, the police

cruiser has become the contemporary talisman, urging the maintenance of both

conformity and obedience. Adams raises an interesting point when he

discusses the necessity of the police *performance*, one that we continually

associate with order and civility. It is the bureaucratic regularity of modern

society that promotes a sense of bystander apathy or disconnection from the

reality of day-to-day living. In *Law Abiding Citizen*, the bureaucratic imposition

of the judicial system disempowers Sheldon as the victim and discourages by

threat of imprisonment or even execution. While Sheldon was physically

victimized, restrained, and made to watch the death of his wife and child, the

judicial process forces him to watch helplessly yet again as his family's murderer

is given a reduced sentence in exchange for incriminating testimony against his

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[16] For more in-depth examination of justice and the judicial process in film, see Chase.

partner. The hero, therefore, is initially transformed into the emasculated bystander. Since justice is a performative social practice designed to condition a given population toward civility, we must also consider the idea that justice, or the artificial restoration of moral balance, is paradoxically both emasculating and empowering. Both films feature flawed judicial systems that are defined by a mythology of victim protection and which disable the heroism of the hero. The system prevents hypermasculine figures like Sheldon or Munny from handling their own affairs, yet (ideally) endows the weak and vulnerable with ability to impose the judicial process on the hypermasculine villain. Therefore, since a flawed judicial system effectively disempowers both Munny and Sheldon, the notion of unsanctioned retribution is consequently affiliated with the hero's redemption or remasculation. This failure of justice, dramatized in a narrative format, constitutes a telltale feature of this remasculation cluster: a breakdown of the judicial system results in the emasculation of the male protagonist whose subsequent remasculation is actualized only in the restoration the character's perception of, and initiation of, moral balance. Further, the character's subjective correction of the moral equilibrium typically accompanies an abrupt, though often predictable, descent into an expression of vigilante rage.[17]

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[17] For an interesting historical examination regarding the emergence of the vigilante film, see Kimmel's *Men and Masculinities*.

Faulty Justice in Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven*

In *Unforgiven*, reformed outlaw William Munny is unable to revive a

failing pig farm in Wyoming at the end of the nineteenth century. With two

young children to provide for, Munny is confronted by a young stranger whose

faith in folklore has brought him to the doorstep of this legendary thief and

murderer. Embarrassed by an archaic reputation that he feels no longer

represents his true nature, Munny rejects the young man's offer to accompany

him on a mission to murder two men who mutilated a young prostitute in a

neighboring town. Appropriately titled "Big Whiskey," this small town in

Wyoming exudes a kind of gothic horror. The opening of the film features an

establishing shot that presents a small, dimly lit Midwestern town pummeled by

a storm where the consistency of the rain invokes an atmosphere of eerie calm.

An abrupt cut reveals a violent interpersonal storm inside the second floor

bedroom of the town's brothel, where, in a mosaic of sweat and violence, a

half-naked cowboy carves gashes into the face of a young woman as his

conflicted partner attempts to restrain him. Amused by his physical inadequacy,

the young prostitute sent the cowboy into a rage: "We laugh at men when they

do not measure up to looking or behaving like real men" (Lehman 107). While

this dark scene is not humorous, it is revealing, since masculinity in its most

idealistic form is clearly absent here. Unlike the dignified image of the cowboy

portrayed by actors like Gary Cooper in *High Noon* (1952) or Wayne in *The*

Searchers, these cowboys are filthy and unabashedly misogynistic. Further, main aggressor's physical inadequacy reflects a general dysfunction of the masculine element in the entire film. *Unforgiven* features a range of archetypal characters one might associate with hypermasculine characteristics; Munny is the retired outlaw, Little Bill is the town's sheriff, and English Bob (Richard Harris) plays the villain. Yet although each of these characters feature elements of the hypermasculine façade, they are all woefully deficient as men in one way or another. Munny's allegiance to the memory of his wife renders him non-violent and therefore non-confrontational; Sherriff Little Bill is an egomaniac that values his pride above the preservation of justice, and English Bob's reputation as a ruthless villain is largely fictional. Therefore, the masculine dysfunction presented in this opening scene and reinforced throughout much of the film insists on the reassertion of an idealistic hypermasculinity in a manner that reflects the shift in representations of onscreen manhood to which Jeffords refers in *Hard Bodies*. Released in 1992, *Unforgiven* reflects both a discourse of masculinity crisis and exemplifies an effort to reaffirm the value of the heteronormative, hypermasculine archetype during a decade characterized by the proliferation of "alternative" screen masculinities, as discussed in Chapter Three.

The obvious moral injustice associated with the physical mutilation of a young girl instigates an open call for a judicial response. Yet although the

typical environment of a conventional western is characterized by the absence, or severe inadequacy, of a judicial system, this opening scene is immediately followed by an extended shot that tracks Little Bill down the street and into the upstairs hallway of the brothel for a quick inspection of the woman's injuries and then downstairs to the bar, where the cowboys are restrained and awaiting judgment. With a distant, glassy detachment, Little Bill instructs one of his deputies to retrieve a bullwhip, despite the protestation of the other prostitutes, who clearly feel that both men deserved to be hanged. The most vocal amongst the prostitutes is a redheaded woman named Alice, who functions as the unheard voice of morality. Her comparatively modern perspective on gender equality is deliberately undermined by the brothel owner, who claims to possess a legal contract that recognizes prostitutes as an investment of capital on the part of their owner. According to the contract, any damage to owner's "property," would warrant appropriate reimbursement. To address the demands of the owner's contract, Little Bill forgoes the whipping, assumes that neither offender would want to bother with the inconvenience of a trial, and orders the two men to surrender a number of horses to the owner, in this way leaving justice unsatisfied for Alice and her colleagues. Despite Gene Hackman's authoritative portrayal of Little Bill, the overt misallocation of justice despite Alice's moral interjections situates his character as a symbol of judicial inadequacy and the failure of a putatively stabilizing bureaucratic

system. These opening scenes, therefore, present a challenge that, once overcome, situates the noble character Munny as an archetypal masculine hero who imposes a modern conception of justice upon an archaic, corrupt, blatantly misogynistic, and therefore dysfunctional judicial system.

The Emasculated Eastwood

Our introduction to Munny is deliberately understated and disappointing; he appears knee-deep in pig excrement, hunched over, gray-haired, with a large brown smear down his cheek. His young son is attempting to help his father by quarantining the hogs that have acquired "the fever," so as to slow the gradual deterioration of the isolated farm. A voice interrupts Munny's fruitless struggle with his livestock: "You don't look like no rootin'-tootin' and son-of-a-bitch cold-bolded assassin." And it is undeniably true—Eastwood's character is not the confident and stereotypically hypermasculine cowboy that Eastwood portrayed so exactly in *Hang 'Em High* (1968). In this scene, Eastwood offers a tableau of modern, middle-class values, of honest labor exercised only for the preservation of stasis and the maintenance of a conservative life. The uncertain attentions of his unusually young children cast an unmistakable shroud of doubt upon Munny's competency as both a father and a farmer, and his efforts seem steeped in pathos and are clearly inadequate. Reflecting Barry King's comments concerning the fixed image of the celebrity

performer as an imposition upon the portrayed character, the degradation and pervasive sense of loss associated with Munny as a character are magnified by Eastwood's physical appearance in this film by comparison with his earlier ones. Although in trim shape for a sixty-two year old man, Eastwood is nearly twenty-five years older than he was in *Hang 'Em High*, *Coogan's Bluff* (1968), and *Where Eagles Dare* (1968), and thus some of his masculine potency is diluted by the visible loss of both youth and vigor. Munny is clearly too old to be the assassin the stranger is looking for, and similarly Eastwood is too old to portray such a character. Since Munny and Eastwood begin the film from a position of pre-existing emasculation and relative decline, the diegesis of the film provides a suitable stage for the execution of a remasculation narrative.

In his conversation with the stranger (the self-proclaimed "Schofield Kid" [Jaimz Woolvett]), Munny claims that the young man has him confused with someone else, despite the fact that the Kid clearly identifies this filthy pig farmer as Mr. William Munny. The notion that Munny is simply an honest pig farmer is quickly dismantled as his forgotten reputation as a murderer and an outlaw conflicts with his carefully constructed façade of clean and Christian living. The spatial composition of the farm scene becomes an overt expression of Munny's anxiety. Behind him are his two children and the decrepit farm, yet in front, a youthful stranger looks to conquer the expansive unknown of the Wyoming countryside. Behind Munny lies a distinctly domestic obligation, yet

it is apparent that Munny will move forward, accept the stranger's request that

he help bring the two cowboys to justice. It is only a matter of how he will

rationalize the defiance of a promise made to his deceased wife. As he consults

further with the impetuous stranger, he suggests, "I ain't like that anymore kid,

it was whiskey done it as much as anything else, I ain't had a drop in over ten

years. My wife, she cured me of that, cured me of the drink and wickedness,"

to which the Kid replies, "Well, you don't look so prosperous. Hell, you could

buy her a new dress with your half (of the bounty)." Here, the filmmaker

encapsulates the modern man's frustration with the restrictive and emasculating

nature of social institutions like marriage and the law. For years, Munny has

been honest, faithful, and loyal to his departed spouse, yet, as the Schofield Kid

so astutely indicates, the retired assassin has nothing to show for his morality.

In an effort to honor his wife and her memory, Munny has been emasculated

by his own obligations. The mission is therefore a quest or challenge that must

be overcome in order to warrant remasculation.

Before the protagonist can reach the pinnacle of his masculine assent in

a remasculation moment, his relative inferiority must first be clearly established

in order to heighten the cathartic effect associated with his triumphant climb.

Shortly after Munny decides to take the Schofield Kid's offer, the weathered

hero's loss of manhood becomes the focus of a similarly comical pair of scenes.

In anticipation of the adventure ahead, Munny uses an old coffee tin for target

practice. Discovering quickly that with age an unsteady hand has rendered him all but ineffectual as a marksman, Munny returns to the target with a shotgun and finally hits it, as if to assert the value of brute force. Later, Munny attempts to saddle an old horse that promptly resists him by knocking him to the ground. Just as Wayne's inability to ride his horse in *True Grit* (1969) was likely heightened by the contemporary audience's probable familiarity with the celebrity's actual dexterity with horses and horseback riding, Munny's clumsiness during these opening scenes highlights the extent to which *this* Clint Eastwood is not the archetypal western hero from *Hang 'Em High*. Rooster Cogburn's clumsy incompetence in *True Grit* heightened the comedic value because of its contextual base, rendering the title of film an ironic misnomer. Similarly, the grittiness of Munny's existence in *Unforgiven* reorients these comedic interludes with an old horse as an extension of the character's incompetence as an outlaw trying to reconstitute his former capabilities. Like a mature athlete returning to his sport only to be comically surprised by the erosion of his abilities over the years, Munny returns to his profession as an older, uncoordinated, and ineffectual man. Therefore, it is not purely Munny's age that situates this character as an emasculated figure, but rather an abrupt and significant loss of capability, an effect heightened by the hypermasculine competency associated with both Eastwood's celebrity persona and his many previous roles as capable and intimidating cowboys.

Remasculating Munny

Munny's remasculation is not an objective to which he is meant to consciously aspire as the hero. In fact, his apprehension toward an overt acceptance of the violent masculinity that characterized his past is symptomatic of a fear of regression associated with the loss of his wife. His union with the late Mrs. Munny is sustained by a manufactured sense of obligation—Munny is able to maintain a sentimental connection with the memory of his wife by upholding a vow of non-specific benevolence. Yet given Eastwood's extensive history as the classically aggressive American tough guy, his disempowered position within the film and the character's apparent refusal to pick up the threads of that bygone, but stalwart, character create a tension that is resolved when Munny experiences remasculation. Once Eastwood stands up straight and becomes the *icon* whose masculine prowess was a symbol of American machismo for decades, normative hypermasculinity is restored within the diegesis of the film and Mrs. Munny's memory is supposedly tarnished.

