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Introduction

How to praise a man? She cannot vow
His lips are red, his brow is snow,
Nor celebrate a smooth white breast
While gazing on his hairy chest;
And though a well-turned leg might please,
More often he has knobbly knees;
His hair excites no rapt attention –
If there’s enough of it to mention.
She cannot praise his damask skin,
Still less the suit he’s wrapped it in;
And even if he’s like Apollo
To gaze upon, it does not follow
That she may specify the features
That mark him off from other creatures.
No rime can hymn her great occasion
But by a process of evasion;
And so she gives the problem over,
Describes her love, but not her lover,
Despairs of words to tell us that
Her heart sings his magnificat.

[Dorothy Auchterlonie, “A Problem of Language” 79]

As Auchterlonie’s poem asserts, there are more generally recognised and accepted ways of praising or even describing a woman’s body than a man’s. Theorists like Susan Bordo (Male 19) and Maxine Sheets-Johnston align this literary dissimilarity with more widespread cultural conventions, with Sheets-Johnston declaring that, “Within cultural practice generally, a male body is not anatomised nor is it ever made into an object of study in the same way as female bodies” (cited in Bordo, Male 19). Moreover, the terms that are used to praise a man’s body have a very different tenor and implications when compared to those commending a woman’s beauty. While she is aligned with passive, stationary and generally fragile objects (like the hourglass or porcelain) he is virile, muscly or strong – terms that refer not so much to his appearance as to the manifestation of his body’s power. Even handsome, a word frequently used to describe male (usually facial rather than bodily) attractiveness, additionally connotes something well-made or skilfully executed, thus suggesting ability or achievement rather than rather than a state passively or fortuitously endowed.
The dissimilarity in available descriptors for men’s and women’s bodies, as well as their different nature, arises because “A Problem of Language,” as Auchterlonie puts it, is always a problem – and a question – of power. The idea that men (and more particularly, white men) have historically and culturally controlled the means of representation is a common and generally accepted feminist argument. A manifestation of such control relating specifically to the dissimilarities between available and utilised descriptions of men’s and women’s bodies is that, in controlling the means of representation, men have been able to align themselves with the mind, while associating women with the devalued realm of the body.  

Discussion of this division is particularly prevalent in analyses of visual culture, where the idea that men look, while women are looked at, is frequently described. Peter Brooks notes the applicability of this division to fiction, asserting “vision is typically a male prerogative, and its object of fascination the woman’s body, in a cultural model so persuasive that many women novelists don’t reverse its vectors” (88). More recently, however, the increased visibility of men’s bodies in popular arenas has challenged this general demarcation. This book investigates this reversal as it is manifested in a selection of contemporary Australian women’s fiction. Specifically, I will argue that interactions between male characters’ bodies and female characters’ gazes function, in complex ways, both to confirm and to challenge patriarchal constructions of masculinity and the male body.

Auchterlonie’s poem led me to wonder how contemporary Australian women writers describe men’s bodies. Since her poem was originally published in 1967, has the new visibility of men’s bodies in popular culture influenced their depiction in literature by women writers? To address this question, I spent a number of months in the Fryer Library (the Australian literature collection at the University of Queensland) consulting every novel by an Australian woman published between 1990 and 2002. What I found largely supported Auchterlonie’s observations: although there are male characters in almost every

1 For an excellent discussion of this division, and a summary of its different treatments in feminist debates, see Bordo’s introduction to Unbearable Weight (1-23).
2 John Berger’s Ways of Seeing and Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” are often identified as foundational statements and explorations of this division.
3 These last two sentences unreflectively employ a number of terms integral to this book: namely, and on the one hand, contemporary, Australian, women and fiction, and on the other, patriarchy, masculinity and the male body. None of these terms is simple, and all will be variously problematised, unpacked, justified and explained as this Introduction progresses.
work – as Jane Miller points out, “women have always written about men” (9) – their bodies are almost completely absent. While facial features as well as general size and comportment are frequently described and used as aspects of characterisation, male characters’ bodies are rarely depicted in any particular or extensive way. Male characters are accordingly peripheral to the central focus of such fictions, namely, the desires, struggles and triumphs of female characters.

This scarcity of detailed descriptions of male characters’ bodies in Australian women’s fiction, and the peripheral nature of such characters, is reflected in critical discussions of women’s writing generally. Until recently, there have been virtually no analyses of representations of men’s bodies in women’s writing. In the last few years, critical works such as Tanis Macdonald’s assessment of Lorna Crozier’s “Penis Poems,” and John Stout’s analysis of the depictions, by nine contemporary French women poets, of men’s bodies through a reworking of the Renaissance blason, suggest both a critical and a fictional change, one which this study intervenes in and investigates. In terms of the broader issue of male characters, assertions regarding their peripheral role in women’s fiction are a significant element of what little criticism there is concerning the phenomenon. It is, for example, a tendency described in many of the essays in Men by Women (see, especially, Kort 189; Poovey 40; Rogers 10, 22), and a central tenet of Helena Eriksson’s Husbands, Lovers, and Dreamlovers (an investigation of men in women’s fiction of the 1970s) and of Miller’s Women Writing About Men (an analysis of male characters in women’s fiction from the early nineteenth century to the early 1980s). In all of these critical works, men in women’s fiction are shown to function not as fully delineated characters, but as nominal figures in the heroine’s world (fathers, brothers, husbands, sons, lovers) and as symbols, embodiments of choices or tests she must confront. The peripheral nature of male characters in women’s writing particularly contrasts with the often central position of female characters in men’s writing. For instance, Ben Knights notes that, “frequent[ly] … male novelists have preoccupied themselves with a female protagonist. … Women

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4 See also Ursula K. le Guin (8) and Nainsi-Jean Houston (9). Alternatively, Gloria G. Fromm describes men in Dorothy Richardson’s fictions not as fully developed characters, but as a means by which the author “offered her own distinctive version of the critical questions human beings have always asked about the nature of their existence” (171).
novelists have been much less forward in volunteering to speak for men’s experience” (135; see also Segal, *Slow* ix).

In analyses of Australian women’s fiction, male characters are similarly peripheral, and are predominantly discussed in order to explore the heroine’s character.\(^5\) The different gendering of author and character is rarely noted, and references to male characters overwhelmingly focus on their negative qualities, particularly their ill-treatment of female characters.\(^6\) A possible reason for this relative absence of fictional and critical attention to male characters and their bodies in women’s writing in the Australian context, may be the noted desire and tendency of women writers and critics since the mid-1970s through to the early 1990s (a timeframe generally associated with the influence of second-wave feminism in Australia) to concentrate on women’s experiences and bodies in an effort to redress their traditional silencing and/or disparagement in patriarchal literature and history.\(^7\) More generally, as Lynne Segal points out, in contrast to books focusing on the experiences of, for instance, female, black or gay characters, the construction of white men as “universal” subjects means that, when they are the subject of a novel, it is rarely “classified as such” (*Slow* ix).

Although women writing men is not a generally recognised category in literary analysis, some women writers (Australian and other) are noted for making male characters – fully delineated figures with, but not defined by, their negative qualities – central to their fictions. George Eliot is a frequently cited example (Knoepflmacher 133-134; Todd, “Introduction” 3; Wallace, “Ventriloquizing” 322), and Steven Cohan has discussed Iris

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\(^5\) All of the essays in *Elizabeth Jolley* adopt this approach, as does Kerryn Goldsworthy’s discussion of Helen Garner’s fiction. In a way that highlights the peripheral nature of male characters in much Australian women’s writing, discussions of Barbara Hanrahan’s (Stewart 31, 34, 43-4, 56-7) and Olga Masters’s (Van Herk 78-82) fictions describe a prevalence of dead, absent or unimportant fathers. While Hanrahan is also noted for her depiction of mutilated men, such “mutilation” contributes to the portrayal of male characters as either “[i]nvisible, absent, or missing” by providing “a physical metaphor for the various missing parts of men” (Van Herk 82). Pam Gilbert similarly describes fathers in Hanrahan’s fiction as “missing, dead or insignificant” (66).

\(^6\) Australian women writers discussed in this manner include Kylie Tennant and Elizabeth Harrower (Clancy), Barbara Hanrahan (Walker, “Tea”; P. Gilbert 71), Beverley Farmer (Walker, “Fingers”; Wilde, Hooton and Andrews 198; Gelder and Salzman 179, 192-3), Elizabeth Jolley (Gelder and Salzman 69, 71-72; Brady, “Speaking”; Kirby), Jessica Anderson (Gelder and Salzman 65; Elaine Barry) and Olga Masters (Gelder and Salzman 71-72).

\(^7\) See Gelder and Salzman (60); Carole Ferrier (“Introductory” 3); Gillian Whitlock (“Graftworks” 236-37); Bronwen Levy (“Constructing” 194); Bruce Bennett (259). Relatedly, Sneja Gunew asserts: “That women writers have privileged access to truth or to the confessional mode is an assumption underlying much of what gets published in recent women’s writing, so much of which is cast in the first person” (165).
Murdoch’s predilection for male characters and narrators (“From”). Although commonly interpreted as “a woman’s text concerned with women’s issues,” Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is increasingly identified as a famous instance of women’s writing that focuses not only on male characters, but on the construction of a monstrous male body. In the Australian context, discussions of male characters are common in analyses of Christina Stead’s and Thea Astley’s fictions. Although most commentary on these Australian women’s fictions overlooks the different gendering of author and character (thus treating male protagonists as ungendered human rather than explicitly male figures), some recent analyses – like Knights’ discussion of Stead’s *The Man Who Loved Children* – explore the implications of this juxtaposition.

While analysis of the Fryer Library collection largely supports Auchterlonie’s observations regarding the absence of men’s bodies in women’s writing, and critical assertions regarding the peripheral role of male characters, it does yield some novels centrally concerned both with male characters, and with the description and narrative potential of their bodies. Not only do such fictions challenge the commonly marginal position of men in women’s writing but, in focusing attention on men’s rather than women’s bodies, they upset the patriarchal association of man with mind and woman with body. While there were fictions of this nature published before 1998 – notably works by Astley (*It’s Raining in Mango*), Dorothy Porter (*Akhenaten*) and Kate Grenville (*Dark Places*), as well as others by less well-known authors such as Amanda Lohrey (*Camille’s Bread*), Kirsty Machon (*Immortality*) and Susan Johnson (*A Big Life*) – between 1998 and 2002 a definite cluster emerged. These novels include Patti Miller’s *Child* and Wendy Scarfe’s *Miranda* published in 1998; Fiona Capp’s *Last of the Sane Days* in 1999; Jillian Watkinson’s *The Architect* in 2000; Georgia Blain’s *The Blind Eye* and Vivienne Cleven’s *Bitin’ Back* in 2001; and Mireille Juchau’s *Machines for Feeling* and Sarah Myles’s

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8 Johanna M. Smith (284); see also Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar 213-47; Barbara Johnson or Brooks (218-20).
9 Works that use Shelley’s novel to ponder the implications of women writing men include Marjorie Garber (111), and Berthold Schoene-Harwood (5-20).
10 The prevalence of analyses of men in Stead’s fiction suggests the centrality of male characters to her work (see Clancy; Rooney; Sheridan, “Woman”; Woodward). Elizabeth Perkins discusses Astley’s ironic treatments of masculinity (379), while P. Gilbert asserts, “One of the most noticeable features of Astley’s fiction is her preoccupation with male experience, male protagonists, male-dominated narratives” (109).
*Transplanted* which appeared in 2002. This group of novels, largely by emerging writers, indicates an increasing trend in Australian women’s fiction, while the lack of academic attention the male characters’ bodies in these works have received perhaps implies a critical difficulty with identifying and discussing women representing men.\(^\text{11}\) A central aim of this book, then, is to open up discussion and suggest critical terminology for analysing this trend.

While all of these fictions would make for a fascinating discussion, I have chosen to focus on those published between 1998 and 2002, largely because they are different from their predecessors but similar to one another. They are all prose novels (in contrast, Porter’s *Akhenaten* is a verse novel and Machon’s *Immortality* a compilation of short stories), and set in the present. Although Scarfe’s *Miranda* sometimes seems to be situated in the nineteenth century, sometimes in the 1920s and at other times in the present, historical setting is not foregrounded as it is by Astley, Grenville, Porter and S. Johnson. Unlike these earlier works, where historical distance renders the male characters’ bodies remote, even exotic, represented in the present they have an immediacy to readers, as well as to contemporary notions of masculinity, that groups these later fictions together. Furthermore, these texts are all explicitly pedagogical in their approach to gender relations. They attempt, in other words, to explain, to teach, and even to theorise, about interactions between men and women.\(^\text{12}\) Additionally, and certainly compared with the canonical position of writers such as Astley, Porter and Grenville, the authors of the novels published between 1998 and 2002 are all new.\(^\text{13}\) Finally, and most importantly, the male bodies depicted in these later texts are far more prominent than in those published before

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\(^\text{11}\) Although these novels have received a remarkable number of reviews by Australian standards – perhaps indicating popular interest in the issues they explore – they have received little academic attention. A similar absence of discussion of women’s representations of men’s bodies (in literary and visual texts) is noted by theorists like Lee Parpart (“Cowards”), Macdonald, Wallace (“Ventriloquizing” 323, 332) and Margaret Walters (18). They attribute this lack of critical attention to, in Parpart’s words, “the lack of conceptual models for including a gaze at the male within the range of activities thought of as feminist” (“Cowards” 256).

\(^\text{12}\) Grenville’s treatment of Albion Singer’s character and body in *Dark Places* – particularly her explicit references to psychoanalytic concepts – represents a similarly pedagogical stance.

\(^\text{13}\) *Bitin’ Back, The Architect, Child, Machines for Feeling* and *Transplanted* are all first novels. *Last of the Sane Days* is Capp’s second novel and *The Blind Eye* is Blain’s third. *Miranda* is Scarfe’s fourth novel (she has also published others – both fiction and non-fiction – with her husband Allan Scarfe). Yet while not new, Scarfe is certainly a marginal figure in Australian literature. Indeed, her marginal position – and subsequent recourse to publishing independently and in small presses – is the topic of Bridgit Plim’s interview with the author.
1998. Although these earlier fictions described men’s bodies at length, the more recent ones make them thematically and dramatically central. Indeed, it is almost impossible to overemphasise the importance of representations of male characters’ bodies to these later works: not only are these fictions motivated by what occurs to the male bodies they depict, but these bodies function in the narratives as central thematic reference points.

Of these fictions published between 1998 and 2002, the majority, and the ones that will be discussed in this study – namely, *The Architect*, *The Blind Eye*, *Machines for Feeling*, *Last of the Sane Days*, *Transplanted* and *Miranda* – share two preoccupations. Firstly, the male characters’ bodies are almost always wounded or damaged; these characters are subsequently suffering in some way, and in representations of this suffering, emotional and physical pain are frequently intermingled. Secondly, the ability (or inability) of female characters to look at these bodies is foregrounded. Examples from the texts themselves illustrate the prevalence and significance of these two themes. In all of these fictions, male damage constitutes either the motivation for the novels and/or the reason for their dramatic climaxes. *The Architect* begins with a motorcycle accident in which Jules, the main character, suffers extensive burns which cause him to lose his right arm entirely and most of the use of his left arm. His struggle to triumph over physical adversity motivates the rest of the narrative. *The Blind Eye* similarly focuses on its central character’s damaged body, and is composed of the stories Silas tells his homeopath, Daniel, while seeking treatment for the burning pain in his chest as well as for his self-mutilating behaviour (motivated by emotional pain). *Last of the Sane Days* centres on the journey that Rafael, its main male character, undertakes in response to and in order to overcome the terrible burning in his abdomen. Although Rafael, like Silas, self-mutilates, he does so in response to physical as well as mental pain. Self-mutilation is also practised by Mark, one of the central male characters in *Machines for Feeling*. However, in his case, it seems motivated by a desire to understand his body. A dramatic climax in this novel takes place when Rien, Mark’s girlfriend, beats him; the main one occurs when Dog Boy, the other central male character, is brutally and graphically murdered. The three main points of narrative movement in *Miranda* also occur in relation to a damaged male body: firstly, when Miranda...
finds John/Helios (bruised, cut and unconscious) washed up on a reef; secondly, when he is attacked by whalers; and thirdly, when Miranda’s husband severely beats him.

Damage characterises all of the male bodies depicted in *Transplanted*. Its four main male characters are wounded in various ways. Ian is repeatedly brutalised by and subsequently murders his brother, Ross. Kelvin has been involved in a horrific truck accident where, among other injuries, his arm was crushed under the carriage and the skin of his face ripped off. He is subsequently beaten savagely by a gang. Peter is suffering from severe end-stage heart failure, and there are many descriptions of his damaged and deteriorating body, as well as of the multiple operations he undergoes before he dies. The sufferings of these central figures are mirrored by depictions of the damaged bodies of peripheral male characters. Julia, Peter’s wife, recalls her father’s deteriorating, dying body, as well as a man – “in some kind of pain” (101) – whom she encounters in a rubbish dump. Similarly, Ross and Ian’s father’s body is damaged by a lifetime of alcoholism. The other novels described above, excepting *Miranda*, also contain an assortment of wounded male bodies in addition to and reinforcing the importance (and thematic centrality) of the central suffering male bodies. In *The Architect*, Jules’s damage is mirrored by his son’s (a severely burnt drug addict with AIDS) and Marc’s (his surrogate son who has been a paraplegic since early childhood). References to wounded soldiers provide another layer of damaged male bodies in this novel. Silas’s pain in *The Blind Eye* is echoed by other damaged male bodies, including those of Rudi (who has an enormous cancerous chest growth), Mick (a broken foot) and the eldest son of Silas’s landlady (who carries scars from a dingo attack, making it painful for him to talk). Similarly, in *Last of the Sane Days*, Rafael’s pain is reflected in the young men Hilary (his godmother) remembers from the casualty ward where she trained to be a doctor, and in the old man who is hit by a car in front of Hilary and Rafael. Finally, in *Machines for Feeling*, Mark’s and Dog Boy’s various experiences of pain are matched, and perhaps exceeded, by Rien’s father’s heart attack, and by Jonas, who dies after setting his body alight.

The second preoccupation – the ability (or inability) of female characters to look at male bodies – is evident in the depiction of female protagonists characterised by blindness and/or sight in all of these novels. Blind female characters – namely, Chloe in *The Architect*,
Constance in *The Blind Eye* and Mother-in-law in *Miranda* – populate these texts with surprising frequency. These literally blind characters are accompanied by female characters who are metaphorically blind. Wendy, in *Transplanted*, is frequently depicted as sightless, as are all the women in the community described in *Miranda*. While not described in terms of blindness, Rien, in *Machines for Feeling*, nevertheless has a very fraught relationship with vision. Complementing these literally and metaphorically blind women are female characters explicitly described in terms of their ability to see, primarily through their association with either art or medicine. The eponymous narrator of *Miranda* is an artist, while Julia, in *Transplanted*, and Greta, in *The Blind Eye*, were artists and now, respectively, are or intend to be, art gallery curators. Donna, in *The Architect*, and Hilary, in *Last of the Sane Days*, are aligned with vision through their role as medical practitioners (Donna is a nurse while Hilary is a doctor). This profession involves them looking frequently and intensely at damaged male bodies. The focus on female characters looking, or being unable to look, at men’s bodies creates a doubling effect, whereby external context of women writing men’s bodies is mirrored in the portrayal of female protagonists predominantly characterised by their visual relation to these bodies.

These common themes feed into each other, with damage functioning as the central means by which male visibility is presented. Although elaborated and explored in different ways in each text, such dual preoccupations raise similar concerns – namely, the intersection of issues relating to bodies, gender and visibility. In addition to these shared themes, I decided to focus on these particular fictions because, as an emerging trend in Australian women’s fiction specifically, and women’s writing generally, there is little direct literary analysis of representations of men’s bodies to draw upon. Although masculinity studies is a burgeoning field, and analyses of men’s bodies proliferate in relation to popular culture and cultural forms such as film and television, relatively little critical material exists that is specific to literary narrative. While recent analyses of fictions by male authors have gone some way to addressing and redressing this critical deficit, the portrayal of masculinity

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14 Daniel Lea and Berthold Schoene describe this discrepancy in their “Introduction to the Special Section on Literary Masculinities,” asserting that, “as far as men’s studies is concerned, literary criticism constitutes a kind of late developer – in contrast to disciplines such as sociology, psychology, cultural studies, and history, within which continuous and politically committed research on masculinity has been flourishing for nearly two decades” (319).
in women’s writing has received little attention.15 This book must, therefore, conceptualise a field, rather than work within one already constituted. The close reading of a selection of texts concerned with similar issues seems the most appropriate way to move towards the development of the critical awareness and vocabulary required to explore this phenomenon more widely.

Before describing the methodology employed in analysing these fictions, some of the terms used in defining and exploring *women writing men’s bodies* require clarification and justification. While the remarkable thematic similarities in these fictions (both those published before and after 1998) lend support to the exploration of representations of men’s bodies through, and in relation to, the contentious critical category of *women’s writing*, such a phrase cannot be employed unreflectively. Although an important, even constitutive, element of feminist literary analysis, the feasibility of discussing women’s fiction as a distinct category has been disputed in the light of recent challenges to the term *women* (as wrongly suggesting the existence of a unified and coherent identity position).16 The concerns created by such a challenge are well-rehearsed (though no less valid for the frequency with which they are iterated). In relation to Australian literature, Susan Sheridan argues that the category of women’s writing has historically been employed – by feminists as well as non-feminist critics – in ways that reinforce the construction of women as outsiders whose activities and achievements are marginal to the national (but actually male-dominated and -identified) Australian mainstream (*Along x*). Other commentators contend that the generalisations wrought by the category of women’s writing limit awareness of the variation within such writing (Levy, “Constructing 194-99, “Women” 183), and produce “reductive and even essentialist” arguments concerning the value and quality of writing by women (Gelder and Salzman 57). More generally, Anna Couani asserts that women’s writing is constructed and constrained by the ways in which it is published and marketed.

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15 Since the late 1990s, discussions of male characters in writing by men have increased markedly (see, for example, B. Smith, Kane, Bassi or Fjellestad). In regards to representations of men in women’s fiction, recent dissertations by Houston and Janina Camille Hornosty – respectively discussing male characters in Irish and English-Canadian women’s writing – suggest that this critical deficit is beginning to be addressed.

16 Such a challenge is well-established and has been discussed by many feminist theorists. At the beginning – and as the starting point for – *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler provides a detailed overview of the main ideas and theorists within such debates (3-44).
Such arguments demonstrate that women’s writing (Australian or other) cannot be employed as a self-evident and unproblematic term in literary analysis.

However, despite concern regarding the potential problematics of approaching women’s writing as a separate category, many critics argue for the continuing importance and relevance of such a project. Essentially, this is due to a belief that women’s writing is (at least potentially) different from men’s writing because, as Giulia Giuffre explains, “a woman writes in a context that is different from that of a man” (5) (though one must certainly add, different from that of other women as well). Just as assumptions about a novel based on the author’s gender can produce limiting generalisations, failing to consider the influence of gender on writing potentially reinstates the notion of a transcendent individual, a conceit generally accepted as privileging white, heterosexual men. Elizabeth Grosz extends this general position, arguing that, just as the author’s gendered corporeality “intrudes into or is productive of the text,” so too is it “rendered through its discursive production and iteration” (“Sexual” 21). Women’s writing, in other words, both influences, and is influenced by, the construct, women. By conceptualising women as contingently-constructed and multiply-positioned subjects, both theorists (and others) reject the notion of the author’s sex as the origin of textual meaning. At the same time, they retain a belief in the relevance of an author’s specific embodiment to the text’s meaning, and consequently, in the political importance of feminist analyses of women’s writing. As Sally Robinson proclaims, women’s writing is “a construct both useful and risky”; yet “the risk is worth taking” not only because this critical category challenges the implicit masculinism of literary standards and production, but because “debates over the specificity of women’s writing have not yet exhausted themselves, even if they seem to have generated more divisiveness than consensus” (Engendering 10). While this framework of women’s writing might provide support for the exploration of any topic in women’s writing, the specifically heterosexualised nature of Western/patriarchal societies arguably renders women’s views of men’s bodies, like men’s constructions of women’s bodies, particularly fruitful sites for investigating depictions and enactments of gender.

In this book, women’s writing will be employed as a provisional or contingent category, useful for posing questions about gender, visibility and bodies, but not necessarily
constructive in producing answers. Indeed, as close readings will demonstrate, contemporary Australian women’s fictional representations of men’s bodies frequently adopt radically different approaches to their shared themes. Implicit in this approach is an acknowledgement that the question of women representing men’s bodies is not an inherently more interesting, enlightening, or indeed, more feminist question than men writing men’s bodies. However, it is a question posed in response and in relation to a trend in contemporary women’s fiction in Australia (and elsewhere). It is also a question that challenges and necessitates a rethinking of critical and fictional categories often taken for granted, or assumed to work in all situations.

Other terms used to explore the depiction of men’s bodies and women’s looks in contemporary Australian women’s writing – namely, patriarchy, masculinity or masculinities and the male body or men’s bodies – must be similarly unpacked and justified. The basic issue with such terms (as with the critical category of women’s writing) is whether the social framework for analysis they offer justifies the textual, social and historical nuances they potentially occlude. Answering no to this question, a small, though significant proportion of recent analyses of gender (like Butler 35), and masculinity and men’s bodies more specifically (see Bourke 14), have chosen not to use the term patriarchy, arguing that it wrongly implies the monolithic subordination of all women to all men, and thus ignores historical, cultural and individual variations in gendered power relations. In this book, however, the focus on bodies and pain – topics that might (falsely) be considered individual and ungendered, as well as transcultural and transhistorical – renders attentiveness to the general inequality of women in relation to men in contemporary society paramount. The framework of patriarchy fulfils this function, and simultaneously provides a way of discussing and situating dominant constructions of bodies, and discourses such as pain, within a thoroughly and unequally gendered social world.

Like patriarchy, the terms masculinity and the male body threaten to impose a monolithic framework on the various portrayals of gender and corporeality in contemporary Australian women’s fiction. Masculinity suggests one gender position that all men (and no women) occupy, while the male body implies one type of corporeality shared by all men. Accordingly, some theorists have rejected the term masculinity as too poorly defined to be useful (Clatterbaugh, “What”), or as diverting attention away from social relations between men and women (Hearn; Heartfield, especially paras 44-45). The
relationship between masculinity and the male body, particularly as it is discussed in masculinity studies, also presents problems. Specifically, although an understanding that bodies, like genders, are constructed has become familiar in feminist theory (due, largely, to the influence of gender studies), a significant proportion of masculinity studies theorists persist in conceiving and portraying the male body as natural.\(^\text{17}\) Alternatively, even when bodies are understood as constructed, there is a strong tendency in masculinity studies to understand corporeality as somehow intrinsically subversive of gender norms.\(^\text{18}\) Furthermore, even when both gender and bodies are conceptualised as constructed, the majority of studies of masculinity – as Judith Halberstam demonstrates in *Female Masculinity* – assume that masculinity and the male body are somehow innately connected. To avoid the reductionism, as well as the false naturalisations, associated with the terms masculinity and the male body, I refer to *masculinities*\(^\text{19}\) and *men’s or male bodies*, unless specifically referring to patriarchal or hegemonic constructions of gender and corporeality.\(^\text{20}\) The differentiation of these terms compels an awareness of the patriarchal constraints placed on performances of gender and corporeality, while enabling a conceptualisation of dominance that does not render it total. Considering gender and corporeality as pluralities also challenges their natural association by disrupting the notion that they are directly and simplistically aligned.

The general methodological approach I adopt in analysing representations of men’s bodies and women’s looks (and the relationship of such representations to masculinity/ies) in contemporary Australian women’s writing is a feminist one. However, as with the lack of specific critical attention to men’s bodies in women’s fiction (Australian or other), masculinities and men’s bodies are underdeveloped issues in feminism. Various theorists have commented on this critical neglect, particularly noting the contrast thereby established between this lack of discussion and the intense scrutiny that women, as a gender, have

\(^\text{17}\) John Beynon, for instance, begins his recent book, *Masculinities and Culture*, blithely proclaiming, “While all men have a male body in common … there are numerous expressions of gender, of ‘being masculine’” (1).

\(^\text{18}\) Even the work of R. W. Connell – one of the leading and most sophisticated analysts within this field – exhibits this tendency at times. In *The Men and the Boys*, for instance, he argues: “Exemplary masculinities in Western societies are typically defined by body-reflexive practice …. Yet closer examination shows bodies repeatedly breaking the bounds or failing the uses proposed for them” (86).

\(^\text{19}\) Theorists like Kenneth Clatterbaugh (“What’s”) and Jeff Hearn reject the term masculinities as well as masculinities. However, the alternative they advocate – referring only to men’s (and women’s) practices – also naturalises men’s bodies and their association with masculinity/ies.

\(^\text{20}\) For similar reasons, except when directly discussing certain theoretical accounts, I refer to women’s looks or gazes instead of the more ubiquitous *the female gaze*. As in analyses of women’s looks, in considerations of corporeality, *the male body* is still widely preferred to men’s bodies. Contrastingly, in recent years, references to masculinities (rather than a single, unified masculinity) have become the norm.
received from men (see, for example, Todd, “Introduction” 1; Segal, Slow ix). Generally, reservations regarding the suitability of masculinity as a feminist topic of inquiry are attributed to feminist concerns that such an investigation would detract from the project of theorising women’s bodies and experiences. In their introduction to the 1993 collection *Male Trouble*, Constance Penley and Sharon Willis ask:

wasn’t there a danger that a theoretically sophisticated study of masculinity, which would necessarily involve positing male subjectivity as nonmonolithic and even capable of positive or utopian moments, could entail a significant digression from a feminist project that remains underdeveloped in its attention to differences among women? (vii)

While such beliefs are certainly changing, even as late as 2000 Roseanne M. Mandziuk’s statement – “feminists don’t theorise about men” – was generally justified. In accordance with Penley and Willis’s statement, Mandziuk elaborates:

across the expanse of contemporary scholarly inquiry undertaken from a feminist perspective, the notions of ‘men’ and/or ‘masculinity’ have largely been defined unproblematically. In such feminist studies, masculinity is viewed as a homogenous and monolithic force while attention is turned instead to the careful theorizing of women’s experience and perspectives. (105)

Increasingly, however, pitfalls associated with a lack of feminist attention to masculinities and men’s bodies have been highlighted. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark insist that “the scant attention paid to the spectacle of men ends up reinforcing the apparent effacement of the masculine as a social construction” (“Introduction” 2). A lack of feminist theorising regarding women’s particular relation to the site/sight of men’s bodies has been identified by Peter Lehman as “elid[ing] significant questions of female heterosexual desire” (“Realm” 105), and by Christine Gledhill as “not only risk[ing] the overidentification of women as victims of patriarchy, but refus[ing] recognition of women as makers of meaning out of male images” (“Women” 74). Most importantly, perhaps, the tendency of feminist theory to focus on women’s bodies to the exclusion of men’s has, as Lehman asserts, “replicated as well as deconstructed the very cultural structure which it attempts to overthrow” (“Realm” 91): namely, the association of men with mind and women with body

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21 Taking a different view of this reluctance, Robyn Wiegman attributes second-wave feminist inattention to “the masculine,” and differences among men, to strategy rather than to fear: “the assumption of masculinity as an undifferentiated position aided feminism’s articulation of its own political subjectivity,” and united women in opposition to “the representation of men as the common enemy” (*American* 167).
In general terms, moreover, analyses of women’s representations of men also function as a necessary corrective to the tendency for studies of masculinity (predominantly written by male theorists) to focus on representations of men produced by men – a tendency that Bryce Traister identifies as working against feminist cultural and academic gains. One of the primary effects of the growing disciplinary influence of masculinity studies, he insists, is a restoration of representations of men – produced by men and analysed for the most part by men – to the centre of academic cultural criticism … effectively crowd[ing] out the women and texts responsible for the rise of feminism within academic literary studies and return[ing] … cultural criticism, once again, [to] the dominant study of malekind. (276)

Attuned to such consequences, these and other theorists have identified the construction of masculinities (Mandziuk 105; Segal, Slow) and the representation of men’s bodies (Silverman 2-3; Bordo, Male) as viable and fruitful areas of investigation for feminism. In the early 1980s, Shelly Rice identified the “redefinition of the male image [as] … a feminist issue, and one that might have significant bearing on the lasting effectiveness of the feminist movement” (17), while Deirdre English wrote, “Whether we love men or hate them, we – as feminists – have no task more necessary than understanding them” (49). More recently, Naomi Schor has urged attention “to the question of the representation of the Other’s other” (114), while Segal (Slow 61) and Judith Kegan Gardiner (“Introduction” 9) described a feminist understanding of men and masculinity as vital to an understanding of the social structures of male dominance. Similarly, Kaja Silverman – identifying representations of men’s bodies as “an urgent feminist project” – argued that “masculinity impinges with such force upon femininity [that] to effect a large-scale reconfiguration of male identification and desire would, at the very least, permit female subjectivity to be lived

22 The extent to which ‘the body’ is synonymous with ‘the female body’ in feminist discourse can be seen in the number of feminist-oriented collections of essays that purport to be analyses of the body in general, but are concerned largely or exclusively with the female body. The 1997 collection of essays entitled Bodily Discursions: Gender, Representations and Technology, edited by Deborah S. Wilson and Christine Moneera Laennec, is one example of this pattern. Of eleven chapters – including one of that discusses Frankenstein in relation to the maternal body – only one concerns the male body, and even then, it is exclusively the non-normative gay male body that is investigated. Rosemary Betterton’s Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body, published in 1996, does not even include a token reference to a male body, using ‘the body’ of the title to refer explicitly to women’s bodies.
23 Wiegman (“Unmaking” 36), and Rachel Adams and David Savran also discuss feminist trepidation regarding “the rapid spread of masculinity studies during the last decade of the twentieth century” (7).
differently than at present” (2-3). With specific attention to male corporeality, Calvin Thomas similarly asserted that “if we consider the history of male disembodiment’s specific effects on lived female bodily experience, then the project of male reenfleshment takes on a certain feminist urgency” (“Reenfleshing” 71).

An increasing number of feminist theorists – from within disciplines including art history, cultural studies, film studies, philosophy and gender studies – have responded to such calls, and engaged innovatively and productively with the construction of masculinities and/or men’s bodies. Of the feminist theorists who have written about representations of men’s bodies, Abigail Solomon-Godeau’s *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation*, Bordo’s *The Male Body* and Silverman’s *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* have offered particularly valuable insights regarding the meaning of the damaged male characters’ bodies in the contemporary Australian women’s fiction under consideration here. Feminist discussions of masculinity, especially those by Sedgwick, Grosz (*Volatile*), Segal (*Slow*) and Halberstam have proven similarly fruitful. Valuable insights have also come from masculinity studies’ theorists – particularly Connell (*Masculinities; Men*), David Buchbinder (*Performance*) and Michael Kimmel (*Postfeminist; Manhood*). However, as such analyses do not consider the specific relationship between women’s looks and men’s bodies, these insights are complemented by work from the fields of art history (Marsha Meskimmon; Melissa Dabakis), film studies (Lehman [*Running*]; Tania Modleski [*Feminism*]; Yvonne Tasker), and feminist visual theory (Donna Haraway [*“Situated”*]; Jennifer Harding). While not all of these theorists are explicitly used in discussing the fiction, their work provides an intellectual base – a complex frame of reference – enabling entry into a field that has not yet been fully constituted nor conceptualised.