Self-Serving Justice in *Law Abiding Citizen*

Gary Gray's *Law Abiding Citizen* features a similarly formulaic incantation of the judicial remasculation format. In a scene whose urgency precedes the opening credits, Sheldon is the victim of a home invasion. Two men dressed in black burst into his unassuming middle-class residence, hitting him squarely in the face with a baseball bat. As Sheldon is bound, gagged and forced to look

on as a helpless bystander, the more unkempt of the two men (a villain by the name of Clarence Darby [Christian Stolte]) delightedly penetrates Sheldon's chest with the tip of a three-inch blade, one that he deftly pulls out and wipes on Sheldon's sweater as the victim struggles on the floor in the front entranceway. Sheldon's symbolic rape emblematizes his disempowerment and functions as a precursor to the actual violation of his wife. Yet before the pudgy and sweaty Darby has a chance to rape Sheldon's wife, he is distracted by the appearance of Sheldon's adolescent daughter, whom he promptly ushers out of the room beyond the camera's view. When Darby removes Sheldon's child from an already violent scene, the filmmaker implies that her violation, her brutalization will constitute the worst of Sheldon's punishment. Writhing on the floor, Sheldon is left to witness the scene with Darby's words, "You can't fight fate," resonating in his ears and effectively articulating both his disempowerment and emasculation. The rape of Sheldon's entire family is implied when his wife is partially disrobed and his daughter is deliberately shown into another room off-camera. What is clear, however, is that neither survives the attack. Initially, Sheldon's trauma becomes the impetus for a pursuit of justice, but the film's misguided prosecutor quickly frustrates this objective and overtly prioritizes his own personal career goals over working toward a judicial settlement that will bring some measure of satisfaction.

An ambitious Assistant District Attorney, Nick Rice believes that the reality of the judicial process is one of half-measures, bargaining, and maintaining a high conviction rate. When Rice's associate Jonas Cantrell (Bruce McGill) suggests that the promising ADA is capable of actually winning the Sheldon case, Rice replies: "It's an imperfect system . . . I can't take that chance, some justice is better than no justice at all." Presented with a seemingly open-and-shut case, Rice believes that he is assured at least a partial conviction if he offers Clarence Darby a chance to testify against his partner, Rupert Ames (Joshua Stewart). In a frustrating scene between Rice and Sheldon, the dark oak and leather-bound books of the attorney's office belie the misallocation of justice that Rice attempts to justify to a confused and jilted Sheldon. The exchange between the men escalates, then climaxes with Rice's misguided and unwholesome assessment of the judicial process: "It's not what you know, Clyde, it's what you can prove in court." Rice personifies the dehumanization of social organization in a general sense while illustrating the corruption of a collective social impulse to impose order at the expense of morality or ethics. As a confused and desperate man pleads for heroism and bravery from his lawyer, Rice displays no guilt over his decision to pursue a plea bargain for what he believes is a guarantee of some judicial retribution. That there is even a possibility that both Darby and Ames could go unpunished

after graphically brutalizing Sheldon and his family stands in opposition to the ideological rationalization for a judicial system.

In *Law Abiding Citizen*, justice is not the ideologically simplistic concept to which the idealistic viewer would have those who serve the law aspire. In the opening scenes, justice as a utopian ideal is presented and deliberately crushed, dismissed as a fantasy. For Nick Rice, half-measures and dissatisfying outcomes define realistic justice. Gray presents justice as a machine, an organization of activity that must routinely function and be served. The judicial machine, however, is altogether separate from the idea of justice, or justice as a symbol of unbiased equality. The idea of justice is perfect because the concept need not rely on the imperfection of humanity to exist. Yet the judicial machine is operated and must depend on real people with real biases and real faults. Gray offers a realistic portrayal of a system, which, as much as it is sometimes appalling, serves the victims and the perpetrators in an attempt to ensure the preservation of human rights. The unsatisfactory nature of reality is likely as unpleasant to the escapist viewer as it is emasculating to Sheldon, who is forced into the position of the helpless bystander that must endure the reality of Darby's imminent release. Sheldon's restraint at the beginning of the film reorients him from a victim to a bystander, and further disappoints an expectation of hypermasculine heroism. As Dyer and Goffman indicate, masculine performance results from an intersection between multiple fronts,

one of which is the actor's celebrity persona. In 2010, Butler promoted a line

of L'Oreal moisturizers geared towards younger men. The television ad

campaign featured a montaged representation of Butler's day-to-day life, which

consisted of a number of heteronormative pursuits ranging from bare-knuckle

boxing to motor-cross racing. Since the majority of Butler's previous roles

combined with his celebrity persona unavoidably influence his portrayal of

Sheldon, there is an implicit expectation that this character's remasculation will

accompany a transformation, one in which Sheldon's emasculated façade is

definitively rejected in favor of a hypermasculine form more typical of Butler's

filmography.

Remasculation through Personal Retribution

Ten years later we revisit Rice, whose career aspirations have earned him

a more expensive suit, finer household appliances, and a promotion to the role

of District Attorney. We follow him as he attends the execution of Rupert

Ames (the second and far *less* culpable of the two perpetrators), whose final

moments are unexpectedly marred by agonizing pain, later revealed to be the

result of a mislabeled vile of pancuronium bromide, one of three chemicals

used in lethal injection. Rice immediately suspects Sheldon, who subsequently

re-introduced to the audience now exuding the agency, confidence, and

fortitude commonly associated with Butler's more stereotypical and

hypermasculine roles. In an elaborate and strategically organized plan, Sheldon now demonstrates his considerable cunning as he assists the paroled Darby in evading the police by posing as an officer himself. Relying on a wig, fake mustache, and a pair of bifocals to complete a non-threatening disguise, Sheldon allows himself to be temporarily victimized once again while lulling Darby into a false sense of security and empowerment. As Sheldon removes the wig and confronts the confused and suddenly terrified Darby in an abandoned field on the outskirts of Philadelphia, he appears confident, capable, exuding both the arrogance of King Leonidas in *300* and Kable's anger in *Gamer*. Dressed as it is in a form-fitting police officer's uniform, Butler's "hard body" is on display in a manner that contrasts sharply with our earlier image of him standing lonely and defeated in an archway outside the courthouse. Confident and almost playful now, Sheldon addresses Darby in a familiar, non-threatening, and officious manner as he carefully explains how the handle of the gun which Darby was instructed to remove from Sheldon's holster is rigged with a neurotoxin designed to paralyze its victim while preserving all other neurological functions. While this film's vilification of the judicial system is tied to Sheldon's retributive strategy, his remasculation moment describes only his reclamation of power and dominance, as Darby--unjustly, immorally, and unethically emancipated--is subjected to a literal and figurative paralysis. This inversion of power constitutes not only the imposition of ideological, or ideal

justice-- as it is gestured to in the beginning of the film-- but also the enactment of a particularly savage (and later gory) expression of personal retribution. This scene also marks Sheldon's bodily transformation, as the removal of the wig and fake mustache accompanies the rebirth of the hypermasculine found in Butler's earlier work.

Remasculation through Regression

William Munny's remasculation moment takes place on a hillside just outside of Big Whiskey. As the Schofield Kid leans against a solitary tree within a barren landscape, Munny peers intently at the prostitute who approaches on horseback with the ransom he and his partner earned for the assassination of the two cowboys. As he stands flanked by the Schofield kid and the woman who remains on horseback, he learns of Ned Logan's torture and eventual demise at the hands of Little Bill. As Munny learns of his friend's death, he sarcastically suggests that Little Bill's conception of justice is the execution of an innocent man, an implicit allusion to the gross dysfunction of the judicial process. With two stitched gashes on either cheekbone and a few days of beard growth, Munny's haggard appearance functions as a visual expression of his impending regression into a previous and lawless version of himself as his gaze fixates intently upon the bustling town of Big Whiskey down in the valley. With a blank expression, Munny listens to a description of

Logan's final moments and realizes that under duress Logan regaled Little Bill with the sordid history of William Munny. Unable to escape his authentic, gritty, lawless, cussing, violent, and murderous self, Munny grabs the bottle of whiskey from the Kid and soon, as we watch in awe, the uncertain, ineffectual, clumsy old man melts away only to be replaced by the steely-eyed Clint Eastwood that asserted himself so heroically in films like *Hang 'Em High*: "Soon old Eastwood motifs reappear – the slow ride into town, the subjective track to the saloon, and, most startlingly, the surprise emergence of the stranger figure – or his shotgun – from out of an 'objective' camera position . . . In the fervid darkness of Jack N. Green's cinematography the Eastwood gunman now appears as the spectral hallucination he perhaps has always been, the elegant phallic six-shooter replaced by a crude shotgun loaded for bear, fires burning in the sockets of Munny/Eastwood's eyes" (Bingham 240). Munny's regression into a former state of vigilante lawlessness constitutes a moment of realignment, one where Munny is remasculated and thus transformed into a character more congruent with both Eastwood's classically hypermasculine celebrity persona and his previous roles as the ruthless cowboy, the tough military man, or the hardnosed cop.[18]

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[18] For more on the conflation of Munny the aged lawbreaker and Clint Eastwood the celebrity persona, see Knapp.

The ensuing massacre in the saloon becomes an expression of Kirby Farrell's "berserk" impulse, featured in his discussion of post-traumatic culture: "A good deal of the public complaint about Hollywood's sleaze seems derived from an anxiety that the industry weakens cultural restraints by flirting with the idea of berserk violence as a form of the devil's pact, even though that anxiety is an invigorating tonic and in demand at the box office. The hero's injury is symbolically the price – or sop – paid to justify his excess and to forestall the spectator's fear, envy and condemnation" (291).[19] As Munny enters the saloon, Eastwood's celebrity machismo has all but eradicated Munny's frail morality. The ruthless slaughter of Little Bill and his associates is even preceded by an instance of performative bravado where, facing seemingly unconquerable odds, Munny says, "I've killed women and children. Killed just about everything that walks or crawls at one time or another, and I'm here to kill you, Little Bill, for what you did to Ned." It is the simplicity and raw defiance of this moment that situates the reinvented Munny as the archetypal remasculation hero.

As Munny proceeds to gun down Little Bill and his gloating entourage, we must return to the question of justice and its role in this film. In her evaluation of the embedded gender politics of the "classic Western" narrative, Jane Tompkins examines the male aversion to the domestic, his love of pain,

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[19] For an interesting side-note to this idea of masculine vulnerability, see Bracken.

and his desire for lawless exploration as expressions of a rebellious masculinity. Tompkins also suggests these gritty cowboys share a fear of femininity and the domestic space, which accounts for Munny's decision to leave his children in pursuit of an objective that will almost certainly induce a moral regression. Munny's aversion to a domestic existence was perhaps *not* a fear of the feminine, as Tompkins suggests, but rather an expression of a distinctly male frustration over his inability to take matters into his own hands. A misguided stranger proposing a quest whose objective was, among other self-serving goals, the pursuit of "justice," lured him back into a self-destructive past. Justice, therefore, became the lofty objective used to rationalize an indulgence in the very behavioral patterns from which Munny longed to abstain in honor of his wife's memory. Yet justice is not Munny's objective any more than it is for Big Whiskey's prostitutes, who continue to pelt the pious cowboy with horse manure after he makes what appears like a sincere apology and a peace offering. Justice, atonement—these are socially-accepted compensation systems, but neither quells an irrational desire for revenge:

> In the typical revenge story the answers to these questions
>
> seem straightforward: injury demands redress and when
>
> redress is not forthcoming injuries should not be forgotten.
>
> Victims seek both to remember but also to obliterate memory,
>
> to attend to the past and yet to make a different recollection.

Memory is for victims a source of pain; the past constitutes the

true victimization. They seek to rectify the past, to placate

memory by silencing the ghosts whose constant call is for

vengeance. (Sarat 2)

What is revenge but a personalized form of justice designed to accommodate

the unreasonable demands of the victim? In *Unforgiven*, the protagonist

indulges in his authentic self; a persona characterized by violence and

aggression, but does so under a guise of justice and morality. Similarly out for

justice, Alice and the other prostitutes offer a reward for the death of the two

cowboys and undermine Little Bill's judicial authority. As an idealistic concept,

justice becomes an impediment to a satisfaction of the carnal, for although it is

identified as a noble pursuit, the innate idealism associated with such an

objective proves largely unattainable. Further, justice is a social construct that,

while of great benefit to society as a whole, dismantles the infallible agency of

the hypermasculine figure. While justice is a superficial pursuit in this film, it is

pertinent to consider the attraction of irrational vengeance as a defiance of the

judicial process. Kirby Farrell suggests that "only if berserk violence in life and

onscreen represents one sure method of settling scores and relieving the stress

of an excruciatingly competitive society, can trauma exercise a sinister

attraction" (5). Munny achieves remasculation by, in effect, "giving in" to the

persistent temptation of vigilantism,[20] the indulgence of which is, indeed, a

reification of that which was lost, and the viewer's triumph hinges upon that

aspect of the remasculation formula.

     Unforgiven and *Law Abiding Citizen* typify the widely applicable

characteristics of the remasculation cluster and do so in a comparable manner

that effectively bookend both the beginning and the conclusion of the period

with which this investigation is ultimately concerned. Furthermore, their

divergence as conventional genre films further reinforces the parameters of the

remasculation film, cutting across traditional genre boundaries. One a western,

the other a modern action film, these motion pictures exhibit an almost

identical narrative format characterized by an emasculatory incident, followed

by a period of maniacal disassociation, and finally a poignant moment of

remasculation in which the central character is transformed into a "hard-

bodied" (to use Jeffords' term) agent of power, action, and vigilantism.

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[20] For more on this notion of "giving in," see Brian Baker's discussion of Joel Schumacher's
film *Falling Down* (1993).

Chapter Seven: Remasculation and the
Hard-Bodied Hero

In Brian Helgeland's *Payback* (1999)

and Stephen Kay's *Get Carter* (2000),

protagonists Porter (Mel Gibson) and Jack

Sylvester Stallone as Jack Carter in *Get Carter* (Stephen Kay, Morgan Creek, 2000). Digital frame enlargement.

Carter (Sylvester Stallone) are assertive, intimidating, and physical men whose

relative prosperity within the context of their respective criminal underworlds

depends entirely on the maintenance of a hypermasculine façade. Initially

presented as impermeable, this image of masculine invincibility is both abruptly

and unexpectedly obliterated in an emasculatory scene, one in which the

character's considerable physical agency is deactivated or rendered ineffectual.

Further, this emasculatory scene reads as one of humiliation because the ease

with which both men are disempowered and stripped of their agency exposes,

in particular, the underlying fragility of their hypermasculine fronts.

Considering their previous roles as figures of uncompromising, impervious,

and, to some extent, invincible masculinity (see Mel Gibson in *Mad Max* [1979],

Lethal Weapon [1987], or *Braveheart* [1995], and Sylvester Stallone in *Rocky* [1976],

Rambo [1982], and *Over the Top* [1987]), both Porter and Carter's humiliation is

intensely degrading because their disempowerment *seems* incongruous to the

actors' résumés. Chapter Four argues that hypermasculine characters are rarely

portrayed as powerless even when they are (see Wayne in *The Wings of Eagles*

[1957]); the success of a remasculation film depends upon a poignant disempowerment of the invincible.

Chapter Four of this project suggests that the image of the hypermasculine leading man had been an evolving expression of screen masculinity that was solidified as an archetype in the 1940s and 1950s with the performances of a few key actors. During this period, the hypermasculine figure was characterized by, among other things, a kind of discipline or self-restraint, and few if any of these characters found themselves emasculated, disempowered, or completely ineffectual. Yet as representatives of a more contemporary screen masculinity, Gibson's "Porter" and Stallone's "Carter" are physically and emotionally incapacitated by unlikely foes in parallel scenes that both feature a moment of degradation and physical incapacitation. Yet as classically "hard-bodied" heroes,[21] Porter and Carter's remasculation accompanies their return to an earlier and, most importantly, more familiar expression of Gibson and Stallone's infallible and pugilistic expressions of screen masculinity (Jeffords, *Hard Bodies* 11). When Porter tortures and brutally murders his enemy, the audience is likely returned to the ruthlessness of his earlier role in *Mad Max*, and when Carter pummels a defenseless Mickey Rourke in the middle of crowded dance floor, he channels Stallone and the

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[21] For more on the idea of the "hard-bodied" hero onscreen, see Malin.

distinctive form of pugilism with which *Rocky*, volumes one through six, are

forever associated.[22] As one of its variations, the pugilistic remasculation film

typically features a leading man whose résumé has been affected by his notably

hard-bodied physique, and remasculation often constitutes a moment of

pugilistic indulgence for his character. Further, the moment at which this

character's onscreen front realigns with the actor's celebrity persona often

signifies an affirmation of normative masculinity within the diegesis of the film

and the protagonist's remasculation.

<center>Understanding Emasculation in Context</center>

Before the hero can reclaim his masculinity, he must first lose it

onscreen. While other variations of the remasculation film feature protagonists

whose emasculation occurred before the events of the film (in *American Beauty*,

for example), those that feature men whose manliness is defined largely by their

physicality often include very graphic emasculatory scenes. When the audience

meets Porter (Mel Gibson) for the first time, he is lying face down on a filthy,

metallic slab while an obese and potentially intoxicated man wearing a filthy

undershirt sterilizes a set of primitive operating utensils in a glass of scotch.

Since he is surrounded by grime and in the care of an unseemly character,

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[22] For a discussion of the marriage between pugilism and the cinema, see Roberts and Skutt.
Additionally, for a related discussion of pugilism in the early American cinema, see Streible.

<center>142</center>

Porter seems both near-death and desperate. With his face bloodied, bruised, and compressed against the table, the man known only as Porter has been shot twice in the back and has clearly selected this kind of unhygienic and unsanctioned medical care in order to avoid attracting unwanted attention to either his condition or his profession. As a thief betrayed by his partner and his wife, Porter lies emasculated and virtually lifeless on the table while a voiceover recounts the narrative leading up to this moment. However, Porter's injuries combined with this graphically unpleasant encounter with an amateur surgeon do not make this scene emasculatory unless the narrative context for Porter's loss of power, authority, agency, and control are also supplied. The performance of emasculation, therefore, can resemble a simple exhibition of the wounded male body as defined by Peter Lehman in *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture* and Paul Smith in his article "Action Movie Hysteria, or Eastwood Bound," in which both authors discuss the eroticization of the brutalized male form as a normalized trope in the modern action film. The emasculated male and the wounded male could prove indistinguishable from one another if not for the signifying and contextualizing properties of the narrative in which the emasculated man is situated.

The plot of *Payback* exemplifies the classic narrative structure of the remasculation formula presented in the form of a flashback that ultimately illustrates Porter's path to remasculative dominance. However, this

retrospective narration style dilutes the cathartic weight of the emasculation

moment and the corresponding remasculation that follows. Porter's injury and

the ensuing self-reconstruction mean little to an audience that has not been

given the opportunity to identify and establish an emotional connection with

Porter as a character. In this opening scene, Porter has clearly been injured,

but his wound only registers as emasculatory *after* the specific circumstances

that brought him to the care of such a questionable surgeon. Therefore, the

retroactive sequencing of the narrative in *Payback* illustrates how a wounded

male[23] is *not* automatically the victim of emasculation; instead the emasculative

moment is almost defined by the male protagonist's humiliating

disempowerment, which (in this variation of the remasculation film) is

perpetrated, either directly or indirectly, by a female character. In the

normative rhetoric of the remasculation film, the hero's emasculation depends

not only on a loss of power, authority, and agency, but also on a *humiliating* loss

of masculinity. Had Porter received his wound from a male character of

comparable status, physical presence, and ability, the opening scene in *Payback*

might not have registered as emasculatory. But it is woman who (in the

chauvinistic diegesis of this particular variation of the remasculation film)

obliterates Porter's hypermasculine front, despite her initial presentation as the

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[23] For another perspective on the wounded male, see Baker.

hero's dutiful, loyal, and, most importantly, non-threatening wife. Further, the ease with which this woman renders Porter completely helpless undermines the impermeability of the masculine façade by demonstrating its vulnerability to even those characters that are portrayed (within the remasculation rhetoric) as the most ineffectual.

Mapping the Road to Emasculation

Although it is a female character that perpetrates Porter's emasculation, his arrival at the emasculatory scene is precipitated by his own avarice. Midway through the film, he flashes back to a smash-and-grab robbery he executed with his partner Val Resnick (Gregg Henry), designed to yield a bounty between $350,000 and half a million dollars, which the two men intended to divide evenly. With no discernable strategy, Porter and Resnick robbed an Asian street gang of approximately $350,000 dollars. With his wife Lynn (Deborah Kara Unger) driving the getaway vehicle, all three escaped to a safe house where Porter was shot by Lynn, robbed by Resnick, and betrayed by both. Porter experiences his emasculative moment as he bleeds out on a cold cement floor. With a hollow, wide-eyed, and disbelieving gaze into the distance, his shaken wife clutches a still smoking revolver while his former best friend and partner gloats obnoxiously, but not before kicking Porter in the face and extinguishing a cigarette in the wounded man's blood as it pools around his face. Porter's

disbelief at this betrayal is easily identifiable as he struggles to understand Lynn's anger, yet Porter's emasculation cannot be derived purely from visual cues featured within the scene. Yet although Porter's emasculation is discernable through an interpretation of his overall visual morphology within the context of the relevant scene, the onscreen representation of his symbolic castration is enhanced by the actor's résumé and the extent to which the majority of his previous roles are associated with the hypermasculine archetype.

<center>The Moment of Emasculation</center>

The emasculation moment in *Payback* is literally a few seconds in length and is communicated with a provocative low-angle close-up that features great depth of field. From this angle, Porter appears both physically pained and powerless on the cold, cement floor. The dual focus of this particular shot allows the viewer to witness Porter's physical and mental disempowerment from his perspective, as his injuries have potentially left him paralyzed. This moment qualifies as emasculatory in light of some recognizable morphological signifiers. Gravity pulls on the side of Porter's face and his eyes are left wandering and unfocused as his facial morphology and orientation indicates a loss of physical power and agency when he is left semi-conscious of the events transpiring immediately behind him. His mannerisms are indicative of disorientation and therefore incapacity, as his arms are legs seem partially

<center>146</center>

paralyzed and remain awkwardly distended, as if reaching backward to relieve the discomfort in his back. Porter's posture and physical stance prior to his emasculatory moment are interesting precisely because they typify the potency and aggression of his masculinity before the instant of symbolic castration.[24] With Val in front and his drug-addicted wife behind, Porter is a modern Ozymandias before the fall, as his shoulders are back, hair perfectly coiffed, his gun holstered but at the ready and prepared for a head-on assault from his partner. As Porter reaches for his weapon, he snarls invoking his primitive and animalistic masculinity, only to be immediately deflated by the two shots that send him to the ground. Coiffed, assertive, and arrogant, Porter's apparent invincibility in this scene proves little more than an exemplification of Goffman's front, a constructed façade buttressed by his performed hypermasculinity, which exists only as long as he exerts control over both Val and his wife. Porter is emasculated rather than simply wounded in this scene because the ease with which Lynn dismantles her husband's hypermasculine persona emphasizes the underlying fragility of this performative front. Though Lynn appears conflicted about firing the shot, Porter's wound is *instantly* debilitating and thoroughly disempowering.

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[24] For an interesting and related study on the prevalence of castration anxiety in film, see McCaughey and King.