Combined, these theoretical perspectives help illustrate, and explain the implications of, the engagement of contemporary Australian women’s fiction with various

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24 In her introduction to *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory*, Gardiner asserts that, although the topic of masculinity now engages feminists from virtually every field, the impetus for such investigations originated with psychoanalytic feminist theorists, both those interested in Lacan’s notion of the phallus or Freud’s Oedipus complex, like Segal (*Slow*) and Madelon Sprengnether, and those that investigated the “male gaze” in cinema, such as Mulvey (“Visual”), Silverman and Susan Jeffords (*Remasculinization*). Other commentators – like Adams and Savran in their introduction to *The Masculinity Studies Reader* – identify Sedgwick’s *Between Men* as the stimulus for feminism’s interest in masculinity, as well as a founding text for both masculinity studies and gender studies (6-7).
discourses, most prominently, feminism and masculinity crisis.\textsuperscript{25} Without wishing to suggest an uncritical opposition between these two discourses, it is safe to say that, in most popular debates, assertions of masculinity crisis exist in conflict with (despite being enabled by the liberationist rhetoric of) feminist discourse (Young 313-14; Gardiner, “Introduction” 7). While feminism is variously concerned with the inequalities experienced by women (and various Others) as a result of male or patriarchal power, popular discussions of masculinity crisis generally identify men as the new victims in societies in which they have repeatedly and variously been disenfranchised and disempowered.\textsuperscript{26} Although many popular propagators of masculinity crisis deny that they are blaming women or feminism for men’s (purported) disempowerment (see, for example, Bly x), such denials are countered by frequent assertions regarding women’s emasculating influence on men, and/or claims that the balance of power has unequally tipped in women’s favour due to the general influence of and credence given to feminist arguments in contemporary Western society. The popular discourse of masculinity crisis also attributes men’s oppression to the purported advantages of various minority groups, to the changing nature of work and/or to patriarchy itself. Whatever the cause of men’s oppression, such groups unanimously insist that men need urgent help and support. Although it might seem absurd to direct feminist energy towards understanding, in Traister’s words, this “historically laughable or politically appalling” “new voice of victimhood,” the discourse of masculinity crisis has become, as he asserts, so “well-funded and widely reported” that it has “created a clamour too loud to ignore” (277).\textsuperscript{27} In investigating and interpreting the different ways

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\item My use of the phrase masculinity crisis rather than the more common, a crisis in masculinity, attempts to emphasise my focus on a prevalent and complex discourse, rather than a particular moment or arena in which concern for masculinity is expressed.
\item I am chiefly referring to assertions by, or resonating with the beliefs of, men’s liberationists, men’s rights advocates, and mythopoetic men: groups, or rather movements, that undeniably dominate popular debates about masculinity crisis. Commentators like Clatterbaugh (\textit{Contemporary}) and Michael A. Messner, identify these movements as anti-feminist, and this opinion has been generally accepted in academic discussions. These theorists also describe other, marginal manifestations of the discourse of masculinity crisis – using Messner’s terminology, radical feminist men, social feminist men, men of colour, and gay male liberationists – which they identify as pro-feminist. Such groups aim to assist men in reforming their oppressive (sexist, racist, homophobic) practices through shared discussion and a focus on self-growth. Kimmel’s belief that “the ‘traditional’ definition of masculinity leaves [men] unfulfilled and dissatisfied” (\textit{Gendered} 268) is representative of the arguments of these (purportedly) pro-feminist groups. As Thomas notes, however, even these “well-intentioned interventions, based on the argument that the confines of normative masculinity are damaging to men, can seem perilously close to a whiney men-have-it-bad-too line of defensive reaction against feminism … motivated by a desire to ameliorate the condition of men, while ignoring or minimizing the oppression of women” (“Reenfleshing” 61).
\item According to Segal, “many people” now identify “the presumed ‘crisis’ of masculinity in the western world” as “a, if not \textit{the}, burning issue of our time” (\textit{Why} 160).
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popular notions of masculinity crisis emerge in fiction – notably, in fiction which, at least ostensibly, claims some alliance with feminist politics – this book endeavours to decipher some of the underlying concerns motivating, expressed in and developed by depictions of men’s bodies in contemporary Australian women’s writing.

Upon first encountering these novels, I understood their common preoccupation with damaged men’s bodies and (im)possible women’s looks as unproblematically feminist – as embodying, in other words, a direct challenge to patriarchal constructions of masculinity, and the hegemonic male body such a construction produces and supports. This understanding was informed and encouraged by the prevalent theoretical association of dominant constructions of the male body with invisibility. The hegemonic male body, in Western/patriarchal societies, is frequently shown to have been positioned as neutral or normal. As a result, the male subject is universalised to the extent that he is rendered invisible. Rather than being seen as a particular form of embodiment, in other words, male bodies have been constructed as the norm against which other forms of embodiment are measured and differentiated. Grosz makes this argument in *Volatile Bodies*, where she asserts that, due to the association of man with mind and women with body within patriarchal/philosophical traditions, “the specificities of the masculine have always been hidden under the generality of the universal, the human. … Thus what remains unanalysed, what men can have no distance on, is the mystery, the enigma, of the unspoken male body” (198). Accepting the basic premise of this argument, other theorists have sought to refine the terms of debate, showing how other identity categories (such as race, sexuality, class, age and able-bodiedness) are vital in the constitution of the disembodied and transcendent Western subject.28 Particular attention has been paid to the importance of whiteness in the construction of the male subject’s invisibility.29

Overwhelmingly, such discussions emphasise the importance of invisibility in the establishment and maintenance of patriarchal power. Robinson summarises this position as follows: “What is invisible escapes surveillance and regulation, and, perhaps less obviously, also evades the cultural marking that distances the subject from universalizing

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28 Within masculinity studies, heterosexuality has been widely described as a necessary precondition of invisibility (see, particularly, Traister’s analysis of masculinity studies as hetero-masculinity studies). Class, age, and more recently, able-bodiedness (Gerschick and Miller; Chouinard and Grant; Loeser, 55-57; Sparkes and Smith, 258-62; McIlvenny, 100-103) are also increasingly identified as constitutive of the normative male subject.

29 This argument has been made by a great many theorists, including Richard Dyer (*White* 146-80), John Kasson, Ross Chambers, Robinson (*Marked*), Fred Pfeil (*White*), DiPiero.
constructions of identity and narratives of experience” (*Marked* 1). The universal subject, in other words, is able to accrue power because he can present his views and interests as being representative of, and beneficial to, humanity as a whole. Such power is further consolidated by his ability to evade the critical and political scrutiny to which marginalised individuals and groups are subjected.

As the source of male dominance is aligned with the invisibility of (white, heterosexual, middle-class, middle-aged, able-bodied) men, to mark or to name (to make visible) this universal subject as a specific colour, age, class, sexuality, etc., is regarded as a way of subverting patriarchal power and dominance. Images of naked male bodies are frequently identified as embodying such a challenge. Often, such images are seen to threaten patriarchal (or phallocentric) discourse because they expose the incommensurability of the penis (the male bodily organ) and the phallus (identified as the symbolic source of masculine power). Described by Silverman as “the dominant fiction” (41) of patriarchal society, the alignment of penis and phallus naturalises (constructs as biological) male social power. Thus Lehman, a principal commentator on the nature and meaning of male nudity in popular culture, asserts: “dominant representations of phallic masculinity … depend on keeping the male body and the genitals out of the critical spotlight” (*Running* 28). Barbara de Genevieve similarly and succinctly proclaims, “To unveil the penis is to unveil the phallus is to unveil the social construction of masculinity. And *that* is the real taboo” (4). However, it is not only nude male bodies that are seen as posing a threat to patriarchal discourse. A foundational text in such discussions is Steve Neale’s “Masculinity as Spectacle.” Here, he argues that even when fully clothed, the spectacle of the male body subverts the patriarchal dichotomy dictating that men look while women are looked at. Developing this argument, theorists from a variety of disciplines have identified the visible male body – particularly when eroticised – as a site where representation exceeds and transgresses the confines of the patriarchal linguistic and visual economy. Such representations, these theorists assert, produce and proliferate instabilities,

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30 Theorists who describe and advocate this technique include Haraway (192), Anthony Easthope (7), Thomas (12), Jane Gallop (131), Schor (113-14) and Jim Perkinson (174-77).

31 This position is evident, for instance, in various accounts of the position of the male nude in the history of photography. Such images (and their critical discussion) are overwhelmingly identified as transgressing the taboo against displaying and commenting on the naked male body. See, for example, Davis (1-3) and Rice (17).

32 Other theorists who have made this argument include Brooks (15-16), Schor (113-14), Christine Ann Holmlund (45), Buchbinder (*Performance* 51-52), Solomon-Godeau (178-80), Ruth Barcan (84), Lawrence R. Schehr (4-7), Bordo (*Male*) and Don Ihde (240-42).
enable gender codes to cross-over and even collapse, and thus provide new ways of thinking about and theorising men’s bodies. This argument, prevalent in film studies, is also becoming more prominent in cultural studies and art history.

In accordance with the view that making the hegemonic male subject visible undermines patriarchal power, the popular discourse of masculinity crisis – which makes men the explicit topic of discussion – is seen to work against his traditional invisibility and thus to undermine the source of patriarchal power. Despite its anti-feminist stance, in other words, this discourse is taken to signify the positive and politically productive challenge that feminism (and other identity-based liberationist approaches) have posed to traditional enactments of male power. Accordingly, the recent commercial visibility of men’s bodies is frequently described – in popular and academic debates – through the rhetoric of crisis. Simpson’s discussion of male visibility as in terms of “a crisis of looking and being looked at” (Male 6) makes this association explicit. According to such logic, the particularisation and exposure of male bodies in contemporary Australian women’s fiction can be read as one manifestation of a productive feminist version of masculinity crisis, in which patriarchal power is undermined by the focus on masculinity and men’s bodies as topics of discussion.

The challenge apparently posed by male visibility in these fictions is reinforced and heightened when it is assessed in terms of the prevalent feminist identification of reversals in representational dichotomies as subversive of patriarchy. Situations in which women represent and/or look at men’s bodies are repeatedly identified as subversive because they upset the representational system underlying patriarchy (whereby men represent/look and

33 See, for example, analyses by Cohan (Masked 167-200), Miriam Hansen, Gaylyn Studlar, Lucia Bozzola, Christine Geraghty, Ginette Vincendeau (“Beast’s”; “From”), Leon Hunt, Sarah Street, Toby Miller (“James”), Kevin Goddard (paras 4-6), Kelly Farrell (“Naked”), Suzanne Moore (“Here’s” 53) and Walt Morton.

34 Cultural studies discussions of the transgressive potential of male display include those by Caroline Daley, T. Miller (“Short”), Bordo (Male 65-66), Mark Simpson (“Hairy”), John Di Stefano, S. Moore (“Here’s” 53) and Mark Finch.

35 In art history, instabilities in the depiction of male bodies are generally discussed in relation to and identified with periods of conceptual and/or historical change. Tamar Garb (“Masculinity”), Robin Osborne, Solomon-Godeau and Dabakis all discuss various historical “cris[e]s of representation” (Osborne 100) that resulted in changes in the depiction of men’s bodies.

36 Theorists who adopt such a position include Simpson (Male), Segal (Slow), David Morgan (73-74) and Anthony Rotundo.

37 For a particularly extensive and explicit elaboration of the crisis in masculinity in terms of a crisis of male visibility see Edisol Dotson’s Behold the Man.
women are represented/looked at). In the fictions explored in this book, women not only write men’s bodies, but foreground interactions where such bodies are looked at by female characters. Thus, a reading of these novels as feminist in intention and effect is consolidated by the fact that they not only function as but depict such a reversal in gendered dichotomies. Until recently, the implications of women’s looks being directed at men’s bodies were largely unexplored. Thus, when Suzanne Moore, in 1988,

… searched for material on how women look at men, [she] discovered, instead, a strange absence. There is plenty on how men look at women; some on how men look at men; and just a little bit on how women look at other women. But to suggest that women actually look at men’s bodies is apparently to stumble into a theoretical minefield which holds sacred the idea that in the dominant media the look is always already structured as male. (“Here’s” 45)

While this critical (mine)field has changed somewhat, the usual tendency for theory to “lop[e] in its ungainly way behind what is actually happening” (45), is still notably exaggerated in relation to the issue of women representing and/or looking at men’s bodies. As Gledhill, also in 1988, asserts, “judging from the paucity of writing on the meaning of images of men for women, even by ethnographic researchers, it would seem that this has been a difficult question to pose” (“Women” 73-74). To adapt Jane M. Gaines’s phrase, women looking at men’s bodies can be considered a “taboo coupling” (31)39.

In historical studies, the difficulty of posing this question has been explained in relation to cultural taboos against women representing and/or looking at men’s bodies. The strength of such taboos is fittingly evident in analyses that chart the historical exclusion of women from art academies, largely due to anxieties associated with even the possibility of women looking at, and subsequently portraying, nude male bodies.40 The modern manifestation of this taboo can be seen in the particularly virulent condemnation to which women representing or discussing men’s bodies are routinely subjected. Walters asserts that “Contemporary women artists who have dared to portray the naked male body have been violently attacked for obscenity by men who are unruffled by the most pornographic of female nudes” (17). Walters’s statement is certainly supported by the extensive and angry

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38 See, for example, Brenda Cooper, Jane Dromm, Lynnette Felber, Sarah Kent (“Scratching” 3-12) and Williams (“When” 83-99).
39 Gaines defines a “taboo coupling” as those “sexual relations that confound white male culture, that reject its norm … [and] disturb the dominant model” (31-32). While she is specifically interested in combinations of race and gender sexuality (i.e. “heterosexual racial cross-over”; “plain (same race) homosexuality”; “homosexual racial cross-over” [32]) that disrupt patriarchy, her term is nevertheless applicable.
40 See Laura Auricchio (paras 9-12), Garb (“Forbidden” 33-36), Paola Giuliani (72), Patricia Mathews (Passionate 3), Rice (17) or Walters (16).
criticism the 1980 exhibition “Women’s Images of Men” received.\textsuperscript{41} But in spite of this taboo, various theorists have noted the increasing tendency for women artists to depict men’s bodies.\textsuperscript{42} This “revers[al] of the centuries-old model-artist relationship” (Schor 113) is overwhelmingly described as challenging patriarchal representational power. As Rozsika Parker has asserted, “to take men as the objects of our fantasies and the subject of our art is to shift the power relations within art … [to] demot[e] men from standing unproblematically for mankind; presented through women’s eyes men can no longer be Man” (45).

Despite the historical and cultural difficulties associated with the issue, the (f)act of women representing and/or looking at men’s bodies has received increasing theoretical attention. As with assessments of the female gaze generally, women looking at men’s bodies is overwhelmingly identified as posing a challenge to patriarchal gender dichotomies. In S. Moore’s opinion, “to say that women can and do look actively and erotically at images of men” also “disrupts the stifling categories of a theory” – dominant in film studies – “that assumes that such a look is somehow always bound to be male” (“Here’s” 49), and the object of that look, female. Other theorists discuss the threat posed by women writing male characters and their bodies. Schoene-Harwood discusses Shelley’s \textit{Frankenstein} in relation to “cross-writing” – a “profoundly subversive” activity that exposes masculinity as performative (9). Relatedly, Knights asserts that, “For a male author to write his way into a woman may be seen as an act of colonisation. Conversely, the woman writing her way into a man may be engaged in an activity which has much in common with post-colonial writing of traditional power relationships” (139). Diana Wallace concurs, and uses the concept of ventriloquism to assert that, “[a]ny attempt to construct a man, even through writing, especially by a woman, threatens the perceived authority of the masculine as natural, the norm, the universal subject” (“Ventriloquizing” 324). Very recently, theorists like Laura E. Tanner, Parpart (“Cowards”) and Macdonald have investigated fictions and film that manifest the same doubling strategy evident in the

\textsuperscript{41} The outraged (male) critical response to this exhibition is described by Kent (“Scratching” 3; “Looking” 58) and by Jacqueline Morreau and Catherine Elwes (18-20). Although discussing a completely different arena (sports’ reporting), Lisa Disch and Mary Jo Kane describe the public and ferocious condemnation of Lisa Olsen – a sports reporter accused of “peek[ing] excessively” (280) in the male players’ locker room – as a manifestation of this same, general taboo against women looking at and/or representing men’s bodies.

\textsuperscript{42} For discussion and examples of phenomenon, see, for example, Germaine Greer (238), Emmanuel Cooper (183-235), Lehman (“Realm” 106-8), Rice (17), Joan Hope (5-11), D. Morgan (74), Andrew Campbell and Nathan Griffiths (158-61, 170-74) and Kent (“Erotic” 87-105; “Scratching”).
contemporary Australian women’s novels I discuss in this book: namely, texts by women which foreground female characters looking at men’s bodies. This configuration is unanimously identified as highly subversive. Thus, while difficult, the question of how women (might) look at and represent men’s bodies seems to present a site of possibility and potential for feminist theorising.

Accordingly, a significant proportion of the film and cultural studies analyses that identify male visibility as a site of proliferating instability, specifically focus on the intersection of men’s bodies and women’s looks. One of the original and most famous of such studies is Dyer’s discussion of “[i]mages of men aimed at women” in “Don’t Look Now: The Male Pin-Up” (267). Among the progeny of this argument is Bozzola’s identification of Warren Beatty as “a man for women’s eyes,” and hence, a “gender category breaker.” His image, she argues, foregrounds “the notion of sexuality as a construction by destabilizing the accepted terminology”: namely, that men look while women are looked-at (229). Felber and Street also insist that men for women’s eyes (to use Bozzola’s phrase) exceed and subvert the gendered dichotomies of the patriarchal visual economy, thus destroying traditional constructions of masculinity and potentially enabling the emergence of new masculinities.

In making male characters’ bodies visible through damage, these novels additionally challenge the hegemonic construction of men’s bodies as invulnerable, thus further encouraging a reading of these fictions as being underwritten by feminist concerns. Depictions of wounded men have variously been described as challenging to patriarchal conventions: theorists like Studlar and, perhaps most influentially, Silverman, discuss the subversive potential of depictions of wounded male bodies through the paradigm of male masochism. In Male Subjectivity at the Margins, Silverman builds on Freud’s association of masochism with femininity (and sadism with masculinity) to assert that, for a man to assume (or a male character to be represented in relation to) a masochistic position not only calls his masculinity into question, but destabilises gender norms generally. Specifically, she argues that masochistic male bodies are characterised by alterity, castration, specularity and, hence, femininity (3). In a way that corresponds to theoretical associations of patriarchal power and invisibility, Silverman insists that representations of such bodies

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43 Freud also asserts that all sadists are at heart masochists and vice versa (“Economic” 163-64). Silverman acknowledges this argument (188), but tends to concentrate on sadism and masochism as separate and opposite subject positions.
expose the incommensurability of the penis and the phallus, and thus disrupt “the dominant fiction” (16) of patriarchal society. Other theorists – again following the logic of those who posit invisibility as a source of male power, and often building on Silverman’s work – similarly interpret depictions of wounded men’s bodies as disrupting the commensurability of penis and phallus and thus undermining phallocentric discourse. As Schehr asserts in his analysis of men’s bodies in literature and philosophy (by male authors from the mid-nineteenth to the end of the twentieth century), representations of men’s bodies in pain (or pleasure) bring the physicality of that body to the fore and, in the process, offer a nonphallic model of “bodily immanence” (14). Other theorists, like Linda Ruth Williams and Tanner, identify representations of abject men’s bodies as transgressively non-phallic. Specifically, such bodies are shown to deconstruct phallocentric dichotomies such as self/other, masculine/feminine, subject/object, inside/outside and (according to Tanner) see-er/seem. Thomas’s more extensive analysis of male abjection – *Male Matters* – argues that texts which bring the male body and the traversal of its boundaries to the forefront produce abjection anxiety. If left unresolved, such anxiety has the potential to create a space where “new configurations of identity and representation can be performed” (3). In all of these accounts, wounded men’s bodies are identified in terms of the eruption – and, hence, the visibility – of the repressed and non-dichotomous realm of male physicality. Again, this desublimation (often described as specifically feminine or feminised as well as visible) subversively reveals the incommensurability of penis and phallus.

In accounts that resonate with the dual focus in contemporary Australian women’s fiction – on women’s representations and looks and men’s visibility and damage – various theorists have noted the tendency for women, when depicting men’s bodies, to portray them as wounded. Parker, for example, discusses the “prevalence of ‘invalided’ men in women’s art since the seventeenth century” (45), and highlights the continuance of this trend in the 1980s exhibition “Women’s Images of Men” (47-53) where, as Sarah Kent and Jacqueline

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44 Silverman elaborates: “Within every society, hegemony is keyed to certain privileged terms, around which there is a kind of doubling up of belief. Since everything that successfully passes for ‘reality’ within a given social formation is articulated in relation to these terms, they represent ideological stress points ... within our dominant fiction the phallus/penis equation occupies absolute pride of place. Indeed, that equation is so central to the *vraisemblance* that at those historical moments when the prototypical male subject is unable to recognise ‘himself’ within its conjuration of masculine sufficiency our society suffers from a profound sense of ‘ideological fatigue’. Our entire ‘world’, then, depends upon the alignment of phallus and penis” (16).
Morreau elaborate, “the theme of weak, crippled and dependent men repeatedly surfaced and was integral to many other ideas” ("Themes" 27). All of these theorists identify the conjunction of women’s representations and looks and men’s damaged bodies as offering new ways of conceptualising masculinity in particular and gender relations generally. All of these arguments suggest that the foregrounding of wounded (and, therefore, profoundly embodied) male characters in contemporary Australian women’s fiction can be interpreted as presenting progressive and liberating alternatives to patriarchal constructions of masculinity.

Accordingly, and as with discussions of male visibility, representations of wounded men’s bodies are frequently aligned with a disruptive and (for feminism) politically productive masculinity crisis. For instance, Silverman’s discussion of a group of post-World-War-Two Hollywood films interprets their insistent representation of physically and psychically wounded male characters as dramatising a particular historical moment when the equation of penis and phallus could no longer be sustained. They are indicative, in other words, of a massive loss of faith – a “crisis” – in traditional masculinity, and in the social order that such a construction sustains. A similar argument emerges in Pfeil’s discussion of wounded men’s bodies in recent action films. Identified as somatisations of masculinity crisis, these wounded bodies are described as “sign[s] of opportunity – an indication that the sign white-straight-working-man is in flux and open to renegotiation” (White 33). The growing importance of the discourse of masculinity crisis in contemporary Australian debates makes it possible, following such arguments, to identify the wounded bodies of male characters in contemporary Australian women’s fiction as not only transgressive of patriarchal dichotomies, but as indicative of positive social changes wrought by a crisis in traditional conceptions of Australian masculinity.

While a firm theoretical basis therefore exists for interpreting, as unproblematically feminist, the depiction of female characters looking at visible and wounded male characters’ bodies in contemporary Australian women’s fiction, other theoretical accounts point to the possibility that far more conservative, even anti-feminist, concerns inform popular depictions of visible and wounded men’s bodies. Various theorists have demonstrated that male visibility is not necessarily subversive of patriarchal gender dichotomies. Butler, for instance, insists that the creation and reproduction of the heterosexual matrix (her version of Silverman’s “dominant fiction”) necessitates the
performance – and hence, the visibility – of men and women’s bodies as, precisely, male or female. Thus, in direct contravention of the idea that power lies in invisibility, the prominent visibility of the hegemonic (white, heterosexual, able-bodied, etc.) male body is seen to embody, and thus become the means of upholding, oppressive social systems.

Strong support for such an argument comes from various analyses demonstrating the differing degrees to which men’s bodies have been historically visible without the overthrow of patriarchy. Indeed, not only have these bodies been visible, but their very visibility is identified as being central to the resolution of various masculinity crises. For example, in her analysis of the prominent depiction of working-class men’s bodies in late-nineteenth-century American sculpture, Dabakis shows how their presence stabilised the contemporaneous crisis in masculinity by affirming hegemonic notions of manhood. Similarly, Solomon-Godeau argues that depictions of idealised men’s bodies in French neoclassical art, rather than implying a questioning of male social authority, helped to resolve the masculinity crisis brought about by Revolutionary social changes. Specifically, the ephebic and herculean male figures featured in such art works contributed to the exclusion of women from public space and positions of power while providing “a visual language for (and of) male supremacy” (12).

Underlying these arguments is the idea that patriarchal society requires, and is constituted by, the naturalisation of male dominance. For this to occur, hegemonic constructions of masculinity (as an identity connoting strength, courage, power and authority) must appear to be naturally aligned with the hegemonic male body. Such an alignment is most directly facilitated by the depiction of such bodies as inherently (naturally) strong, powerful and authoritative: as, in other words, embodiments of masculinity.

While other theorists have recognised male visibility as a potential site of instability, they have supported its association with patriarchal power by identifying various ways in which male display is recuperated into dominant models of masculinity. Noting the historical and cultural association of display with passivity, desirability and

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45 Christopher Capozzola, for instance, asserts that “[w]hen the U.S. entered World War II … representation of the male form became not only acceptable but downright patriotic” (para 11). Similarly, within the extremely patriarchal cultures of ancient Greece and Rome, men’s bodies were eminently visible in popular representations (for discussions of such visibility see Christ, Clarke, Ferrari, Hawley or Osborne). For a contemporary cross-cultural analysis of a rigidly patriarchal society where male prestige is centrally constructed and affirmed by the prominence of the male form in traditional and modern art, see Kathy Curnow’s discussion of Benin culture.

46 For further arguments of this nature see Patricia G. Berman (83), Kay Saunders (96-106), Christopher Fulton (31-41), Sandy Flitterman or Joseph Bristow.
femininity, analysts have described conventionalised methods of depicting men’s bodies, and discourses informing such representations, that simultaneously function to foreground the association of men with power while denying the position of the hegemonic male body as an object of spectacle. In particular, these conventions and discourses supply a non-erotic reasoning for male display and, in this way, displace the potentially desiring spectator’s gaze onto another economy. Indeed, even in analyses where male display is initially identified as subverting gender categories, such transgression is usually shown to be recaptured and contained by patriarchal discourses and conventions. When this is impossible, Neale argues that the visible male body is feminised, thus refuting the challenge male visibility poses to the association of masculinity with looking, not with being looked at (286). These theoretical accounts raise the possibility of a competing and conservative discourse underlying the explicit feminist approach taken in many of these contemporary Australian women’s novels.

Resonating with such arguments is the idea that representations of wounded men’s bodies, rather than transgressing patriarchal constructions of masculinity, actually provide a premise for consolidating male power. This view is generally supported by the tradition of wounded men’s bodies evident in texts commonly identified as patriarchal. As Katherine Crawford notes, “The wounded hero and suffering male recurs throughout classical literature, narratives of war, men’s movement literature, religious texts and Christianity” (para 15). More specifically, depictions of wounded men overcoming adversity have been identified as a dominant narrative of male supremacy. In repeatedly depicting damaged men triumphing over apparently insurmountable odds, such narratives raise the fearful spectre of male vulnerability, and inspire concern for masculinity crisis, only (and perhaps

47 Conventions include depicting or describing the male body in action (Dyer, “Don’t” 270-71; Walters 8, Berman 77; MacKinnon 19; Lehman, Running 19, 92; Kirkham and Thumim, “You” 15-18, “Me” 23-27); surrounding or investing the male body with signifiers of masculinity, including weapons or extreme muscularity (D. Morgan 71-2; Sanders 15; Dyer, “Don’t” 273-76; Hatt, “Making” 24, 27; Bordo, Male 30; Walters 8-10; Buchbinder, Performance 52; Dabakis 204, 214, 216; Garb, “Masculinity” 53); and depicting or describing the male figure as rejecting the position of spectacle by glaring challengingly back at or looking away with feigned disinterest in the spectator (Bordo, Male 186, 188; Dyer, “Don’t” 267-69).

48 Discourses include comic (Dyer, “Don’t” 114-117; Lehman, Running 105-29; MacKinnon 22-24), medical/scientific (Lehman, Running 131-46; E. Cooper 37-54), health (Flitterman; Berman 83), racial (Bordo, Male 50, 75-76; Maynard) moral/heroic (Brooks 16-17; Dabakis 222; Hatt, “Muscles” 68; Walters 8) and, most prominently, aesthetic (Hatt, “Muscles” 67-68; Alex Potts, “Beautiful” 24-48 and Flesh 1; Solomon-Godeau 88, 185, 193; Garb, “Forbidden” 40).

49 This might occur through the ultimate reassertion of male power (Farrell, “Naked” 126; Tasker; Gledhill, “Women” 86), the aggressive (re-)assertion of conventions for male display (Vincendeau “Beast’s”, “From”; Daley paras 3-5; Hunt 69-73; Kibby and Costello 357-60) or by offsetting the objectified on-screen male body with a paratext of normal off-screen manhood (Cohan, Masked 64).
in order) to reassuringly alleviate it. In this sense, narratives foregrounding wounded men can serve to depict and resolve the purported masculinity crisis in ways that support, rather than subvert, hegemonic constructions of masculinity. Even theorists like Pfeil (*White*) and Jeffrey Brown, who argue that depictions of wounded men’s bodies in action cinema disrupt hegemonic conceptions of masculinity, insist that such disruption is only momentary. The concluding message of male triumph ultimately dramatises the ability of individual men to overcome crisis, and thus reinforces hegemonic constructions of masculinity." One of the main differences between these theorists and those who insist on the intrinsic subversive power of images of wounded men’s bodies, then, is the extent to which the conclusion of such narratives (the reassertion of male power) is taken as decisive in terms of overall meaning. In accordance with these arguments, a frequent pattern in contemporary Australian women’s fiction (primarily explored in Chapters three and four), is to demonstrate the severity of male (physical and emotional) pain, and then to portray its healing.

Other theorists deny that patriarchal power is even momentarily troubled by depictions of male physical or emotional pain. Rather, as Modleski argues in *Feminism Without Women*, the appearance of male weakness is often merely another ruse of male power:

… however much male subjectivity may currently be ‘in crisis’, as certain optimistic feminists are now declaring, we need to consider the extent to which male power is actually consolidated through cycles of crisis and resolution, whereby men are ultimately able to deal with the threat of female power by incorporating it. (*Feminism* 7)

Analysing various post-classical Hollywood genres, Modleski and Kathleen Rowe (who builds on Modleski’s work) have described the sexism underlying representations of emotionally vulnerable male characters. While the strategy of male vulnerability might seem to create feminised heroes “cut to the measure of female desire: liberated from machismo, sensitive to women’s needs, attuned to the ‘child’ – or even the woman – within them” (Rowe, “Melodrama” 184), in fact, their feminisation is shown to occur at the

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50 Texts featuring “angry white men” are frequently described as manifesting this pattern of male endangerment followed by male triumph (see, for example, discussions by Gabbard 7; DiPiero, *White* 1; Somerson, 216). For analyses that chart this trope more generally, see Jeffords (*Hard*), Cohan (*Masked*), Pat Kirkham, Hunt (73, 81-2), Peter Hutchings (84-94), James Catano or Robert Eberwein. Kasson’s recent analysis of the discourse surrounding Houdini makes this same argument from an historical perspective (98-124).
expense of female characters. By portraying male characters in ways that appropriate areas of culture and character positions usually associated with women and femininity, such films either marginalise women or hold them in contempt. As Christopher Newfield asserts,

Hegemonic patriarchy can survive without male assertion, but not without feminization: only feminization enables men to evade the one-directional dominations of stereotypical masculinity, to master the non-conflictual, and to occupy both sides of a question. Whereas tyranny depends on male supremacy, liberal hegemony or “consensus” depends on male femininity. (66)

Thus, while seeming to resist traditional patriarchal images and plots, these feminised heroes actually function “in the service of a beleagured masculinity” (Rowe, “Melodrama” 185) and, as a result, “undermine the feminist project” (Modleski, Feminism 92). Juliana Schiesari describes a similar pattern in Renaissance literature, where “myths of the ‘sensitive’ male have co-opted or appropriated a certain femininity for the benefit of men and to the detriment of women” (x). Such arguments are given credence by the regularity with which historians have identified various crises in masculinity without any apparent collapse in or dismantling of male power.

Similar arguments have been made in relation to depictions of physically wounded men’s bodies. In their introduction to Me Jane, Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim note that the physically wounded men in the films discussed in that collection construct masculinity “time and again, as delicate, fragile, provisional; it is under threat, in danger of collapse” (11). While acknowledging the alternative versions of masculinity and the transgression of patriarchal dichotomies offered by such depictions, the authors note that such “adventur[ing]” (31) into the realm of the feminine not only functions as a way for these male characters to reassert power, but also represents “an appropriation which leaves little place for the female subject” (32). They argue, in other words, that the “masculine crossing of the gender divide is an adventure largely conducted in the interests of the male subject

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51 Dennis Bingham similarly identifies the “‘gentling’ of white masculinity [as] an apparent strategy for holding on to power during shifting times” (4). For more discussions of the melodramatised, melancholic, soft-bodied, sensitive or cross-dressing male, and the ways in which he incorporates the feminine while eliminating or marginalizing women and affirming male power, see Vincendeau (“Beast’s”; “From”), Jeffords (“Can” 253-59), Elisabeth Krimmer, Pfeil (“Getting”), Mark Nicholis, Farrell (“Keeping” 272-76) or Pam Cook. One of Modleski’s main points in Feminism Without Women is that postmodern theory similarly “affirms sexual difference and male/female hierarchy in the very act of denying them” (55), an argument also made by S. Moore (“Getting”).

52 Various points of crisis in the history of masculinity, many of which have been identified in the North American context, include the turn of the nineteenth century (Roberts; Solomon-Godeau; Kimmel, Manhood); the turn of the twentieth century (Dabakis); the post-war period (Cohan, Masked; Silverman; Griswold) and within contemporary society (Robinson, Marked; Jeffords, Hard; Clare).
… unequivocally at the expense of the female subject” (31). Similarly, Solomon-Godeau draws on Modleski’s identification of suffering as a ruse of power to argue that the wounded male ephebes populating neoclassical French art, rather than subverting the phallic model represented by their herculean counterparts, worked in conjunction with such images to present a version of ideal manhood that supported and affirmed patriarchal society. The ephebe, Solomon-Godeau argues, “no matter how ostensibly feminized, is as much a masculinist icon as its martial and virile Other. Where the latter depends on the literal evacuation of the feminine, the former depends on its no less triumphalist assimilation” (175). This same critique could be applied to the theoretical discussions above, where the feminisation of men’s bodies through masochism, abjection and/or wounding is overwhelmingly identified as subversive – whether such subversion is conceived as momentary or absolute.

In her analyses of masculinity in popular American fiction (by male authors) since the 1960s, Robinson does not use the term feminisation to describe the privileged theme of male wounding. Although less absolute in her assertions than theorists like Modleski and Rowe, Robinson nevertheless argues that the trope of male wounding constructs the white male subject in ways that consolidate (but can paradoxically function to undermine) patriarchal power. Specifically, Robinson argues that such texts, lacking recourse to social inequalities, use representations of bodily damage to validate and create concern for the discourse of masculinity crisis.53 “Bodily wounds,” she argues, “have a persuasive power that does not depend on the social; and images of men’s bodies at risk work to legitimize a discourse that often veers off into the apolitical and asocial.” Described as “an opportunistic appropriation of the ‘victim’ position for successful, white, heterosexual men” (“Men’s” 208), this strategy functions to consolidate male power in a society where victimhood represents a new claim of authenticity and a justification of rights. By transforming social power into individual pathos, such a strategy counteracts feminist claims of women’s victimisation with the (perceived) decline of the white male. In these theoretical accounts, therefore, representations of wounded or disempowered men’s bodies, as well as the function of such bodies within discourse, are shown to support a patriarchal agenda. Analyses that identify visible and/or wounded men’s bodies as supporting patriarchal

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53 While Marked Men is Robinson’s most extended exploration of this position, she develops aspects of her general argument in articles like “‘Emotional Constipation’ and the Power of Dammed Masculinity” and “Men’s Liberation, Men’s Wounds.”
discourse problematise a reading of contemporary Australian women’s fiction as uncomplicatedly feminist.