147

Incapacitated by his injuries, Porter is immediately transformed from a physical and capable ex-marine to a figure devoid of corporeal authority. Having been previously established as an impulsive and active character largely incapable of calculated forethought or sophisticated strategizing (read the simplicity of his "smash and grab" approach to the robbery, his inability to recognize his wife's prior discontentment, not to mention that he was betrayed in this scene), Porter is immobilized, and this temporary paralysis functions as the emasculatory moment because it constitutes the only point throughout the film where he is unable to forcibly alter the circumstances of his immediate environment. The emasculation registers quite fully in the fifth and final morphological category, which refers specifically to his manner of dress following the emasculative event: yet since Porter's betrayal is being presented as a flashback, we must return to the beginning of the film, diegetically five months after the event. Returning to Chicago on foot, Porter dons a borrowed or possibly stolen, ill-fitting suit and a white shirt without a necktie. The French-cuffed shirt is over-sized, as the sleeves extend beyond Porter's wrists leaving only the tops of his fingers exposed. Dwarfed in his rumpled suit, Porter and his manner of dress reflect a confused and irritated expression on his face, which slowly erodes as he embarks upon the long road to symbolic remasculation in this opening sequence. While Porter's emasculation

experience is punctuated by extensive physical injuries,[25] his journey towards

remasculation (to be addressed later in this chapter) is driven by his own sense

of honor and principle regarding the obligations associated with receiving

payment for services rendered. Yet Porter's remasculation is eventually

actualized by an uncivilized temptation to be violently pugilistic.

Las Vegas enforcer and henchman Jack Carter (Sylvester Stallone) is

similarly motivated by self-defined principles and an intrinsic sense of personal

street justice in *Get Carter*. Like Porter, Carter rejects law and order and

embraces an unstructured, covert, and relatively marginalized existence.

Further, Carter's masculinity is similarly defined by his physicality and the

portrayal of his emasculatory moment, which involves a loss of physical agency

resulting (indirectly) from his niece's poorly considered actions. Embracing the

romanticized notion of the archetypal outlaw, both Carter and Porter define

their masculinity beyond the law's protective purview. By resisting conformity

and refusing to adhere to the rule of law, both men project a similar front of

unfettered emancipation.[26] However, by rejecting the imposition and restrictive

nature of the law, Carter and Porter simultaneously rebuff its protection and

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[25] For a related study in onscreen torture and the modern action hero, see Nelmes.

[26] For an in-depth look at the rebel in Hollywood film, see Morella and Epstein.

must impose their own conception of the judicial process within their respective environments.

The Prelapsarian Carter

Stallone plays Jack Carter as the archetypal hard-bodied hero who hits first and asks questions later. We first meet him as he walks purposefully down the strip in Las Vegas amidst a blur of neon street signs and flashing lights. The film opens, somewhat incongruently, with a line from nineteenth-century Victorian poet Robert Browning: "That's all we expect of man this side of the grave: his good is – knowing he is bad," which both gestures to the importance of self-awareness and playfully justifies the kind of "bad" behavior commonly associated with the stereotypical Stallone character. In her discussion of Stallone's onscreen presence in *Hard Bodies*, for example, Jeffords theorizes this actor as an almost exclusively physical performer: "One of the most popular icons of the Reagan era was the film character of Rambo, played by Sylvester Stallone, a man whom audiences watched develop his hard body throughout the *Rocky* films" (28). Dressed professionally and impeccably, Carter is the picture of composure, control, and authority as his dominance is clearly communicated through a series of choreographed, low-angle shots designed to

reinforce his unquestionable power.[27] Carter's unmistakable confidence in his

ability to intimidate stems from a combination of his considerable physical

presence and his implied rejection of the judicial system as any kind of a

deterrent. While the audience met Porter near death, brutalized, and

emasculated, Carter is initially presented as a typification of the ultra-masculine

front. Despite lacking the distinctive agrarianism of the hypermasculine

archetype in the 1940s and 50s (a characteristic integral to many of Wayne's

onscreen performances), Carter boasts the unflappability, confidence,

capability, and staunch heteronormativity of the hypermasculine archetype in

its classic albeit updated form. Carter even demonstrates conservatism and an

uncompromising sense of duty as he informs his partner Connie McCarty

(John C. McGinley) that his upcoming trip to Seattle is motivated by a noble

desire to avenge the death of his estranged younger brother.

Against Connie's strenuous objections, Carter maintains his resolve and

suggests that his impending trip must be taken out of a sense of obligation and

duty to his family, an incongruent statement in light of a strained relationship

with both his brother Richie (Michel Cook) and the rest of the family. In fact,

Carter's attempt to maintain some semblance of family despite his

estrangement echoes the motivations of Wayne's Ethan Edwards in this

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[27] For an interesting discussion about visual coding and the onscreen villain, see Indick.

151

character's relatively unceremonious decision to spend years tracking his niece who was kidnapped by Indians in *The Searchers* (1956). In addition to *Get Carter*, many of writer David McKenna's screenplays feature an aggressive and belligerent hypermasculine character that expresses his manhood with physical violence. Further, McKenna's other screen narratives like *American History X* (1998) and *S.W.A.T.* (2003) are saturated with a number of overt references to some of Wayne's more notable films (*S.W.A.T.* features a character named Lieutenant Dan 'Hondo' Harrelson, after Wayne's *Hondo* [1953]), which at least suggests that McKenna's construction of Carter's character may have been influenced by some of Wayne's earlier roles. Like Carter, Edwards has a tense relationship with his brother, but his brother's murder awakens an instinctive sense of familial obligation that seems tied to his ultra-conservative values. For Carter, however, his sense of obligation and familial duty is diluted by his narcissistic disposition and vanity, which is evidenced by his gaudy clothing, his designer sunglasses, and an imposing Cadillac. In fact, Carter's sense of familial duty is entirely performative and seems motivated by a desire to bolster his own self-image by creating and executing a quest to avenge a brother for whom he never cared.

Carter's decision to investigate the circumstances of his brother's death stems from a misplaced sense of nobility and familial duty. As discussed in Chapter Four, a concern for the maintenance of the family unit is a key

attribute of the hypermasculine archetype. Yet Carter's sudden concern for his

estranged family is inconsistent with the character's almost exclusively physical

front. As far as the diegesis of *Get Carter* is concerned, the protagonist is a

hard-bodied henchman, and offers a thorough performance of the

hypermasculine archetype. Although Carter's concern for the honor of his

family is both contrived and clumsy in its presentation, it *is* a feature of the

hypermasculine model as it has been defined in this project. Physically, Carter

is every inch the ultra-masculine model, but the simplistic narrative structure of

Get Carter renders the complex sentimentality of its main character too

incongruent and ultimately unbelievable. Further, Stallone's limitations as a

character actor reinforce the implausibility of Carter's emotional depth, his

willingness to destroy his career, abandon his love interest, drive across the

country, and risk his life for the memory of an estranged sibling.

<div align="center">Emasculating Jack Carter</div>

Once symbolically castrated, Carter's period of suffering and

corresponding remasculation can begin. While Porter's emasculation

accompanied a paralyzing physical wound, Carter is equally powerless as he

watches a video of his intoxicated niece Doreen (Rachael Leigh Cook) being

raped by one of his younger brother's former associates. Having returned to

his old stomping ground, the man whose masculinity seems to erode before

our very eyes discovers that younger brother Richie had become involved in an elaborate prostitution ring that attracted seedy high-profile clients like Jeremy Kinnear (Alan Cumming) and demanded the services of low-level enforcers like Cyrus Paice (Mickey Rourke). Back home, then, Carter discovers that his extensive absence may have indirectly contributed to the systematic destruction of his family. This realization culminates within the emasculative moment evidenced by a kind of visual morphology that has, at this point, become characteristic of the remasculation narrative as it has been described here.

Having discovered the evidence that proves Doreen was raped, Carter enters Doreen's room in the attic of Richie's suburban residence. Painted a shade of orange designed to advertise its association with an impulsive teenage disposition, the room is oppressively small relative to Carter's imposing physical stature, reinforcing an incongruity between a suburban existence and the outlaw trying to rebuild it. Dwarfing the small desk chair, Carter's shoulders are visibly slumped beneath a vaulted ceiling noticeably illuminated by the light of a small window opposite the desk. Like a man humbled by the presence of a higher spiritual power, Carter's engagement with the small work area in Doreen's room resembles a pious man before a cathedral's lonely altar. As he plays the video file on Doreen's computer, Carter's facial morphology begins to change as he watches his intoxicated, underage niece ushered into the back of a limousine and then to an apartment where she is raped on camera.

For the first time in the film, Carter is unable to confidently hold his gaze on the digital video, as the graphic nature of the images is seems too disturbing for him to watch. While a shifty gaze communicates Carter's disdain for the events onscreen, his raised eyebrows and tensed jaw indicate a combination of outrage and disbelief, as if he is overwhelmed by the sudden realization that he does not have control over his environment or the people in it. In spite of his hulking physique, intimidating quips, and gangster-like attire, he is rendered a helpless bystander in that moment. As the viewer watches Carter watching his niece, the camerawork allows the viewer to temporarily occupy a position of power, slowly circling the subject as he is visibly stripped of his masculinity. His mannerisms denote one who is sheepishly defeated and powerless to affect the events onscreen. Carter's posture is perhaps most revealing, as his slumped shoulders signify a kind of deflation, as if the rape of his niece constitutes the final blow to the gallant, chivalrous façade of impervious masculinity that he has maintained up to this point in the film. As an established figure of force and action, Carter's inactivity while he watches the video could be perceived as a kind of quiet anger, yet his stillness in conjunction with his pained facial morphology seems more characteristic of a beleaguered individual who is overwhelmed by the violation of Doreen and his inability to prevent her trauma. Since Carter's manhood is defined almost exclusively in physical terms, the irrelevance of the hero's pugilistic talents in this scene precipitate his

emasculation and the destruction of his hypermasculine front when he realizes that he did not protect his family.

Dressing for Emasculation

Carter's emasculation is complemented, as nearly all emasculatory events are, by an inconsistency in the character's outward presentation. Regardless of the circumstances, location, or occasion, Carter wears a light grey suit that features a clear sheen evocative of Henry Hill's (Ray Liotta) clothing in *Goodfellas* (1990) or Sam 'Ace' Rothstein's (Robert DeNiro) traditional outfits in *Casino* (1995). Posited as an intimidating mobster figure from Las Vegas, Carter is rarely out of his protective suit and tie, which seem to function like the proverbial knight's armor, intimidating adversaries through the implication of status, wealth, and therefore power. Carter does appear out of "uniform," however, in circumstances clearly designed to communicate the inherent vulnerability beneath his hypermasculine facade. Prior to his emasculatory event, he answers Doreen's knock at his hotel door wearing an undershirt and suit pants, indicating a degree of comfort or presumed intimacy with Doreen. As Carter watches the video in which Doreen is raped, he is without his sunglasses (another symbolic barrier) and has loosened his necktie. As a symbol of his precision and appropriated social class, his necktie remains loosened for the duration of the film until the final scene when he appears at

his brother's grave without a tie at all; as if to suggest that the restoration of his honor by way of familial retribution negates the necessity of a hypermasculine façade.

In his book *The Inward Gaze*, Peter Middleton suggests that gender identity is almost entirely performative and assembled from recognizably hypermasculine signifiers extracted, personalized, and then eventually recast. In his consideration of what "authentic" masculinity looks like, Middleton suggests that what he refers to as the "real man" does not actually exist, meaning that a hypermasculine persona onscreen may, in fact, signify a corresponding *absence* of authentic or genuine masculinity beneath an otherwise convincing façade (See Langford).[28] As Middleton, Goffman, and Peberdy implicitly suggest, the clothes do not necessarily "make the man" but aid in the construction of the man's outer façade of masculinity, which is, (as has been previously argued), largely performative in the context of the remasculation film. While Carter's suits are clearly expensive, their ostentation seems steeped in overcompensation and posits the wearer as a man hiding from his true identity. Like Samson's beard, Carter's self-assurance, confidence, and personal agency are part of a façade that is little more than a postmodern amalgamation

[28] For more on the performative aspects of onscreen masculinity, see Perchuk and Posner.

that exudes a kind of pure, ultra-conservative, and distinctly American hypermasculinity.

Giving in: Remasculation through Pugilistic Indulgence

The simplicity of Porter's quest to reclaim $70,000 worth of stolen money is routinely a point of humor throughout *Payback*, especially when the opportunity to extort more money presents itself on more than one occasion. Porter encounters a number of unseemly representatives of Chicago's criminal underground, and each seems equally confused by the magnitude of his effort for a relatively small amount of money. At a crucial point, Porter visits Fairfax (James Coburn), whose opulent surroundings implicate an executive role within Chicago's crime syndicate. As Porter holds him at gunpoint, Fairfax asks: "What is it? The principle or something," and inadvertently alludes to one of the crucial aspects of Porter's masculine façade. While Carter was drawn to Seattle under the pretense of familial obligation, Porter is also facetiously concerned with the restoration of his honor through the reconstruction of his fractured family life. Betrayed by his wife and best friend, Porter gestures to the principle behind retrieving his share of the money, which he (somewhat hypocritically) stole from another criminal. Porter's injury is defined by a betrayal, a theft, and a physical assault: all of which simultaneously motivate and rationalize his pugilistic rampage throughout the streets of Chicago.

Requesting only what he feels is rightfully his, Porter seems to occupy a

transcendent moral high ground, one which is quite low by conventional

standards, but sufficiently elevated relative to the greed, violence, and

corruption that characterizes the majority of his many enemies throughout the

film. Porter certainly wants stolen money, but he seeks *only* what he stole in

order to finance a shamelessly implausible and romanticized escape with Rosie

(Maria Bello), a high-end prostitute.

Porter strives to rebuild his fractured hypermasculine façade through the

endurance of considerable physical pain, struggling towards remasculation with

each murder he commits on his quest to reclaim his loot. Yet as he works his

way up Chicago's criminal hierarchy, Porter is routinely assaulted and tortured

along the way: "The persistent image of heroic male bodies bruised, beaten,

and displayed for the film audience challenges the gendered binaries that have

characterized such moments of powerlessness as feminine. The excessive

physical tortures endured by Mel Gibson's characters in such movies as *Lethal*

Weapon, *Braveheart*, and most clearly *Payback* illustrate the importance of

suffering as an essentially masculine trait" (Brown 123). The relationship

between physical suffering and reward is linked to the formulaic structure of

the remasculation narrative. Having reclaimed the money and murdered

everyone who attempted to interfere with his mission, Porter arrives at Rosie's

doorstep with two broken feet, a severe head-wound, and a face visibly marked

159

with scarring injuries. Having "earned" his freedom, his money, and his girlfriend through horrific suffering, Porter relaxes into the passenger seat of a stolen limousine as an entirely remasculated man, having literally rebuilt his masculinity through a systematic reacquisition of the various normative signifiers of modern, masculine fortitude. With a replacement female companion arguably more physically attractive than his wife, a duffel bag brimming with untraceable cash, and the freedom to indulge in the associated pleasures of both, Porter's suffering yields the restoration of his personal agency and some measure over his destiny.

Remasculation through Transformation

Carter's quest for redemption via the symbolic restoration of his familial bonds is equally transparent, and little more than a narcissistic extension of the imposing hero's self-image as the invincible, well-dressed protector of the feminine. Richie (the younger brother) is feminized, with his post-mortem characterization typically including a report of submission to one physically stronger and more intimidating than he. Additionally, Richie's extra-marital affair further marginalizes him from his older brother, who presents himself as the ultra-conservative and moral reincarnation of classic hypermasculinity. Hypocritical to the core, Carter has left an extra-marital relationship of his own in Las Vegas, having had a series of inappropriate encounters with his

employer's wife. Further, it seems crucially important to Carter that the nobility of his quest is understood and appreciated by those affected by its execution, since he associates its completion with the safety of his remaining family members and the reaffirmation of his status as their brooding protector.

Porter surprised many representatives of Chicago's criminal underground by adamantly reiterating the modesty of his monetary demands. After reclaiming $70,000 and *only* this amount, Porter's pugilistic rampage seems at least loosely justified by the universal importance of justice, code, and honor. Murdering the man who raped Doreen, gunning down his employer, and finally shooting the owner of the nightclub in which Richie was employed, Carter's remasculation is equally gradual and characterized by periodic incidents of intense physical suffering as well, indicating that remasculation is not only earned but ultimately endured. Therefore, if we are to presume that remasculation describes the process by which one's masculine identity is reclaimed or restored, then we can conclude from these two parallel films with nearly identical narratives that "masculinity" as an onscreen performance has become increasingly tied to its durability and visceral substance, rather than *mainly* its physical beauty as Steve Neale implies in "Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on men and mainstream cinema," or Donald Reuter examines more completely in *Shirtless: The Hollywood Male Physique*.

Summative Thoughts

Carter and Porter are both physically violent, but must each endure violence in turn. It is this oscillation between sadism and masochism that has become a normative trope within the modern action film in general, and the pugilistic remasculation picture in particular. In an almost formulaic fashion, both heroes systematically murder their way up the chain of criminal syndicates and perpetrate gruesome assaults on underground bureaucracies. Each triumph, however, is routinely offset by a corresponding physical assault upon the hero, implicating the implicit corporeality of modern onscreen hypermasculinity: "The cinematic model of masculinity represents more than the sum of its binary parts. The oscillation between the hero's position as sadist and as masochist, between administering violence and suffering violence, represents not a fracturing of gender-specific subjectivity but a model of masculinity that is cohesive – stronger for its weaknesses. Rather than signifying clearly demarcated masculine and feminine positions marked as either sadistic or masochistic, *Payback*, like most of Mel Gibson's movies, reveals that ideal masculinity must incorporate both sides of the sadomasochistic continuum" (Brown 124). Brown's conception of "ideal masculinity" complements the formulaic narrative structure of the remasculation film, since pugilistic heroes Porter and Carter oscillate between moments of emasculation and remasculation, between "suffering violence" and

162

"administering violence." Further, although the remasculation hero does typically occupy the gendered positions of sadistic masculinity and masochistic femininity, this hero experiences remasculation only when he prevails and assumes a seemingly permanent and heteronormative role of sadistic dominance.

Carter's remasculation is as visible as it is unmistakable. Having murdered Cyrus Paice in the middle of a crowded dance floor and threatened Jeremy Kinnear, the over-confident techno-wiz, to within an inch of his life, Carter feels that he has sufficiently avenged his brother's death and protected his family, most notably Doreen. For the first time, Carter appears in the sunlight. The sky is no longer overcast, and the persistent drizzle that gave the film its monochromatic pathos (a similar effect was used in *Payback*) seems a distant memory. Again, for the first time, Carter appears without a tie and holds his jacket over his arm, like a shield he no longer needs. Yet perhaps most significantly, Carter has shaved his intimidating goatee, a change to which young Doreen playfully draws attention: having removed yet another layer of protection he stands bashfully before the young girl to whom he implicitly dedicates his remasculation. While the digitized rape ultimately stripped Carter of his hypermasculine fortitude in the emasculation scene, her position as the masochistic victim allowed Carter to justify his sadistic rampage and restore his honor through performed chivalry. Further, Carter owes his emasculation and

corresponding remasculation to Doreen, and the implicit didacticism of the

experience has clearly liberated the hero from an endless cycle of

sadomasochistic violence.

Chapter Eight: Emasculative Redundancy and the Reacquisition of

Purpose

In *The Company Men* (2011), director

John Wells articulates the destruction of

American industry as a direct result of the

economic downturn in the United States

during the autumn of 2008. Following the

trials of three men who are systematically and

abruptly dismissed from their managerial roles

Ben Affleck as Bobby Walker in *The Company Men* (John Wells, Weinstein, 2010).
Digital frame enlargement.

at the GTX Corporation, Wells compartmentalizes three individual case

studies, each used to animate the disintegration and decay of the modern

American bureaucrat at various life stages using the same emasculation,

remasculation pattern that we have seen thus far. Bobby Walker (Ben Affleck)

is an MBA graduate in his mid-thirties and has a small family with whom he

enjoys the luxuries of a spacious home and an ostentatious sports car. Phil

Woodward (Chris Cooper), in contrast, began his career as a welder in the

company's shipbuilding department. Roughly two decades older than Bobby,

Phil has a daughter who is only months away from beginning an expensive Ivy

League education. At the top of the bureaucratic hierarchy is Gene McClary

(Tommy Lee Jones), a prosperous executive whose beginnings were just as

humble as Phil's. Yet as a man roughly ten years older than Phil, Gene holds

an executive position, while Phil performs a managerial function of lesser importance. With an immaculate home and an exotic European sports car, Gene embodies the superficiality of American decadence, surrounding himself with luxury in order to disengage from his family and coworkers.

Bobby, Phil, and Gene all define their masculinity by their ability to "provide" for their families. Yet the film opens with a mosaic of interior still shots from each man's home, as if to emphasize the hubris of capitalism. With suburban sanctuaries that are truly the epitome of decadence and excess, the prescriptive principles of the conventional Greek tragedy all but demand each man's destruction. Gargantuan and palatial homes strewn with recreational paraphernalia personify Lenin's worst fears concerning the end result of capitalism. Consumption without cause and conspicuous displays of prosperity denote a specific kind of arrogance implicated as a distinctly American characteristic. Bobby, Phil, and Gene have gone far beyond this archaic notion of familial provision and have instead come to associate accumulation and excess with their masculine identities. If moderation is the golden rule, all three men defy this sensible notion in favor of asserting their masculine competency and implicit potency by transforming their lives into an outward expression of masculine agency. After having been removed from the golf course at his country club because of unpaid dues, Bobby defiantly suggests to his wife that

he must *appear* successful in order to *be* successful, which is a sentiment that seems to resonate with all three men.[29]

In a manner that seems to openly contest some nostalgic notion of a post-World War Two America whose ideological foundations are associated with the triumph of industry and the strength of American production (see the historical accounts put forth by George, O'Sullivan, and Keuchel), Bobby, Phil, and Gene's weakness seems tied to their bureaucratic distance from the means of production. While each man is initially employed within GTX's shipbuilding division, Gene and Phil have not been physically involved in the practice of construction for a number of decades, while it seems that Bobby has never experienced the authenticity of "working on the floor." In her article "Class Action," Gaylyn Studlar suggests that Hollywood's representation of "authentic" masculinity is conventionally defined or signified through a display of the hero's corporeality.[30] What Studlar gestures to as the authentic or "real" man,[31] aligns yet is not entirely synonymous with the hypermasculine archetype. Studlar's "real" man derives his authentic masculinity mainly from his physicality, whereas the hypermasculine archetype is defined by his agency,

[29] For further discussion surrounding the idea of "performing class," see Foster.

[30] For more on the relationship between physicality and modern onscreen masculinity, see Whitehead.

[31] For a related discussion of the "real man" as a derogative term used to normalize heterosexuality through language, see Benshoff and Griffin.

167

appearance, ultra-conservative values, and duty to his family *in addition* to his physicality. Older and more visibly weathered, Gene and Phil are defined as masculine by their experiences as hands-on laborers and, perhaps most importantly, by their systematic and gradual ascension through the hierarchy at GTX. They are "old dogs," veterans of a dying industry incongruently placed in the midst of an economy defined by technological innovation, service industries, and the exchange of intangible commodities. Once defined by their ability to construct and create an exchangeable product (one that literally emblematized the fortitude of American industry), Gene and Phil begin the film having never been further removed from the physicality of the shipbuilding trade. Surrounded by the luxuries and comfort of suburbia and edified by the status that their positions within the bureaucratic hierarchy afford, Gene and Phil's comfort within the protection of their accrued wealth is presented as being not only noble but also natural. Their honest labor as young men and ensuing loyalty to the company have (apparently) won them personalized expressions of the American Dream. Like Fitzgerald's Gatsby, Gene and Phil began their lives epitomizing the middle class, yet in a manner nobler than Fitzgerald's morally questionable protagonist, both men spent their youths doing honest work and producing American products designed to symbolize the nation's economic strength. Having progressed through the

ranks at GTX, Gene and Phil's congeniality stems from their unquestionable support of distinctly middle-class values.