Given the focus of these theorists on texts produced by men or in male-dominated institutions (like Hollywood), and the overwhelming critical identification of women representing and/or looking at men’s bodies as subversive, it is tempting to argue that the authorship of these novels (combined with their insistent focus on female characters’ visual relation to male characters’ bodies) makes the above arguments – which counter a positive feminist reading of depictions of visible and damaged men’s bodies – largely irrelevant to these fictions. Such an argument, however, assumes that women’s vision and fiction are inherently inimical to patriarchy and, as a close reading of these fictions demonstrates, this is not necessarily the case. Indeed, in contemporary Australian women’s fiction, the female characters’ looks often function as a means of demonstrating, reinforcing and encouraging sympathy for the potentially conservative theme of male pain. As Modleski asserts in her reading of the conservative and anti-feminist meaning of male vulnerability in contemporary texts, it is not uncommon to find “woman presiding over her own marginalisation, participating in a nostalgia for a time in which human relationships are felt to have been relatively uncomplicated, though the cost of this simplicity is the repression of women” (“Incredible” 62). Lehman similarly argues that, as “men and women may share the same ideological assumptions about sexuality and the male body … we may expect that some women … may replicate many patriarchal assumptions about the male body” (Running 23-4). These arguments imply that the intersection of bodies, gender and visibility in these fictions – produced by the portrayal, by women writers, of female characters looking at visible and damaged men’s bodies – produces not unproblematically feminist plots, but novels grounded in a conservative and anti-feminist focus on masculinity crisis.

This study, however, is not aimed at determining whether depictions of men’s bodies and women’s looks in contemporary Australian women’s writing are ultimately aligned with either a discourse of masculinity crisis or of feminism. Rather, I argue that these novels resonate with both positions, often concurrently and in complex and contradictory ways. These texts thus demonstrate how patriarchal discourse can be maintained through the disavowal of male visibility and damage, and women’s visual and representational agency, but at the same time can be upheld by these same operations and
structures. Accordingly, none of the theoretical paradigms discussed above applies to every novel, nor even to different aspects of each novel. Kobena Mercer’s practice of ambivalent reading provides a model for this inconclusive, but not conflicted or undecided, approach to fiction. In particular, Mercer’s strategy of ambivalence remains open to multiple and contradictory textual meanings by centrally attending to “the important, and equally undecidable, role of context in determining the range of different meanings that can be produced from the same text” (1). An ambivalent approach to contemporary Australian women’s fiction reveals the complicated and mutually-influential intertwining of the discourses of feminism and masculinity crisis around representations of women looking at men.

Mercer’s attention to context raises another important issue: while these fictions are written in a specifically Australian context, this is not the case for the vast majority of theoretical discussions of masculinities, men’s bodies and/or women’s looks. Many analyses are, instead, based in psychoanalytic theory: a perspective widely criticised for its ahistorical and acultural conceptions of identity, sexuality and corporeality. Those studies that do investigate representations of masculinities, men’s bodies and/or women’s looks in relation to a cultural and historical context, overwhelmingly refer (sometimes explicitly, but often implicitly) to North American texts and discourses.54 Faced with the similar problem of deciphering Canadian images of “male sexual representation” using preponderantly psychoanalytic or American commentaries, Parpart asserts that, “an overemphasis on shared characteristics and universal principles … tend[s] to obscure important distinctions in the way such images have been dealt with in different genres and nation[s]” (“Nation” 168).

Acknowledging the embeddedness of these fictions in a specific historical, cultural and national context has various implications. It requires, for one, a consideration of the category Australian fiction. This term, like women’s writing, is often taken to designate an obvious and unproblematic critical field. While institutions like the Fryer Library both presume and help to create this field, questions have been raised regarding the critical and descriptive potential of the term Australian for literary studies. Gunew describes the difficulties in defining what constitutes a national fiction in a country largely composed of

54 Prominent theorists of masculinities and/or men’s bodies who focus on a North American context include Modleski (Feminism), Jeffords (Hard and Remasculinization), Pfeil (White), Robinson (Marked) and David Savran.
immigrants, while Delys Bird problematises the term Australian in the context of an increasingly globalised publishing industry (184-85). Ultimately, as with women’s writing, I will employ Australian fiction as a contingent term, useful for asking questions but not (necessarily) for providing answers. Rather than a self-contained and self-explanatory cultural field, in other words, the critical category of Australian fiction offers a framework for thinking about the fictions, and the fictional trends, produced by a loose cultural grouping of women writers.

Certainly, masculinity is a central feature of Australian literature and culture. As Connell asserts, “It is by now a familiar observation that notions of Australian identity have been almost entirely constructed around images of men.” Significantly, in the images of Australian masculinity he subsequently delineates – “the convict shaking his shackled fist; the heroic explorer facing inland; the bushman plodding down a dusty track; the digger scrambling up the slopes at Gallipoli; Bradman and McCabe facing the bodyline attack; Midget Farrelly swooping down the wave face” (“Introduction” 9) – the corporeal is repeatedly foregrounded. Unsurprisingly, given its importance in Australian culture and national identity, there have been countless discussions of Australian masculinity, both implicit (particularly before the 1970s) and explicit (especially since second-wave feminism made men and masculinity specific topics of inquiry). At the same time – and despite (or because of) a preponderance of discussion of Australian male homosociality (or mateship) – little attention has been given to women’s views of Australian masculinity. Analysis of the trend of women writing men’s bodies thus provides a way of investigating this underexplored area, while potentially offering a different perspective not only on Australian masculinity, but Australian identity more generally.

All of these fictions contain identifiably Australian themes, mostly associated with travel and landscape. In The Architect, and particularly in Last of the Sane Days, the

55 Some recent analyses of Australian masculinities, literary and otherwise, include Clive Moore’s overview of the ways in which “Australian Masculinities” have been historically constructed and enacted (“Guest” 1-16; see also “Colonial”); Wendy Seymour’s discussion of the interrelation between Australian masculinity and various images and performances of the male body (67-76); Linzi Murrie’s analysis of the fictional construction of Australian masculinities (in the work of male authors), both historically (“Australian”) and more recently (“Changing”); and Rose Lucas’s description of the transformation in representations of Australian masculinity in film. A significant proportion of studies focus on particular manifestations of Australian masculinity, including the larrin (Rickard; Mortimer), the soldier (Blair; Nicoll; Caesar; Garton), the middle-class man (Crotty) and the lifesaver/ironman (Connell, Men 69-85; K. Saunders).

56 A notable exception, and one that highlights the contingent nature of the notion of an Australian women writer is Phillippa Moylan’s analysis of G.B. Lancaster’s colonial adventure romances. The pseudonym of a woman writer (who was actually a New Zealander), Lancaster’s novels were fundamentally concerned with negotiating imperial and colonial constructions of Australian masculinity.
importance of Europe suggests a typically (and strongly literary) Australian desire for acceptance and respectability through internationalism. In these same novels, and in *Transplanted* and *The Blind Eye*, the bush – and its complex relationship to Australian identity and masculinity – is also prominent, and presented as a site of struggle, authenticity and understanding. Alternatively, in *Miranda, Transplanted* and, to a lesser extent perhaps, *Machines for Feeling*, another icon of the Australian landscape – the coast – is frequently invoked.57

In general, however, Australian themes and characters do not determine these fictions. Instead, these recognisably Australian elements seem to function simply as backdrops for depictions and explorations of more generally Western conceptions of masculinity. The almost uniform interest of male characters in these novels in intellectual pursuits like poetry, art, alternative medicine or philosophy, for instance, exists in stark contrast to the firmly anti-intellectual tradition associated with Australian masculinity. While at first glance surprising, this fictional trend in fact corresponds with a growing theoretical insistence on the increasingly globalised and homogenised nature of contemporary masculinity.58 I am particularly concerned with the manifestation of such homogenisation in the discourse of masculinity crisis that has emerged in Australia. Although largely originating in North America, notions of masculinity crisis have become increasingly prominent in Australian cultural debates.59 However, the nature of these debates has remained largely constant despite their geographical translation. Thus, the primary issues in Australian debates about masculinity crisis – namely, the disadvantages faced by boys (particularly in education) and by fathers (specifically in divorce and custody

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57 Notably, and in a way that reinforces the engagement of these novels with specifically Australian notions of identity, Philip Drew focuses on these same three geographical elements (Europe, bush and coast).

58 Connell is one of the foremost theorists of the new globalisation of masculinity (*Men* 46-56, “Masculinities” and “Preface”). Bob Pease and Keith Pringle discuss this trend and provide a literature review of recent, influential studies that adopt this approach (“Introduction”). Other studies discuss the globalisation of issues such as men’s health (Wadham; Boni) or fatherhood (Russell), while Steve Derne describes the counter-process of local resistance.

59 This is demonstrated, for instance, by a prominent series of articles published in *The Australian* during February 2004, all debating the impact of this purported crisis on the well-being of boys and the status of fathers (Bachelard and DiGirolamo; Carr-Gregg; Costello; Editorial; Legge). For an overview of discussion of the problems purportedly faced by Australian boys see Natasha Cortis and Eileen Newmarch. Although beyond the scope of this book, the resonances – but enormous differences – between traditional constructions of Australian masculinity (as an identity forged through struggle and hardship) and the popular discourse of masculinity crisis seem a particularly pertinent area for future analyses. Such an investigation – in the context of (what seems to be) an increasingly homogenised discourse of Westernised masculinity and femininity – could offer an entirely new perspective on the negotiations around contemporary constructions of Australian masculinity, and Australian identity generally.
proceedings) – are described by Connell as the principal concerns of masculinity movements generally ("Preface"). Similarly, Michael Flood ("Four", "State") identifies the same four strands in the Australian men’s movement – profeminist men, men’s liberationists, mythopoetic men and men’s rights – as David Throop describes in his American analysis.\(^{60}\) Ultimately, therefore, while an awareness of the potential cultural specificity of these fictions (combined with the cultural specificity of most studies of masculinities, men’s bodies and women’s looks) must be acknowledged, these fictions often suggest a more generally Western version of masculinity (created, it seems, due to the currency that the discourse of masculinity crisis has attained).

The first part of this book analyses the recurrent depictions of objectification in these fictions. Chapter One explores the portrayal – in *The Architect*, *The Blind Eye*, *Miranda* and *Transplanted* – of the unequal power dynamics manifested in interactions between blind female and seeing male characters. The contrast established between male sight and female blindness suggests an explicit engagement with feminist notions of women’s objectification. In particular, and in a way that demonstrates the pedagogical/feminist approach of these fictions, Mulvey’s specifically psychoanalytic account of objectification (as she elaborates it in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”) is frequently and explicitly evoked in all these novels. *Miranda* and *Transplanted* reinforce a focus on women’s objectification with extensive descriptions of male characters physically and socially oppressing female characters. In contrast, *The Architect* and *The Blind Eye* overwrite concern for women’s oppression with a conservative focus on and sympathy for the crisis male characters undergo.

The unequal nature of gendered visual interactions is also the focus of Chapter Two. This chapter, however, explores instances – in *The Architect*, *Miranda* and *Last of the Sane Days* – where female characters look at male characters in explicitly voyeuristic and fetishistic ways. The subsequent masculinisation of female spectators and feminisation of male spectacles in these novels permits an exploration of male visibility and female desire. While *The Architect* forecloses on the subversive possibilities of the conjunction of men’s bodies and women’s looks, *Miranda* and *Last of the Sane Days* allow the resulting

\(^{60}\) Throop, however, includes a fifth strand – the Christian’s Men’s Movement – in his survey of the North American context.
instabilities to proliferate, thus creating a space for eroticising and consequently re-imagining masculinity.

These first two chapters explore the mode of visual engagement overwhelmingly identified as problematic in these narratives: objectification (whether it is male characters objectifying female characters or female characters repeating those same power dynamics in their visual interactions with men). The second half of this book investigates the alternatives to objectification imagined in these fictions. Significantly, the main solutions offered to objectification – namely, homeopathy or psychic abilities (Chapter Three) and (hetero)sexual love and equality (Chapter Four) – are generally manifested through touch, either in conjunction with or as privileged in relation to vision. Touch repeatedly heals male pain (emotional or physical) and hence alleviates masculinity crisis. In accordance with this general pattern, Chapter Three explores how psychic abilities, in *The Architect*, and homeopathy, in *The Blind Eye*, are explicitly constructed as alternative and non-objectifying ways of seeing and, manifested through touch, of understanding male characters’ bodies. The repeated association of these paradigms with acknowledged partiality and embodiment resonates strongly with Haraway’s conception of feminist objectivity (“Situated”) and again implies a feminist/pedagogical approach. Upon closer examination, however, these fictions can be seen as replacing one form of absolutism with another. Indeed, in different ways in both novels, the overtly liberating properties of homeopathy and psychic abilities actually function as smokescreens for underlying narrative patterns that resonate closely with the precepts of the popular anti-feminist discourse of masculinity crisis. In particular, these fictions depict the appropriation of women’s visual agency and, in conjunction with their marginalisation, the affirmation of male homosociality.

Chapter Four explores the portrayal of idealised (hetero)sexual relationships in *The Blind Eye, Last of the Sane Days, Transplanted* and *Machines For Feeling*. In these novels, tactile and visual relations between male and female characters produce an equitable and erotic reciprocity which heals male pain and, though less frequently, enables the visual agency of female characters. In a general sense, these novels exceed the conventions of popular romance, particularly in their portrayal of heterosexual unity as somehow unachievable or unsustainable. Nevertheless, the dichotomous framework of patriarchal discourse – and the celebration of dependence frequently manifested in the popular genre of
romance fiction – is sustained by the depiction of men and women as interdependent. In contrast, heterosexual love and desire are absent from *Miranda*, the novel discussed in Chapter Five. Instead, the novel’s eponymous narrator engages and radically reconceptualises men’s bodies in ways evocative of postmodern visual theory. Various feminist theorists have identified postmodern understandings of visual culture as ignorant of real social power differentials. However, Miranda’s humour and her performative interactions with patriarchal society produce a strongly feminist postmodernism. In this way, *Miranda* offers a passage through unresolved issues regarding women’s vision, central both to these fictions and to contemporary feminist debates. Furthermore, in describing a female spectator not yet fully delineated by theory, *Miranda* suggests new ways in which women might look at men and new ideas about how men might appear under such a gaze.
Chapter One

Obscene ecstasy

Interactions between seeing men and blind women in

*The Architect, The Blind Eye, Transplanted* and *Miranda*.

... it could be argued that men don’t have any bodies at all. Look at the magazines! Magazines for women have women’s bodies on the cover, magazines for men have women’s bodies on the cover. When men appear on the covers of magazines, it’s magazines about money, or about world news. Invasions, rocket launches, political coups, interest rates, elections, medical break-throughs. Reality. Not entertainment. Such magazines show only the heads, the unsmiling heads, the talking heads, the decision-making heads, and maybe a little glimpse, a coy flash of suit. How do we know there’s a body under all that discreet pinstriped tailoring? We don’t, and maybe there isn’t.

[Margaret Atwood, “Alien Territory” 512]

Complaining about the demeaning nature of sex-themed advertising used to be a girl thing. ... Interestingly enough, however, increasing numbers of lads are also getting shirty about being portrayed as shallow and mono-dimensional in advertising. They’re not happy that idealised versions of their semi-naked bodies are being used to flog pizza, credit cards and pool cleaners. They claim they’re more than a pair of well-turned pecs; and they’re not just pantyhose-activated robo-rogerers, either.

[Emma Tom, “Sweating over a sex-themed ad that’s not on the nose” 13]

Particularly over the past decade, Atwood’s playfully posed but seriously intended question – whether men have bodies at all – has been repeatedly answered in the affirmative by the prominent and increasing presence of men’s bodies in popular culture generally, and in advertising particularly. According to Rosalind Gill, it is not the number or the desirability of these bodies that makes this recent trend important, as well as historically and culturally specific. Rather, it is the coding of contemporary images of men’s bodies in Western culture “so as to give permission for [them] to be looked at.” Like the majority of commentators discussed in my Introduction, Gill asserts that such portrayals of men’s bodies – particularly when aimed at or depicted in relation to women viewers – “constitut[e] a disruption to conventional patterns of looking” (np). In other words, and

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61 For detailed analyses that relate this trend to consumerist culture see Frank Mort (*Cultures*) and Sean Nixon (“Exhibiting”; *Hard*).
62 While historically and culturally *specific*, various historical analyses show that the representation of (particularly young) men’s bodies coded so as to be looked at and admired is not historically and culturally *unique* (see, for example, Clarke, Ianziti, Solomon-Godeau).
contravening Berger’s famous pronouncement that “Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at” (47), the visibility of men’s bodies in modern Western society produces a visual economy where men are objects, rather than simply subjects, of a gendered gaze.

Emerging contemporaneously with this trend, the fictions explored in this book construct similar visual economies, repeatedly depicting male characters’ bodies as exposed and objectified. Like the majority of popular and academic discussions, these fictions evince significant interest in, and often concern for the consequences of, such visibility. Certainly, in many of these novels, the portrayal of objectified men’s bodies in terms of damage resonates with the considerable academic and popular concern for men’s psychological and physical health in the context of what is frequently described as a contemporary crisis in male body image. However, in contrast to many popular discussions (but like the majority of academic expositions), the fictions explored in this chapter repeatedly and insistently frame descriptions of male visibility within an acknowledgement of the historical and cultural construction of women as objects rather than subjects of the gaze. This framework creates an explicitly feminist basis for explorations of male visibility. More generally, in depicting the objectification of both male and female characters, these novels can be seen as exemplifying, or at least intervening in, contemporary academic and popular debates about the nature of masculinity and femininity, and of relations of power between men and women.

*The Architect, The Blind Eye, Transplanted* and *Miranda* facilitate and foreground a recognition of women’s objectification within the patriarchal visual economy by centrally depicting blind female characters and the subordinate position they occupy in interactions with seeing male characters. The foregrounding of these interactions means that in these fictions, male visibility is explored, and commented on, in the context of women’s objectification. In one sense, and given the popularisation of feminism (and discussions of gender generally) in Western culture, it is hardly surprising that contemporary Australian women’s fictions acknowledge the involvement of power dynamics in gendered looking relations. What is significant, however, is the way in which the presentation of male characters objectifying female characters in these novels extends beyond commonplace

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63 A large proportion of the work that has been done on male corporeality focuses on body image (see, for example, Drummond; Epperley; Furnham and Greaves; Grogan and Richards; Jirousek; Miskind et al.; R. Morgan; Mort, “Boys”; Pope et al., “Evolving”; Pope, Phillips and Olivardia, Wienke).
understandings of visual relations. Instead, gendered looking relations in *The Architect* and *The Blind Eye* and, to a slightly lesser extent, in *Transplanted* and *Miranda*, are in many ways highly evocative of the specific conceptualisation of the relationship between spectator and spectacle elaborated within psychoanalytically based feminist film theory, particularly as it is described in the most cited piece of scholarship in this field (MacKinnon 13): Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”

What might seem at first to be an idealistic and simplistic notion of linkage between fiction and theory is, in fact, a very deliberate and deliberated proposition. In making this statement, I am not simply asserting that Mulvey’s theory is particularly useful for interpreting these fictions. Nor am I drawing a connection between fiction and theory only because the depiction of female characters looked at by, but unable to look back at, male characters provides a fitting allegory for the broad concept of objectification, or even for a non-specialised understanding of Mulvey’s assessment of the patriarchal visual economy. Also, I am not aligning fiction with theory purely because these novels (particularly *The Architect* and *The Blind Eye*) very specifically depict the voyeuristic and fetishistic modes of objectification Mulvey identifies and critiques. Rather, all of these elements contribute to the ways in which these fictions engage with and indeed strategically evoke Mulvey’s argument. The portrayal of looking relations in these novels, however, does not merely concur with her version of the patriarchal visual economy. Instead, attuned to and descriptive of the objectification of male as well as female characters’ bodies, these fictions construct and consider gendered visual relations in ways that both support and challenge Mulvey’s assertions, often in highly pedagogical and explicitly feminist ways. 64 Mulvey’s argument, in other words, provides a feminist framework for the discernable desire in these fictions to teach, even to theorise, visual gendered inequalities, particularly as they function and change in the context of male visibility and the anxiety, or crisis, it provokes. 65

64 References to psychoanalytic concepts are, at times, so foregrounded that the texts become theoretically over-determined and, especially in the case of *The Architect* and *The Blind Eye*, sometimes uncomfortably didactic. Significantly, many recent analyses of representations of men’s bodies in women’s film and fiction note this same pedagogical approach, especially in texts which simultaneously foreground female characters looking at these male bodies (see, especially, Parpart, “Cowards”; Macdonald; Stout).

65 The idea that these fictions are self-consciously theoretical and pedagogical is bolstered, though by no means proven, by the fact that many of these authors work, or have worked, in teaching and/or research jobs. Watkinson is currently enrolled in a PhD in creative writing; Scarfe has taught in Australia, England and India; Juchau has worked as a researcher and is now the assistant editor of *The UTS Review*; Capp has a PhD in literature and has worked as a researcher and a lecturer.
Paradoxically, however, in *The Architect* and *The Blind Eye* (the novels I explore in the first part of this chapter), this explicitly feminist framework produces narratives more evocative of the popular discourse of masculinity crisis. Specifically, it will be argued that, although the depictions of interactions between blind female and seeing male characters in these novels strongly evoke Mulvey’s account of the voyeuristic, fetishistic and oppressive “male gaze” (“Visual” 19), a discourse of masculinity crisis – presented as a crisis in male visibility – is ultimately given pre-eminence. As a result, the pain endured by male characters is privileged over the subjectivities of the female characters, and their suffering due to objectification. Likewise, although overtly optimistic for a feminist reading, the visibility of these male characters actually does not alter the subordinate position blind female characters occupy. The same can be said for the ability and willingness of these male characters to change their oppressive visual approach to female characters (a situation which overtly contrasts with Mulvey’s pessimistic views regarding the inevitability of gendered visual inequalities). Ultimately, therefore, while *The Architect* and *The Blind Eye* offer alternatives to Mulvey’s conception of gendered looking relations, the pain and emotional growth of male characters are privileged in a way that leaves the unequal power dynamics initially manifested in interactions between blind female and seeing male characters essentially unaltered.

In contrast, and at first glance, *Miranda* and *Transplanted* (the fictions I discuss secondly) might seem less open to a positive feminist reading. These novels do not refer so specifically to voyeuristic and fetishistic modes of objectification, and thus, do not evoke so obviously the framework of Mulvey’s argument. Nor are the male characters who objectify blind women in these narratives transformed into more caring, self-aware beings. Both fictions, however, insistently consolidate depictions of women’s visual objectification with examples of their social and physical oppression. These texts consequently present stark and strongly feminist interpretations of patriarchal society and the unequal looking relations such a society creates and perpetuates. The feminist nature of these texts is compounded by their treatment of the association of male visibility and crisis. In *Miranda*, this association is mocked, while in *Transplanted* it is balanced with an acknowledgement of women’s analogous suffering in the patriarchal visual economy. Ultimately, therefore, although male visibility is often taken to constitute an explicitly subversive reversal of traditional
patriarchal dichotomies, in the fictions explored in this chapter, depictions of men’s bodies can, but do not necessarily produce a critique of patriarchal looking relations.

Before elaborating on such contentions through a close reading of these fictions, the centrality of Mulvey’s article to the discussion in this chapter necessitates a brief overview of the arguments proposed in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” as well as a survey of the various responses her ideas have generated. For Mulvey, the impossibility of both a male spectacle and a female spectator is so obvious in and intrinsic to the workings of the patriarchal unconscious that she expends very little energy in accounting for their absence. She dispenses with the possibility of a female gaze by asserting, “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, sexual pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly” (19). The impossibility of a male spectacle is accounted for almost as briefly:

According to the principles of the ruling ideology and the psychical structures that back it up, the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. … A male movie star’s glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic object of the gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego. (20)

With the male body unable to be objectified, Mulvey’s description of looking relations in mainstream cinema strongly correlates with critical discussion regarding the hegemonic male subject’s invisibility.

The association of invisibility with power in such critical discussions further resonates with Mulvey’s description of the power obtained and exercised by the “male gaze” in voyeuristically and fetishistically objectifying the female body on-screen. According to Mulvey, voyeurism and fetishism are ways of looking that allow the male spectator to control his sexual anxieties regarding female lack (of a penis), as well as his associated fear of castration. The voyeuristic gaze does this by allowing the male spectator to create a distance between himself and the female object, and thus to enact a fantasy of being able to see while remaining unseen. The resulting feelings of omnipotence permit the male spectator to investigate and demystify the female object, and thereby expose her lack. The anxiety created by this exposure is subsequently counterbalanced by assertions of male

66 The following overview refers only to her arguments in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” Mulvey subsequently revised her position (somewhat), especially in her “Afterthoughts” article. It is her original propositions, however, that provide the focus of much continuing critical debate, as well as the framework for the portrayal of looking relations in these novels.
control, manifested in “devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object” (“Visual” 21). While the voyeuristic gaze resolves male sexual anxiety by maintaining distance between the male spectator and the female spectacle, the fetishistic gaze demands closeness and identification. In over-valuing the female star’s beauty, and aligning her beauty with the phallus, the male spectator denies castration and thus transforms her into something “reassuring rather than dangerous” (21). While voyeurism and fetishism are very different – one distances and under-values, the other over-identifies and over-values – both ways of looking are identified by Mulvey as modes of objectification. In other words, both voyeurism and fetishism allow an active male spectator to project his anxieties and fantasies onto a passive and de-individualised female body-object.

Since its original publication in 1975, Mulvey’s article has provided “the springboard for much feminist film criticism” (Stacey, “Desperately” 244). However, its influence extends well beyond film or media studies. In disciplines such as art history, literary analysis, sociology, masculinity studies and cultural studies, Mulvey’s assertion of the impossibility of either a female spectator or a male spectacle within mainstream film are taken as a comment on, and applied in discussions of, the patriarchal visual economy as a whole. Her influence, however, does not mean that all theorists, or even the majority, agree with the terms, conditions or findings of her work. The psychoanalytic framework she employs has been repeatedly criticised. According to Jackie Stacey, a psychoanalytic framework “collapse[s] gender and sexuality into a totalistic binarism of masculinity and femininity.” This approach is problematic, she asserts, because it necessarily theorises “identification and object choice within a framework of binary oppositions (masculinity/femininity; activity/passivity) that necessarily masculinise active female desire” (Star 27) while, in turn, feminising passive male display and heterosexualising visual interactions. Brown similarly insists that the “dominance of the gender dichotomy” within current theorising has become so complete, as a result of the influence of psychoanalysis “that it is nearly impossible to discuss the idiosyncrasies of masculinity

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67 Discussion of the debates surrounding the position(s), difficulty(ies) and possibility(ies) of female spectatorship(s) would necessitate a book in itself. Excellent overviews of this field have already been provided in Stacey’s Star Gazing and Sue Thornham’s Passionate Detachments. Stacey’s analysis is primarily concerned with psychoanalytic feminist film theory. She identifies three positions that such analyses have made available for the female spectator—masculinisation, masochism and marginality—and suggests an ethnographic form of fantasy theory as an alternative to such restriction. Thornham charts the field of feminist film theory as a whole, demonstrating the gradual (though by no means total) challenge that other modes of analysis (like queer theory, black and post-colonial feminist theories and postmodernism) have posed to the pre-eminence of psychoanalytic feminist film theory.
without resorting to the language of feminine characteristics and masculine characteristics.”

His subsequent statement – “This semantic problem in turn influences and limits the understanding of gendered traits” (128) – goes to the heart of the totalising function of such an approach: its circular nature. In addition to imposing and reproducing an overly simplistic binary framework in relation to the multiple processes of desire and identification, such a model, as Jackie Byars argues, operates “conservatively to extend and naturalise the repression of women, defining ‘woman’ in terms of aberrance and deviance.” “Not surprisingly,” she proclaims, such a model “lacks an explanation of change and so consign[s] women to an inevitably secondary status” (112).

In addition to these general criticisms, Mulvey’s article itself has been variously described (both from within psychoanalytic feminist film theory and without) as acultural, ahistorical, heterosexist and totalising. Although providing important “evidence” of the ways in which looking relations are gendered, Mulvey’s assertions regarding the impossibility of both a female spectator and a male spectacle have proven so difficult to theorise beyond that many commentators have described her influence in terms of the instigation and construction of a “monolithic [theoretical] system,” where looking relations are inevitably and universally “saturated with patriarchal needs and desires” (Stacey, Star 20). Edgar Snow, for example, identifies Mulvey’s “male gaze theory” as “an unwitting agent of the forces … it wishes to oppose,” and adds that “Nothing could better serve the paternal superego than to reduce masculine vision completely to the terms of power, violence, and control, to make disappear whatever … remains outside the patriarchal” (31). Indeed, critical debate has now arrived at a point where the difficulties of Mulvey’s argument are so well established that most recent analyses of male spectacles or female spectators refer to her argument in shorthand, still grappling with the consequences of the ideas she raises but no longer feeling required to demonstrate the problems underlying her assertions. Beyond this point, however, there has been very little agreement on a theoretical or social space from which women can actively look at and desire men’s bodies. Although the extensive criticism and re-theorisation that Mulvey’s article has been subjected to – including Mulvey’s own “Afterthoughts” – has challenged the singular authority of her

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68 Deidre E. Pribram’s introduction to Female Spectators (1-11) surveys such criticisms.

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“Visual Pleasure” argument, it has not altered the pre-eminence of her original line of reasoning in discussions of female spectators and male spectacles.

Given the extensive negative criticism both Mulvey’s psychoanalytic framework and her article have received, it might seem perverse to theorise contemporary Australian women’s fiction in relation to her argument. The difficulties posed by such an exercise would certainly appear to be compounded by the divergence between Mulvey’s insistence on the impossibility of either a male spectacle or a female spectator, and the prevalence of both positions in these novels. Furthermore, this approach necessitates using visual theory – developed in relation to mainstream cinema – to understand fiction (fictions, moreover, that explore a marginal issue – men’s bodies – from within an arguably marginalised literary genre – women’s writing). However, discussion of Mulvey’s article is compelled not only by the evocation of her arguments and terms in these fictions, but by the nature of the critical field: Mulvey’s thesis is so central to debates about female spectators and male spectacles that an analysis that ignores her views risks being irrelevant to contemporary debates. Repeated references to Mulvey’s theoretical framework in other analyses of the intersection of men’s bodies and women’s looks in film (Summerhayes, 72-6; Parpart, “Cowards”) and literature (Tanner; Macdonald) further suggests the relevance of her arguments to a discussion of these fictions. Indeed, the regularity with which Mulvey’s article is raised in such discussions implies that her understanding of visual relations still has much relevance to questions of women looking and men being looked at, even if only as a model of the patriarchal visual economy which highlights the difference represented by, and hence (it is usually argued), the subversiveness of such positions and their conjunction. Finally, while acknowledging that visual theory cannot be transferred unproblematically from discussions of visual texts to fiction, some analysts support a considered application of this kind. The increasing tendency of literary theorists to apply visual theory to analyses of fiction further suggests the fruitfulness of such an approach.

Looking relations in *The Architect* and *The Blind Eye* resonate with Mulvey’s understanding of the patriarchal visual economy in their general depiction of seeing male characters objectifying blind female characters, and more specifically, in their portrayal of such objectification in ways that explicitly evoke Mulvey’s description of voyeurism and fetishism. In *The Architect*, Jules voyeuristically objectifies the blind female character

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69 Theorists like Janet Clare Wondra (ix-x) and Alison McKee have advocated and described “a productive cross-fertilization of film and literary theory” (McKee 147) in analyses of female spectatorship.
Chloe and, in this way, controls his castration/sexual anxiety. This may seem an extreme or overly didactic proposition. However, such an interpretation is encouraged from the moment Jules and Chloe meet. At this point, Jules is “[v]ulnerable. Self-conscious. A one-armed man” (Watkinson 49), very anxious about his visible mutilation. Seeing Chloe’s “[w]omb-blighted” eyes, he immediately thinks, “She is blind and I am grossly, obscenely ecstatic” (49). Both one-armedness and blindness are well-known metaphors, in psychoanalytic terms, for castration. Drawing on the Freudian understanding of sexual difference employed in Mulvey’s argument, Jules’s anxiety regarding the amputation of his right arm symbolises his fear of potential castration, while Chloe’s blindness represents her already-castrated status. In these terms, the obscene (sexual) ecstasy Jules experiences upon discovering Chloe’s blindness (castration) arises from a voyeuristic desire to expose, use and punish her lack. A Lacanian understanding of sexual difference (a paradigm also employed by Mulvey) yields a slightly different reading. According to Jacques Lacan, all subjects – male and female – are psychically castrated upon entry into language (henceforth unable to access the phallic plentitude previously found in union with the mother). Although, in this framework, both Jules and Chloe are psychically castrated, by hiding his castration from her Jules can present himself as whole in relation to her lack. He delights in her blindness, therefore, because it allows him to claim access to the wholeness and power of the phallus (although, of course, in Lacan’s estimation, the phallus can never belong to any subject). The novel’s depiction of Jules’s amputation and Chloe’s blindness, and the relationship between these two metaphors of castration, variously resonate with these two psychoanalytic conceptions of sexual difference. His amputation additionally suggests contemporary portrayals of masculinity crisis, where physical wounding – particularly the loss of a body part – is repeatedly used to signify emasculation.

Unable to see Jules, Chloe assumes that he has two arms: “when one can’t see, one just assumes there are two hands” (69). Jules fosters this illusion during their first meeting by instructing Chloe in playing the guitar. This denial allays Jules’s anxieties – “The fist in my stomach has unclenched. … The emptiness is closing over” (50). When Chloe’s lover, Peter, arrives and realises that Chloe is unaware of Jules’s one-armedness, Jules entreats

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70 As described in my Introduction, Jules’s mutilation is the result of a motorcycle accident in which he suffered extensive burns leading to the amputation of his right arm and the loss of much of the use of his left.
71 See Freud, “Some.”
72 Robinson has repeatedly and persuasively made this argument in her analyses of middle-brow North American texts, written by men, from the late 1960s to the late 1980s (Marked, “Emotional,” “Men’s”).
him not to tell her: “I plead with my eyes. Oh, dear God, dear Peter, do not tell her that once I could fly, that now I am crippled by fear and by a clumsiness I cannot master. Let one person not see this.” Jules’s non-verbal plea is more firmly tied to a desire to disavow castration by the words he subsequently whispers to Peter: “Let me be whole” (53). Peter agrees and, signifying the investment of patriarchy in maintaining the male spectator/female spectacle division, for much of the rest of the narrative he continues to conceal the “truth” (88) from Chloe. The homosocial actions of Jules and Peter place Chloe firmly in the position of object, and leave her having “never, never felt so fucking blind in all [her] life!” (69) Even when Jules is forced to tell Chloe that he has only one arm, he refuses to let her touch his right side: “She lifts her hand, brushing fingers across my chest, searching for my right shoulder, but reflex leans me into the seat back so that she cannot touch the part that will show her the truth other people can see” (70). In “avoiding her seeing touch” (83), Jules is able to continue concealing his amputation and, in the process, to disavow either the reality of his castration and/or the anxiety evoked by its possibility. As Chloe says, “I’d need a statue to understand. I can’t make an image out of thin air, so nothing’s any different” (71). As Chloe’s statement illustrates, Jules’s denial of castration relies on the homogenous and unimpaired image of Man that Chloe carries in her imagination. This, as Silverman asserts, is a time honoured way of disavowing “male lack.” Specifically, the female subject is summoned “to uphold the male subject in his phallic identification by seeing him with her ‘imagination’ rather than with her eyes” (47).