There is no doubt that Gene and Phil typify the working-class hero, but as men in their late fifties and early sixties, their masculinity is imbued with an authenticity that the considerably younger Bobby does not exhibit. Like Wayne's role as the dying gunslinger in *The Shootist* (1976), these two managerial employees of an industrial company are revered for their experience and loyalty rather than their current value or ability. Masculinity, in *The Company Men*, is defined in a manner unquestionably nostalgic for a national consciousness whose values are rooted in wholesome notions like honor, hard work, honest production, and moral propriety rather than the implicitly avaricious nature of capitalism. As one review suggested: "The modern corporation [as represented in *The Company Men*] is a sterile Darwinian shark tank in which the only thing that matters is the bottom line. The old days of corporate beneficence and loyalty to longtime employees are long gone" (Holden, par. 3). Yet even though we are clearly meant to revere the experience, wisdom, and integrity of these two personifications of the "American Dream," Wells emphasizes the material indulgence of all three men, alluding to their hubris in a foreboding manner that essentially prophesizes their downfall. Further, Gene and Phil's masculinity is constructed via Bobby's relative femininity onscreen. As a man in his mid-thirties, the educated Bobby joined the corporation in a managerial

capacity, effectively circumventing a more conventional progression up the organizational hierarchy. In addition to his overconfident swagger, youthful good looks, and cocky attitude, Bobby's disconnection from the means of production subtracts from his masculinity. Like many in his generation, Bobby is representative of a cohort of Americans whose acquired knowledge (no doubt financed or at least subsidized by wealthy parents) permits them to bypass the "hard work" that defines the middle-class onscreen hero. As student and then a bureaucrat, Bobby embodies a more contemporary form of masculinity than that of those hypermasculine icons discussed earlier in this project. Studlar's contention that real onscreen men must suffer to prove their masculinity is illustrated directly in *The Company Men*, as Bobby's lack of experience "on the production floor" stigmatizes the young MBA graduate as the detested personification of corporate America, a class of sinister bureaucrats fixated on the accumulation of wealth at the expense of good, old-fashioned production. Having never held a tool to a work in progress at GTX, Bobby's masculinity is initially posited as *inauthentic* according to Studlar's characterization of what she describes as the "real man." Since Phil and Gene personify Studlar's authentic archetype, Bobby's masculinity registers as feminine by comparison because his presence onscreen does not align with these parameters of masculine authenticity.

Bobby Walker: The Female Man

As a young, good-looking man in his thirties, Bobby strolls confidently into a boardroom full of men and women who appear to be anxiously awaiting his arrival. While their anticipation could be a function of their respect for the man clearly responsible for running a potentially important meeting, this tension is quickly identified as the result of knowledge the men and women at the table wish they did not have. After twelve years as manger at GTX, Bobby walks in to his place of work to discover that the social and professional roles that once defined him have been eliminated due to redundancies and the economic downturn. Confident and self-aware, Bobby enters the interior space of his office, appropriates the attitude and behavior of his workplace identity only to discover that his services are no longer valued. Unlike the conventional action hero, for instance, Bobby's masculinity is not defined by his physicality, or even his capabilities, but rather his economic value within the organizational hierarchy of GTX. Whether or not Bobby's role in the company was truly essential or not, the audience is never informed, but Bobby's loss of function within the bureaucratic structure that supported his own sense of self and ensured the financial security of his family is equivalent to a crippling wound to the buff action hero,[32] one that leaves him incapable and emasculated. In the corporate setting, masculine potency is akin to conspicuous consumption,

[32] For additional discussion regarding representations of the wounded male, see Baker.

earning potential, and the economic means for the indulgence of unadulterated excess.[33] Having played roles ranging from the brutish Boston street thug in *Good Will Hunting* (1997) to the blind vigilante superhero in *Daredevil* (2003), Affleck is traditionally cast in roles that demand impressive and imposing physiques. In Affleck's more recent film *The Town* (2011), the actor plays a cunning townie bank robber from Charlestown. In order to more plausibly appropriate the persona of a meticulous outlaw, Affleck spent months in the gym preparing for a shirtless exercise scene in his apartment. Affleck's tall stature, broad shoulders, square jaw, and clean-cut exterior have typically won him roles in which his corporeality is integral to the character's plausibility (See *Armageddon* [1998], *Daredevil*, *Pearl Harbor* [2001], *The Sum of All Fears* [2002], *Paycheck* [2003], and *Smokin' Aces* [2006]). With the exception of a film called *Changing Lanes* (2002), Affleck has never been cast as the bureaucratic everyman, and even in this particular film he plays a lawyer who evolves into a very physical vigilante.

<center>Locating the Emasculating Force</center>

Mary Ann Doane describes the femme fatale archetype as one who is "consciously manipulative or conniving" (125) and suggests that the "power

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[33] For an interesting discussion regarding Hollywood's representation of the white, corporate man, see Dow and Wood.

accorded to the femme fatale is a function of fears linked to notions of uncontrollable drives… the femme fatale is situated as evil and is frequently punished or killed" (2). In *The Company Men*, the Sally Willcox character is inherently two-dimensional and exhibits no real sentimental attachment to anyone. Although Willcox is little more than an emotionless cog in the corporate machine, she is very deliberately a woman in the diegesis of the film. Narratively, Willcox contributes almost nothing to the film aside from furthering the complexity of Gene's character with her role as his mistress. The castration scene is quick, but degrading, as Bobby tears into a boardroom similar to the one he just left with his staff and confronts Willcox, who sits calmly and emotionlessly at the far end of the table. Unceremoniously, Willcox hands him a document that outlines the details of his severance package, but makes no attempt to apologize for the misfortune of his situation, or even infer that his dismissal is not related to his performance as an employee. In this scene, a physically unimposing woman renders a protagonist played by an actor who is typically portrayed as the personification of masculine strength and capability, essentially powerless. Instantly transformed from the cocky, self-important rogue into an exasperated and terrified wreck, Bobby's emasculation precipitates the downfall of his elder coworkers Gene and Phil, and establishes the persuasive rhetoric of the film.

Phil Woodward and Gene McClary: Middle Class Hero and Class-Climbing

Martyr

Having contributed to the construction of GTX, both Gene and Phil do

not show much concern for their own situations when they learn of Bobby's

dismissal. As the head of the shipbuilding division, Gene is infuriated by the

cutbacks and takes his concerns directly to the company's Chief Executive

Officer, James Salinger (Craig T. Nelson), who dismisses the layoffs as simply a

function of the changing economy. Displaying a genuine concern for the

welfare of employees like Bobby, Gene identifies himself as perhaps the film's

only humanitarian and seems largely disinterested in the increase in GTX's

stock price as a result of the layoffs. Perhaps once motivated by the seductive

appeal of material wealth, Gene's life is a hollow façade of decadence, one

complete with the sprawling estate, a regal wife, and private jet. While his life

appears attractive from the exterior, Gene is estranged from his spouse and

engaged in an affair with Willcox, the very same Willcox who coldly fires him

later in the film. In one scene, Gene returns home to discover that his wife has

casually purchased an outrageously expensive end table for one of the many

rooms in their large estate, and his visible disgust implicates the severity of his

inner conflict. Once seduced by the lure of wealth and decadence, Gene begins

to realize throughout the course of the film that one's possessions cannot

define one's masculinity, nor can they behave as a viable substitute in the event one's masculinity is threatened.

Prior to his role in *The Company Men*, American audiences had seen Tommy Lee Jones in a number of hypermasculine roles that were both similar and decidedly dissimilar to Affleck's roles during the late 1990s and early 2000s. From his performance as the tirelessly pursuant U.S. Marshall in *The Fugitive* (1993) to the earnest and weather-worn sheriff in the Cohen Brothers' *No Country for Old Men* (2007), Jones is commonly portrayed as an honest, ultra-conservative military man with an agrarian undertone,[34] one distinctly reminiscent of Wayne's roles in films like *The Searchers* (1956), *Rio Bravo* (1959), and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962). While Affleck's onscreen masculinity is product of his classic American good looks and the heroic, ultra-capable, and physically demanding roles that have come to define his career, Jones' onscreen masculinity is less dependent on corporeality, and more an expression of wisdom and experience. Hollywood's audiences have seen Affleck assert his masculine authority through hand-to-hand combat in *Good Will Hunting*, *Daredevil*, and *The Town*,[35] but we have rarely seen Jones in any kind of a physical confrontation with the exception of his role in *Under Siege*

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[34] For a related discussion of Tommy Lee Jones and masculinity, see Benshoff and Griffin.

[35] To broaden the discussion of the intersection between Ben Affleck's celebrity persona and his role choice, see Edwards.

(1992), in which he plays a deluded domestic terrorist up against a retired Navy Seal (Steven Seagal) aboard a U.S. Destroyer. While there have been some deviations throughout the length of his forty year career, Jones has become type-cast as the veteran sage that is active and capable, though not typically physical. Jones' particular form of onscreen hypermasculinity is rarely personified through scenes involving physical violence such as hand-to-hand combat. In fact, the maintenance of his onscreen façade is still dependent on his apparent invincibility and unflappable confidence, just as much as it is for younger, more physical performers like Affleck.

Gene discovers that his friend and coworker Phil has been laid off despite Gene's prior objections. Outraged, Gene storms into Willcox's office of and demands his rehiring. Without a word, Willcox hands Gene a single sheet of pink paper, bringing his tirade to an abrupt halt. Instantly, Gene's body language mimics that of a deflated balloon and personifies a man stripped of his social role, authority and consequently his masculinity. While Gene's humiliation is jarring, its effect is heightened by the hypermasculine construction that is Tommy Lee Jones. In an instant, Willcox renders Gene symbolically female by stripping him of his social, professional, and cultural identity. In the next scene, he wanders aimlessly into the lobby of GTX and happens upon his coworker Phil, who sits similarly defeated with only a small box of possessions from his office. Once emasculated, these men lose their

176

power, which ultimately defines their masculinity and are subsequently feminized by default. Yet once symbolically feminized, they are aimless, ineffective, and stagnant.

Gene's emasculation exposes the superficiality of his daily existence by subverting the value of his material possessions and accrued wealth, while Bobby's emasculating dismissal raises concerns of self-preservation and has real consequences for his young family. Since Gene has presumably spent his career pursuing the comfortable and luxurious existence of the proletariat, the loss of his position catalyzes a period of reprioritization. Gene's role within the corporation in conjunction with his considerable stock options leave him in a much more secure position financially, rendering his altruistic concern for his two partners in unemployment initially suspect. What is genuine, however, is the dysfunction of his home life; the few scenes Gene does have with his wife are strained and non-communicative, which may or may not relate to his ongoing affair with Willcox. While Gene's career earned him considerable wealth and allowed him to support his wife and a family, the conflicted and suddenly displaced man of action is transformed into the film's unlikely sage. In a hopeful scene, Gene pitches a business plan to Bobby that involves his managerial participation in the genesis of a new shipbuilding company, so (as Gene suggests) they may both reconnect with the honesty of old-fashioned hard work.

While Gene is unquestionably emasculated by the same female corporate efficiency expert with whom he is having an affair, his symbolic castration is fleeting as compared to Bobby and Phil's parallel experiences. Unable to face his wife after being fired and potentially destroying the outward perfection of his "home life," Gene retreats to Willcox's apartment and does little more than exist as an ineffectual fixture in his mistress' residence. In a manner designed to invert heteronormative gender roles, Willcox scrambles to prepare for a busy day at work, while Gene sits powerlessly at the kitchen table, quietly sipping coffee in his underwear with no plans for the day. Gene's emasculation leaves him purposeless, but not without means. Although stripped of his authority in the company, his considerable stock options leave him capable of action and therefore with some semblance of masculinity.

Phil Woodward: The Dying Gaul

Gene and Phil are both roughly the same age and both began at the company as young men. Gene, however, achieved an executive position while Phil only managerial role, yet both men consumed conspicuously and advertised their wealth throughout the duration of their employment at GTX. Phil's emasculation is both complete and permanent because he lacks the accumulated resources necessary to sustain his lifestyle following the loss of his

position. In *The Company Men*, masculinity is defined by one's agency in the free

market economy rather the individual's material wealth:

> The term "organization man" was coined by business commentators in
>
> the 1950s to describe the growing armies of career managers in public
>
> corporations…While the word "man" implies a common humanity
>
> including women and men, the image evoked by writers like C.W. Mills
>
> of 'the salaried bureaucrat, with brief case and slide rule' is at the same
>
> time undeniably masculine. "Organization man" suggests impartiality.
>
> It conjures up the image of a classless, genderless, disembodied
>
> administrator who – in contrast to the owner-manager of old- can
>
> exercise complete neutrality in decision-making. The bureaucrat's power
>
> is vested in the ability to act, as Max Weber put it, "without regard to
>
> persons." (Roper 1)

Gene and Phil both appear to be comfortably affluent, but Phil's visual wealth

is contingent upon his position at the company. Phil's dismissal accompanies

the realization of financial dependence, an epiphany that completes his

emasculation. Seemingly a capable provider for his dependent wife and

daughter, Phil's firing reinforces his own status as an unknowing dependent.