As The Architect progresses, an association of Jules’s gaze with voyeurism is strongly suggested by the extensive and selfish use he makes of the distance and visual inequality Chloe’s blindness permits. His ability to see Chloe while remaining unseen is presented as a significant source of Jules’s scopic pleasure. Thus, there are many descriptions of Chloe’s robe slipping off her shoulders and exposing her breasts to Jules’s delighted gaze. Despite assisting Jules, Peter makes overt his position of voyeuristic power when he notes that by not allowing Chloe to touch him Jules has “confined her to a world that’s defined by [his] interpretations” (90). However, Chloe herself is shown to ultimately collude in her own objectification, telling Jules she is happy for him to use her “dark” as “the pot you hide in” (76). The sadistic element of voyeurism described in Mulvey’s analysis is also present in Jules and Chloe’s relationship, and can be seen when he punishes her for not obeying his command to keep away. He returns her kiss as if she is a child he is
fond of, denying, in the process, the maturity of her love for him. As Donna, Jules’s nurse states, “It’s a nasty, terrible, terrible thing to do to a woman in love” (121).

The strength of Jules’s voyeuristic gaze, its significance in his relationship with Chloe and its association with omniscience and omnipotence, are reinforced by Jules’s specular relationships with other characters, particularly Donna and Peter. Just as he continually watches Chloe, Jules “watches” (12) and “watches and watches” (15) Donna. This gaze is portrayed as omniscient: Donna says, he “holds my gaze as if he is delving into some secretive place” (7). Peter believes Jules is able to see his thoughts absolutely – “the completeness of my understanding, my adulation and reverence, my bared soul.” While able to see and know all, Jules’s eyes are themselves “non-reflecting” (17): they reject the possibility of mutual looking or understanding. His treatment of Donna and Peter is linked to his objectification of Chloe when he describes their “blindness” as the “steppingstones by which I achieve my goals” (265). Finally, Jules’s many incarnations – as war photographer, artist and architect – are all shown to place him in the position of voyeur, the one who sees while remaining (from behind the camera, the canvas or the architectural firm) unseen.

Even more so than in The Architect, Mulvey’s description of voyeurism and fetishism resonates with Silas’s relation to Constance in The Blind Eye. Constance is a beautiful, blind woman who lives with her father in a remarkable garden near the remote South Australian settlement of Port Tremaine. Silas meets her when he comes to the town following his mother’s death, wanting to start a new life in the place – and the house – where his mother took holidays as a child and, in this way, to recapture some sort of closeness with her. As with Jules and Chloe’s interactions, Silas’s relationship with Constance is described in specifically visual terms. Silas says, “It was always her that I was watching. Always” (235). Indeed, “One look” (103) is shown to be the basis of his feelings for her – enough to motivate him to want to return daily to her garden to see her. The centrality of Silas’s gaze to his interactions with Constance is reinforced by the novel’s

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73 Silas’s journey to Port Tremaine lends itself to a psychoanalytic reading: his return to a place associated with his mother is motivated by a desire, always and certainly in this case unrealised, to return to the womb and/or the imaginary sense of maternal plentitude before the formation of subjectivity through entry into language (psychic castration). This return to the mother is doubled by Silas’s subsequent daily journey to Constance and her garden. As Silas traverses the path between the town and the garden, he moves daily from desolation and dryness (the Symbolic) to a place of lush life and unimaginable beauty (maternal plentitude). However, immersion in such plentitude is, again, unrealised and unrealisable: Silas can never achieve the closeness with Constance he desires.

74 Blain’s novel has many italicised sections. All italics are as per the original unless indicated.
title as well as by the explicit visual focus of the narrative as a whole: the novel’s world is one where gazes are constantly being held, averted or hidden; where characters are repeatedly forced or unable to look at other characters’ eyes. Like Mulvey’s voyeur (and Jules), a significant aspect of Silas’s pleasure in his interactions with Constance lies in his ability “to observe … unobserved” (238). The release from anxiety her sightlessness permits is demonstrated by Silas’s expressed feelings of “relief, that she cannot see” (105). A psycho-sexual reading of Silas’s attitude towards Constance’s blindness is further encouraged by the fact that he finds her, and the “world” she inhabits with her father, “both exciting and … a little frightening” (193). However, unlike Jules’s voyeuristic look, Silas’s gaze is also strongly fetishistic. Indeed, throughout the narrative, Silas oscillates between voyeurism and fetishism in his approach to Constance, the changes motivated by her repeated refusal to comply with either position.

As well as wanting to see Constance while remaining unseen, Silas desires the visual closeness characteristic of fetishism. Thus, he rejoices in the feeling of “swimming in visions of Constance” (113, my italics) and longs to “let himself sink, deep, into the sight of her” (238, my italics). Silas’s fetishistic desire for immersion is also evident when, beginning to smell like the garden he so frequently visits, he insists that the smell “was Constance,” and delights in the idea that “she had … got under his skin” (165). Like Mulvey’s male spectator, Silas overvalues Constance’s physical appearance, portraying her as “more beautiful than he would have believed possible” (103). He similarly idealises her life, describing himself as “fascinated” and “enticed” by “the whole fairytale nature of her existence” (112; see also 229). Such descriptions indicate Silas’s attempts to restrict Constance to archetypal images based on his own interpretations, a strategy similar to one Jules employs with Chloe. However, despite Silas’s attempts to construct her as a fetish object, Constance (with all the perseverance her name implies) steadfastly refuses to accept this construction. When, for instance, Silas – positioning himself as the knight in shining armour to Constance’s fairy princess – offers to rescue her from her father, Constance simply “pointed to the keys in her pocket … shak[ing] her head in wonder at his stupidity” (210). Similarly, and in response to Silas’s assertions that she is not really blind (assertions that might, in a psychoanalytic reading, indicate the fetishists’ refusal to believe in the castration of the desired female object), Constance repeatedly asserts her blindness (132, 136, 166).
Frustrated by Constance’s refusal to be confined to his fetishistic idealisations, Silas begins to believe the more sinister stories Pearl, the owner of the local store, tells him about her mysterious abilities. Although, at first, “[t]hose stories of Pearl’s. That Constance had something, something that other people don’t have,” merely increase Silas’s infatuation, as he gradually accepts these tales, the identificatory closeness he once desired is transformed into feeling “ensnared, trapped” (167). His gaze is correspondingly changed from fetishistic overvaluation to distanced, sadistic voyeurism. The myth about Constance that appears to have particular significance for Silas is that, due to the “venom in her blood” (152), snakes “obey her …. You cross her and they’ll bite” (164), Pearl warns. On the one hand, this association of Constance constructs her as a possessor of the phallus, thus reinforcing Silas’s fetishism. On the other hand, her ability to command and control men’s “snakes” with her evil powers positions her as a potential castrator. While absurd, Silas’s beliefs about Constance acquire a certain currency in the context of the narrative, where her enigmatic statements and unusual lifestyle seem to support Pearl’s assertions against her. As a result, the reader is drawn into this transition from fetishism to voyeurism, becoming less trusting of Constance’s character, more suspicious of her motivations and abilities.

In transforming Constance from a fairytale princess into a wicked witch, Silas continues, in accordance with Mulvey’s analysis of the male gaze, to construct her only according to his own anxieties and desires. However, just as Constance refuses to comply with Silas’s fetishistic image, she rejects his voyeuristic view. When Silas claims that she has special powers, for instance, she insists that her healing abilities are learned, not miraculous (260). In different ways throughout the narrative, Constance tells Silas, “Do not presume to think you know what [my] life is like … you are simply seeing what you want to see” (135). Significantly, Constance’s assertion of her own, independent desire for Mick (the local mechanic) represents her strongest rejection of Silas’s objectifying gaze: “Don’t

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75 The association of Constance with snakes is reinforced when, deep into his obsession with her, and at a time when “Constance was his only concern …. it was snakes that [Silas] had dreamt about, thousands of them coiling, slippery, smooth, the coldness of their flesh pressed against his own” (192). Constance’s related position as a powerful castrator of men is consolidated when she shows Silas the mandrake roots that grow in her garden: “It’s the roots that we use, and she had shown him. They were human in shape, a male figure, there in her hold./ She had smiled at him then, a full smile, alive with mischief” as she tells him about the belief that “Anyone who hears the shriek of a mandrake root dies” (149). While Constance’s castrating power is obviously represented in her ability to hold the “male figure” in her hand, the text, in this instance, does not propagate this view of Woman. Instead, her mischievous smile brings to mind Hélène Cixous’s rewriting of the Medusa myth. Although Silas often seems to view Constance (as Freud portrayed the Medusa) as a figure of frightening, castrating lack, as Cixous comments in relation to the Medusa, “You only have to look at [her] straight on to see her. And she is not deadly. She’s beautiful and she’s laughing” (255).
look at me …. [Mick] knows me … far more than you ever have, and her stare was defiant. He sees me for what I am” (261). Prior to this statement, Silas had ascribed Constance’s unresponsiveness to his romantic overtures to shyness:

It was shyness, that was all it was. He had said too much. He had scared her. She would have no experience with men. He had to be more careful, more gentle. This is what he kept telling himself in an attempt to convince himself that the truth was as he would have liked it to be. (208)

Following Constance’s assertion of desire for Mick, Silas sees her in a way that is neither voyeuristic nor fetishistic:

He had heard Pearl’s stories about her. He had seen the wonder of her with his own eyes and that was the truth, but when he eventually glanced across at her, she was starting blankly at him, desperate, her eyes unseeing, the dirt smeared across her cheek as she wiped her face with the back of her hand and waited for an answer to her question. (261)

This image of an ordinary and emphatically blind woman exists in stark contrast to Silas’s construction of Constance as an archetypal fairytale character, and causes the reader to doubt the validity of Silas’s view.

Silas’s clarity, however, does not last long. Instead, Constance’s continual refusal to correspond to his voyeuristic or fetishistic fantasies, and in particular, her assertion of an independent and autonomous desire for Mick, transform her into a “Freudian nightmare” (130). The various tests Silas subjects her to on the day of her death can be seen as attempts to resolve this nightmare: “he kept stealing glances at her, knowing he was judging her, assessing her with each sharp doubt that pricked his consciousness, knowing that Mick’s presence was still right there with him, despite his efforts to deny it.”

Significantly, these tests are designed to discover whether she is blind (castrated) or not and, as a result, whether to view her as an overvalued fetish object (whose castration is denied) or an undervalued voyeuristic object (whose castration is exposed and punished). Silas, for example, refuses to pass her the remedy she asks for, insisting that “she could see them, far more clearly than he could” (259). Later, he creeps up on Constance as she is working in the garden, “wanting to know if she could see his approach.” Although the

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76 While it is Constance’s garden, rather than Constance herself, that is described in these terms—filled, as it is, with “strange life … fleshy tubular flowers, sticky stamen, gaping mouths and drooping heads” (130)—the strong association between Constance and her garden transfers this description onto her. At their first meeting, Silas describes Constance as “more exquisite than any of the flowers that clustered around her” (94). Her association with the garden continues throughout the narrative, to the point where Constance identifies herself in relation to the garden: “she had told him that this was who she was. This, and she had pointed to herself and then the plants that surrounded her” (161).
narrative remains inconclusive as to whether Silas’s final (and fatal) testing of Constance is intentional or not,\(^7\) there is a strong suggestion that her death occurs as a result of his desire to finally know the truth about her (whether or not she is blind and, therefore, castrated). Silas’s thoughts are worth quoting at length in order to demonstrate both the oscillation between voyeurism and fetishism that motivates his testing of Constance, as well as the extent to which this novel lends itself to a psychoanalytic reading of this type:

Perhaps he had been aware of [the snake] … perhaps he had watched, fascinated, as it had slid, stealthy, silent … and he had wanted to know, for one horrible instant, just exactly what Constance was.

*Look out*, he should have warned. *Be careful*, he should have said.

But Pearl had told him she was born with venom in her veins and Rudi had told him she could see … He had told himself she was all they said and more.

And now there was this, the very presence of Mick there between them, the jagged sharpness of his jealousy enough to spur Silas on, daring him to test all he had wanted to believe.

*I wanted it to be true*, he had whispered, finally making himself utter the words out loud, to recognise it at last. *I wanted proof*.

And in that one brief moment he had acted in a way that had no sanity, no rationality; he had clung, desperate, to his own ludicrous vision, wanting to believe she would see that snake as it had slithered across her path, right there where her foot was about to land, even if all she saw was just the colours that surrounded it; or that it would slide over her, without harming her; or perhaps, most impossible of all, that even if its venom did slip through her veins it would be like blood on blood, a joining of like with like. Was this what he had done, or had he, as he had tried so hard to believe, seen nothing at all? (262-63)

An obvious meaning for the snake that Silas “had watched, fascinated” is a penis (according to a Freudian reading) or a phallus (drawing on Lacan’s view of all subjects as castrated upon entry into language). The consequence of Constance’s interaction with the snake (with the penis or the phallus) would determine, for Silas, whether or not she was castrated. If she had seen the snake, or if it had not harmed her, Silas would have “proof” that she was not castrated, and would consequently be able to position her, finally, as the overvalued fetish object he so desperately desires. However, Constance’s failure to see the snake proves that she is castrated and must, therefore, be conceived voyeuristically. Accordingly, the snake bite can be interpreted as the voyeur’s punishment exacted upon proof of castration. Given the specific reference to Freud in the narrative, it seems possible that the reason Silas “had tried so hard to believe” he had seen “nothing at all” (263), arises

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\(^7\) It is never entirely certain whether Silas saw the snake which bit Constance and deliberately failed to warn her or whether guilt over her death has caused him to retrospectively imagine having seen it.
from his desire to believe that she was, indeed, castrated, and that, consequently, her punishment was justified. The severity of Silas’s punishment of Constance can be understood as a response to the enormity of the threat Constance’s assertions of desire pose to Silas’s power. As Williams asserts in relation to the horror film, it is precisely because female desire is so threatening to the male spectator that she is punished so violently (“When” 85).

In many ways the dramatic exposure of the operations of voyeurism and fetishism in both these narratives, and particularly in The Blind Eye, functions to critique women’s objectification within patriarchy. However, while these texts evoke, they also deviate from and challenge Mulvey’s account. Specifically, in incorporating female desire and male desirability, these fictions present what seems to be a more positive paradigm for imagining gender relations than Mulvey’s formulation of the “male gaze.” The first, and most easily identifiable difference is the independent and autonomous desire these female characters express. While Chloe is far less vocal in asserting her desire, and certainly more willing to comply than Constance is, it is Chloe who instigates sex with Jules. Chloe’s desire is mirrored by the text’s frequent description of male characters’ bodies as beautiful. Jules’s nurse Donna, for instance, refers to him as “a joy to watch” (156), and Jules and Marc describe each other’s “eyecatching beauty” (96; see also 98).

Jules and Marc’s appreciation for each other’s beauty signals another element of these narratives that challenges Mulvey’s theory – the presence of a homoerotic gaze. Admittedly, in many ways, Mulvey’s understanding of the visible male body in terms of identification rather than erotic objectification could be applied to the relationship between Silas and Daniel, the narrator of The Blind Eye. Identification is suggested, for example, by Greta, who says that Silas reminds her of a younger version of Daniel (37). More obliquely, Daniel admits that at the end of his homeopathic sessions with Silas, “I would sometimes catch myself staring out the window, my own reflection looking back at me” (86). Concurrent with this is Daniel’s description of himself as being “consumed by my … memories of Silas and all that I associate with him” (59). At the same time, however, Daniel’s extreme obsession with Silas is inadequately explained, and therefore suggestive of homoeroticism as well as identification. There is no need in The Architect to read between the lines to discover a homoerotic gaze. While Jules claims that he is “not
fortunate enough to be able to take pleasure from both sexes” (181). Peter is shown repeatedly and explicitly to desire Jules. This desire is firmly connected to the visual economy established in the narrative when, for example, Jules’s gaze is shown to leave Peter “floundering inside Jules van Erp” (19), or when Peter’s desire for Jules is described as “the message in his eyes” (40). Moreover, this homoerotic gaze is directly linked to Jules’s visual objectification of Chloe, and to Peter’s collusion with Jules when, to stop Chloe discovering his amputation, Jules “jams his shoulder into [Peter’s] crotch. Rubs against [his] penis, hardening the erection that has been growing for months” (106).

Mulvey’s assessment of the “male gaze” is additionally challenged by the remorse Silas and Jules feel regarding their objectification of Chloe and Constance. In The Blind Eye, Silas frequently concedes, implicitly and explicitly, the inappropriateness of his treatment of Constance. He confesses that he only “saw her as he had made her up to be” (278). Acknowledging that he was “obsessed” (131, 192) and infatuated (131) with her, Silas concedes that he had acted “in a way that had no sanity, no rationality” (263). Moreover, when Silas tries to itemise the reasons for his obsession with Constance, he always arrives at one conclusion: “Myself” (142). These, and other allusions to the idea that Silas saw Constance only according to “his own, ludicrous vision” (263), reinforce the critique of objectification presented in the narrative and expose his claims of love to be just “the excuse [he] … tried to use” (90) to justify his actions. Similarly, in The Architect, when Jules realises the pain his voyeuristic attitude has caused Chloe, he expresses remorse that his “plea for wholeness, made in desperation those many months ago would still be binding me into an alliance with dishonesty against someone who trusts she will be told the truth of the things she does not see” (Watkinson 69). Although Jules’s continuing refusal to allow Chloe to touch him reveals his remorse as somewhat disingenuous, unlike the heartless and sadistic voyeur’s delight, Jules’s inability to be honest causes him to feel “[d]espair” (70).

The potential for men to change suggested by these expressions of remorse – as well as the representation of desiring female subjects and desirable male bodies – differs radically from Mulvey’s discussion of a monolithic and unchangeable system of male power alterable only by a complete dismantling and destruction of mainstream cinema

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78 This construction of Jules’s sexuality cleverly assures his hegemonic (necessarily heterosexual) masculinity while simultaneously protecting him from the taint of homophobia (a form of intolerance that would surely compromise his cosmopolitan characterisation).
(“Visual Pleasure” 26). In place of such monolithic power, these novels might suggest a more nuanced version of patriarchal society, in line with the contemporary (and largely post-structuralist and masculinity-studies-influenced) notion of multiple and differently empowered masculinities.79 However, the fact that male remorse does not change Chloe’s position or, more pointedly, avert Constance’s death, suggests that the ability of these male characters to change has ambivalent implications for a feminist reading. Indeed, while both narratives present explicit critiques of objectification, the culpability of the individual male characters in these relations is, at times, mitigated to quite an extraordinary degree.

While *The Blind Eye* places the blame for Constance’s death on Silas, the novel also questions the extent of his culpability. Functioning like Silas’s murder trial – with Silas himself as judge, jury and defendant – the novel repeatedly portrays Silas as an unreliable witness, while simultaneously providing him with the defence of diminished responsibility. The copious amounts of alcohol and marijuana he consumes while in Port Tremaine, as well as his family history of delusion (125), create a general sense that his account of events is, as the narrator confirms, “always out of proportion to the reality of the occasion” (9). Similarly, when the narrator visits Port Tremaine in an attempt to confirm Silas’s story, it is ultimately “impossible” for him to “tell whether the vision that Silas had described ever existed” (288). While some of the differences between Silas’s account of Port Tremaine and Daniel’s perspective can be “attributed to the passing of time,” Daniel admits that “[t]here was still so much … that may never have measured up against the visions he had conjured up for me and the stories he had told” (6).

This ambiguity is reflected in the novel’s final two descriptions of Constance. In response to Silas’s offers of assistance after she is bitten by the snake:

> With her mouth twisted in pain, she had vomited on the ground at his feet and told him he had done enough, enough, and all the doubts about himself had solidified, hard and cold inside him, as he saw the look on her face.  
> *She knew …. She saw the worst in my heart, the fact that I had wanted to test her. In whatever way it was that she saw, she saw.*  
> *How could you?* she had hissed. *How could you?* (263-64)

On one level, this description confirms that Silas had, indeed, seen the snake and foregrounds Constance’s humanity and normality. Simultaneously, however, she is

79 Such a model is also suggested by the unequal power dynamic shown to be created by Jules and Peter’s collaboration in the objectification of Chloe, which results not in the formation of a monolithic patriarchal structure but in Jules feeling “reduced” (54) in relation to Peter.
presented as not only monstrous (mouth twisted and vomiting), but omniscient and snake-like in her hissing accusations. The ambiguous nature of this description is given particular resonance by virtue of the fact that it is the final image of Constance, alive, presented in the narrative. Ultimately, however, if we accept the traditional notion of the death-bed confession as truth, the pre-eminence of Constance’s negative qualities in this passage suggests a revelation of her inner monstrosity. Indeed, the final image of her in the narrative subtly shifts attention to Silas’s (emotional and physical) pain:

Each time he dreamt of Constance, Silas saw her as he had made her up to be. There she was, impossibly beautiful …. He would wake, stunned by the vision … not daring to move as the dream dissolved, disintegrating like ash between his fingers, aware of his desire to tear at his own flesh and the need to resist it. (278)

This passage resurrects Constance and validates the image of her that Silas most wanted to believe. Simultaneously, it emphasises his enormous guilt and the physical pain he consequently and repeatedly inflicts upon himself. All these techniques allow the objectifying male gaze to be exposed, explored and critiqued, while simultaneously permitting Silas to be at least partially exonerated.

By far the most direct way in which the presentation of looking relations in both texts deviates from Mulvey’s analysis is in the presentation of Jules’s body, and to a lesser extent, Silas’s, as profoundly exposed in, rather than hidden by, the narratives’ visual worlds. Silas’s time in Port Tremaine is marked by experiences of intense visibility. When he first arrives, he feels “strangely vulnerable … as though he were being watched” (53), and upon entering the bar he recalls: “All eyes were on [him] now, and in that moment he knew they all wanted to know who this person was, this person who was foolish enough to come to a town that everyone had left” (41). As Silas gradually becomes unwelcome in Port Tremaine, the disdainfully curious eyes of the male community are reduced to Mick’s “unwavering” “gaze” (178). When not concealed behind reflective wraparound sunglasses, Mick’s eyes are full of “coldness,” “hostility” and jealousy (implied by their intense green). These sunglasses, which render Mick’s “expression unreadable” (145), dramatise the division between spectators and spectacle. Indeed, the dark glasses that divide the spectators (the male members of the Port Tremaine community) from the spectacle (Silas)
might be interpreted as mobile panopticons which, as in Michel Foucault’s analysis of the relationship between warden and prison in Jeremy Bentham’s model prison (Discipline 195-228), construct a visual division of power and result in Silas’s feeling of being constantly under surveillance.

Silas’s visibility can be understood in relation to the male body’s historical and cultural invisibility. As demonstrated in the Introduction, a central theoretical position taken in discussions of men’s bodies in the visual sphere asserts that the white, heterosexual, middle-class, middle-aged, able-bodied male subject has been constructed as universal to the extent that he is rendered invisible. Silas’s body is made visible in Port Tremaine because it differs from the norm. The community’s perception of Silas’s sexuality as abnormal, for instance, and his subsequent exclusion from the heteronormative fold, is demonstrated by the questions Lucas (Thai’s son) poses to Silas: “Why do you wear a skirt? …. Are you a poof? [he] asked, clearly uncertain as to what the word meant …. Jason reckons you are …. Steve just reckons you’re a wanker. …. No one seems to like you much anymore [sic]” (225-26). The fact that these community opinions are expressed by a child – an individual who might still be considered to be undergoing the process of socialisation – highlights the constructedness of normalcy. Although a general understanding of the hegemonic male body’s invisibility helps explain Silas’s comparative visibility, a fuller understanding of his position requires a more nuanced and critical application of this theoretical paradigm. The contrast between Silas’s extreme visibility in Port Tremaine and his apparent invisibility in the city suggests that the categories defining the norm vary according to context. While the invisible or unmarked position is generally associated with the middle- or upper-class male body, in the context of Port Tremaine’s distinctly working-class community, Silas’s wealth and the effect this has had on his general comportment mark him as different.

Even more than Silas, Jules is portrayed as intensely visible. Although, following the accident, amputation is the main reason for Jules’s visibility, even before the accident he was marked as racially and culturally different from the (white Western) norm. The novel contains frequent references to Jules’s mixed heritage: his Indo-Chinese mother and childhood in a Vietnamese village; his Swiss father and education in Europe; and his current habitation and acculturation in Australia. Due to his racial and cultural difference, when he first arrives in Australia:
People stopped to look two times because I was yet very European in my mannerisms. And I think, also, because I am a big man who is too feminine. In this country big men dig ditches and play football. They are not artists. They do not have the eyes of the cat or the accent of a perfume maker. (Watkinson 32)

Jules, however, “wished to be little known, only to be an architect, to be moderate and anonymous” and so “learned not to be too much one thing or too much the other” (32). Although temporarily (and dubiously) elevated to the position of universal subject, physical mutilation again shatters his anonymity.

In accordance with the notion that visibility challenges the universal male subject’s power, Jules’s physical deformity causes him to feel particularised and subsequently diminished. As Jules asserts, “Once I could hide inside my own body to walk around in the world … but the body has become too distinctive to serve me now” (210). Because of his mutilation, “strangers stare. Or look quickly away from the flapping sleeve. Now, each morning as I walk among the people … the maiming grows bigger and I grow smaller” (32). In diminution, Jules perceives the obliteration of his identity: the “asymmetrical shadow of my body is awkward. … [it] blot s out the other images … of Jules van Erp” (40). The association of exposure with diminishment and obliteration, as well as the distress and anxiety such a state causes him, is made evident when Peter draws his naked, burnt body. Although he was once able to pose “unselfconscious[ly]” (93) as a model for art classes, the exposure of his marked body causes Jules to feel he is “dying from exposure” (92). Descriptions of the suffering Jules experiences as a result of exposure mirror Chloe’s similar distress and, in this sense, continue and, indeed, consolidate the narrative’s critique of objectification.

Such a critique is also detectable in the depiction of Jules’s many attempts to hide, which illustrate, by implication, the undesirability of being exposed. A desire for concealment seems to motivate his choice of house – one where “the neighbours never talk to one another” because “the dividing fences are too high” (14). The emotional walls Jules constructs are similarly designed for concealment. Not only do “social workers and psychologists get the full cold-shouldered treatment” (12), but, as Peter notes, “when I move too close to his self-protecting wall. He steps back … and smiles. The smile rarely

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81 The incongruous ease with which Jules is able to occlude his racial heritage and assume a position of moderation and anonymity (or invisibility) is facilitated through his construction as “the international person” (264). As Chloe says, “Jules seems to move between countries as easily as we mortals go for picnics” (74). In this sense, Jules occupies a position of hyper-invisibility in the narrative, despite his racial markings.
reaches the dark in his eyes” (83). While these attempts at emotional concealment might seem unrelated to the exposure of his body, they contribute to the portrayal of Jules as “fear[ing] exposure and guard[ing] his secrets with obsessive effort” (168). Refusing to tell anyone about his burns is another way Jules hides, this time from himself. As he tells Peter, “if I do not see … knowledge [of my burns] in their eyes, then I can pretend, sometimes, that there is only left-handedness to surmount” (39; see also 89). The principal way Jules hides, however, is through the careful construction and assertion of “the public face” of “the architect” (27), a practice imbued with additional significance through its association with the book’s title. Feeling that his identity has been obscured and diminished as a result of his visibility, Jules insists that “the architect … is all that remains of Jules van Erp, and desperately I need to hold onto this shred of myself” (38). Describing this “self-portrait” (30) or “public mask” (83) as a “shell” (208), Jules asserts, “I stay hiding while I send out a puppet to perform for me” (151). In case the reader had not grasped this repeated metaphor and its association with hiding, Jan points out that “Alter egos aren’t immaculate conceptions. They exist because of some need within the man” (205). In Jules’s case, and as the narrative repeatedly demonstrates, his need is for concealment.

The depiction of Jules’s distressing hyper-visibility partly supports and contributes to the novel’s critique of objectification. Furthermore, in compelling sympathy for a male character in his transition from invisibility and power to visibility and powerlessness, *The Architect* exposes, and thereby subverts, the privilege accorded to the position of invisibility within patriarchal discourse. At the same time, however, the impact of this critique in feminist terms is mitigated by the focus on Jules’s exposure and diminution, and the concurrent marginalisation of Chloe’s distress. In light of his multiple attempts to hide, Jules’s desire for invisibility in his interactions with Chloe emerges as one manifestation of an overall tendency in his character, rather than a specifically gendered mode of interaction. Indeed, the fact that Chloe’s pain is emotional while Jules’s is also physical implies that his condition is worse than hers and that his (and by association, the male) experience of visibility is more difficult or traumatic than hers (or women’s in general). Moreover, the general perception of physical pain as more real than other types of trauma permits the transformation of Jules’s phantasmatic anxiety regarding castration and/or visibility into a bodily crisis that not only matches but surpasses Chloe’s suffering. Just as references to Silas’s unreliability render his objectification of Constance ambiguous, Jules’s treatment of
Chloe is somewhat excused, perhaps even totally, by the presentation of his actions as a response to his own physical and emotional pain, rather than as a deliberate attempt to objectify, dominate and control. According to this reading, it is even possible to see Jules’s treatment of Chloe as an entirely unintended outcome of his own desperate situation. Certainly, this is the interpretation of events that Jules’s own statements encourage. For instance, his plea to Chloe for forgiveness – “When I was a whole person to you, I could sometimes feel human. Through your image I was … authenticated” (181) – emphasises his pain while diminishing his responsibility for her unhappiness.

The portrayal of Jules as emotionally inexpressive and isolated similarly functions to exonerate his objectification of Chloe. Jules admits to Donna that “always I have been … insular. … [A]lthough I have many languages learned in childhood, the one of self-disclosure is unfamiliar” (130). Chloe supports this assertion when she notes that Jules is able to “describe … everything except [him]self” (74-5) in exact and elaborate detail. Jules’s characterisation, in this sense, resonates with a dominant narrative of Western masculinity, that of the stoic man. This discourse heightens the significance of his emotional pain in comparison to Chloe’s for, as Milette Shamir and Jennifer Travis argue in their introduction to Boys Don’t Cry?, in “an affective economy where masculine emotion is ‘scarce’ and feminine emotion ‘excessive’ … the slightest expression of masculine feeling [is endowed] with inflated value” (2). At the same time, the portrayal of Jules as out of touch with his feelings also implies that he cannot really be held responsible for his hurtful actions – he does not have the emotional awareness, in other words, to perceive Chloe’s pain. Once again, Jules’s own assertion encourages such a reading. Regarding the lies he has told to Chloe he muses:

Always … I have hidden inside the layers of myself and the habit has lent such ease to the practice that I fail to recognise now the difference between the camouflage and the nakedness, between the deception of planned half-truths and the unplanned lies that are self-deception. (70)

In conflating the lies he told Chloe with his own self-deception (arising from a lack of self-knowledge), Jules centralises his own emotional blindness while marginalising his treatment of Chloe’s. By the end of the narrative, he identifies his self-deception as far more damaging and hurtful than the lies he told Chloe, insisting that “I used her only to deceive myself” (265).
The depiction of Jules as negatively affected by his stoicism – not only lacking the “emotions … necessary to be a good artist” (207) but, due to his “isola[tion]” from others, alone and “lonel[y]” (68) – also elides Chloe’s pain by encouraging readerly sympathy for his predicament. When people ask him how he is feeling, Jules tells them he is fine but asserts, “I do not know how to tell them anything else” (140). As Robinson has argued, the idea that (white, heterosexual, middle-class) men are damaged because they are required, by gender norms, to suppress and repress their emotions, is a central tenet of the popular discourse of masculinity crisis. Men have been victimised, in other words, by the same strict gender codes that offer them power. Unable to draw on a foundation of social inequality, this damage is presented on an individual level through the depiction of men’s bodies as “both literally and metaphorically wounded” (“Men’s” 207). Robinson’s identification of this strategy of wounding, as well as her description of the depoliticised outcome of such representational practices, resonates with the emphasis in The Architect on Jules’s emotional and physical pain and the associated marginalisation of Chloe’s dismay at her objectification: “Trumping women’s blocked opportunities with men’s blocked emotional expression, men’s liberationists substitut[e] the personal for the political instead of forging a link between them” (207).

With the help of Jan, Jules eventually learns to express himself. Although he fears that, without the disguise of “the architect” he “would be a fish without a backbone” (208), he is “tired of hiding” (135) and longs to “assassinate” and discard his disguise. Jules’s “fantasy” (208) of assassination comes true with Jan’s love and support and his own growing self-knowledge. By the end of the narrative Jules is fully reformed: caring and sensitive, accepting of commitment and love, and able to express his emotions. His consequent ability to embrace his true identity – of artist rather than architect – gives this transition a sense of authenticity that aligns it particularly with the mythopoetic strand of the popular discourse of masculinity crisis. At the same time, his transformation resonates with the changes sought by profeminist men. Jules’s transformation seems to holds great

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82 See also, Robinson’s Marked Men and “‘Emotional Constipation’ and the Power of Dammed Masculinity.”
83 Robert Bly’s Iron John, for instance, (often identified as the founding text of the mythopoetic men’s movement) asserts that men (emasculated by a female-dominated society) need to rediscover their “wildman” masculinity.
84 Before he abandons the disguise of “the architect,” Jules suffers under the damaging effects of hegemonic constructions of masculinity as they are identified by profeminist men’s groups. Such roles, these groups assert, “narrowed [men’s] options, forced them into confining roles, dampened their emotions, inhibited their relationships with other men … women and children, imposed sexual and gender conformity, distorted their
promise for a feminist reading – after all, a caring, expressive and committed man is surely better than a repressed, angry and isolated one – but his ability to change, as with the representation of his emotional and physical wounds, once again overwrites the social critique presented in the depiction of Chloe’s objectification with a personal and therapeutic emphasis, this time in the form of a happily-ever-after ending.

Only Marc’s condemnation of Jules’s concealment of his disability seems to threaten his complete exoneration. From his wheelchair, Marc tells Jules, “there you are, internationally successful and in the perfect position to blow the stereotyping that handicaps me and all the others.” In these terms, Jules’s “[p]ublic denial” of his disability – one manifestation of his tendency to hide – becomes a “disservice” (239), not just to Chloe but to the entire disabled community. In these apocalyptic terms, the sympathy generated for Jules seems insufficient in comparison to the damage his desire for concealment creates. However, Marc’s condemnation is completely counteracted by Jules’s revelation that he negotiates for the safety of children in war zones, and that this is the reason he must conceal his disability. Introduced suddenly at the end of the narrative, Jules tells Marc that, when he was an “idealistic young press photographer” he was

… approached by a group of the old French-Indochine families who wished to find a way for the children to be removed from the war zones. Over the years it became established that I am a mouth without political agendas, and so I am trusted to be in situations where other negotiators are not welcome.

And it is because of this work that I could not die after the fire of the accident. I could not abandon the children. I am a man with words, negotiating for their safety. But now, to keep the negotiator credible, I must disguise the fact that I cannot hold a gun or carry a baby. … This is why I must be the public man, the one who is seen performing at the opening of the beautiful monuments to his ego. (265)

The welfare of these nameless, faceless and countless children is revealed as the motivation behind Jules’s secrecy. Through some kind of hierarchy of worth – where children’s innocence trumps disability discrimination – his service to the children compensates for any disservice to the disabled community. Jules emerges as not only completely selfless (even his architectural designs are for “the children”), but heroically masculine.

Thus, in The Architect and The Blind Eye, Chloe and Constance function as allegories for the role and position of women within the patriarchal visual economy Mulvey describes. Ultimately, however, their oppression emerges as secondary to male pain (Silas’s

self-perceptions, limited their social consciousness, and doomed them to continual and humiliating fear of failure to live up to the masculine mark” (Gardiner, “Introduction” 5-6).
delusion and guilt, and Jules’s exposure and emotional isolation), and the value imbued in the emotional development of these male characters, manifested in their ability to change. Contrastingly, the portrayal of interactions between blind female and seeing male characters in *Miranda* and *Transplanted* represents a far more forceful and sustained critique of women’s visual oppression and, particularly in the case of *Miranda*, far less sympathy for the purported crisis of male visibility.

In *Miranda* and *Transplanted*, the inequalities present in interactions between blind female and seeing male characters are grounded in and strengthened by a more general demonstration of the social and physical oppressions women experience within patriarchy. Even a basic plot summary indicates the male-dominated nature of the worlds imagined in these novels. *Miranda* is the story of its eponymous narrator, who lives in a small, coastal town at an indeterminate time in Australian history. A talented artist, she is restricted, almost fatally, by the small-mindedness of her autocratic husband Alfred, and a firmly male-dominated community. *Transplanted* is composed of two intertwined narratives, the main one of which concerns the lives of Ian, Wendy, Kelvin and Ross. The first half of this narrative foregrounds Ian and Ross’s physical and sexual abuse of Wendy. The explicitly and violently male-dominated nature of these interactions is highlighted by comparison with the subplot’s intertwining narrative, concerning Peter and Julia’s (initially) equitable and loving relationship. The contrast between these two modes of male-female interaction is compounded by the fact that Julia and Peter are rich and successful while Ian, Wendy, Kelvin and Ross are almost hopelessly destitute.

The extensive and detailed depiction of Ian’s abuse of Wendy bears elaboration because, in its reproduction of a popular formula of domestic abuse constructed and recognisable as a result of feminism, it demonstrates a familiar material instance of women’s oppression. Although presented non-sequentially through Wendy’s memories, the depiction of their relationship coheres precisely because the narrative of domestic abuse is so well-known. In the beginning, Wendy is attracted to and excited by Ian’s strength, “his arms around her so strong that he seemed both safe and dangerous” (35). At first, everything seems fine. Ian is “affectionate” and “kind,” and Wendy feels “warm” and “safe” (58). They soon begin to argue (54), however, and although Wendy now fears Ian’s extreme mood swings (59), she makes “excuses” for his behaviour (54). Before long, Ian is
undermining Wendy’s confidence (3, 28) and hitting her, “slapping her around, all the time
telling her she is a useless bitch, a lousy fuck” (25). Wendy responds by denying what is
happening or “try[ing] not to think about it” (53). Each incident of abuse she views as
another, separate fight, “rather than the continuation of a pattern she had grown to accept”
(52). For a long time she believes that “she might somehow change him” (31), that she
would “find some way to ease [his] anger” (52). Despite Wendy’s hopes (and because of
them), the abuse quickly escalates: “nearly every time worse, always more vicious, more
forceful than the time before” (156). This abuse, which is often presented in highly
formulaic terms – “He cornered her, and then when he hit her, he told her she had it
coming” (31) – is followed by Ian’s inevitable apology (62-63) and Wendy’s “better
treatment in the hours or days that followed” (53). When Wendy finally realises that Ian
will not change (31), she begins to blame herself for the abuse in their relationship: “she
thought herself stupid or crazy; if anyone was to blame it was probably her. In a way she
kept it going. She nagged, and in some cases provoked him outright. Like he said, there
were times when she deserved it” (52).

Ian’s abuse of Wendy is explicitly shown to enact a form of male desire directed
exclusively at the acquisition and exertion of power and control; it expresses a
desire/anxiety, in other words, that has nothing to do with pleasure or love and very little to
do with sex. Although at the beginning of their relationship, Ian and Wendy “fuck in an
attempt at intimacy” (62), it is not long before even this is removed from their sexual
encounters. Instead, sex becomes something that Ian does to Wendy, an act that is aligned
with, indeed is an extension of, his habitual violence. The two moments when their sexual
contact is described (rather than simply referred to) explicitly combine sex with violence,
such as in Wendy’s memory of Ian “pushing himself into her and then the whack across her
face in case she didn’t know” (34). The same combination is present in the other
description of their sexual contact:

They no longer talked, perhaps they never had, although more often than not, he
would grab her and, furious and quick, have her up against the kitchen sink. Sometimes he wouldn’t even wait for her to take her hands out of the water, but just
do it to her there in about thirty seconds flat, his strong hand pressed into the back
of her head. (53)

Wendy’s position – with her hands still immersed in the water of the kitchen sink –
symbolises the gender inequality underlying and enabling this rape. Her subordinated and
objectified status is reinforced by the way that Ross’s treatment of Wendy often mirrors Ian’s. Ross, for instance, touches Wendy’s breasts (50), grabs and kisses her and pulls her head back by the hair (57). The sexual nature of these attacks is emphasised by Wendy’s description of “the violence of his mouth and the strength of his knee in her groin. His hard-on” (67). The fact that all of these encounters are described from Wendy’s point of view aligns the reader’s sympathies with Wendy rather than Ian or Ross.

The power dynamics underlying physical and sexual abuse are presented more generally, and metaphorically, in descriptions of the burglary of Peter and Julia’s house. This burglary is central to narrative meaning and development: its organisation and execution occupy the opening chapters of the novel and it prompts much subsequent narrative action. Furthermore, it intertwines the two worlds (poor and rich) and provides a metaphor for interpreting many other events in the narrative. Also perpetrated by Ian and Ross, the burglary, like Wendy’s abuse, would not be possible without Wendy and Kelvin’s reluctant complicity. The association between the burglary and Wendy’s abuse is further compounded by the depiction of this robbery as a masculine/ised possession, penetration and destruction of a feminine/ised realm. This domestic space signifies femininity not only generally, but through its specific association with Julia and Wendy (although the house belongs literally to Julia and Peter). In this way, and like the sea and the reef in *Miranda*, it is coded feminine. Julia, for instance, identifies the house as the place where she feels the most “authentic. Here … she liked to imagine that [she and Peter] were complete” (108). Although she includes Peter in this image of completeness, Peter himself does not really identify with the house, largely experiencing the burglary “in a purely abstract sense” (83). Julia, in contrast, feels it as an invasion, not only of the physical structure of her home but of her self. Cleaning the house after the robbery she can “smell them. See and feel them going through her life” (101). Although one of the intruders, Wendy, too, strongly identifies with the house. Indeed, “[a]s soon as she enters … Wendy knows it will be hard to leave” (46); “she is drawn into the house. Into the intimate complexity of its detail” (47). Playing little part in the plunder, Wendy lies on the bed, contemplating the lives of the occupants and paying close attention to the small, fragile signs of love that she finds everywhere about her. The only thing she takes from the house are Julia’s paintings. This

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85 Just as Kelvin unwillingly facilitates Wendy’s abuse by never intervening, he assists, while not taking a direct role, in the robbery. Similarly, although Wendy is not actively involved in the burglary, it is made possible by her organisational and literacy skills, just as the excuses she makes for Ian’s violence perpetuate her abuse.
she does with reverence, gently enfolding them in soft fabrics, “carefully, as if she were wrapping a precious gift or enfolding a small child” (51). Her actions express a desire to know and experience what the house represents, rather than to possess and destroy it.

Acquisition and annihilation, in contrast, are Ian and Ross’s demonstrable aims. The constitution of Ian and Ross as a single masculine/ised force, “tearing the place apart” (46), is encouraged by the presentation of their actions as different manifestations of the same underlying tendencies. While Ross “moved through the house, disembowelling each room with the same removed fluidity … requir[ing] more than he can ever possibly take” (55), Ian moves

… throughout [sic] the house … as he empties cupboards and drawers, rips up carpets, takes things he knows he will never need or use. And what he can’t take he will break … as he smashes, defiles, wrecks, the muscles in his forearms working like levers. But it does not satisfy. (58)

Wendy’s assertion that “knocking off houses for Ian was like sex” (63), makes explicit the sexualised nature of this intrusion in a way that extends the metaphor of the burglary to Wendy’s sexual abuse and oppression. The interspersing of Wendy’s memories of Ian’s repeated beatings and rapes with descriptions of Ian and Ross in the house make this interpretation difficult to avoid.

Wendy’s further conjunction of sex and burglary – as activities that “relieved [Ian], but it was only ever a temporary thing. The rest of the time he was always slightly out of control” (63) – introduces the commonplace (and hence, seldom challenged) notion of male sexuality in terms of an uncontrollable build-up followed by a violent explosion.86 It is possible to argue that the coupling of this notion of male sexuality with the idea that “the very act of taking comes naturally” (56) to these men, identifies violence and oppression as essential outcomes of male biology. However, it seems more likely that Wendy’s statement is designed to critique this paradigm of violent and uncontrollable male sexuality as a particular attempt to validate patriarchal power. Such an interpretation is supported by the fact that Kelvin, representative of an alternate form of male sexuality, does not enter the house until after the robbery is completed and, even then, “he does not drink, does not eat

86 Dyer, for instance, asserts that male sexuality is predominantly constructed as “insistent, inescapable and inevitable” (“Male” 121). Similarly, though more evocatively, Robinson describes the “uncontested” notion that “male sexual energies must be released lest men implode from the force of their suppression” (“Men’s” 206). Clearly, portraying male sexuality as imperative (in the sense of being absolutely necessary and unavoidable, as well as forceful and demanding the respect and obedience of others) supports, privileges and naturalises male power.
with them” (69) as Ian and Ross greedily raid the kitchen. Thus, in *Transplanted*, patriarchy is depicted in terms of a destruction of the feminine by an aggressive urge for penetration and possession.

The operations of patriarchy are also described metaphorically in *Miranda*, where they are evoked through the repeated association of men, particularly Alfred, with God, and women, primarily Ellie, with the Virgin Mary. Ostensibly, the community in which Miranda lives is highly religious. It becomes evident early in the novel, however, that God and his son have no interest in the world – Christ, for instance, is described as “look[ing] Heavenward with disinfectored disinterest” (26) and “lost forever to humanity” (76). The church has subsequently become “a place of soul stealing” and “pomposity” (77). Although overtly set on instigating a “hierarchy of obedience” – “children to parents, wives to husbands, husbands to God” (76) – God’s absence or indifference has allowed men to usurp His position, transforming this hierarchy into one in which they have complete control over women (and children) and are obedient only to themselves. Women’s consequently unequal and subservient role is particularly evident in the figure of Ellie, a “good … self-sacrificing” (59) woman who is repeatedly aligned with the Virgin Mary. “Poor Mary,” in Miranda’s estimation, was “[m]anipulated from the start. Turned into a victim and then deified for it” (74). Correspondingly, Ellie is fooled by religious rhetoric into believing that men and women (husbands and wives) are essentially equal in God’s (man’s) eyes. As she tells Miranda, “God has joined them. They are one” (158). Shocked by Miranda’s alternative and, certainly in the context of this novel, more accurate view – “If God has joined them He has stuck woman onto man. She has no roots of her own, none” (158) – Ellie dedicates herself to the good of male-dominated society, tending, for instance, to her infirm and demanding father. Firm in her belief in an ultimate reward, “The self-sacrifice involved neither soured nor wearied her” (57). In Miranda’s view, however, Ellie merely joins the ranks of the

… [t]oo many women [who] have waited too many centuries in breathless anticipation of something that might be given them. They were always so grateful for gifts, believing themselves essentially unworthy receivers. And if the gift brought pain, they endured it because the unworthy were not entitled to the frivolity of enjoyment. (115)

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87 *Miranda’s* atemporality reinforces the strength of its portrayal of patriarchal oppression as timeless.
The feminist sentiments evident in Miranda’s statements are continued in her description of her husband’s appropriation of God’s authority. As Miranda comments, “[h]e prayed regularly to cast the devil out of his home and all his activities, but I really couldn’t see him believing that he needed God to achieve this” (10). Rather, God is a convenient totem of male authority that Alfred calls upon, particularly when attempting to compel obedience from Miranda. Thus, “He is fond of telling [her] that ‘He watches’ or ‘He hears’, or ‘He listens’. By ‘He’ he means God” (15). The alignment of God with man – represented by the repetition of H/he in this passage – is consolidated by Miranda’s wry comment on her husband’s invocation of God: “It would have to be another man” (15). Aware that her husband uses God’s name to refer only to himself, and rebelling against this presumption of a transcendent and all-powerful male (visual) authority, Miranda recalls: “I flung off all my clothes and pirouetted … round and round and round. … And I called out ‘Have a good look, God!’ And my husband lay on his back in bed and watched me while his eyes watered with lust” (15). Conflating her husband with (a non-existent) deity, Miranda exposes her husband’s arrogant and debased appropriation of God’s authority – he is, after all, the only one looking despite his claims of God’s omniscience. Simultaneously, however, her own powerlessness in relation to his assumption of a transcendental authority is revealed when she adds, “He always grabs me as if I might dart out of reach. But physically I can’t escape him” (15).

The central way in which Alfred establishes himself as a replacement for God is in his relationship with the young man Miranda finds washed up on the reef. Although discovery usually confers the right of naming, Alfred rejects Miranda’s identification of the man as Helios and takes him “to work in the store and called him John.” Having “in mind the youngest disciple” (50), Alfred correspondingly imagines himself as Christ. The description of Alfred’s subsequent interactions with Helios/John expose and comment on the operations of patriarchy and, in directly aligning male dominance with religious pretension, further critique the association of men with God in the narrative. Whereas the reef and sea function as symbols of femininity, the town, and particularly Alfred’s chandlery, are explicitly masculine – and male-dominated – sites. Miranda describes the space behind the counter in the store, for instance, as her husband’s “fortress, a grandiloquent castle of ownership … used … to establish his superiority, the dependence of others upon him” (9). Alfred’s removal of John/Helios from the realm of sea and reef and
into the store – an action Miranda describes in terms of “appropriat[ion]” (51) – enacts the denial of the feminine often identified as characteristic of patriarchal society. Indeed, the description of the sea as “the great bloodied womb of life” (82) suggests an even more pointed denial of the (m)Other. Although Alfred overtly objects to the name Helios because it is “pagan,” Miranda asserts that, “It was not really the name that tormented him but a fear of some secret understanding from which he was excluded” (51). Thus, rather than a masculine destruction of the feminine (as in Transplanted), patriarchy, in Miranda, is depicted in terms of the assumption of a transcendent male authority combined with a fearful retreat from the feminine. The homoerotic undertones of this homosocial retreat are made overt in Miranda’s description of John/Helios as Alfred’s “first love” (55).

In his role as Christ, Alfred cloisters himself with his disciple in the store. His subsequent teachings regarding the running of this male-dominated realm represent John/Helios’s indoctrination into patriarchy:

In the store my husband instructed Helios in the names, whereabouts and costs of the products. Helios followed him obediently, repeating his instructions. When my husband had finished he retraced their steps, repeating over and over what he had been told … tractable as a child. (52-53)

Following his induction, John/Helios “remembered [her] husband’s instructions and carried them out with complete obedience” (130). While apparently forgetting Miranda, his memory lapse is revealed as a form of patriarchal repression when, in response to Miranda’s attempts to engage him in conversation, John/Helios “simply repeat[s] [these] instructions aloud as if the incantation were some sort of defence against [her]” (131). Although Alfred associates his (patriarchal) teachings with the benevolence of Christ’s love for his disciples, Miranda’s perspective reveals his lessons to be a form of enslavement: “As Helios followed him behind the counter I had the illusion of the sun bewildered and enslaved following night into the labyrinth” (130). Through this fairly standard feminist association of (Western) religion with women’s oppression, albeit presented in a highly imaginative way, Miranda identifies the society in which she lives as explicitly patriarchal.

Building on these descriptions of social and physical oppression, both novels show male domination to be manifest in the visual economy, specifically in the position and oppression of literally and/or metaphorically blind female characters. The literally blind
female character in *Miranda* is Miranda’s mother-in-law. The fact that she is not young or beautiful like Chloe or Constance (or, indeed, Miranda) influences her position in the visual economy of the narrative: Mother-in-law is not an object of sexual desire (anxiety) for any man. Nevertheless, her blindness confines her to a particular social position, akin to that of a child. To Alfred, his mother’s “blindness [is] a sign of her mental and physical decline” (138). Throughout the narrative, he uses his mother’s inability to see as an excuse to monitor and diminish her, taking her blindness as a sign of ignorance (98) and susceptibility to “corrupt[ion]” (138), leaving her feeling “perpetually guilty” (60).

In *Miranda*, a critique of women’s construction by men is presented in the portrayal of all women as metaphorically blind. As Mother-in-law explains, they are “[u]sed to looking,” not “seeing” (116). Even Miranda, whose role as an artist as well as her visually-oriented style of narration strongly align her with the power to see, asserts that she is “as blind as [her Mother-in-law], we all were. She would never see, I would see only if it were unfolded for me” (36). Although Miranda’s self-proclaimed blindness indicates her partial view of the world (a humble awareness of her ability to understand its complexities only with time and assistance), it simultaneously functions to associate blindness with the position of women as a whole. This strategy offers a broader commentary on visual inequality than is presented in *The Architect* or *The Blind Eye*. These novels, in portraying objectification only in relation to literally blind female characters, allow the subsequent power inequalities to emerge as incidental, even unavoidable outcomes of these women’s blindness: as they cannot look back, even if they want to, their objectification occurs by default. In *Miranda* and *Transplanted*, however, objectification is depicted as something that (almost) all men do to all women.

Although literal blindness is absent from *Transplanted*, the depiction of Wendy’s metaphoric blindness contains a similar broadening of the relations of control and objectification to include women who are able to see. Although Wendy learns to see (rather than simply to look) when she escapes from Ian and Ross’s abuse, in the first half of the novel her metaphoric blindness is continually invoked. She is described as being “drawn
into herself like some sightless sea creature” (55), her eyes “blank and disinterested” (24), “expressionless” (25) and “sourceless holes” (51). This metaphoric blindness is linked to her abuse in the way that she “refused to see what was happening” (53) in her relationship with Ian. In contrast to her metaphoric blindness, Ian and Ross are presented as continually and intrusively scrutinising Wendy. The sexualised violence underlying and informing such scrutiny is made explicit not only in Wendy’s abuse, but in descriptions of Ross and Ian’s rape of a girl by the river. As Ian describes, they saw this girl “in the mall, with her short skirt” and then “follow[ed] her … keeping at a distance, but following her, then drawing in close, giving her what [Ross] said she asked for anyway, and telling [Ian] afterwards that it was his turn” (67). The significance of this rape to a reading of heterosexual power, and its relation to other examples of sexualised violence, is signalled by the repetition of the story throughout the first half of the narrative (17, 21, 67, 112). The alignment of male sexual violence and power with both an imagined and embodied sadism establishes a strong association between visual and physical objectification, while reinforcing the terrible effects of such a gendered power differential. Visual and physical objectification are further aligned with Wendy’s abuse and the burglary through Ian and Ross’s construction of this girl’s body as a dehumanised object. The complete objectification of “that Asian girl by the river” (17) is demonstrated by Ian’s laughing reference to her as “Power-point face power-point cunt” (21). This description constructs her “face” and “cunt” as interchangeable, while showing both to be racially marked objects available, indeed intended for, penetration.

*Miranda* and *Transplanted* also depict male characters visually dominating and controlling female characters who are aligned with sight rather than blindness, metaphoric or otherwise. Although, in contrast to Wendy, Julia, in *Transplanted*, is portrayed in terms of her ability to see, the narrative opens with her being diminished and objectified by Ross’s gaze. This occurs when he arrives at her holiday home to “case the place” for the subsequent robbery. Looking at her “as though he had every right” (1), Ross enjoys her fear as well as her ineffectual attempts to protect herself from his gaze by pulling the collar of her jumper over her mouth. When Julia tries to challenge him – calling out, “Who are you looking for?” – her words “rupture, then dissipate,” having no power, “as he stands there

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89 Julia excels in her job as a gallery director due to her ability to understand art “with a clear and uncomplicated confidence” (44). “She is obsessed by visual memory” (44), and has “always thought of her life in relation to colour” (102). Her husband, Peter, claims that he “had fallen in love with the way she saw things, the way she could stand in front of a painting and lift out its smallest detail” (82).
watching, his eyes fixed on her. Watching and yet saying nothing.” This initial watching, and the fear it creates, are shown to be “perhaps … the part [Ross] likes best” (2) about burglary. His gaze is given an obvious sexual connotation – linking it back to the anxiously desiring male gaze described in *The Architect* and *The Blind Eye* – in the identification of Julia’s fear as “[t]he part he will think about later, remembering her with her hands clenched white around the blue balustrade, her mouth half open” (2). Significantly, this description of Ross’s look at Julia explicitly aligns the narrative’s dominant metaphor for patriarchy’s operations (the burglary) with visual objectification. The intrusive, dominating nature of Ross’s gaze also characterises Alfred’s approach to Miranda, another female character portrayed in terms of an ability to see. When he comes home from work, for instance, Alfred’s “eyes would flick into all the corners of [Miranda’s] clothes and boots and hair looking for particles of sand” (3-4).

In both of these novels, the entirely unsavoury nature of the male characters who oppress female characters – both socially and in the visual realm – constitutes a strong critique of patriarchy. *Miranda* adds to this critique by portraying Alfred, in particular, and religion and the community in general, in terms of metaphorical blindness. Whereas women’s blindness arises from their oppressed position, community and religious blindness are aligned with a lack of perception occurring as a result of bigotry, ignorance and hypocrisy. The association between community blindness and ignorance is suggested when Miranda notes, “With all the universe to widen their vision men bind themselves to opinion in small communities and women, fools that they are, bind themselves to men” (13). Miranda’s assertion that “[p]rivate violence” – specifically, “rape” – “decently concealed has always been acceptable” (152) associates hypocrisy with deliberate blindness and women’s oppression. When Mother-in-law protests her son’s claims that John/Helios robbed him (the lie he disseminates to disgrace his once-prodigy), his particular version of hypocritical blindness is thus described: “He looked at her with eyes as blank as hers and replied with perfect assurance, ‘Of course he stole from me. Everyone in the town knows it’” (141). These forms of blindness are, in turn, associated with religion through descriptions of God’s blindness.90

While these elements contribute to the novel’s critique of men’s oppression of women – and women’s complicity in it – metaphorical blindness (arising from hypocrisy,

90 Miranda describes God as “a dark mirror which absorbs and loses all images” (15), and Mother-in-law aligns this emptiness with blindness a few pages later when she comments, “Perhaps He is blind also” (22).
ignorance and bigotry) are primarily evoked in relation to the community’s inability to perceive the truth of Alfred’s lies about Miranda. When Alfred discovers that Miranda has drawn and sculpted John/Helios naked, he condemns her in explicitly religious terms, describing her as a “Jezebel” and screaming to the community that “she has copulated with the Devil. So that we’ll all burn. Burn in Hell” (147). In order to punish her, Alfred relies on the community’s ability to look but not to see (through) to convince them that Miranda is evil. Thus, as Miranda reports, “In the house he continued to ignore me but when we went to church he shrank from me and sat several seats away, glancing at me every now and then with fear in his eyes.” Although his “fear was a lie … [it] slid through the community like a bank of invading seaweed, insidious enough to entangle everyone but to drown only me” (159). Eventually, even Mother-in-law “believe[s] his syrupy lies” (160) – “her awareness as well as her sight was blinded. Without perception she withdrew from me” (160). Thus, both inside the house and out, Miranda feels as if she is always “look[ing] in to the faces of enemies. Their suspicion, hatred, fear told me clearly how influential my husband had become. His genie of respectability had conjured lies and innuendoes out of the bottle and now as his servants these were sent to destroy me” (160). The association between Alfred’s lies and his religious attitudes aligns patriarchy with bigotry, while simultaneously demonstrating the unjustness (the lie) of men’s (natural) domination of women.

In addition to presenting a critique of patriarchal society and the unequal visual position women occupy within it, Miranda and Transplanted, like The Architect and The Blind Eye, present men’s bodies in terms of exposure. While such exposure does not mitigate the portrayal of women’s oppression and objectification as it does in The Architect and The Blind Eye, it does strongly suggest an engagement with the discourse of masculinity crisis and its association with visibility. In Miranda, as might be expected from a novel so centrally concerned with women’s oppression, this notion of male crisis is largely undermined and mocked. Transplanted, however, portrays its suffering men – Peter and Ross – with a sympathy bordering on pathos. As with Jules’s visibility (occurring largely because of his physical mutilation), Peter and Ross’s bodies are exposed as a consequence of physical damage or difficulties: for Peter, “severe end-stage heart failure” (81) and for Ross, a blow to the head causing fatal brain damage.
Both Peter and Ross are explicitly embodied as a direct result of their physical crises. As Peter’s heart fails, his body becomes increasingly apparent to him. Previous to the onset of this condition, Peter (an archetypal universal subject) never really thought about his body, “accept[ing] his good fortune, his good health, as the young accept their youth” (82). When his body stops “function[ing] to the dictates of his mind,” however, Peter (like Jules) can no longer take its existence and performance for granted. He is portrayed, for instance, sitting

… on the edge of the bath with his head slumped between his knees. He was already unable to wash himself, unable even to brush his teeth. He lifted his arm to try again, but the weight was astonishing. It was as though his limbs had turned to stone and his lungs had filled with sand … he dreamt he was ploughing through mud and breathing it in. (87)

Eventually, he is unable “to step outside his own dissolution, nor separate his unworking heart from himself” (90). Ross’s brain damage renders him similarly embodied. Indeed, as the attack leaves him with no mind, so to speak, his embodiment is even more profound than Peter’s. Ross’s extreme loss of control is firmly reinforced by the personification of the spasmodic impulses resulting from his brain injury and the description of his incontinence: “Ian saw Ross’s face darken and the whites of his eyes protrude. Then suddenly Ross’s neck arched as though some unseen hand had grasped him by the hair and snapped his head back. … [H]e saw [Ross’s] crotch grow dark with urine” (112). Drew Leder describes this awareness of embodiment due to adverse physical experiences as the body’s “dys-appearance,” asserting that,

Insofar as the body tends to disappear when functioning unproblematically, it often seizes our attention most strongly at times of dysfunction; we then experience the body as the very absence of a desired or ordinary state, and as a force that stands opposed to the self (4).

Such dys-appearance typically leads to a conceptualising of one’s body as “Other,” thus reinforcing the conceptualisation of subjectivity according to a Cartesian model (70, 87).

As a result of their extreme embodiment, both Peter and Ross are rendered intensely visible to the medical gaze. Peter describes his resulting feelings of being objectified and dehumanised in terms of confinement and imprisonment. The heart specialist’s consultation room, for instance, is portrayed as “designed less for privacy than for exposure … And yet he had never felt so confined” (81-82). Throughout his treatment, he is confined to a series of similar rooms where
More X-rays and blood samples and further consulting specialists … reviewed him; authoritative figures who walked into the room, their medical phrases infiltrating so that he became the patient, dazed and obliging. Obediently cooperative. And then it seemed to him, his body, which had become both more and less human, was placed under house arrest, every aspect charted and measured. (89)

While his individuality is obscured as he is reduced to a “series of colour-coded charts … containing all he is to them … classified and recorded” (132), his body becomes pre-eminent in such consultations. Indeed, their “irrefutable and collaborative certainty” is such that “[t]hey seemed not to need him” (88). Peter’s role as an object is reinforced by subsequent references to “the tubes and wires which attach[ed] him to various machines” (141) reporting the occurrences of his body in a language the doctors will hear as more authoritative than Peter’s own reports. Within this medical regime, and like the woman on screen described by Mulvey, Peter is reduced to, and functions only in relation to, his body.91

Peter’s position as non-individuated patient/body is fully realised during his transplant surgery during which, unconscious, he can no longer even report feeling objectified. His operation is described by a detached third-person narrator in terms that emphasise his passivity and exposure. Even before the surgery begins,

His gown is removed …. Measured eyes assess him …. He is connected and monitored. Tubes inserted in procedural order. … The sheet is removed and he lies naked. They shave his unconscious body …. His arms are strapped onto boards, his limp penis catheterised, his eyes taped and his face covered. (132)

When the operation begins Peter’s passive and exposed body is invaded by the surgeon’s gaze: “Knife-to-skin. And he is unseamed … Refractors pry him apart. His chest stretched wide, his rib cage dissected and clamped open” (133-34). These passages resonate with Gayle Whittier’s description of surgery. Following Foucault’s analysis of the doctor-patient relationship in The Birth of the Clinic, she describes surgery as “a major visual invasion of the clinical body” (12), rendering “the body as if transparent and/or visual accessible to the clinical gaze” (11) while “simultaneously separating patient and doctor as tactile human beings with a commonly mortal flesh” (10). The surgeon’s gaze, in other words, invades and investigates the patient’s body in a way that establishes and enacts a subject/object

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91 The association of the medical gaze with male objectification is also present in The Architect. While in hospital, for instance, Jules is positioned as “an interesting set of physical phenomena separated from my mind and will” (135) and “filed away in a pile of buff-coloured hospital charts which bear ID numbers in lettering more bold than the names that give us identity as people” (135-6).
dichotomy. Leder similarly argues that, at moments of dys-appearance, the body becomes most susceptible to external scrutiny, judgment and constraint “through the alienating projects of the Other” (98); susceptible, in other words, to what Foucault terms biopower.92

Peter’s position as a disempowered object is compounded when, at the ultimate point of exposure – as his heart is removed and discarded and his chest lies open – this invasion by the medical gaze is presented in terms that feminise his body. The “procured heart … is held in a double plastic bag. The surgeon ruptures the bag and the heart is released, his gloved hands pushing it out, stillborn … it is placed into the empty chest” (138). The transplanting is thus presented as a reverse birth, where the empty chest/womb receives its stillborn form and gives it life. “They begin to wire the sternum. Pulling the skin edges together, the wound closes as though it were a red-lipped clam” (140) and, as the medical gaze retracts from the body, this womb/wound becomes almost vulval. This feminisation of Peter’s body is reinforced by previous and subsequent references to Julia’s miscarriage and menstruation. Peter’s surgery thus dramatises and mirrors the operations of patriarchal visual relations, as they are elaborated in well-established theoretical accounts and in the text.

Ross’s hospitalised body is profoundly exposed to the medical gaze in a way that is very similar to Peter’s. When he arrives in the hospital he is “spread out like a crucifix. His clothes are cut from him and … [he] is scanned and examined” (110). This is reinforced by his father’s report that when he arrived, “His clothes had been cut from him and the upper part of his body exposed … a gloved hand lifted Ross’s eyelids, first one and then the other. A torchlight was shone into his son’s fixed pupils” (119). Even Ross’s eyes, therefore, are intensely seen but unable to see. Just as Peter is reduced to a series of colour-coded charts, Ross’s dehumanisation is represented by the plastic ID bracelet a nurse attaches to his wrist, which reads, “Number: 6126243 … Name: unknown male” (110). Ross, too, is connected to various “monitors” and “tube[s]” (118). Whereas Peter was strangely

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92 In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* Foucault outlines the concept of biopower as the matrix of power relations that “brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life” (143). Though in no way precluding this interpretation, Thomas Elikins’s discussion of dissection – which he identifies as “one of the most apt metaphors for the experience of intense, directed thinking and seeing” (127) – suggests that, in addition to a critique of objectification, the focus on dissected male bodies in *Transplanted* represents a more general knowledge project: a manifestation of an intense investigation into male corporeality and its construction. Such investigation allows opportunities for what Elikins describes as “visceral seeing” or “thoughtful embodiedness” (viii) – a mode of analysis that is perhaps necessary given the “Problem of Language” posed by attempts to describe and theorise men’s bodies.
feminised, Ross is uncomfortably infantilised when the nurse “lifts, then turns his … heavy body, placing the long unconscious limbs in a way that seems wrong, her cupped palm turned inward to protect the bandaged head” (120). As with Peter, Ross’s exposure to the medical gaze is accompanied by the extensive invasion of his body. His veins are “injected” (110) and a “young doctor … insert[s] a chrome instrument … into Ross’s throat.” “[S]haped like the hooked end of a crowbar” (119) – the tool with which Ross was originally beaten – this intrusive medical instrument is thus compared with the original attack on his body. The similarities are made most evident when, after being pronounced brain dead, Ross’s organs are removed:

Ross’s chest is sawn open, his stretched skin split from neck to pubis. He lies naked and outstretched as gloved hands and surgical instruments slide into him, seeking, with accomplished precision, his heart and lungs. Swiftly his organs are taken, silently appropriated. (123)

Ross, even more than Peter, is thus placed in the position previously occupied by the burgled house. Contrasting with the intense sympathy compelled by depictions of Peter’s body – a sympathy that is represented, mirrored and encouraged by Julia’s accompanying grief – the relatively dispassionate portrayal of Ross’s body might constitute some sort of comment on, even a punishment for, his previous position as representative of patriarchy and his related visual objectification of Wendy and Julia.

The abject nature of descriptions of Ross and Peter’s bodies – compounded by portrayals of their bodies bleeding (119), swelling and corrupting (204) – might be seen to disrupt patriarchal constructions of the male body. The abject, as theorised by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, refers to all of those things, expelled in the formation of acceptable forms of subjectivity, that threaten to engulf and overwhelm when identity is challenged. These include saliva, milk, urine, semen, faeces, tears and, in relation to Peter and Ross’s bodies, blood. While the abject is a realm of general defilement, it is primarily associated with the feminine and, in particular, the maternal body. At a general level, abjection is identified as particularly threatening to the hegemonic male subject because the body that supports such an identity construction is insistently constructed as closed, bounded and hard, an imaginary armour erected to assuage the threat of contamination posed by others (see for example, Bersani 217-18, Pronger 72-3; Waldby 272; Zita 47). In particular, the feminisation of men’s bodies seen to result from abjection is identified as deconstructing patriarchal dichotomies (Tanner; L. R. Williams), signalling “masculinity in
crisis” (L. R. Williams, 32) and threatening the perceived commensurability of penis and phallus (Thomas, *Male*). In these terms, descriptions of Ross and Peter’s bodies as abject challenge patriarchal constructions of the male body. Further, and following Kristeva’s description of the corpse as “the utmost of abjection” (4), Ross and Peter’s deaths can be seen to perpetuate and intensify the subversive implications of their bodies’ permeability.93

Thomas, however, describes death – along with castration anxiety – as “finally rather phallus friendly” (*Male* 27) in comparison to abjection anxiety.94 He insists that, while death and castration anxiety ultimately reaffirm the phallic subject, abjection anxiety – particularly when deliberately produced (by bringing the traversal of male bodily boundaries to the forefront of representation) – has the potential to create “new configurations of [male] identity and representation [that] can be performed” (3). According to Thomas’s argument, therefore, Ross and Peter’s deaths resolve and foreclose the subversive implications of their exposure and feminisation. But Thomas’s argument suggests that, until this moment of foreclosure, the emphasis on abjection in descriptions of these bodies allows new, positive forms of male subjectivity to emerge. In *Transplanted*, however, any subversion implied by the portrayal of abject men is overwhelmed by pathos – a pathos that specifically directs attention towards a dangerous and desperate masculinity crisis.

Abjection is also prominent in descriptions of Jules’s body in *The Architect*. His “flesh” frequently “weeps” (6, 44, 161), “leak[s]” (80), “ooze[s]” (160) and “break[s] down” (122). He is injected (7, 177) and constantly plagued by “infection[s]. Another and another and another” (44; see also 35, 64, 80, 115, 155). His skin is disruptively permeable

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93 Elisabeth Bronfen’s critique of the psychoanalytic conception of castration supports this reading: “What is put under erasure by the gendered concept of castration is the other, so often non-read theme of death, forbidden maybe because far less conducive to efforts of stable self-fashioning than notions of sexual difference. To see the phallus as secondary to the scar of the navel means acknowledging that notions of domination and inferiority based on sexual difference are also secondary to a more global and non-individual disempowerment before death” (35).