Phil was completely reliant on the income he received from GTX for survival,

and the sudden absence of that financial support forces him to realize his

vulnerability. As a consequence, Phil is no longer able to maintain his

masculine façade, a constructed front that was dependent on his and his family's ability to conspicuously consume within the economy. Without the ability to maintain this front, Phil gradually loses his masculinity and subsequently becomes both feminized by default and implicitly associated with incapability, ineffectuality, and subjection.

Phil's emasculation is an exposure, one that reveals his disguised financial vulnerability and the associated fragility of his home life. Without any plausible hope to recapture his former status at another company because of his age and substantial salary at GTX, Phil dyes his hair to appear more youthful and begins to apply for positions far beneath him out of desperation. Despairing and ashamed, he continues to leave his house dressed for work and returns home at five o'clock in order to maintain the façade of normalcy for those in the neighborhood. With neither Gene's financial security and agency nor Bobby's youth and potential, Phil's character embodies the temporality and fragility of American prosperity. Wealth and luxury are posited as fleeting expressions of success manifested in material form. The beautiful homes, ostentatious vehicles, and luxurious lifestyles are social signifiers indicative of accomplishment in the free market economy. Yet the abrupt and largely unexpected economic downturn in the fall of 2008 proved that one's accrued wealth is not an explicit indicator of social value. All three men in this film began as valued employees whose abilities were crucial to operational success

of the company. In one scene, GTX CEO Salinger alludes to the economic

shift from industrial production to service-based industries and

telecommunications, two trades that do not produce a physical product. As

nostalgic relics from a period in American history where the production of a

physical and tangible item defined one's masculinity and sense of identity, Gene

and Phil cannot adapt to this changing market. Gene has means and therefore

uses his unemployment to reflect on his country's transitioning economy and,

perhaps more significantly, his role in it, if any. Phil's frantic attempts to find

any position that provides a paycheck are steeped in pathos since his focus is

desperately fixated on the maintenance of a fraudulent masculinity defined by

superficial displays of prosperity. Yet Phil's unceremonious and self-inflicted

asphyxiation at the wheel of his car in his garage is rooted in his detachment

from the wholesome ideology of the working class and his desperate concern

for the maintenance of his inauthentic self.[36] Phil's suicide reinforces the

working-class rhetoric of this film, as his unwillingness to return to his roots

alludes to a sense of self-loathing that eliminates the nobility of his character.

Shortly before he is actually fired, Phil angrily declares that he will "take a

fucking AK-37 to [his office]," before he allows them to terminate his

employment. Phil's anger stems from a disguised disdain for the underclass

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[36] For additional information regarding the representation of the working class in American cinema, see Oberdeck.

and, implicitly, his own membership within that class. Therefore, in a film that celebrates the nostalgia of the wholesome and honest stereotypical middle-class laborer, Phil represents the mindset of the working-class man whose exposure to the allure of the proletariat lifestyle has polluted his character and instigated a toxic self-loathing that leads to his untimely death (Mills 7). Like Jay Gatsby's, Phil's pursuit of an unattainable fantasy creates a distance between his identity and his social role. As a young man working "on the floor," Phil established his masculine identity as a middle-class laborer who contributed to the physical construction of a version of America. Regardless of the viewer's age, work experience, or socio-economic status, the film's nostalgic and mythologized revelry is easily recognizable, as all three men allude (often ambiguously) to an era of stability within the American workforce, when a man could depend on working hard in exchange for financial security.

Jack Dolan: The Unlikely Middle Class Hero

Enter Jack Dolan (Kevin Costner). As the only man posited as a middle-class laborer without aspirations of upward social mobility, Dolan begins the film as the stereotypically disgruntled tradesman bitter about the relative value of labor and the economy's recent shift towards the service and telecommunications industries, fields that reward employees with higher education. As a man in his mid-fifties, Jack functions as foil to Gene and Phil,

embodying the uncorrupted "road not taken." Presumably seduced by the allure of wealth and its associated prosperity, Gene and Phil supposedly rejected their working-class roots in order to bolster their sense of self-worth within a community governed by the principles of capitalism. Jack's character emulates the hypermasculine in a general sense, and Wayne's ultra-conservative and distinctly agrarian manliness in particular. With a harsh Boston accent, a large and imposing pick-up truck, and an extensive wardrobe featuring garments of plaid and denim, it seems that Jack has never worked in an office and demonstrates an evident disdain for the white-collar world. In the beginning of the film, Jack attracts pity, as his home, vehicle, and the prestige of his job are undeniably humble relative to Bobby's, Phil's, or Gene's, whose education gives them access to a realm of opportunity unfamiliar to Jack. Wells' representation of the economic downturn creates an atmosphere that Mikhail Bakhtin might describe as "carnivalesque." Bakhtin's term characterizes a scenario in which the conventional system of hierarchical organization is inverted such that the traditionally powerless are abruptly imbued with the ability to influence the surrounding circumstances. Under normal economic circumstances, MBA graduates and individuals with significant corporate experience hold more financial value in a capitalist system than members of the working class; such is the difference between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, as Marx would describe it. Yet the unexpected

183

downturn creates a situation characterized by the carnivalesque, as the weak market directly contributes to the displacement and subsequent emasculation of highly educated laborers like Bobby, Phil, and Gene. As the only character amongst these four men with a job that seems comparatively impervious to the fickle nature of the marketplace, Jack is empowered by default and the inherent stability of middle class labor is validated by the production of "something you [can] see," as Gene nostalgically puts it.

While Jack is undeniably crass and clearly has difficulty disguising his resentment towards over-educated bureaucrats like Bobby (his brother-in-law), this working class hero is empowered by comparison and is consequently given a choice that he would otherwise not have. Desperate for money after having sold his house and car, Bobby is humbled further as he is forced to ask Jack for a job working on his construction site doing manual labor, a profession he once had the luxury of looking down upon. For what is perhaps the first time in the entirety of their relationship, Jack has power over Bobby in the context of the carnivalesque and is consequently given a choice to express his delight at Bobby's well-deserved fall from grace and further the young man's emasculation. On the other hand, Jack has a unique and unlikely opportunity to support his brother-in-law in his time of need by providing him with a job. True to the rhetoric of this film, Jack's nobility as a middle-class man working only to keep his friends and family employed during difficult economic times is

juxtaposed with the CEO of GTX, Salinger, whose duty to the welfare of his employees extends only so far as their continued employment raises the company's stock price and increases his net worth. Ill-mannered and without class, Jack's honesty and uncompromising morality demonizes Salinger by contrast and implicitly vilifies capitalism in general at the same time. In *The Company Men*, Wells posits a clear disconnect between class and wealth by suggesting that the two are by no means mutually exclusive. While both men accumulated material wealth, they did so with the presumption that conspicuous consumption and accumulation would result in class promotion. The loss of their jobs, however, forced both men to accept their middle-class roots and the superficiality of their constructed lives of material decadence and indulgence. In this film, remasculation does not accompany the reclamation of lost wealth. Instead, Bobby and Gene are remasculated when they reacquire agency within the workforce by contributing to the fabrication of a tangible product.

Just as Jack defines his masculinity through physical creation and "building something you [can] see," Gene's remasculation is characterized by a return to a wholesome middle-class mentality, while Bobby's remasculation is similarly achieved through an introduction to a "wholesome," "authentic," and idealistic social perspective. Jack embodies the "manly man" archetype, while Bobby and Gene struggle against the seduction of capitalist pursuits in order to

185

appropriate Jack's honesty, consideration, and nobility through physical

construction. While Bobby's brief stint as a construction worker proves

didactic insofar as he realizes the frivolity of wealth and decadence and the

relative value of family and hard, middle-class labor, Gene is remasculated

when he reengages with the marketplace by starting his own shipbuilding

company. In a crucial scene following Phil's funeral, Gene and Bobby meet at

a harbor-side warehouse in the industrial district just outside of Boston.

During this meeting, Gene reveals what he believes to be the secret to the

collective remasculation of the bureaucrat within the context of a capitalist

system specifically designed to dehumanize its workforce and separate the

laborer from his labor. To reclaim this version of ultra-conservative,

chauvinistic, and anti-bureaucratic masculinity best represented onscreen in

1940s and 50s by actors like Wayne, Mature, Palance, and Bogart, Gene spouts

a nostalgic diatribe that implicates the role of physical labor in the

reconstruction and remasculation of the American man.[37] In his discussion

with Bobby, Gene implicitly argues for a return to this ultra-conservative

masculinity by emphasizing the resonance between masculinity and labor: "In

terms of pub(lic) masculinity, the engagement between masculinity and labor

creates and even more compelling relationship between masculinity, localness,

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[37] For a related discussion about the relationship between labor and onscreen masculinity, see Kessler-Harris.

and history… the resonance between masculinity and labor is important, as masculinity is constantly enacted, by proxy, through the social categories of work" (Campbell, Bell, and Finney 97). When Gene explains his plan to start his own shipbuilding company with Bobby as his chief salesman, he appeals to the young man's faith in the transcendence of the working man and the nobility found in a hard day's labor, and magically Bobby's previous concerns about his salary and associated benefits become unimportant in the face of what Gene presents as a more noble, more wholesome, more lucrative, and more American objective.

Summative Thoughts

In his foundational text outlining various strategic approaches to "reading" film, James Monaco discusses Cubism and its applicability to the analytical interpretation of film:[38] "One of the important elements of Cubism, for example, was the attempt to achieve on canvas a sense of interrelationships among perspectives…it is very much like the dialectic of montage-editing-in film. Both Cubism and montage eschew the unique point of view and explore the possibilities of multiple perspective" (Monaco 43).   Wells' *The Company Men* is truly a film about men and their struggle to redefine or remasculate

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[38] For further discussion on the topic of Cubism and film, see Fairservice.

themselves in the wake of unforeseen economic hardship. Yet Wells does not tell the story of the corporate bureaucrat's downfall, rather he narrates his demise on three separate planes, effectively showcasing the tragic experiences of three subjects at different points in their lives, each with different familial obligations and associated outcomes. As the narrative Shuttles back and forth between Bobby's inauspicious job interviews, Gene's troubled conscience, and Phil's frantic desperation, all three men share the same beginning point yet grapple with their emasculation and disempowerment differently, attributing dimension and depth to the experience of losing one's vocation. Narratively, Bobby, Gene, and Phil constitute three separate planes that, once combined, embody a three-dimensional portrait of the archetypal bureaucrat, emasculated by the vacillations of the marketplace and perpetually at the mercy of his modern environment. While Wells would have us believe that these men are but a small sample of thousands or perhaps millions of Americans displaced by the economic downturn, it is truly the same man at different points in his life, removed from the temporality of his own insular narrative and represented both two-dimensionally and parallel to another version of himself. In a manner evocative of the "slow-motion, instant replay," Wells emasculates the same man from three different temporal and socio-economic angles, since the audience is privy to the emasculation of the white collar employee when his

children are adolescents (Bobby), just about to leave for college (Phil), and fully grown with families of their own (Gene).

Despite the fact that *The Company Men* laments the emasculation of the modern man, it does so at the expense of women with its implicitly chauvinistic rhetoric. The "villain" in this film is (indirectly) capitalism and its associated irregularities, but it is the imposition of "the woman" within the stereotypically male-dominated corporate world that is directly responsible for the emasculation of the male hero. In his thoughts on the representation of gender at the end of the twentieth century, Murray Pomerance posits both onscreen masculinity and femininity as a manipulation of sorts: "the masks of gender in the late 1990s may be less rooted in cultural practice, an expression of hope more than social fact; or a clever deception built and re-built to guide us away from the pathway to equality instead of toward it" (Pomerance 7). Roughly ten years later, it is the objective of this project to document the modern remasculation picture's coercive representation of gender and its typically chauvinistic rhetoric in *The Company Men* and the other films examined within the broader context of this dissertation. Common to all the films within the remasculation cluster is a nostalgic concern for a form of masculinity that became iconic because of the actors who performed this role and donned this hypermasculine "mask." Among others, Wayne, Palance, Mature, and Bogart personified the attitude of American G.I.s home from the war and still reveling

189

in the post-coital bliss of a "mission accomplished" overseas (see Jeffords).