94 He elaborates, “it is by virtue of the figure and fear of castration that the phallicized ego is allowed to see the other not even as shattered but as castrated, its own symmetrical other; castration anxiety thus becomes a roundabout ticket to a final phallic coherence. … Death, on the other hand, is not something that happens to the phallicized ego at the very end of that teleological narrative. It is not even, or exactly, that Freudian state of quiescence and absolutely reduced tension, far beyond the pleasure principle, to which the phallus longs to come in its own sweet time. Rather, … death is the subject position of ‘absolute master’ that the phallus occupies and from which it produces the death of others. Anxieties (Freudian or Heideggerian) about castration and death are privileged precisely because they function to install individuals in phallic subject (or metasubject) positions by virtue of the promise of their resolution. The phallicized ego thus knows how to handle itself … in the face of death and castration; death and castration are the figures by which the phallicized ego is produced. Abjection, however, is another matter, and so is the anxiety that surrounds it” (27).
instead of “a perfect and undeniable boundary between inner and outer” (McLane para 34). A sense of the danger presented by this crossing of male bodily boundaries is reinforced by references to male characters and AIDS (Watkinson 91, 131).

Again, the weight of theoretical commentary on male abjection would seem to compel a reading of Jules’s disintegrating body as subversive of patriarchal constructions of male corporeality and subjectivity. Jules’s abjection, however, is entirely foreclosed and contained, often in very literal ways. Jules is bounded, for instance, by a “heavy compression jacket” which “manage[s]” (44) his “deformities” (89), and he is covered in a full body cast (111). In addition to these ways of managing his permeable body, Jules’s recovery allows him to overcome abjection anxiety completely. His triumph contrasts with Peter and Ross’s death which, for Kristeva if not for Thomas, renders the cessation of male abjection in *Transplanted* ambiguous. Indeed, *The Architect* offers not only the reassuring spectacle of an endangered masculinity triumphing, but Jules actually becomes even more firmly bounded and impermeable than he was before the operation. Near the end of the novel he is described as “mummified in hard, tight, shining scars” (216), suggesting a completely inviolable body. Although, at this point, there are still fresh wounds on his throat (217), by the end of novel, references to Jules’s wounds cease and his body is reassuringly and resolutely sealed. At the same time, the sense of crisis created by descriptions of Jules’s abjection might be seen as another of the ways the novel works to privilege his pain and crisis and correspondingly mitigate his treatment of Chloe. Such an interpretation corresponds with the assertions of theorists like Modleski (*Feminism*) and Kirkham and Thumim (“Me”), who identify male suffering as a ruse of patriarchal power, one that appropriates women’s experiences in the service of male pain while simultaneously marginalising female characters. Essentially, the depiction of abjection in *Transplanted* and *The Architect* demonstrates that representations of men’s bodies generally considered alternative (and by association, feminised) are not necessarily subversive. As Robinson argues in “Pedagogy of the Opaque,” understandings of masculinity must move beyond a simplistic division between dominant (bad) representations and alternative (good):

While we can learn a great deal from identifying what masculinities are hegemonic at a particular historical moment, and what emergent masculinities challenge that hegemony, a reliance on the traditional/alternative dyad actually blinds us to those historical specificities. (144)
In the particular context of *The Architect* and *Transplanted*, depictions of abject male characters largely function not to put patriarchal constructions of masculinity *in crisis*, but to evoke the popular, and generally anti-feminist, discourse *of* masculinity crisis – a crisis that is, once again, one of visibility.

In *Transplanted*, the sense in which Ross and Peter’s abject bodies represent masculinity crisis is reinforced in various ways. For instance, although vastly different, even opposites, in life, in unconsciousness and death Peter and Ross are repeatedly aligned. Thus, their similar sufferings compound the idea that men, as a group, are disempowered in or by contemporary society. Moreover, many descriptions of Peter’s condition resonate strongly with the terms used in popular, anti-feminist proclamations of masculinity crisis. His heart, for instance, is “seriously damaged” (81), “infiltrated” (84), “invaded,” “weakened” (91) and “failing” (79). At one point, Peter explicitly describes his condition as a “crisis” (86). Depictions of his feelings of shame and guilt at not being able to perform masculinity adequately, and his resulting anxiety and fear at the loss of his identity, similarly suggest the popular discourse of masculinity crisis. For instance, when Julia is talking to the police after the burglary, Peter feels “vaguely embarrassed that he is not there taking on the role that might be expected of him” (94). Indeed, “He does not think of the people who have robbed them …. It is his failure to protect that seems the weakness. That he cannot know or predict. That he cannot take control” (83). In an attempt to recapture a sense of masculinity he expends much energy “each day hiding the indiscretions he was too ashamed to own” from Julia’s “connoisseur’s eyes, her searching. But in the weeks that followed he often failed to … convince” (88-89).

Unable to perform masculinity convincingly, Peter feels (as the popular discourse of masculinity crisis claims all men do) confused, uncertain, anxious and afraid. Such feelings are repeatedly emphasised in a way that seems designed to provoke sympathy for Peter’s condition. In terms of confusion, for instance, he describes himself as unable “to reason, to adjust” (83) to this new position. Despite being “[s]o often the rationalist” – a defining character trait of the hegemonic Western male – he now finds that “he could not think clearly.” Everything seems “dislocat[ed]” (80), “nothing made sense” (86). The uncertainty of his condition is similarly emphasised in his descriptions of the possibility of a transplant as “arbitrary” (89), “a bingo call, a chance, a risk” (90), and even “an improbable illusion” (92). The “anxiety” (80) he subsequently feels, the “fear … he could not forget” (86), he
describes as “like falling, then falling again. There is no longer any substance, it’s like grasping thin air, if anything a type of defeat, a complete lack of structure. He wants to be able to understand, to claim a knowledge that will calm him” (80) but cannot. This feeling of “falling” is later associated with “something not unlike shame … over-tak[ing] him. Shame and then panic, which he also felt to be a kind of reckless abandoning” (81). Recklessness, in this context, corresponds to his feeling that he is obscurely to blame for his condition. Immediately preceding his transplant operation, Peter is portrayed as a man without an identity. Wearing an “ill-fitting” hospital gown – a “costume” that obviously does not belong to him and casts him in the de-individuated role of patient – he signs his consent form and “he sees his signature appear beneath his hand as if it were someone else’s, as if in fact it were a forgery” (129). He “knows he is no longer capable or even sure how to act” (130), and when the attendants wake him while moving him to the operating theatre he is no longer even human: “he looks as if he were suddenly deranged, the whites of his eyes back-rolled, and then a low moan comes from him. A terrible, stifled cry which at once seems intimate and strangely inhuman” (131).

Given the established notion of the heart as the seat of emotions, and the allegorising of Peter’s body in terms of masculinity crisis, his heart failure aligns him with Jules, the emotionally stoic and disconnected male damaged by his own inexpressivity. Peter’s thoughts when he “recalls the image of his heart, invaded by a virus – weakened” are suggestive of this interpretation. He ponders, “perhaps there was an irony to it … that it was his heart which was sick. His love which was weak” (91). This construction of Peter as a damaged by his stoicism is in a sense upheld by descriptions of his growing estrangement from Julia. While The Architect demonstrates a rapprochement between the wounded man and the caring, nurturing woman, Peter’s anxiety seems to be exacerbated by his emotional distance from Julia. Although they have both experienced physical trauma in association with some vital element of their beings – Julia’s miscarriage is almost a female version of Peter’s heart failure – they are unable to communicate with one another. Thus, “[h]e’d said nothing to Julia” (81) when his breathing became “strained, his pulse irregular” (80), and even when he goes to her office to explain, “[h]e wanted to tell her everything, but he felt there were no words, that nothing was communicable” (87). Although Julia tries to understand what Peter is going through, she finds even his words “incomprehensible” (203).
In Ross’s case, it is the very instrument of patriarchy – Ian – who does the damage. Indeed, the fact that it is their father’s crowbar that Ian uses in this assault – an instrument that he subsequently throws “over the cliff as if it were somehow responsible for what he’d just done” (112) – confirms the sense in which Ross is damaged by patriarchy. The interspersion of images of Ross’s damaged body with his father’s memories of Ross as a child – of the time they spent together as well as of their estrangement due to the father’s alcoholism, absence and neglect – further compels a reading of Ross’s character in these terms: the absent or inadequate father is a favoured topic in the popular discourse of masculinity crisis. Peter, too, is portrayed as a victim of patriarchy, though more subtly, through the association drawn between his heart condition and the burglary (significantly, an event also perpetrated by Ian). Not only is his discovery of the burgled house interspersed with reflections on the emotions motivated by his heart condition but, upon discovering the burgled house he “recognises the same sensation he felt three months ago” (80) when his condition was diagnosed. Indeed, the “robbery is perhaps the only thing which makes sense to him; this malignant and complete intrusion” (91) so resembles the “virus” that has “infiltrated” (84) his heart as well as the medical instruments that later invade his body.

Transplantation, at first, seems to offer a relatively straightforward solution to male crisis.95 Such a solution is, perhaps, similar to Bly’s prescribed resolution to the masculinity crisis – men retreating into the bush with other men to discover a true or deep masculinity. In this context, and in relation to the above reading, the notion of Peter’s “heart [as] obsolete” (136) might suggest that his model of masculinity is outmoded and needs to be replaced. However, the fact that he dies even upon receiving a new heart suggests the enormity of masculinity’s crisis, while the inability of the doctors to understand the nature of the complications – “We don’t know for sure what’s wrong” (199), “[we] cannot understand” (203) – indicates its complexity. While the meaning of Peter’s (body’s) “acute rejection” (214) of what must surely be Ross’s heart is by no means clear, it seems plausible that Ross’s version of masculinity is also inadequate to the task of healing the male body. Further, in depicting a failed transplantation, the novel seems to suggest that there is something fundamentally wrong at the heart of masculinity and of patriarchy – a

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95 According to Cynthia J. Fuchs’s analysis, this is the case in the film Heart Condition, where a heart transplant between men overcomes masculinity crisis. In this film, an upscale black lawyer’s heart is transplanted into a racist white cop: “the men’s literally shared heart figures a masculine hegemony … an all-male unit transcending race and class distinctions to produce stable self-identity” (194).
suggestion firmly reinforced by the condemnation of patriarchal power dynamics presented in depictions of Wendy and Julia’s objectification (as well as the burglary of the house and Wendy’s abuse).

Ultimately, whereas visibility was the cause of Jules’s crisis in *The Architect*, in *Transplanted*, it seems to be a means of representing a general problem with masculinity. Additionally, in contrast to *The Architect* and *The Blind Eye*, where the evocation of masculinity crisis ultimately works to marginalise women’s sufferings, the pathos evoked in description of Ross and Peter’s exposed and damaged bodies does not detract from the condemnation of objectifying visual relations presented in depictions of Wendy and Julia’s visibility. The extensive depiction of Wendy’s abuse, Julia’s objectification, the rape of the girl by the river and the penetration/destruction of domestic space ensures that an awareness of women’s equal (if not more extensive) oppression under patriarchy is retained. Thus, although the portrayal of a crisis in masculinity accords, in some respects, with popular notions of the difficulties men face, there is no sense in which women’s suffering is concomitantly reduced or marginalised. At the same time, there is some alignment of women’s and men’s oppression: not only are all of the oppressed characters (including the house) damaged by patriarchy, largely in the form of Ian, but the parallels drawn, for instance, between Peter’s heart condition and the burglary suggest a common source of difficulty. In this vein, it is perhaps Julia and Peter’s inability to work together against some common difficulty that leads to Peter’s crisis and death.

Male exposure, and its association with crisis is treated sympathetically in *The Architect* and *Transplanted*, but this is not the case in *Miranda*, in which the anxiety Alfred experiences as a result of John/Helios’s nudity is mocked. Specifically, Alfred’s anxiety emerges, and is critiqued, as the manifestation of a patriarchal (or phallocentric) desire to maintain male power by concealing the male body. Male and female characters display very different attitudes to male nudity in *Miranda*. Whereas Mother-in-law and the women at the art show are gently appreciative of male nudity and its vulnerabilities, it arouses in Alfred deep anxiety and fear. When he and Miranda go to collect John/Helios for church on Christmas morning and find him asleep, “half naked” (78), Alfred is enraged. It is not John/Helios’s nudity in itself that angers him, but Miranda’s witnessing of it. He jumps between Miranda and John/Helios, and “flung his arms wide as if warding off an assailant … a wall between [Miranda] and the horror on the bed,” eventually becoming “hysterical”
when Miranda refuses to leave the room. Alfred’s anxiety regarding male nudity is demonstrated in other ways. He carefully “conceals his nakedness under a white calico nightshirt” (112) and, when Mother-in-law confronts him, saying, “God made us naked,” he refuses to concede even this point. He screams, “No! Not without clothes!”, and insists that “Heathens are without clothes. Christians wear them” (138). Mother-in-law’s assertion that, “[h]is father must have influenced him in such silliness” (80) associates a fear of male nudity with patriarchy.

Miranda’s comment on naked men – “Everything is revealed really” (137) – goes some way to explaining Alfred’s anxiety. As demonstrated in my Introduction, exposing the penis is frequently identified as undermining patriarchal (or phallocentric) discourse by exposing the incommensurability of penis and phallus. This is because, as theorists like Silverman, Schehr, Thomas (Male) and Schor argue, patriarchal power derives from the association of the biological penis with the symbolic power and authority of the phallus. However, and as Solomon-Godeau puts it, “the power of patriarchy is so much in excess of its anatomical representative that the actual organ fails to carry its symbolic weight” (178). Thus, when the penis is exposed, precisely as not-a-phallus, male power is undermined. The applicability of such an argument to an understanding of the crisis evoked by male nudity in Miranda is suggested by the male community’s extreme aversion to Miranda’s sculpting of John/Helios. It is more explicitly encouraged by Miranda’s description of the lighthouse as both a “penis” and a “phallus,” a conflation she subsequently identifies as a “mad parody of power” (41). Accordingly, the comments of the women at the art show demonstrate the subversiveness of differentiating penis from phallus. Pondering Miranda’s sculpture of John/Helios’s naked body, one woman says, to general agreement, “Just like my little boy when I bath him. So soft, like a tiny mushroom. Men don’t know that we know” (200). If the male community’s anger at Miranda’s sculpture represents an attempt to maintain the conflation of penis and phallus, the women’s comments suggest the belatedness of such an endeavour.

In some ways, Miranda’s use of the word “lingam” (67, 70) – a stylised phallus used to represent the Hindu god Shiva – to describe John/ Helios’s penis might reduce the impact of the challenge male nudity poses to the conflation of penis and phallus. By referring to John/Helios’s penis in this way, Miranda seems to re-conflate the distinction between penis and phallus established in the women’s comments on Miranda’s sculpture at
the art show. The phallic quality of John/Helios’s “lingam” is reinforced by the way Miranda wants her sculpture to “balloon mushroom-like from the hot earth, virile and aggressive” (67). Additionally, the use of this specialised and obscure word to refer to John/Helios’s penis can be seen to re-conceal his distance from the phallus. This same technique – a stalwart of romance fiction (where penises are only referred to in euphemistic terms of male members and hardness) – is used in *The Architect*, where Jules losing his “desire” and Chloe overcoming his “inertia” (183) is doublespeak for Jules’s penis becoming flaccid and Chloe encouraging his erection. Simultaneously, however, the association of John/Helios’s “lingam” with mushrooms – “their small white hoods tender, soft and intact” (70) – reintroduces ambiguity into the meaning of the relationship between penis and phallus in the text.

A similar crisis is provoked by Silas’s nudity. Mick, Jason and Steve (the principal representatives of the male community in Port Tremaine) are moving a car out of soft, wet sand. Silas, wearing only a sarong, tries to help. The ambiguous chain of events that follows suggests a crisis for the male community centring on Silas’s nudity, a crisis out of all proportion to the event that prompts it:

> With both hands under the car, Silas could feel his sarong slipping away, pulled down by the water, and he wondered, for a moment, if he should try to hold it. As he tripped on the loose cloth, he heard someone shout out, his voice a howl of pain, and then he realised he had lost it; the cloth was floating around him and he was standing there, naked to all.

As the men turn their backs on Silas in disgust, Steve asks him “what the fuck he thought he had been doing” (177). This question comes to symbolise both the men’s enormous anger at Silas, as well as the fact that it is completely unclear (both to Silas and the reader) what has actually happened, what he has done wrong. For a significant time, therefore, Silas’s nudity exists as the only reason for the sense of crisis contained in this passage – signalled by the men’s shouts, the howl of pain and Silas’s feeling that “he had lost it” – as well as for Silas’s subsequent exclusion from the community. Although it eventually emerges that Mick’s foot has been broken, the secondary, almost incidental nature of this physical wound is emphasised by there being no explanation for how Silas’s actions caused this accident. In contrast to *Miranda*, this association of male crisis and nudity is suggested but not critiqued, and certainly not ridiculed.
While all the novels discussed in this chapter focus on female objectification and male exposure, the outcome of this emphasis is very different. The presentation of looking relations in terms of a division between seeing male and blind female characters gives all of these novels an apparently feminist dimension, but female suffering is marginalised, even obscured, by male pain in *The Architect* and *The Blind Eye*. These narratives, along with *Transplanted*, evince a great deal of sympathy and concern for masculinity’s contemporary crisis. Particularly in *The Architect* and *Transplanted*, these exposed male characters’ bodies are shown to be analogous, in some ways, with the objectification of women in popular culture. The latter novel, however, manages to temper such concern with a continuing awareness of women’s enormous sufferings under patriarchy. *Miranda*, in contrast, refuses to heed the concern for male crisis – particularly in the form of a crisis of visibility – currently prominent in popular culture. Instead, such concern is displaced onto the disparaged Alfred, propagator of patriarchal discourse and other lies, and is thus exposed as a ruse for maintaining patriarchal power.

Simultaneously the gradual movement in these fictions from relationships composed of blind female and seeing male characters, to explorations of male visibility, can be read as a comment on the trend that these fictions themselves constitute. Female blindness, in other words, metaphorically signifies the absence of established and acceptable conventions for women representing, looking at and desiring men’s bodies. Accordingly, the movement towards male visibility in these fictions symbolises the entry of men’s bodies into language. The following chapter more fully explores male visibility by investigating instances, in *The Architect* and *Miranda*, but also in *Last of the Sane Days*, when female characters voyeuristically and fetishistically objectify male characters’ bodies.
Chapter Two
Looking (im)properly

Women objectifying men in *Last of the Sane Days*,
*Miranda* and *The Architect*

When the man steps out of his traditional role as the one who controls the whole action, and when he is set up as sex object, the woman then takes on the ‘masculine’ role as bearer of the gaze and initiator of the action. She nearly always loses her traditionally feminine characteristics in doing so – not those of attractiveness, but rather of kindness, humaneness, motherliness. She is now often cold, driving, ambitious, manipulating, just like the men whose position she has usurped.

[E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both sides of the camera* 29]

... reversal ... remains locked within the same logic. The male striptease, the gigolo – both inevitably signify the mechanism of reversal itself, constituting themselves as aberrations whose acknowledgement simply reinforces the dominant system of aligning sexual difference with a subject/object dichotomy. And an essential attribute of that dominant system is the matching of male subjectivity with the agency of the look.

[Mary Ann Doane, “Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator” 230]

Many of the theorists and critics discussed in the Introduction identify the visible male body – particularly when eroticised or wounded, and especially when represented and/or looked at by women – as fundamentally excessive to and transgressive of patriarchal dichotomies and discourse. Specifically, the propensity of men’s (wounded/eroticised) bodies and women’s (active/desiring) looks to invert traditional gender codes is seen to offer new ways of imagining and theorising masculinity, femininity and corporeality. In contrast with such arguments, the epigraphs above reject the disruptive potential of gender role reversals, specifically when they occur as a result of women objectifying men’s bodies. Other theorists also contend that reversing binary oppositions fails to produce change because it maintains and perhaps even reinforces dichotomous structures. Robert Schultz claims that gender reversals “do nothing to expand our traditional frame of reference. After they’ve provided their conceptual jolt, they leave the old terms and categories intact” (381). Lehman similarly asserts that, “Simple reversals never address true power imbalances; while masquerading in society as liberating activities, they reinscribe the traditional ideological imbalances in ways that seek to contain any threat posed by the new activity” (*Running* 6). Referring (like Kaplan and Doane above) specifically to visual relations,
Linda LeMoncheck insists that the “de facto equality” represented by reversals in gendered positions such as

… [t]he catcalls of women in clubs with male strip dancers and the voyeuristic gaze of the female viewer of pornography … simply legitimize men’s continued subordination of women, encourage women to dehumanize men, and fool women into thinking we are successful. (133)

Such arguments resonate with the assertions of theorists like Kirkham and Thumim (“Me”), Modleski (Feminism), Schiesari and Rowe (“Melodrama”), who identify gender role reversals (in the form of feminised male characters) as functioning to uphold male power while marginalising women and their experiences. Ironically, therefore, discussions of gender reversal, particularly in relation to the visual sphere, are frequently polarised: theorists tend to describe them either as implicitly subversive, or as simply another means of consolidating patriarchal dichotomies.

Both positions, however, overlook the fact that reversals in gendered positions are rarely, if ever, simple or straightforward. An analysis that does not succumb to this critical tendency, and one that has remarkable relevance to the issues explored in this book, is Farrell’s discussion of the film The Full Monty (“Naked”). Farrell uses the framework of Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” to explore the evocation of contemporary notions of masculinity crisis in the film’s depiction of women looking at naked, disempowered and non-hegemonic men’s bodies. By integrating textual analysis with attention to context, Farrell demonstrates that the portrayal of looking relations in this film alters patriarchal dichotomies while simultaneously confirming patriarchal power.

As she notes, stripping – which entails the men proudly displaying their bodies to a female audience for monetary gain – enables the male characters to overcome masculinity crisis together (in a men’s group). The climax of the film occurs when the women who watch them strip, support and celebrate their efforts. Like Farrell comments, it would be difficult to imagine a similarly celebratory and supportive tone if the relations depicted in this film were simply reversed: namely, if a group of overweight, unemployed and unreliable women were stripping for a roomful of men in order to overcome economic and social disempowerment (“Naked” 126).

96 Farrell’s detailed contextualisation of the film’s release includes discussion of the British-inflected discourse of masculinity crisis, for which working-class masculinity and unemployment are a focus; the consistent appearance of this discourse in British films since the early 1980s; and the spate of men “doing the full monty” following the film’s release, thus suggesting a resonance between the version of masculinity crisis explored in the film and the experiences, anxieties and concerns of (some) British men.
On the one hand, therefore, this film transforms, rather than reproduces, the dichotomies Mulvey (among others) identifies as enabling objectification: the object, rather than the subject, of the gaze is empowered. Moreover, the bodies displayed challenge hegemonic constructions of the male body: one of the men who strips is black, one fat, one old, two gay; all are working-class and none is conventionally attractive. On the other hand, this transformation of patriarchal conventions occurs in a way that reinstates and affirms male power generally. The film ends with the male characters exposing their penises to the women in the audience (though not in the cinema). The bravery of their actions (in displaying their less-than-perfect bodies and in this way overcoming the emasculating effects of unemployment) restores these male characters to patriarchy. This reassertion of male power is confirmed and celebrated by the reaction of the female audience members, who respond ecstatically to the sight of their penises. Although patriarchal power is ultimately affirmed in *The Full Monty*, Farrell’s reading of the film challenges both those theorists who insist that gender dichotomies are not transformed in their reversal, and those (discussed in the Introduction) who identify male nudity – in exposing the incommensurability of penis and phallus – as inherently subversive of patriarchal (or phallocentric) discourse.

My argument in this chapter builds on Farrell’s analysis of *The Full Monty* in several ways. As in Farrell’s essay, this chapter investigates the consequences and complexities of gender role reversals, specifically those that occur when female characters objectify male characters’ bodies. Such reversals are particularly evident in, and will be discussed in relation to, the initial interactions between Donna and Jules in *The Architect*, and Miranda and John/Helios in *Miranda*, and most prominently, in the relationship between Hilary and Rafael in *Last of the Sane Days*. Like Farrell’s analysis, the close readings in this chapter infuse textual analysis with discussion of context. As in Chapter One, the various manifestations of masculinity crisis and feminism provide a particular focus for deciphering the ways in which these novels respond to and engage with contemporary debates about gender. Finally, and again like Farrell’s discussion of *The Full Monty*...
Monty, close readings of the fictions demonstrate that gender reversals do not implicitly subvert patriarchal dichotomies, nor do they inevitably leave them unchallenged and unchanged. Rather, reversals in gendered positions have the potential both to transform and/or to affirm patriarchal dichotomies, and the power relations such dichotomies sustain. Context, in other words, and as was emphasised in the Introduction, is paramount in determining the meanings and consequences of the conjunction between visible and damaged men’s bodies and active and desiring women’s looks. In particular, I argue that, whereas the reversal of gendered looking relations in The Architect ultimately upholds patriarchal power differentials, in Last of the Sane Days and Miranda, gender reversals both transform and challenge patriarchal conventions.

I will begin by demonstrating and discussing reversals in gendered looking relations, firstly in Last of the Sane Days, and then in The Architect and Miranda. In these novels, reversal is constituted and foregrounded in a variety of ways, not simply by the portrayal of female characters looking at male characters’ bodies. Perhaps most fundamentally, and in a way that is surprisingly consistent across these fictions, when occupying positions of visual authority in relation to male bodies, female characters (namely, Hilary, Donna and Miranda) are masculinised. Correspondingly, when objectified, the male characters (respectively, Rafael, Jules and John/Helios) are feminised, often in very explicit ways. At times, these feminised male characters are portrayed as metaphorically blind, thus emphasising the concern of these fictions with the relationship between gender and visual relations. Of course, some instances of male visibility previously discussed were also portrayed in terms of a feminisation (especially the depiction of Jules, Ross and Peter’s bodies as abject). However, whereas discussion in this chapter focuses specifically on male visibility in relation to female spectators, the bodies analysed in Chapter One were objectified and, at times, feminised, by ungendered (and implicitly masculine) or explicitly masculinised societies and institutions. In Transplanted, Ross and Peter’s bodies are exposed by male doctors’ eyes (and hands), and in The Blind Eye, Silas’s visibility occurs in relation to a specifically male community. Similarly, whereas this chapter explores the relationship between Jules’s visibility-feminisation and Donna’s vision-masculinisation, Chapter One discussed his objectification by the medical establishment generally and by (ungendered) others’ eyes. Finally, although John/Helios is
visible in the presence of Miranda, male reactions to such exposure – primarily Alfred’s – were the focus in Chapter One.

While agreeing with Robinson that it is simplistic and counterproductive to interpret all “violations of dominant masculinity as feminizations” (“Pedagogy” 145), these fictions compel such a reading. This occurs primarily through the portrayal of female characters objectifying male characters in ways that specifically evoke Mulvey’s notions of voyeurism and fetishism. As in the visual interactions discussed in Chapter One, the resonances between fiction and theory in depictions of female characters objectifying male characters’ bodies are frequently explicit and pedagogical. Given the extensive representations of male characters objectifying blind female characters in *The Architect* and *Miranda*, the evocation of Mulvey’s notions of voyeurism and fetishism in descriptions of female characters objectifying male characters directly highlights the fact of reversal. In these fictions, in other words, normative gender relations and gender reversals are elaborated using the same framework. Thus, gender reversal is explicitly associated with, and explored in the context of, its normative counterpart. This is not the case in *Last of the Sane Days*: contrary to the other fictions, this novel contains no instances of male characters objectifying female characters. Nevertheless, its representation of voyeurism and fetishism is so detailed, extensive and theoretically aware (far more so than in any of the other fictions discussed in this study) that Mulvey’s understanding of patriarchal visual relations is implicitly evoked.98 Further, and resonating with Mulvey’s notion of an overarching and institutional, as well as an individually manifested male gaze, voyeurism and fetishism in *Last of the Sane Days* are firmly aligned with, and elaborated in relation to, traditionally patriarchal institutions (namely, medicine and the military).

The depiction of female characters masculinised by looking might suggest that Mulvey’s “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ Inspired by King Vidor’s *Duel in the Sun*,” is more relevant to discussion in this chapter than her original argument. In this essay, Mulvey modifies her previous assertions regarding the impossibility of a female gaze by arguing that women can look, but only if they adopt a masculine subject position. According to Mulvey (following Freud), women are able to oscillate between masculinity and femininity because the definition of femininity “in terms

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98 A reading of this text as informed by visual theory is supported by Capp’s earlier work on a history of the security surveillance of Australian writers and intellectuals in *Writers Defiled*. Indeed, *Last of the Sane Days* echoes and explores many of the underlying themes in this earlier work.
of opposition or similarity, leaves women also shifting between the metaphoric oppositions
of ‘active’ and ‘passive’” (“Afterthoughts” 31). However, despite the resonance between
this notion of women’s “trans-sex identification” (33) and the masculinisation of female
spectators in Last of the Sane Days, The Architect and Miranda, Mulvey’s original
argument is still more relevant to the elaboration of gendered looking relations in these
fictions. This is largely because instances of female characters objectifying male characters’
bonus continue to be primarily described in terms of voyeurism and fetishism, rather than
repression and oscillation. In another context, this would not necessarily inhibit the
application of Mulvey’s revised argument. However, the self-consciously theoretical nature
of these fictions, combined with the central importance of voyeurism and fetishism to their
elaboration of looking relations, suggests that they are invoking (in the case of Last of the
Sane Days) or continuing to engage with (in the case of The Architect and Miranda)
Mulvey’s original essay. Further, the primary focus of these narratives is not the
masculinisation of female spectators, but the feminisation of male characters’
bonus. And although Mulvey revises her views of female spectators in “Afterthoughts,” she continues
to reject the possibility that men’s bodies can be exposed and feminised. Consequently,
Mulvey’s revised argument is no more directly applicable to the principal focus of these
fictions – male visibility – than her original article. Indeed, the fact that her original
argument is notoriously expressed in terms of opposites, perhaps makes it more applicable
to a discussion of the concept of reversal.

As with the looking relations explored in Chapter One, the broad concern with
objectification in these fictions, as well as the specific evocation of Mulvey’s notions of
voyeurism and fetishism, implies that representations of reversals in normative looking
relations – and, by consequence, explorations of male visibility – are presented in the
context of an overt engagement with feminist concerns. However, as I have shown, an
explicitly feminist framework may produce narratives that resonate more closely with the
popular, and anti-feminist, discourse of masculinity crisis. Yet, as will be demonstrated in
the second part of this chapter, it is in the attempts to disavow or overcome such crisis – by
reincorporating these (potentially) subversive representations back into patriarchal
constructions – that the anxiety surrounding and informing depictions of masculinity and
men’s bodies becomes most evident in these fictions. Recuperative strategies employed in
these novels include depicting male characters’ bodies in relation to medical or sculptural
conventions, emphasising their youth, or allowing male characters a returned gaze. Even wounding and feminisation – the principal ways in which these bodies become visible in these fictions – can, and sometimes do, function to mitigate the (potentially) subversive implications of male display.

In theoretical terms, the existence of such frameworks is often taken to reinscribe depictions of men’s bodies (and women’s looks) into patriarchal discourse. A close reading of these fictions, however, shows that this is not necessarily the case: although various, and often the same, normative conventions and discourses inform depictions of male characters’ bodies in all three novels, they have different effects. In *The Architect*, they function to recapture Jules’s objectified, wounded and feminised body back into patriarchal discourse. Yet in *Last of the Sane Days* and *Miranda*, the presence of frameworks and discourses elsewhere identified as conventionalising does not overwrite the instabilities created by representations of (respectively) Rafael and John/Helios’s exposed, eroticised and feminised bodies. Instead, these instabilities remain operative, destabilising dichotomies and suggesting new ways of thinking about and theorising masculinities and men’s bodies.

Before embarking on a discussion of gender reversal in *Last of the Sane Days*, some narrative context is required. The past experiences of characters in this novel continually impact on events that occur in the present time-frame of the narrative. Until intense abdominal pain ended his career, Rafael was (in fulfilment of his childhood dreams) a fighter pilot in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). When the novel begins, he is travelling in Europe, attempting to overcome this pain by following in the footsteps of Nietzsche.99 Rafael’s godmother, Hilary, is also in Europe, travelling in order to escape the devastation she feels at the collapse of her medical practice. Europe, however, evokes in Hilary painful memories of her long-enduring yet unrequited love for Eva, Rafael’s mother. Meeting coincidentally, Hilary and Rafael embark on a forbidden affair, insistently characterised by Hilary’s voyeuristic and fetishistic approach to Rafael’s body. The end of their affair – combined with Rafael’s despair at the continuance of his pain and his eventual abhorrence of Hilary’s objectification of his body – results in his suicide.

Like the other fictions explored in this book, *Last of the Sane Days* engages with the popular discourse of masculinity crisis, primarily through the metaphor of Rafael’s pain. As

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99 As Veronica Brady asserts, “it has become a truism that Nietzsche is a crucial figure for the understanding of Australian culture” (“In” 87). Accordingly, the importance of Nietzsche to *Last of the Sane Days* indicates another paradigm besides visual theory through which the text could be read.
with Peter’s heart condition in *Transplanted*, Rafael’s pain forces him to abandon his stereotypically masculine career. The association of Raf (Rafael’s nickname) with the RAAF reinforces the centrality of this masculine role to his identity, and figuratively explains why his inability to perform this hegemonic version of masculinity leaves him fearful, desperate and confused (emotions the men’s movement claims that all men experience due to the erosion of their role in contemporary society). Popular notions of masculinity crisis are also suggested by Rafael’s estrangement from his father Gerald, while the purportedly ubiquitous extent of men’s predicament is reinforced by Gerald’s simultaneous crisis, characterised by “impotent fury at the way the world he had so carefully cultivated had done him in.” In one sense, this cultivated world refers to Gerald’s farm, which is failing due to drought. That he must be supported by his wife is a source of shame that compounds his “smouldering rage.” Gerald’s fury also relates to the world at large, arising as it does due to the feeling, preponderant in discussions of masculinity crisis, that men have been denied their traditional rights. Presented through the “perfect metaphor” of spontaneous combustion, Gerald’s rage mirrors Rafael’s emotions. Rafael’s acknowledgement of this similarity leads him to see his father “in a different light … and for the first time in years he wished that his father was with him so he could tell him he understood” (100). However, this healing of masculinity crisis is never achieved. Before they can meet again, Gerald kills his wife Eva and himself. Paradoxically, this murder-suicide further connects Gerald and Rafael, and presents the masculinity crisis that aligns their emotional trauma as insurmountable and devastating. Significantly, however, although the discourse of masculinity crisis is foregrounded, the sufferings of male characters are not unmitigatedly privileged and nor are female characters blamed. Instead, as in *Transplanted*, the struggles of both male and female characters are treated sympathetically and shown to arise from a patriarchal society that positions powerful and powerless as the only available subject positions.

*Last of the Sane Days* is a narrative with two distinct halves. The first is situated in Nice, and is divided from the second half, set in Sils Maria and Turin, by Hilary and Rafael’s short-lived physical relationship. Occurring largely during their train journey between Nice and Sils Maria, this sexual interlude is explicitly differentiated from their other interactions, which are characterised by Hilary’s objectifying visual desire. In
particular, the equality they experience on this journey differs from Hilary’s fetishism of Rafael’s body in Nice, and her voyeuristic gaze in Sils Maria and Turin.

The visual nature of Hilary’s desire is foregrounded by the depiction of the initial stages of their interactions largely in terms of Hilary looking at and for Rafael’s body. After catching glimpses of him around Nice, she follows, “hurry[ing] to keep him in sight” (27), “manag[ing] to keep him in sight” (32), as Rafael disappears behind various obstacles. When this game of visual cat-and-mouse finally comes to an end, Hilary finds herself unable to resist “staring at the curve of his muscular arms, the olive glow of his skin” (67). The depiction of this sexual relationship in terms of a woman’s desiring look at a male body is reinforced by Eva’s explicitly visual desire for male bodies: she falls in love with a Frenchman when they “exchange a glance” (26), and marries Gerald because “[h]e looked just like the Frenchman although without the polish” (30).

Hilary’s fetishising gaze is more elaborate and specific than in the novels discussed in Chapter One, extending beyond a simple overvaluation and desire for closeness. To fetishise something, as Mulvey explains, is to create a pleasure object by aligning that thing with a sexually stimulating quality or property it does not actually possess. This is the process that occurs when the male spectator, looking at the woman’s body on screen, substitutes her lack (of a penis) for the phallus (a fetish object). Hilary fetishises Rafael’s body by ascribing to it the desirable and sexually stimulating qualities of Eva’s. Her desire for Rafael, in other words, emerges as a fetishistic expression of, and a way of realising, her long-standing desire for his mother. The thematic importance of erotic displacement is demonstrated by the mirroring of Hilary’s fetishism in Eva’s substitution of Gerald’s body for the Frenchman’s.

Hilary’s displacement of Eva’s body onto Rafael’s is subtly demonstrated from the moment Hilary sees him in Nice. Glimpsing Rafael on the street, the “after-impression of his face” (20) causes her to feel a “profound shock of recognition. Those familiar features in such an unfamiliar place” (21). While it might be Nice that is the unfamiliar place and his features that are familiar, subsequent references to the similarities between Rafael’s appearance and his mother’s makes another option more likely – namely, that Rafael’s face is the unfamiliar place for Eva’s familiar features. This reading is supported by Hilary’s comment that, ever since Rafael was a child, she had “marvel[led] at his likeness to Eva” (31). Indeed, when Hilary subsequently follows Rafael, it is his mother she has in mind: she
“would not be surprised if he eluded her the way that Eva always managed to do, slipping out of her grasp at the very moment there seemed reason for hope” (27).

Eventually, subtlety and ambiguity are abandoned, and Hilary’s fetishistic association of Rafael and Eva’s bodies is overtly revealed as the basis of her desire. As they walk through the streets of Nice, Hilary notes that if she “looked at him quickly, there were moments when he might be Eva, moments when they might be under the bridge by the Seine” (84). This is a reference to a moment in Hilary’s relationship with Eva when she felt “anything might happen” (25). Although at that time, the arrival of the Frenchman had signalled the end of Hilary’s hope, in glancing quickly at Rafael, she is able to recapture that moment and, through her fetishistic substitution of his body for Eva’s, create a second chance. Shortly afterwards, “thinking of Eva” Hilary is “[s]urprised by the sudden urge to stroke Raf’s fresh-shaven cheek” (89). Later, when Rafael comments on the beauty of her eyes, “Hilary stared over his shoulder …. In front of her, Raf was just a blur. When she forced herself to bring him into focus, all she could see were Eva’s green eyes” (132). Her subsequent description of sex with Rafael as the consequence of “a frustrated yearning for something long denied” (142) further reinforces an understanding of her desire for his body as displaced desire for Eva’s. This is compounded by her subsequent assertion that “[a]s fraught as her relationship with Eva had become, she had never stepped over the line. Now the line had disappeared” (142-43).

Clearly, Hilary’s desire for Rafael is completely aligned with, and only shown to emerge as a result of, his feminisation. References to Rafael’s metaphoric blindness in Nice (the city where Hilary’s fetishism is exercised) reinforce his association with femininity. Passing Hilary on the street, “[l]ike a sleepwalker,” Rafael “looked straight through her” (20). Similarly, when Hilary follows him, “Rafael had not even paused to glance at the ruins” (29), in fact “showed no interest in what was around him” (32). This presentation of Rafael in terms of an inability to see is reinforced by his strong connection with Nietzsche, whose pain is frequently described in relation to visual difficulties: “dar[k] times,” “deteriorating eyesight” (154) and “aching eyes” (155). When Rafael is confronted by Nietzsche’s bust he feels an intense connection with these “smooth eyes,” and has to stop himself from touching “the unseeing orbs that looked as if the pupils had rolled back into the head, as if he could not drag his eyes away from his own pain, his own thoughts, that overheated world inside his skull” (152-53).
In the second half of the narrative, Hilary’s fetishism is transformed into an increasingly sinister surveillance, reminiscent of Mulvey’s description of the voyeuristic male spectator. One night, for example, Rafael goes for a walk in a blizzard. Overtly due to concern for his welfare, Hilary secretly follows. In order to see Rafael without being seen, she “kept a good distance behind him, the snow muffling her steps.” When he changes his course and walks over a frozen lake, Hilary seems almost panicked by the idea that there is “nowhere to hide,” realising that he “only had to turn … to see her.” The sinister character of Hilary’s voyeurism is implied by the way that “only her eyes were visible” (146) as she follows him; Hilary’s entire being, in other words, is concentrated in and on her desire to see while not being seen. Only when Rafael falls does Hilary reveal herself. When he asks how she found him, Hilary lies, saying she “followed [his] tracks” (149). After this incident, her look becomes increasingly intrusive and secretive. She searches his rooms for his diary, and sees him constantly in her dreams and imaginings. Increasingly aware of Hilary’s voyeurism, Rafael wonders, for instance, if he should destroy a letter from his mother “in case Hilary searched his belongings again” (237). Ultimately, Hilary’s continual surveillance of Rafael contributes to, or even causes, his insanity and suicide.

Hilary’s voyeurism is compounded and elaborated by her association with medical vision. Her interest in medicine originated in her uncle’s study, where his collection of visually oriented medical paraphernalia – such as “microscope[s]” and “colourful illustrations” (16) – “to expose … to reveal” (15) the inside of bodies to her gaze. The association of Hilary’s medical vision with exposure is perpetuated by descriptions of the objects in her uncle’s study as having “opened her eyes to the marvels of this internal landscape” and initiating “her journey into the hidden territory of the human body” (16). Like her original interest in medicine, Hilary’s decision to specialise as a gynaecologist is motivated by visual stimulus. Until Eva shows her Gustave Courbet’s painting, *The Origins of the World*, depicting “the lower half of a woman’s body dominated by the mound of her pubis and its dark thatch of hair, the pink lips of the labia just showing through” (23), Hilary had believed she would be a surgeon, like her uncle. Moreover, this painting continues the association of her medical gaze with the exposure of hidden things. While Hilary’s description of the way “tourists hovered nearby as if wanting to linger, but no one dared” (23), hints at the taboo associated with depicting female genitalia, the complete
absence of any description of penises perhaps indicates the greater prohibitions surrounding representations of male genitals (especially by women authors).100

The association of medical vision with the exposure of hidden things (particularly female genitalia) offers a strong analogy for Mulvey’s description of the male spectator’s voyeurism. This analogy is perpetuated by the alliance of Hilary’s medical gaze with a desire for distance, knowledge and power. Hilary is strongly characterised by distance, from herself and others. Except during her brief physical/sexual relationship with Rafael – and at the end of the novel when she grieves for the mistakes she has made in this relationship – Hilary is entirely self-contained and restrained. This is evident, for instance, in a photograph of Eva and Gerald’s wedding where Hilary stands “slightly apart from the group” (44). While the other guests are “dressed in pastels,” she is “a statuesque figure in black puce” (43). Hilary’s distance from others is echoed in the way that she has “never felt at home in her own body, always aware of its foreignness: that universe beneath her skin so intimate and yet so strange.” This distance from herself and others is one of the main reasons why Hilary is drawn to medicine: it offers her a “passport to this other place,” the place of bodies. But it cannot provide, nor does she seem to want, intimate connection. Rather, it is medicine’s “dispassionate observation” that Hilary so admires – a dispassion or distance from which she can clinically, even voyeuristically, observe human flesh. Thus she finds it “surprisingly easy to remain detached” when “confronted with her first cadaver” (16).

Like Mulvey’s description of voyeurism, Hilary’s medical gaze – and the distance it permits – offers her a feeling of omniscience and, hence, power. Hilary embraces medicine because it “promised” enormous knowledge – “answers to questions most people did not dare to ask, answers to the secrets of life and death, encoded in the flesh” (17). Repeated references to God in the narrative, and Hilary’s position as Rafael’s godmother, further suggest omniscience, and can be associated with Haraway’s description of the unmarked male gaze as a “god-trick” (“Situated” 189). As Haraway defines the term, god-tricks are those forms of vision – namely, relativism and totalisation – “promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully” (191). The transformation of the medical gaze from god-like to a God substitute is suggested by Rafael’s sermon on God’s death. Quoting Nietzsche to Hilary from the pulpit of a church, Rafael “pray[s]”:

100 Certainly, it is remarkable that, in a group of novels so centrally concerned with men’s bodies and the problematics and potentials of their exposure, this is the only explicit description of genitalia.
What are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchres of God? Do we not smell anything yet of God’s decomposition? Gods too decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. We are all his murderers. But how have we done this? … Must not we become gods ourselves to be worthy of it? (73)

The abortion Hilary performs on Eva makes the replacement of God with medicine even clearer. While “disturbed” by her desire for such power, Hilary nevertheless performs the operation and becomes, in effect, a god with power over life and death. Hilary is not the only doctor in Last of the Sane Days who desires and exercises the all-seeing, all-knowing and all-powerful position medicine apparently offers. The depiction of medicine as “unearth[ing]” a desire for power – described as the “unacknowledged motives behind altruistic acts” (136) – demonstrates how doctors, as a whole, “become gods” (73).

Rafael’s position as the object of Hilary’s voyeurism and fetishism is compounded by his concurrent role as an object of medical surveillance. When his pain begins, he is subjected to numerous medical “examinations … every test imaginable” (59). Like Peter in Transplanted, Rafael feels as if he is “just the patient, a recalcitrant body to be prodded and probed” (62). However, and despite feeling dehumanised, objectified and (in being probed or penetrated) feminised, in some respects Rafael welcomes this medical gaze. His ambivalent feelings regarding medical exposure are related to Hilary’s foundational role in his early life. As a doctor and his “[f]irst love” (169), Rafael had always felt there was a “thrilling knowingness” about Hilary. Further, Hilary’s role as a doctor, the fact that she is “[a]lways the professional,” is associated in Rafael’s mind with her desire for “details,” the way in which “she really wanted to know” (60). He says that, as a child, Hilary

… [s]omehow … seemed to understand him, at times better than he did himself. As a boy he had believed that when a doctor looked into his eyes with an ophthalmoscope, or listened to the blood as it rushed through his heart, they were privy to his deepest secrets and fears. Even now, after all that had happened, part of him wanted to believe. (60-61)

Desiring her knowing look, Rafael deliberately exposes his body to her. Even before Hilary indicates the possibility of a sexual relationship, Rafael’s shaved face is described as giving him an “exposed air” (85). Although, at this point, he leaves “dark stubble above his top lip, the shadow of a sneer,” after Hilary makes the idea of a sexual relationship between them a possibility he not only shaves his face completely – thereby removing any sense of a contemptuous and self-possessed demeanour – he abandons other forms of concealment.
When Raf appeared in the doorway of the café, she did not recognise him at first. His unruly, shoulder-length hair had been cut sharp around his ears and shaved close to the skull at the back, leaving him nowhere to hide. He wore a crisp, new shirt open at the neck, his Adam’s apple visible beneath its taut layer of skin. Eager yet tentative, he stood before her as if offering a gift while remaining unsure how it might be received. (103)

While, as with other examples of male exposure previously discussed, Rafael is described in this passage in terms of visibility and vulnerability, his is not an enforced or secretly achieved exposure.

It is tempting to read Rafael’s offering of his body as a gift – an object of desire – for Hilary’s gaze in terms of a reimagining or renegotiation of heterosexual masculinity. This is Cyndy Hendershot’s understanding of a very similar visual relationship between Ada and Baines in Jane Campion’s film The Piano. The theoretical basis of Hendershot’s analysis is very similar to the one taken thus far in this book: like Mulvey, Hendershot asserts that traditional male subjectivity operates through the voyeuristic and fetishistic objectification of women’s bodies. She expands on Mulvey’s analysis by identifying male subjectivity as sustained by a system that “persistently refuses to allow the male body to be eroticised and … obsessively hides the penis in order to protect the phallus.” From this theoretical basis, Baines’s exposure – which is seen to “make the male body visible and hence vulnerable” (212) – is interpreted as subverting the visual system of patriarchy. Hendershot describes the scene as follows:

When Baines asks to see Ada’s arms, he removes his shirt. Ada in her bodice and Baines in his undershirt maintain an equal state of undress. Baines then removes his undershirt, exposing his body further to Ada. Her rejection of him does not stop his insistence on displaying his body further to her. Desperate to make himself the object of Ada’s desire, Baines undresses behind a curtain in his hut. When Ada looks for him, she finds him completely naked, staring her full in the face. (211)

Hendershot interprets the way Baines willingly offers his body to Ada, and, in doing so, renounces the position of voyeur, as the basis from which an alternative masculinity and an equitable (hetero)sexual relationship is forged, one that “remove[s] heterosexuality from the domination-subordination binary oppositions within which it rests” (212).

However, whereas Ada and Baines expose their bodies to each other, Hilary refuses to match Rafael’s exposure. Her relative concealment is established early in the narrative, in a dream Rafael has of her “standing in a white coat … stripping off to go for a swim.” Although Rafael waits in anticipation to “see her body, her bare arms and the bones of her
spine … there was another layer of clothes underneath, and more beneath them. With each new layer he grew hungrier for a glimpse of her flesh, which she never revealed” (50). Hilary’s concealment is directly contrasted with Rafael’s exposure at other times in the novel – when, for example, she sees him on the street and hides in a doorway (110). The contrast thereby established between Hilary’s invisibility and Rafael’s visibility represents a reversal of the gendered dichotomies Mulvey identifies as characteristic of patriarchal visual relations. Combined with the explicit portrayal of Hilary’s gaze as voyeuristic and fetishistic, this contrast reinforces the sense in which Hilary is masculinised in their interactions while Rafael is feminised. In a broader sense, too, Hilary’s gaze can be seen as analogous, in Rafael’s life, to the “male gaze” in the lives of women within patriarchal society. Berger identifies the male gaze as a constitutive influence in the formation of women’s subjectivity in patriarchal society. Similarly, Hilary’s gaze has always been a constant and important presence in Rafael’s life. As his mother’s obstetrician, Hilary was the first person ever to see his body (21), and since his birth she “had always been a part of Rafael’s life, in one way or another” (134). So reliant does Rafael become on her gaze that “the moment Hilary … turned away” he runs from “a nameless dread, an overwhelming sense of loneliness that swamped him” (217). Rafael’s repeated “yearning” (216) for Hilary’s gaze reinforces his feminisation.

While far less extensive or definitive than Hilary’s objectification of Rafael (or Jules’s objectification of Chloe) the gaze that Donna directs at Jules’s body in The Architect, particularly during their first meeting in the burns unit of the hospital where she is his nurse, contains notably voyeuristic elements. Like Mulvey’s voyeur, Donna wishes to see while remaining unseen, “hop[ing],” when Jules is brought in, that “this one’s unconscious. I can’t stand their eyes when they arrive” (5). This preference for unconscious patients also indicates her desire for distance, as does her ability to “turn off the feelings so their terror can’t touch [her]” (5). Voyeurism is further implied by the way Donna aligns herself with omnipotence and omniscience, wondering if “God used to feel too” (5). Her detached and distanced gaze allows her to see Jules’s body only in terms of urine output, oxygen saturation and heart beat. This sense of his body as a passive and de-humanised object under her active gaze is strengthened by the repeated description of Jules as “just another burnt body” (8), echoing the chapter title: “just another body” (5). Combined with the allusions to Mulvey’s argument contained in later descriptions of Jules’s objectification
of Chloe, these depictions of Donna’s gaze encourage a reading of her interaction with Jules in terms of a reversal of the active male subject/passive female body-object dichotomy.

This sense of reversal is compounded by Jules’s position, in the prologue, as a looked-for body. *The Architect* opens with Marc and Clint arriving on the scene of Jules’s motorcycle accident, where they see many “searchers” and “[p]olice and ambulance spotlights scour the undergrowth” (2) for the lost rider. Entering the search, Marc and Clint find Jules’s burnt body in the shadows. Immediately followed by the description of Jules and Donna’s meeting, this prologue adds to the sense of Jules’s body as a visual object: certainly, both encounters are interspersed with references to eyes, gazes, watching and looking. Given that a similar collage of visual references is created in descriptions of the interactions between Jules and Chloe, these references to Jules’s body as looked-at (by Donna) and looked-for (by Marc and Clint) become foretokens of the main instance of voyeurism in the novel.

Donna’s position as an active spectator-subject compared to Jules, a passive body-object, is reinforced by her active and assertive narrative role during their initial meeting. Her activity directly opposes the role Mulvey ascribes to the woman on screen in Hollywood cinema, whose presence “tends to work against the development of a story-line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation” (19). Instead, Donna occupies the narrative position Mulvey attributes to male protagonists, one of “advancing the story, making things happen” (20). Jules’s passivity – manifested in his semi-conscious state and prostrate position – correspondingly feminises him. The gendered division thereby established is echoed by the female doctor’s activity and the male doctor’s passivity when confronted with Jules’s body. The male doctor is inept: Donna barks orders at him, deriding his “tendency to be conservative” and overruling him by “shoot[ing] the unordered lasix into a bung” (7) to save Jules’s kidneys. Donna expresses relief when the female anaesthetist – “confident. Always aggressive” (8) – arrives. Together, the two women save Jules’s life against the odds.

*Miranda*, too, begins with a female character objectifying and adopting a masculinised narrative role in relation to a feminised male body. Even more than in the interaction between Donna and Jules, Miranda’s look at John/Helios’s body (when she discovers him on the reef) represents a reversal of the dichotomised gendered interactions.
between seeing male and blind female characters also presented in the novel. Miranda’s objectification of John/Helios is immediately and explicitly signalled by the novel’s opening sentences: “He was dead. I was certain of it” (1). As with references to Jules as just another body, this statement is at once dismissive and absolute, establishing Miranda as an active spectator-subject in relation to a passive body-object. Like Silas in relation to Constance, Miranda’s visual relation to John/Helios’s body on the reef, while always objectifying, contains both a distanced and sadistic voyeurism and a reverent and identificatory fetishism.

As with all of the voyeuristic spectators discussed thus far, Miranda distances herself from John/Helios’s body and delights in seeing while remaining unseen. In fact, Miranda is so distanced from this male body that its “humanness and the demands of it,” rather than inspiring sympathy, merely “irritated” (2): it is (only) her voyeuristic curiosity – her desire to see “what he looked like” (4) – that stops her from simply “walk[ing] away or shift[ing] down wind” (2). In contrast to her own desire to see, Miranda is intrigued by the possibility that, “[t]urned from [her], his face might indeed by as eyeless as an old statue” (4). Miranda’s subsequent feelings of omnipotence and power are present in all her actions towards his body while they are on the reef: she repeatedly “look[s] down at him” (4), “look[s] down at his inert body” (7). This sense of power is compounded by descriptions of his body as “constantly threatened” (7): by the sea, by death and by Miranda’s disregard for his well-being.

The instant Miranda discovers John/Helios is alive, she abandons her voyeuristic stance and tries “to reach him” (4), thus transforming distance into fetishistic closeness. When she realises that she will have to stand, kneel or lie on him she is delighted, and chooses to “[l]ie on him like a lover” (6), the position bringing her into greatest contact with his body. Experiencing the male body as merely an object for her pleasure, Miranda feels “no guilt for the exhilaration of her feelings” and “desires” (5). Fetishism is further suggested by the way she overvalues John/Helios’s physical appearance. So enraptured is she by his beauty that she says, “[i]f it were possible I would have cradled him in my hand, holding him and turning him, marvelling at his perfection” (7). The suggestion of ownership or possession (as well as overvaluation and diminution) presented by this image is reinforced by Miranda’s identification of John/Helios as her “inexplicable and wonderful … discovery” (7). This sense of ownership culminates in what can only be described as an
orgy of fetishistic closeness and possession: lying on him she kisses and sucks his body, “again and again” (7), oblivious to the fact that he requires medical attention. At one point, she even bites him, “laugh[ing] and shout[ing]” with joy when she “saw [her] teeth marks flame into tiny red spots” (7).

The terms in which Miranda eventually abandons her objectification of John/Helios’s body further encourage a reading of her gaze as voyeuristic and fetishistic. Perceiving “in his stillness … the threat of death,” Miranda acknowledges that “[h]e needed warmth and food and medical care. My discovery was not my creation” (7). Later, as she runs for help, she remembers “the coldness of his flesh like a wall between us reminded me that we were separate beings” (8). Her acknowledgement that “[m]y discovery was not my creation,” renders explicit the fact that Miranda (like the typical voyeur or fetishist) has constructed the object. Although Miranda thus renounces an objectifying visual approach to John/Helios’s body, for the time that she does objectify him, whether she perceives him as alive or dead (and correspondingly undervalues or overvalues his body), the way in which he is constructed by her look – as an object for her convenience or pleasure, completely lacking in any individuality or subjectivity – is very similar to the ways in which Miranda and Mother-in-law are positioned by Alfred’s gaze.

The association of John/Helios with these female characters is compounded by the feminisation of his body. This is particularly evident in the way he is repeatedly portrayed in relation to aesthetic signifiers historically and culturally aligned with femininity rather than masculinity. Discussions of the depiction of male and female bodies in traditional and contemporary art forms overwhelmingly describe the association of these figures with opposing characteristics. Male figures are shown engaged in action,\textsuperscript{101} surrounded or invested with signifiers of masculinity,\textsuperscript{102} or transformed into representatives of the phallus through extreme muscularity.\textsuperscript{103} In contrast, female figures are usually depicted as passive, vulnerable and sexually available. They are also frequently portrayed in “largely de-narrativised contexts in which the act of viewing and possessing the body is pre-eminent”

\textsuperscript{101} Dyer (“Don’t” 270-71), Walters (8), Patricia Berman (77), MacKinnon (19), Lehman (Running 92) and Kirkham and Thumim (“You” 15-18, “Me” 23-27).
\textsuperscript{102} D. Morgan (71-72), Joel Sanders (15), Dyer (“Don’t” 273-74), Michael Hatt (“Making” 24, 27) and Elliot Gorn (142).
\textsuperscript{103} Bordo (Male 30), Dyer (“Don’t” 274-76), Walters (8-10), Buchbinder (Performance 52), Dabakis (204, 214, 216) and Garb (“Masculinity” 53).
Female bodies are thus “designed for display and delectation” (Solomon-Godeau 12); male bodies are invested with moral, ethic, heroic and religious, rather than erotic, signifiers, and presented “as if every physical characteristic is meant to tell a story” (Fisher 45). Along with various other discourses, such conventions have been identified by many theorists as aligning men’s bodies with patriarchal power, and consequently mitigating the threat male display poses to the gendered dichotomies that order patriarchal visual relations.

Prostrate, unconscious and wounded, John/Helios’s passivity is emphasised by the way he is shown, “[c]aught between two black granite boulders … fitted neatly into the cleft.” Descriptions of his wounds further suggest the abjection – and associated feminisation – that is characteristic of Jules, Ross and Peter’s bodies. “[H]is wounds,” for instance, “seeped a pale frothy red” (1), indicating a blurring of inside and outside. This abjection is noted by Miranda, who “would not have been surprised,” when she stands on John/Helios’s body, “if [her] weight had squeezed salt water from his pores” (5). As a result of being immersed in the sea John/Helios has become, in a sense, permeable, open to the world in a way that traditional images of men’s bodies resolutely are not. John/Helios is further exposed as a result of having his clothes “torn from most of his body” (1) by the sea. After penetrating and exposing John/Helios’s body, the sea is shown to take him as its possession: it “sighed and sucked and ran in and out of his toes” (1), caressing and claiming ownership of his body in much the same way as Miranda will do.

As well as being feminised by his position as the unwilling and helpless victim of the sea’s (and Miranda’s) lust, John/Helios is (paradoxically) feminised through his association with the sea. An unambiguous symbol of feminine subversion and freedom in Miranda, the sea is the direct opposite of, even the force that opposes, patriarchy. Miranda makes this clear when she compares men, “asserting their ownership, flaunting their sex,” to “dogs lift[ing] their legs around the circumference of their territory.” Despite the best efforts of these dog-men, the sea is impervious to their attempts at ownership, remaining “the only continent on which no man ever left a footmark.” Miranda consoles herself with this thought, knowing that “whatever claims they laid to the earth, the sea eluded their pretences, dissolved their illusions of permanence” (2). The fact that the “shape of him was

104 For discussions of the characteristics of female nudes in Western art, in the context of their difference from male nudes, see Gill Saunders, Berger (45-64), Davis (11-12), Dyer (“Don’t” 267, 269, 274) and Solomon-Godeau (12, 44).
105 See also Brooks (16-17), Dabakis (222), Hatt (“Muscles” 68), Walters (8) and Garb (“Masculinity” 53).
human” even though John/Helios’s “flesh was … of the sea” (5) places him indeterminately between the masculine land and the feminine sea. In this sense, he occupies an analogous position to Miranda, who claims the liminal reef as her refuge: “my place” (2). However, while the association of Miranda with the reef and femininity contributes to the depiction of her strength and difference, it dehumanises John/Helios, consolidating his abjection and objectification in his position as one of the “many dead things” the “sea disgorged” (1).

John/Helios is further feminised by the explicit portrayal of his body as a beautiful, sexualised and visually available object. His arms are raised above his head in a manner Dabakis describes as “that of a gesant – a conventional pose in which women with arms raised above their heads expose their vulnerability to the male gaze” (226). The fact that his “[p]alms [are] upwards, fingers curled” (Scarfe 1), compounds the suggestion of passivity and openness to the gaze suggested by this gesant pose. Likewise, his closed eyes, and the way his “head … turned slightly … away from [Miranda]” (1) and her gaze, presents a traditionally feminine attitude, symbolic of modesty and submission (Dyer, “Don’t” 267). He is further aligned with the traditional female nude of Western art by his de-narrativised position – John/Helios cannot remember where he came from and there is no report of a shipwreck to suggest his origins. Unfixed by narrative context, and the heroic/ethical framework it imbues to the male nude, John/Helios’s body exists purely to be looked at. Additionally, in what might be seen as a parody of the traditional accoutrements of the female figure in Western art, John/Helios’s “black hair [is] mingled with a tangle of seaweed and nodules of sea grapes” (1). In all of these ways, John/Helios’s body is coded in terms of exposure and vulnerability, in ways that indicate erotic surrender and visible availability. Additionally, though more tenuously, the phonetic association of sea and see might be seen to affiliate femininity, looking, and freedom in the novel, in a way that encourages a reading of John/Helios’s exposed, visible, vulnerable and feminised body as subversive of patriarchal dichotomies.

John/Helios’s buttocks, in particular, emerge as the focus of Miranda’s visual and physical desire. Looking down on them, Miranda thinks, “It might be nice to lie on him, to feel the stone of his buttock against my stomach” (5). Similarly, on her way to get help, Miranda looks back with regret, remembering how his “buttocks had been palpable, the flesh cold but springy,” and thinks, “I would like to feel that buttock again springing beneath me” (8). When she is distracted from her rescue by decisions about how best to
disquiet her husband in telling the community about the body she has found, “the thought of [John/Helios’s] buttocks” brings her back to her senses and “set [her] running” (10). Peeking coyly from his trousers, “rounded, perfect” (1), like the breasts of a female nude in the Western art tradition, these buttocks provide a focal point for Miranda’s desire and encourage the reading of his body in terms of sexual availability. Simultaneously, however, the focus on John/Helios’s buttocks – and the subsequent positioning of him on his front – presents a contrast with the traditional pose of the female nude. If lying down, she is most often shown on her back or side in a way that reveals the specifically eroticised features of her body, thus highlighting her sexual passivity, vulnerability and availability. In contrast, John/Helios’s penis is concealed. His pose, therefore, might be interpreted as enacting the cultural veiling that maintains patriarchal power by suppressing the incommensurability of penis and phallus.

There is also a sense, however, in which men’s buttocks (and specifically, their anuses) are more suggestive of exposure and vulnerability than penises. Primarily, this is because anuses can be penetrated and, as Connell puts it, “fucking and being fucked in our heterosexist culture … carry connotations of dominance and submission, active and passive,” and particularly, of male and female, masculinity and femininity (Men 116). Certainly, and corresponding with the focus of Miranda’s gaze, much critical interest has recently been directed towards men’s anuses, specifically, the potential their penetrability has for disrupting and reconfiguring patriarchal and heterosexist constructions of the male body. Combined with previous descriptions of John/Helios’s body as permeable and open to the feminine sea, Miranda’s focus on his buttocks suggests that her desire seeks out, or is motivated by, those elements of his body that depart from the traditionally bounded, closed and hard male body. The ambiguous implications of this focus on John/Helios’s buttocks is maintained by Miranda’s subsequent alignment of his penis with his buttocks. Visiting him in the hospital, Miranda spies the form of his erection under “the coverlet” and cheekily wonders, “His buttock?” (29)

106 See, for example, Leo Bersani, Brian Pronger, Catherine Waldby, Richard Fantina or Thomas (Male and “Reenfleshing”). These studies – like many that investigate alternative forms of male subjectivity or corporeality (like male masochism or abjection) – are limited by their assumption that non-phallic constructions of masculinity and men’s bodies intrinsically subvert patriarchal discourse. Further, and as Modleski asserts, the association of “gay sexuality with femininity” reproduces “an alignment that is … at the heart of a homophobic and misogynist phantasmatics in heterosexual patriarchal culture” (Feminism 148). In the case of John/Helios’s body, however, an interpretation of anality as subversive seems (though not unambiguously) appropriate.
Parker’s analysis of the tradition of “invalided” men in women’s art and fiction enables the consistent wounding and associated feminisation of male characters’ bodies, and the accompanying masculinisation of female characters’ looks, in *Last of the Sane Days*, *The Architect* and *Miranda*, to be situated within a subversive tradition of women’s creative practices. Although acknowledging that “incapacitated men have meant different things in different women’s art at different historical periods” (45), Parker argues that this trope generally signals a “desire to reveal, challenge, transform and destroy the imbalance” (44) between men and women. In an argument that closely resembles Mulvey’s conception of the masculinised female spectator (“Afterthoughts”), Parker identifies wounded male characters as enabling scenarios where female characters (and, presumably, women readers or viewers) can “abandon feminine passivity and reticence” (46) and occupy (or identify with) active narrative roles. This is certainly the case in *The Architect*, where Jules’s wounding enables Donna’s narrative and visual activity. Similarly, John/Helios’s unconsciousness allows Miranda to act, and indeed, to act on his body. The situation is slightly more complex in *Last of the Sane Days*, where Hilary’s desire is tied to Rafael’s feminisation rather than to his pain. Nevertheless, his passivity facilitates her active visual role.

Parker also identifies wounded male characters as more tenable objects of desire for women, precisely because they are feminised: “In order for men to appear desirable they have to resemble the objects of beauty and desire in our society – women” (46). Certainly, John/Helios’s beauty predominantly emerges in the context of aesthetic signifiers associated with female bodies in visual art. And Hilary’s desire is not only facilitated by but produces Rafael’s feminisation. Although the desirability of Jules’s body is not so emphasised, the emotional development prompted by his wounding (discussed in Chapter One) resonates with another of Parker’s assertions. As well as coming to resemble women physically, Parker argues that in experiencing dependence and suffering, the male invalid becomes emotionally and intellectually feminised. Kirkham concurs with Parker’s analysis, asserting that in response to and as the result of experiences of suffering, these powerless male figures learn “‘female’ ways of being” (98), especially the ability to love. As a result, he is again rendered more appealing to women. Gledhill elaborates on such arguments, contending that wounded male characters offer female readers pleasurable fantasies of gender-crossing (“Women” 86) and male and female rapport and similarity (87). According
to this line of reasoning, the trope of wounded and feminised men in *Last of the Sane Days*, *The Architect* and *Miranda* – in enabling the representation of desiring/looking women and desirable/looked-at men – challenges and imaginatively transforms gendered power inequalities.

Stated in this way, Parker’s position can be affiliated with the assertions of many other theorists who variously identify women’s looks/desires and/or men’s bodies/wounds as inevitably subversive of patriarchal discourse. In this context, however, certain points of contention emerge. Primarily, centralising masculinity and femininity in explorations of subjectivity (a characteristic of both Parker’s analysis and these novels) can arguably be seen to result in a failure to challenge, and perhaps even a reinforcement of, dichotomous notions of gender. In other words, and in a way that apparently corroborates the assertions of those theorists who reject the potential of role reversals to produce change, discussions of women’s masculinisation (or, for that matter, femininity) and men’s feminisation (or masculinity) seem in many ways to leave power dynamics unaltered. Whether it is a man or a woman who is masculinised/feminised, masculinity remains the site of activity, desire and the gaze, and femininity the realm of passivity, desirability and visibility. Consequently, the dichotomised conception of subjectivity that underlies and enables patriarchal oppression remains firm. Relatedly, the fact that individual women are empowered (or masculinised), and individual men disempowered (or feminised), does not mean that patriarchy is dismantled. Patriarchy is a system of gender hierarchy that allows men (and whites, heterosexuals, Westerners, etc.), in general, to accrue what Connell terms the “patriarchal dividend” (*Men* 25). Thus, regardless of individual differences within this system, while gender dichotomies remain operative – while they continue to centrally define subjectivity – patriarchal power divisions will remain remarkably resilient.

While such criticisms are easy to make, the formulation of an alternative approach – one that does not refer to female spectators and male spectacles as respectively masculinised and feminised, but nevertheless retains an awareness of social and visual power differentials – has repeatedly posed a conundrum for analyses of (what are generally termed) the female gaze and the male body. The question remains: if women who look and desire are not masculinised and, relatedly, if men who are looked at and desired are not feminised, then what are they? While discussing subjectivity in this way implicitly consolidates patriarchal discourse, to overlook the implications of gendered dichotomies
(not to heed, for example, the feminisation wounded male bodies undergo or the masculinisation to which a female bodybuilder is subject) is to ignore the fundamental ways in which bodies and gender are inscribed within patriarchal discourse.

In one sense, Parker’s article indicates a possible way through this conundrum. Although continually referring to masculinity and femininity, her analysis does not present these gender positions as dichotomous. Rather, in allowing men to move towards femininity and women towards masculinity, Parker conceptualises gender in terms of a continuum – representations of wounded men, in this sense, traverse binary oppositions and, in this way, permit an imaginary rapprochement between men and women. Relatedly, Parker’s analysis implicitly highlights the way in which masculinised female characters and feminised male characters potentially disrupt the naturalised association of masculinity with male bodies, and femininity with female bodies. This, in turn, challenges the presumed alignment of male/female and masculinity/femininity with other binary oppositions like active/passive and subject/object, and thus undermines the naturalness of patriarchal power differentials. From this perspective, the resonance between the novels discussed in this chapter and Parker’s analysis would seem to imply that, in terms of the representation of gender reversals at least, these texts can be seen as positive in feminist terms.