Since then, Pomerance notes a transition in the onscreen representation of masculinity:

> The blindly self-assured, dignified James Stewart, Cary Grant, Gary
> Cooper, and John Wayne were shifted by way of the riddling music of
> first Humphrey Bogart, James Dean, and Montgomery Clift and later
> John Travolta into the sensitive, all-seeing, intellectual masculinities of
> Gene Hackman and Johnny Depp…two things can be said broadly
> about gender as a socially attributed characteristic, at the end of the
> twentieth century. It looks different than it did before, and its looks, as
> symbols to be read as verisimilitudinous, are more problematic. (3-4)

Pomerance suggests that representations of onscreen masculinity have changed in Hollywood over the past fifty or sixty years from figures of blind self-assuredness to the sensitive and wise masculinities to which modern audiences have become accustomed in recent years. While this is certainly true, there are certain performers whose previous work precludes their candidacy for the "sensitive, all-seeing, intellectual" roles. In *The Company Men*, Gene, Phil, and Bobby all initially embody this kind of masculine sensitivity but do so awkwardly, incongruently, and temporarily until the moment of emasculation. Remasculation, or the reclamation of masculine power, in this and other remasculation films previously discussed, is characterized by a regression of

190

sorts. Bobby's dismissal forces him to take a job as a construction worker, where unlikely mentor Jack oversees the recalibration of Bobby's moral compass, while Gene's dismissal encourages him to start his own shipbuilding company so he can contribute to the construction of "something you [can] see." Both men are remasculated through a return to a middle-class ideology, one implicitly glorified at the relative expense of capitalism within the rhetoric of the film. Weinhas argues that "real men" must be seen to struggle in order to signify their masculinity onscreen, and the preoccupation with physical production as the path to remasculation in *The Company Men* is simply another expression of this trope. Nestled comfortably within the decadence of their surroundings, Wells' three company men have lost touch with the physicality of their masculinity and have become inadvertently feminized in their allegiance to corporate culture.

Concluding Thoughts: The Significance of the Remasculation Film

Gerard Butler as Clyde Sheldon in *Law Abiding Citizen* (Gary Gray, Film Department, 2009). Digital frame enlargement.

The remasculation film reinforces the performative nature of onscreen masculinity by illustrating an oscillation between a moment of symbolic castration and disempowerment and one of total enablement, authority, and dominance. Whether they are socially humiliated, openly disrespected, shot, beaten, or fired, the emasculated men discussed in the previous chapters are all presented as either failures or departures from a normative image of masculinity. Donna Peberdy suggests that "male angst" is evident onscreen "as the breakdown of 'male' social roles: the failure to be a 'traditional' father and the necessary revision of the father image; the acknowledgement that men can be both 'hard' and 'soft'; or the realization that the aging process calls for a reassessment of what it means to be a man" (169). Regardless of whether the remasculation film is tied to any conventional genre, emasculation is performative and features a number of recognizable signifiers: emasculated men commonly feature slumped shoulders, uncertain gaits, downcast eyes, and pained facial expressions; they generally appear both disheveled and incapable. To intensify the poignancy of the emasculation moment onscreen, remasculation films often feature actors whose previous roles are more commonly associated with a

macho heteronormativity, so that the emasculation experience appears both undesirable and somehow incongruous or inappropriate relative to these actors' often ultra-macho celebrity personas. In the rhetoric of the remasculation film, male emasculation or disempowerment is codified as an imbalance needing a correction or an adjustment. Further, the rectification of this imbalance is coupled with the resolution of the film's primary conflict, meaning that remasculation, or the protagonist's reclamation of a heteronormative hypermasculinity, is synonymous with his victory within the film's diegesis.

Remasculation refers to a form of onscreen regression, a moment in which the protagonist appears to have triumphed, but has in fact simply exchanged a hypomasculine front for a hypermasculine façade, an expression of masculinity characterized by ultra-conservative values, staunch heterosexuality, chauvinistic undertones, and an imposing physicality. Although Wayne may not have been the first or the only actor to exude this kind of masculinity both on and off-screen, his iconic performances during the 1940s and 1950s personified the essence of the hypermasculine archetype to which this project has referred throughout. Further, Wayne's image has been employed only as an example of this façade, since this project does not suggest that the remasculation hero's victory marks his appropriation of Wayne's masculinity specifically but rather the archetype with which many of his performances have been associated.

The remasculation picture is part of a film cluster, not a genre. Genre films are defined according to similarities in setting, wardrobe, theme, character types, and narrative, while films of the remasculation cluster are characterized by a formulaic narrative structure and a reverence for the hypermasculine male. While genres guide viewer expectation, the appearance of a film cluster illustrates a trend or a pattern indicative of socio-cultural circumstances. The remasculation films began to appear at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, amidst an evolving discourse of masculinity crisis within the media and the academic community. In her most recent book, *Hard Bodies* (published in 1994), Jeffords suggests that President Clinton epitomized the conflicted male, and his unstable and inconsistent persona was reflected in a number of popular films during this period. Further, this discourse of masculinity crisis precipitated varied rearticulations of screen masculinity during the late 1980s and early 1990s. From the homosexual, to the metrosexual, to the transsexual, to even the hyperbolic male lead, representations of masculinity began to diversify in Hollywood. The success and gradual normalization of films featuring what Gardiner calls "alternative" leading men suggested that masculinity in the broad sense was not conflicted during the 1990s; only the heteronormative, ultra-masculine archetype was in crisis.

The appearance of the remasculation film in the mid-to-late 1980s is indirectly attributable to the arrival of this discourse of masculinity crisis, and it

was a direct consequence of the plethora of "alternative" screen masculinities characteristic of this same period. Films of the remasculation cluster signify an uncoordinated attempt to reaffirm neoconservative screen masculinities within virtually all the major film genres. Further, this suggestion reinforces the contention that the remasculation picture is part of a cluster of films that glorify 'conventional' manhood rather than a new genre, inter-genre, or sub-genre. While films of the remasculation cluster glorify the heteronormative, hypermasculine male image, one cannot assume that the filmmakers responsible for their production aim to either disseminate ultra-conservative values or to impose them on the audience. Similarly, the relative popularity of remasculation films does not necessarily indicate the presence of an audience seeking narrative diegeses showcasing the reaffirming triumph of the hypermasculine man. The continued production of the remasculation picture signifies only the appearance of a trend in contemporary film that is attributable to the destabilization of the normative masculine image at the end of the twentieth century.

There are a number of themes and variations within the remasculation cluster. In *Unforgiven* and *Law Abiding Citizen*, Munny and Sheldon are emasculated by corrupt and dysfunctional judicial systems. In addition, Eastwood and Butler's largely ultra-macho celebrity personas enhance the significance of their characters' emasculatory events. As Goffman notes, the

actor's résumé is but another front used to construct the onscreen character, which is a mosaic that also consists of the actor's wardrobe, facial expression, mannerisms, and skill in the manipulation of those fronts that are either constructed or innate. Munny achieves remasculation through the imposition of vigilante justice and the restoration of his own conception of morality, while Sheldon seeks a similar form of unsanctioned and deeply personal retribution. Rather than being simply redeemed, both men are remasculated because their emasculatory moments are both humiliating and disempowering, which threatens and undermines the indestructibility of their heteronormative, hypermasculine identities.

In *Payback* and *Get Carter*, both leading men are disempowered by conspiratorial circumstances and reaffirm their particular masculinities through pugilistic rampages designed to forcibly reassert their status and authority within their respective social environments. In this thematic variation of the remasculation film, the protagonist's remasculation is won or earned by way of hand-to-hand combat and the endurance of physical pain. Despite their status as hard-bodied heroes, both Porter and Carter are emasculated rather than simply disempowered because they are either directly or indirectly incapacitated in a distinctly physical manner. While Porter is actually shot and nearly paralyzed, Carter is hundreds of miles away when is brother is executed and cannot help despite his role as a physical enforcer and protector. The identities

of both men are defined by physical strength and capability, and both experience emasculation when this aspect of their hypermasculine facades is compromised.

In *The Company Men*, three men at different levels within the corporate hierarchy experience three separate emasculation scenes all perpetrated by what appears to be the firm's only female employee in an authoritative position. This film fixates on the male experience of unemployment and the associated indignity of being unable to provide financially for (and therefore protect) one's family. Bobby experiences remasculation through an engagement with manual labor and middle-class values, an experience which induces an epiphany that facilitates the recovery of his market value and subsequently allows him to provide for his family. Since Bobby's masculine identity is initially defined in terms of his vocation and the financial support it provides, *The Company Men* posits the bureaucratic corporation as a uniquely dehumanizing institution, one whose organizational structure systematically undermines the authority of the hypermasculine male. While Munny and Sheldon are remasculated through the implementation of vigilante justice, and Porter and Carter quite literally fight to reclaim their masculinities, Bobby is remasculated through the reacquisition of earning power and therefore agency within the marketplace.

In Carroll Ballard's film *Wind* (1992), sailing prodigy Will Parker (Matthew Modine) makes a costly error at the helm of the American team's

boat that ultimately contributes to the loss of the prized America's Cup in an international competition. The tagline for this remasculation film reads: "The only thing better than winning the America's Cup is losing it… and winning it back." The remasculation cluster consists of a series of films that fetishize the hypermasculine archetype through a repetitive formula of loss and reclamation. Within the diegesis of each film, the heteronormative and hypermasculine male is reduced to a hypomasculine derivative only to return triumphantly upon resolving the film's conflict, stronger and manlier than ever. As a professional sailor, Will is stripped of his masculine identity when he loses the race and, subsequently, his position as the boat's skipper. Further, Will's loss reflects the country's loss, since the trophy for this international match race is named after the nation that founded the competition in 1851. While these remasculation films celebrate the power, authority, and control of the hypermasculine archetype, it is more accurate to suggest that they fetishize hypermasculinity *reclaimed*, or "won back." Further, this moment of reassertion seems tied to the discourse of masculinity crisis that became a popular subject of debate in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Amidst the many rearticulations of onscreen masculinity during this period, the remasculation film's insistence on the reaffirming triumph of the heteronormative and ultra-masculine is potentially reflective of a disagreeable resistance to alternative screen masculinities.

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A Place in the Sun. Dir. George Stevens. Paramount Pictures. 1951.

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Armageddon. Dir. Michael Bay. Touchstone Pictures. 1998.

Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford, The. Dir. Andrew

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Big Trail, The. Dir. Raoul Walsh. Twentieth Century Fox. 1930.

Birdcage, The. Dir. Mike Nichols. United Artists. 1996.

Born on the Fourth of July. Dir. Oliver Stone. Universal Pictures. 1989.

Braveheart. Dir. Mel Gibson. Paramount Pictures. 1995.

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Casino. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Universal Pictures. 1995.

Changing Lanes. Dir. Roger Michell. Paramount Pictures. 2002.

City Heat. Dir. Richard Benjamin. Universal Studios. 1984.

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Company Men, The. Dir. John Wells. The Weinstein Company. 2010.

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Crying Game, The. Dir. Neil Jordan. Palace Pictures. 1992.

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Dead Pool, The. Dir. Buddy Van Horn. Warner Bros. 1988.

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Donnie Brasco. Dir. Mike Newell. TriStar Pictures. 1997.

Dream Street. Dir. D.W. Griffith. United Artists. 1921.

Escape from Alcatraz. Dir. Don Siegel. Paramount Pictures. 1979.

Fargo. Dir. Joel & Ethan Coen. Gramercy Pictures. 1996.

Forrest Gump. Dir. Robert Zemeckis. Paramount Pictures. 1994.

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