Despite the logical force of such an argument, gender reversals in these novels do not always denaturalise, and in some cases they actually reinforce, patriarchal dichotomies. Further, and as a variety of commentators have argued, the ultimate political meaning of texts often depends not on whether men’s bodies and women’s looks are feminised or masculinised, but on what is done with such gender reversals. What matters, in other words, is whether potentially disruptive representations of feminised men and masculinised women are recaptured in patriarchal discourse and thus disavowed, or whether the denaturalising possibilities created by gender reversals are allowed to remain a site of (and, indeed, the definition of what Butler famously describes as) “gender trouble.” From this perspective, various questions present themselves in relation to the gender reversals in these fictions. Are female characters stopped from or punished for looking and desiring, as Williams describes in her analysis of classic horror films (“When”)? Correlatively, are male characters protected from the demeaning implications of objectification and/or “remasculinized” (Jeffords, Remasculinization), a plot trajectory that dramatises not a crisis in patriarchal power relations, but an ultimate male triumph over adversity and the return of
male characters to positions of visual, sexual and narrative supremacy? In regards to *The Architect*, the answer to both questions is yes. Even during their initial interactions in the hospital, Jules’s visibility is mitigated while Donna’s gaze is disabled. Subsequently, Jules is insidiously remasculinised while Donna is refeminised. In this sense, at least, this novel thus resonates with the numerous analyses of male visibility that chart the various conventionalising frameworks and discourses which function to mitigate and foreclose on the threatening consequences of male visibility and female vision.

The medical discourse that frames their initial meeting is one of the principal ways in which the potentially subversive implications of Jules’s visibility and wounding, and Donna’s vision, are controlled. At first glance, Jules’s position as an object of medical surveillance seems to subvert patriarchal discourse by challenging the construction of men as subjects and women as objects of the gaze. In actuality, however, this medical framework disavows Jules’s position as a visually available object by supplying a pragmatic and decidedly non-erotic reason for his visibility: he is visible, in other words, because he is wounded and in need of medical attention, not for the purpose of display and scopophilia.  

In particular, this medical framework mitigates the threatening consequences of Jules’s visibility because it situates his body within a narrative. As noted when discussing the coding of John/Helios’s body in relation to aesthetic signifiers of femininity, de-narrativised representations render the body’s visibility and desirability pre-eminent. Contrastingly, medicine tells stories about bodies: by translating symptoms and proposing both what has occurred and will happen, the medical framework ensconces Jules’s body in a narrative and thus reduces the extent to which he functions as a visual object. Correspondingly, although Donna’s voyeuristic approach to Jules’s body renders her gaze implicitly desiring (voyeurism is, after all, primarily a form of scopophilia), the medical framework that surrounds their interactions insistently enlists her (potentially) erotic look for pragmatic purposes. In this sense, while her view of his body in terms of input, output, and percentage of skin burned, dehumanises Jules, it simultaneously conceals his corporeality.

Significantly, and in a way that firmly challenges a reading of gender reversals as inevitably subversive, this medical framework functions to mitigate the troubling consequences of a female character looking at a male character’s body by affirming rather

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107 Lehman provides an extensive analysis of the ways in which medical/scientific discourses control and limit the subversive potential of the visible male body (*Running* 131-46).
than negating Jules’s feminisation and Donna’s masculinisation. As Parpart asserts, a woman’s medical look signals a “stark reversal of the medical or anatomic gaze that conventionally serves as a ‘masculine’ right to peer [at and] into female bodies” (“Cowards” 265). While Donna’s masculinisation is thus reinforced by her medical role, Jules’s feminisation is compounded by his position as patient. According to Doane, for instance, femininity is associated “within patriarchal configurations … with the pathological … both [are] socially devalued or undesirable, marginalized elements which constantly threaten to infiltrate and contaminate that which is more central, health or masculinity” (“Clinical” 152). Instead of denaturalising the association of masculinity and the male body/femininity and the female body, the strength of the conventions that align medicine with masculinity and disease with femininity render Jules’s feminisation and Donna’s masculinisation unnatural. The medical discourse framing their interaction, in other words, distances Jules from the threatening implications of his damaged (visible and passive) body, and distinguishes Donna from the active and controlling role she assumes in relation to his body: femininity, not Jules, is pathologised and objectified, and masculinity, rather than Donna, is affirmed as central, healthy and in control. Thus, as Neale asserts, the feminisation of a male character’s body functions to prevent masculinity, in general, from being tainted by the demeaning implications of display (286). The unnaturalness of Jules’s feminisation and Donna’s masculinisation thence facilitates Jules’s (re)masculinisation and Donna’s (re)feminisation – gender transformations that appear as reassertions of a natural order.

Similarly, while the portrayal of Jules’ s body in terms of damage seems to challenge and disrupt hegemonic constructions of the male body as invulnerable and whole, this framework also mitigates the violation of conventional looking structures entailed by his visibility. As Davis asserts,

… the only way [the] specular male may be born by conventional standards is to reinstate control in an implied third party who forces passivity upon the male figure.

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108 Significantly, Giuliana Bruno’s analysis of the origins of cinema in Italy in the 1900s suggests an historical and epistemological rather than simply a metaphorical association between the cinematic gaze and relationship between the (male) doctor’s eyes and the (female) patient’s body. As Bruno demonstrates, cinema emerged at a time when public anatomy lessons were popular. Overwhelmingly, women’s bodies were the preferred sites/sights of dissection (invariably performed by male doctors). Bruno contends that such displays generated, or at least contributed to the creation of, a particular notion of the female body that was then transferred to cinematic representation.
This passivity traditionally comes in the form of physical suffering, extreme as a punishment and an absolution for passivity. (13)

Given that the victimiser in this scenario is “presumed to be male,” Davis argues that the representation of wounded male bodies reincorporates the feminising effects of passivity into a structure that is wholly masculine – “a triad of masculinity – viewer, viewed, and third, active party” (13). Solomon-Godeau similarly concludes that representations of wounded male bodies encourage a reading that does not challenge patriarchal discourse, but for a different reason. Discussing the depiction of ephebic male bodies in Neo-classical French art, she asserts that, in order to present these bodies without upsetting the visual and economic codes of that society, the “rhetorical sign of pathos” was invoked (124). The troping of pathos works to elevate weakness to tragedy and passivity to stoic suffering. Significantly, such pathos is identified as reinforcing, while compelling sympathy for, the notion of a masculinity crisis.

Both of these elements – the implied activity of a masculine third party and the rhetoric of pathos – are present in the depiction of Jules’s wounded body. He is wounded when a truck hits his motorbike. The impact of these two very masculine symbols creates a homosocial relation which, to use Davis’s phraseology, absolves his passivity. Indeed, the fact that Jules manages to escape from such a terrible accident with his life actually affirms his masculinity. Similarly, the pathos encouraged by the severity of his wounds sublimes a potentially desiring look into a sympathetic one. Combined with his stoicism, such pathos transforms him into an heroic figure, evoking sympathy and admiration.

Donna’s gaze is secondary to this homosocial structure. At the same time, her visual response to Jules’s wounds further mitigates their (potentially) subversive effect by demonstrating and encouraging pathos. Although she initially objectifies Jules’s body, as soon as he speaks, Donna feels compelled to “take a proper look at the unburnt part of him” (6). This engaged look causes Donna to wonder about Jules’s history, ethnicity and age. Thus, rather than dehumanising and objectifying him, her look individuates Jules. What she sees invokes such pathos in Donna that she goes from being emotionally dead to finding herself “almost capable of compassion again” (15). Instead of handing in her resignation, she remains in the hospital to care for (rather than objectify) Jules, even taking on the tasks

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109 Reid Gilbert makes a similar argument in relation to male exposure on the stage.
110 Jules is not upset or afraid, or even in shock, when admitted to hospital. Instead, and despite difficulty even breathing due to the fluid collecting on his lungs, he speaks calmly, even philosophically, to Donna, and is concerned not for himself, but for cat.
of feeding his cat and goldfish. Thus the novel encourages a reading of Jules’s wounds as deserving of compassion, sympathy and respect. Accordingly, the fact that Donna’s gaze correspondingly shifts, in this “proper look,” from his body to his face and hands – “the unburnt part of him” – indicates another meaning for proper: namely, appropriate or socially acceptable.

This transformation in Donna’s gaze accords with another aspect of Parker’s analysis. Parker argues that the presence of “invalided” male figures conceals as well as facilitates (or, indeed, facilitates in part by concealing) women’s desire by providing scenarios in which “unacceptable feelings of sexual desire” appear as expressions of “maternal pity” (46). According to Parker, such a strategy circumvents patriarchal restrictions against representations of women’s desire. J. Miller agrees, asserting that such “circumspection has been required and learned as part of men’s ambiguous inclusion of [women] in a condition of dependence. … not only physical, social and economic but also impeding of assertions of anything resembling a specifically woman’s viewpoint” (44). Such assertions seem to cast the transformation in Donna’s look (from desiring to caring) as a guerrilla strategy – a façade that allows women’s desires to be guardedly imagined within a patriarchal environment entirely hostile to their representation. However, sublimated representations of women’s desire do not seem so different (either in appearance or consequence) from the conventionalising frameworks and discourses surrounding and mitigating male display: both ultimately function to recapture (potentially) subversive representations back into a form that is appropriate or acceptable within patriarchal discourse. Ultimately, Parker seems to agree, identifying the change from desire to care in female characters’ relation to wounded male characters’ bodies as an effect and an indication of the strength of patriarchal discourse: “Traditional power relations are tenacious – casting the man as the invalid almost invariably transforms the woman into his mother” (48). Jules’s wounding, in this sense, enables a disavowal of Donna’s desire as well as his visibility.

Immediately following Donna’s “proper look” at Jules, he returns her gaze and the dynamics change completely. Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* famously explores the notion of a returned gaze, or “the Other’s look,” with the example of a man looking through a keyhole (259-73). While Sartre’s voyeur is able to see the person inside the room yet remain unseen, he believes himself to be omnipotent and disembodied. Yet as soon as
someone catches him looking, his look “loses its power” and becomes embodied: the “Other’s look confers spatiality [and temporality] upon me” (266). “With the Other’s look,” writes Sartre, “I am no longer master of the situation” (265). The returned gaze thus collapses the mastery of the spectator and demonstrates that other viewing-subject positions are available, indeed, are always in play. While Sartre, like Mulvey, conceives of the gaze as sadistic and disempowering, his conception of a returned gaze rejects the notion that looking is a unidirectional relationship – an understanding upon which Mulvey’s notion of objectification is predicated. As a result, the fixity of dichotomies that is central to Mulvey’s theory (active/passive, subject/object and spectator/spectacle) is also challenged. Thus, Sartre’s description of a returned gaze makes it possible to understand visual interactions as always potentially capable of transgressing and destabilising binary oppositions.

It is possible to argue that, in their interactions in the hospital, Jules’s gaze blurs, and perhaps even dissolves, the distinctions between active/passive, subject/object and spectator/spectacle that underlie and facilitate Donna’s voyeurism. Calling Donna “a nurse with hard eyes” (7), Jules observes, and subsequently challenges her voyeuristic look. When he asserts himself as a subject rather than an object, the “automatic goes out of [Donna’s] smile” (6). Donna “touch[es] his hair … strok[e]s it back from his eyes,” further uncovering his gaze and dissolving the voyeuristic distance previously established between them. Donna feels that Jules’s returned gaze has “spied out some thin thread of feeling left over from the time when I used to believe, and he’s tying me to himself with this relic of my frayed humanity” (8). In this way, Jules’s returned gaze might be seen to instigate a reciprocal relationship between them which removes their interaction from the patriarchal visual realm of domination and submission.

Nevertheless, various elements of Jules’s visual engagement with Donna problematise a reading of their relationship as equitable. There is a very strong sense in which Jules’s gaze becomes pre-eminent in their interaction, not only negating but replacing Donna’s voyeurism. When Jules looks at Donna, his gaze is shown to assert itself to the point where she feels, “[h]is gaze is too bright. It imprisons me.” While she is able to “pull away” (6) from this look momentarily, Jules again reasserts himself, he again “holds [her] gaze as if he is delving into some secretive place” (7). Rather than forging an equitable and reciprocal bond between them, Jules’s gaze seems male (as Mulvey employs
the term) and, in turn, very similar to the voyeuristic look he later directs at Chloe’s body. Put another way, the visual power Jules exerts over Donna represents a reassertion of his masculinity: returning and disabling Donna’s gaze counteracts, in other words, the possible feminising effects of his passive and debilitated position.¹¹¹ The triumph of Jules’s returned gaze suggests that Sartre was able to theorise looking relations as undoing binary oppositions precisely because he does not consider the implications and importance of the distinctions between male/female and masculine/feminine in the visual economy.

Thus, while the depiction of Jules and Donna’s visual interactions in the hospital differs from the patriarchal visual economy described by Mulvey, on the whole, the meanings that arise from, and the frameworks and conventions imposed upon, descriptions of his body and her gaze, function to uphold and affirm traditional patriarchal power differentials. In this sense, the depiction of men’s bodies and women’s looks, and the consequences of such portrayals, are remarkably similar in The Architect and The Full Monty. Male characters, in both texts, are restored to power through the visibility of their non-hegemonic bodies, and as a result of female characters’ acceptance of (rather than desire for) these bodies.¹¹² In demonstrating the extraordinary malleability of patriarchal power (the way in which even events or performances that seem unproblematically to undermine patriarchal discourse may in fact affirm the divisions of power that such a system creates and perpetuates) both texts once again confirm the necessity of attending to context when exploring representations of gender and corporeality.

Based on the number of studies that chart such a plot trajectory, the portrayal of a disruption in, followed by a reassertion of, male power is a common theme in many texts. As noted already, various theorists identify this celebratory narrative of male triumph as reassuring and conservative, in that it stages a resolution to (while perpetuating concern for) masculinity crisis. The remarkable recurrence of this plot suggests the central position the discourse of masculinity crisis has come to assume in the contemporary Western cultural consciousness. Simultaneously, however, the prevalence of studies of masculinities or men’s bodies that identify instabilities in male power only to immediately demonstrate the ways in which these forms of transgression are recaptured and contained (usually, as in the

¹¹¹ Accordingly, theorists like Bordo (Male 186-88) and Dyer (“Don’t” 269) demonstrate that the depiction or description of male figures glaring challengingly back at the spectator is a means of rejecting the position of spectacle.

¹¹² Although the men in The Full Monty undress in the context of a strip show, the women who watch do not leer and grab at the men, but cheer asexually and affirmatively.
above analysis of *The Architect*, through the identification of various conventionalising frameworks and discourses surrounding male display)\(^{113}\) seems to have created an orthodoxy of its own. The counterpart of those studies that interpret non-hegemonic men’s bodies as inevitably subversive of patriarchal discourse, this approach works from the assumption that certain common frameworks and discourses will entirely, or at least effectively, foreclose on any subversive implications of the representation of a loss of male power. In such studies, it can sometimes seem as if almost any representation of masculinity or male corporeality can be shown, in one way or another, ultimately to reinforce, reproduce, or be accommodated by, patriarchal conventions. Such studies entail and institute a pessimistic view of the potential of representations of masculinities or men’s bodies to produce, or even to signal, changes in gender relations.

If the presence of frameworks identified as conventionalising inevitably (or at least effectively) forecloses on the troubling implications of male visibility, then the explicit youthfulness of John/Helios and Rafael’s bodies must be understood as reinscribing their exposure, eroticisation and feminisation within patriarchal discourse. Both historically (Greer, Solomon-Godeau) and in contemporary advertising contexts (Bordo, *Male* 192), it is overwhelmingly young, rather than mature, men’s bodies that are depicted and eroticised. This tendency is seen to protect real (mature) men from the demeaning implications of display because, as Gardiner puts it, contemporary society “define[s] being a man not only in opposition to being a woman or a male homosexual but in opposition to being a boy” (‘Theorizing’ 91).\(^{114}\) The persistence of traditional power relations created by the sexualisation of only young men’s bodies can be seen (paradoxically) in Greer’s assertion that, “The boy is the missing term in the discussion of the possibility of a female gaze. Women may not frankly evaluate a man’s physical attractiveness but a boy is in no position to object” (228). While Greer’s argument shifts the terms of the patriarchal visual economy,

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\(^{113}\) See, for example, Tasker, Vincendeau (‘Beast’s’; ‘From’), Daley (paras 3-5), Hunt (69-73), Cohan (*Masked* 64) and Marjorie Kibby and Brigid Costello (357-60) and Brent Malin. Tom Lutz’s analysis of male melodramas in a notable exception to this critical pattern. While acknowledging that “a flashpoint for tears in melodramatic films is always an image of role fulfilment” (186), he insists that in male weepies, “that return is always a notably compromised or transformed version of the role” (189).

\(^{114}\) Buchbinder adds old men to this equation, asserting that the “aging male body – often figured as losing its physical definition, as feminised, or even as decrepit and decaying – constitutes a rupture in the discursive flows of power amongst men in our culture” (“Unruly” 19). Perhaps the distinction between men and boys is the reason boyhood is such a focus for the popular discourse of masculinity crisis. Just as the eroticisation of young rather than mature male bodies protects men from the demeaning implications of male display, discussion of a crisis in boyhood arguably provides a way of posing (and thus, perpetuating concern for) the idea of masculinity crisis, while maintaining a reassuring distance between this crisis – and its connotations of fear, instability, difficulty and pain – and men generally.
it maintains the same power dynamics present in interactions between seeing male and blind female characters in many of these fictions. Indeed, Greer’s statement, though apparently liberating, actually presents the absence of adult men from a visual economy in which women might look as an unchangeable fact.

John/Helios and Rafael are certainly boys rather than men. Miranda thinks John/Helios might be eighteen or nineteen. His youth is compounded by the fact that he has lost his memory, or perhaps even suffered brain damage, as a result of the accident that brings him to the reef. The description of the sea from which he came as “the great bloodied womb of life” (82), infantilises him further. While Rafael is not childlike, his youth is emphasised by Hilary’s relative maturity. This difference is reinforced by frequent references to his childhood perception of her as an awe-inspiring and enigmatic adult, and by Hilary’s position as Rafael’s godmother. Following the logic elaborated above, John/Helios and Rafael’s explicit youthfulness sustains – or, at most, blurs but does not subvert – the traditional dictate that men see while women are seen.

Given the malleability and pervasiveness of patriarchal discourse, and the prevalence of texts where male power is threatened and then reasserted, such an approach is, in one sense, prudent. After all, if representations of damaged or disenfranchised (or even eroticised) men inevitably indicated a general loss of male power, then patriarchal society would have collapsed long ago. Indeed, such logic would ironically locate one of the main challenges to patriarchal power in the Christian church and its iconography of crucifixion. Nevertheless, and as MacKinnon notes, the continual critical insistence on the strength of the conventions surrounding and apparently determining representations of men’s bodies also constitutes, in certain circumstances at least, “a peculiarly academic form of disavowal” (16).115 Theoreticians, in other words, are not immune from the taboos of the social world they both assess and inhabit. Portrayals of John/Helios and Rafael’s bodies challenge a reading of certain frameworks and discourses as inevitably conventionalising. Specifically, although their bodies are described in terms of wounding and medicine – frameworks that in The Architect function to protect Jules from, and mitigate the demeaning implications of, male visibility – in Miranda and Last of the Sane Days, these

115 MacKinnon supports this assertion by wryly noting the sudden interest of his students in active reading (vigorous identifications of various inflections of race, age, class, ethnicity and sexuality) when confronted with texts containing even the possibility of male objectification or eroticisation.
frameworks do not occlude, and in fact can be seen to realise the transgressiveness of, their exposed, eroticised and feminised bodies.

While on the reef, John/Helios’s body, like Jules’s in the hospital, is rendered visible in the context of its wounding. However, while Jules’s wounds absolve his passivity, imbue it with pathos and create a pragmatic reason for his exposure, John/Helios’s wounds produce none of these effects. Rather than being caused by a masculine third party, his condition is the result of an overtly feminine aggressor (the sea). Further, his wounded body invokes sexual desire and curiosity, not pathos, in Miranda. The aesthetic signifiers of femininity that concurrently inform the depiction of his body emphasise the erotic connotations of his wounds, while the lack of pity Miranda expresses for his body is exaggerated to such an extraordinary degree that his damaged body is entirely removed from the realm of pathos. Although Rafael is in pain, his crisis is internal and invisible and, in this sense, causes but does not frame his passivity or visibility. Nevertheless, and like Jules’s, his body is presented in the context of an explicitly medical framework, operative through a female character’s gaze. Yet rather than narrativising and/or pragmatising Rafael’s visibility, Hilary’s medical gaze is explicitly and repeatedly sexualised, especially in its construction as the epitome of voyeurism. As a result, the medical framework contributes to, rather than detracts from, Rafael’s eroticisation. At the same time, this medical framework legitimises Hilary’s vision by ensconcing it within a recognised and respected tradition. In providing a vehicle for, and emphasising the sexualised nature of, a woman’s look at a man’s body, the medical framework – like John/Helios’s wounds – actualises the subversive implications of Rafael’s visibility, passivity and vulnerability.

In a way that is also overtly similar to the visual interaction between Donna and Jules at the beginning of *The Architect*, John/Helios is shown to return Miranda’s look. However, in contrast to Jules’s returned gaze, John/Helios’s look does not overwhelm and disable Miranda’s vision, nor does it (re)assert his masculinity. Miranda is “looking down at [John/Helios]” – from the voyeur’s position of control and omnipotence – when “[i]n the white shell of face one eye glared back.” The “shock of that opening in his face, the vision of life pulsating inside,” causes Miranda to cry out in alarm. Although thereby rendered significant, John/Helios’s returned gaze is only momentary, and is not overpowering like Jules’s – “A second and the periwinkle hood of lid closed shielding itself from all further
danger” (4). The association of his gaze with the body of a fragile mollusc, albeit with a protective casing, reinforces its relative powerlessness (while arguably providing a far more accurate description of the nature and organ of vision than the penetrating, controlling beam implied by notions of objectification and visual power). With the cessation of John/Helios’s gaze, Miranda resumes her objectification of his body, but changes from a voyeuristic to a fetishistic approach. Thus, while his returned gaze disrupts, it does not prevent, John/Helios’s visibility.

At the same time, and in a way that (like Miranda’s shout) reinforces the significance of a bi- rather than a uni-directional looking relationship, it is her memory of John/Helios’s eye (along with his buttocks) that eventually prompts Miranda to seek help. Unlike Jules’s gaze, therefore, and because it does not overpower and disable, Miranda’s vision of John/Helios’s eye initiates an awareness of mutuality that corresponds with and supports Sartre’s notion of vision as always potentially transgressive of binary divisions. This interpretation is compounded by the association of his eye and his buttocks (an explicit site of transgression in the narrative). The fact that both buttocks and eye are marked as soft and potentially penetrable also reinforces the sense in which Miranda’s desire is motivated by those aspects of John/Helios’s body that deviate from the traditionally bounded, hard male body. Thus, while in The Architect, Jules’s wounds, the medical context in which they are seen, and his returned gaze, motivate the transformation of Donna’s gaze from desire to concern, and so protect Jules from the demeaning implications of male display, in Miranda and Last of the Sane Days these same elements occlude neither female desire nor male visibility. In this way they realise, rather than foreclose on, the potential transgressiveness of John/Helios and Rafael’s exposure, eroticisation and feminisation.

Nevertheless, and again as in The Architect, the portrayal of male characters’ bodies in these narratives involve, to an extent at least, a process of (re)masculinisation. Although John/Helios’s body is described in a way that evokes aesthetic signifiers traditionally associated with femininity, references to his body as a marble statue at least partly reincorporate him into an aesthetic context conventionally associated with masculinity. Like ethical/heroic conventions or medical discourse, certain aesthetic conventions – particularly sculptural ones – have been shown to control and diminish the violation of patriarchal looking relations entailed by male visibility. Garb, for instance, asserts that, “Art
transform[s] the naked into the nude and thereby occlude[s] its sexual connotations.” Men’s bodies, presented in the context of sculptural conventions, “came rather to signify the pure, the ideal” (“Forbidden” 40).\textsuperscript{116} Miranda describes John/Helios as “a statue fixed in watery blueness,” and notes that, where his skin is “whole it showed a marble blueness” (1). Similarly, the description of his face as “that blue marble carapace” (4) creates an image of a hard casing for his body, a shell he is able to hide within. Even the “buttock” that “protrude[s] from his trousers” is described as a “stone” (1). These sculptural elements accord with Hatt’s notes on the traditional portrayal of male bodies:

> The male body should be hard and impermeable as a sculpture …. [This is] a way of stabilizing the male nude and mitigating the threats it pose[s], as well as denying the weakness of the male flesh. … Nude, not naked; bronze, not flesh; strong, not weak; clean and solid, participating in a culture without displaying the characteristics of femininity. (“Muscles” 67-68)

Drawing on Hatt’s statement, the description of John/Helios’s body in terms of marble, sculpture and stone can be seen to associate him with the hardness, impenetrability and strength of the masculine, rather than the feminine, subject position. Significantly, and in accordance with Garb’s statement, Hatt goes on to argue that the depiction or description of male bodies as sculptural refers the spectator to the aesthetic qualities of its display rather than “the erotic pleasures of the body” (68), thereby lessening the extent of John/Helios’s sexualisation.

A similar process of (re)masculinisation occurs towards the end of \textit{Last of the Sane Days}. Particularly after Hilary’s look changes from “love” to “pity” (149), Rafael attempts to resist and reject her gaze, believing that his passive “dependence” on her is “at the root of his sickness and deterioration.” Repeatedly expressing the desire to “free himself of her” (240) – to “be free” – Rafael believes that only when Hilary is “gone” (237) will he “find the strength to get on with his life” (240). However, Rafael does not simply wish to escape from the position of feminisation he occupies in relation to her gaze. Before she leaves his life, he longs to reverse their relationship, to place Hilary in a passive and feminised position while claiming activity and masculinity for himself. Thus, his belief that “[i]t was time to take his life in hand … to restore some balance and dignity to his condition,” can be interpreted as a desire to return to the masculine side of the binary opposition – to reassert a “balance” that is paradoxically achieved through inequality. Thus, he fantasises about

\textsuperscript{116} For further discussions of aesthetic conventions that minimise the threat posed by male display see Hatt (“Muscles” 67-68), Potts (“Beautiful” 24-48; \textit{Flesh} 1), Curnow (75-82) and Solomon-Godeau (88, 185, 193).
punishing Hilary, of “mak[ing] her feel just a fraction of what he had endured day after day” (240). Given the association of Rafael’s pain with masculinity crisis (particularly manifested in an inability to perform masculinity effectively), his attempt to end his pain by occupying a masculine role represents a desire to overcome crisis. To a certain extent, Rafael’s strategy works: Hilary is consigned to the position Rafael occupies through the novel, and left feeling “so helpless, so paralysed. Unable to go forward or back” (227).

However, neither John/Helios nor Rafael is entirely (re)masculinised. Even descriptions of John/Helios’s body in terms of marble, statue and stone contain elements which render the association of such references with masculinity ambiguous. The terms “carapace,” for instance, aligns his body with hardness and impermeability, but simultaneously suggests disguise, an attitude traditionally associated with the feminine subject position. Similarly, although described as “a statue fixed in watery blueness,” such fixity is troubled by “the quivering light [that] zigzagged off its surface” (1) – an image of movement and mutability contrasting with the permanence and immobility of statuary. Additionally, it is only where his skin is “whole” that it shows a marble blueness. Thus, descriptions of his impermeability contain within them an acknowledgement of parts of his body that are not whole, that are, in fact, mortal, vulnerable and permeable. Even the constant references to his body as blue marble associate him with the feminine subversion represented by the sea. Indeed, it is the sea itself, and his immersion in it, that turns “[a]ll the blood in him … to ice” (1).

Rafael similarly oscillates between traditionally masculine and feminine positions. This is especially evident in the way that, even as he attempts to reject Hilary’s gaze, he continues to desire, and imagine himself in relation to it. Indeed, at one point, his desire for her gaze is so strong that he injures himself – by smashing a shop window with his fists – and then thrusts his bloody hands in her face screaming, “Do you believe me now?” (230), desperate that she affirm the reality of his pain. His oscillation between masculinity and femininity – and the related ambivalence of his feelings regarding Hilary’s gaze – are particularly evident in her penetration of Rafael’s body:

… he was overcome by an irresistible urge to give himself to her, to let her do whatever she wished. The needle penetrated the pale skin inside his elbow and he watched as the plunger went down. … [H]e felt himself sink into a bottomless pool, his body spiralling downward until he could no longer see the light. Already the cold liquid had entered his veins, pulsing through the tree of his vessels and
tightening its clutch on his heart. In a frenzy he tore the syringe from his arm and woke himself up.

As he lay gasping on the bed, the murky darkness still in his veins, his hatred was so pure it gave him fresh life. She had used and discarded and deceived him. And worst of all, she pitied him. If he did not despise her he would have to despise himself. (228)

At first, Rafael willingly adopts a traditionally feminine, and sexualised role, relinquishing control and offering his body to Hilary. Upon feeling the stultifying effects of penetration, however, he furiously rejects this subordinate position and forcibly rouses himself. Despite his efforts, however, “the murky darkness” of passivity remains “in his veins” (228), a metaphor for the ambivalence of his simultaneous masculinisation and feminisation.

Although a common argument and device, a simultaneously masculine and feminine subject does not necessarily subvert patriarchal discourse. As described in the Introduction, representations of male figures with both masculine and feminine characteristics are increasingly seen to indicate not an eradication or a subversion, but an appropriation of gender difference in the service of male power. Savran, for instance, identifies reflexive sadomasochism – which describes an individual who occupies “subject positions … marked historically as both masculine and feminine” (9) – as characteristic of contemporary hegemonic (and oppressive) forms of white masculinity. Specifically, he argues that reflexive sadomasochism “relentlessly reproduces a tough male subject who proves his toughness by subjugating and battering his (feminised) [internalised] other” (190). In Miranda and Last of the Sane Days, however, John/Helios and Rafael do not so much colonise gender difference, as oscillate rather helplessly between the poles of masculinity and femininity. Their portrayal consequently destabilises the polarity of these positions as well as their naturalness, and produces gender performances that challenge established dichotomies. In particular, these ambiguously masculine and feminine, active and passive, soft and hard male bodies suggest an alternative not only to the construction of male bodies as masculinised, but to difference as it is imagined within patriarchal discourse, where “everything that is not … in line with traditional masculinity is autonomically considered other, that is, feminine” (Flannigan-Saint-Aubin, 239). Ultimately, it is much as Parker asserts: the desirability of these bodies arises from their ability to subvert patriarchal power differentials, just as their subversiveness arises from their desirability.
Significantly, however, and in contrast to the texts Parker analyses, in *Miranda* and *Last of the Sane Days*, female desire for these ambiguously gendered male bodies is not transformed into care or concern for their disempowerment. In fact, the failure to transform is made explicit in *Miranda* and, to a greater extent, in *Last of the Sane Days*, by the coding of Miranda and Hilary as bound to care for the wounded male bodies they desire. As with Donna’s position as Jules’s nurse, there is an expectation that both Miranda, as John/ Helios’s rescuer, and Hilary, as Rafael’s doctor and godmother, will care for these male bodies; this expectation of care is compounded by the social construction of women as naturally caring. However, whereas Donna’s momentary objectification of Jules’s body is immediately sublimated into an appropriate (proper) attitude of care, Miranda and Hilary’s care-lessness persists. While the contrast thereby established between the obligation to, and their lack of, care, might logically be seen to signify a criticism of objectification, this interpretation is frustrated in both novels.

In *Miranda*, such a reading is countered by the sympathetic portrayal of Miranda, and by the construction of her care-lessness as play. In a way that is predominantly childlike – inquisitive, candid and largely ingenuous – she rejoices in finding John/Helios on the reef as it gives her the opportunity to experiment with a male body. Nevertheless, when she realises (with the more adult, analytic side of her personality) that he is in mortal danger, she stops such experimentation. Thus, her careless-playful approach to John/Helios’s body is depicted as an engaging, though not excessive, response to Miranda’s abusive, and hence pitiable, marital situation. This interpretation is supported by the positive portrayal of Miranda’s subsequent curiosity regarding John/Helios’s body. Although her gaze never again manifests the specific operations of voyeurism and fetishism, as soon as John/Helios is safe Miranda’s curiosity returns, and she resumes investigating his (often naked) body in a way that reveals little interest in his individuality. (Again, only when his life is in danger – when the whalers attempt to harpoon him or when Alfred beats him – does Miranda desist, momentarily, from this attitude.) Interest only in the body is generally taken as definitive of objectification and condemned as indicative of shallowness or superficiality. In *Miranda*, however, and as will be extensively discussed in Chapter Five, Miranda’s interest in John/Helios’s body produces, and becomes representative of, a feminist community concerned with creating and claiming women’s
knowledge and strength. Thus, her care-less attitude towards his body is both justified by
the narrative and given an elevated, political meaning.

While the representation and consequences of the conjunction between women’s
vision and men’s visibility in *Miranda* and *The Architect* are, therefore, very different,
these texts are strikingly similar in one, important way: centrally concerned with unequal
gendered looking relations, both novels begin with, yet never again depict, a female
character objectifying a male character’s body. From one perspective, the fact that these
novels begin with such interactions reinforce their critique of patriarchal visual relations.
Specifically, the resonance established between depictions of women objectifying men’s
bodies and later examples of men objectifying women’s bodies (and the way in which both
male and female characters are shown to be oppressed and threatened by such
objectification) produces a general condemnation of looking relations based on power and
control. At the same time, the portrayal of both men and women as objectifying promotes a
version of *equality*. Rejecting the easy assumption that female desire is necessarily positive
and subversive, these novels imply that both men and women oppress and are oppressed.
This suggests a potential way forward in theorising visual relations outside of the rigid
dichotomies that characterise studies such as Mulvey’s.

But what form of equality do these narratives thereby suggest? Given that they
begin with women objectifying men, and that subsequent instances of voyeurism and
fetishism are therefore contextualised by these examples, both *The Architect* and *Miranda*
might be seen to establish a framework that negates a feminist reading of the interactions
between blind female and seeing male characters. Rather than acknowledging that men –
despite recently entering the visual economy as objects – have exerted, and continue to
exert, visual power over women’s bodies, these narratives perhaps imply equality. Even
more than this, in presenting female characters as the initial objectifiers, these texts
potentially construct them as the main objectifiers also, thus shifting attention onto men’s
rather than women’s oppression and pain. This interpretation is too extreme in relation to
*Miranda*, where repeated descriptions of female characters as visually, socially and
physically oppressed compel an acknowledgement of women as the principal victims of
gender inequality. Accordingly, while Miranda stops objectifying John/Helios when his life
is in danger, Alfred is quite willing to cause Miranda’s (intellectual and emotional, and
possibly, literal) death by having her interned in “the madhouse” (162). Ultimately,
Miranda’s objectification of John/Helios’s body seems to function as the means by which his body can be imagined initially as desirable and her gaze as desiring – a means that is subsequently rejected as Miranda explores other ways of looking, investigating, understanding and (at times) desiring men’s bodies. In *The Architect*, however, Jules’s strength and stoicism enable him to reject the construction of his body as a visually available object for Donna. Not only is Jules subsequently shown to triumph, in a sense, over Donna but, because Chloe ambivalently accepts such a relation, she is shown to be somehow at fault.

The expectation that Hilary will care for Rafael is compounded by her dual role as doctor and godmother. Yet while Miranda eventually stops objectifying John/Helios in order to save his life, Hilary persists in her voyeurism until Rafael suicides: he dies, it seems, because she does not stop objectifying him. A reading of Hilary as failing in her duty of care is reinforced by the sense of transgression implied by the ambiguously incestuous nature of the erotic triangle constructed around Hilary, Rafael and his mother, and by Eva and Rafael’s names (Eva invokes Eve’s original sin while Rafael means God’s healing). Given the significant and sympathetically presented indicators of masculinity crisis in this novel, the fact that Hilary’s gaze also frustrates Rafael’s (re)assumption of masculinity, along with the sympathetic portrayal of his pain and suicide, conceivably compounds the novel’s critique of her (and, potentially, women’s) vision. However, despite the logical force of this argument, Hilary is not constructed as the villain, and Rafael the victim. Although objectifying visual relations are repeatedly condemned, both Hilary and Rafael are presented as similarly “helpless” (227) in the seemingly inexorable movement of their relationship towards mutual pain.

This interpretation is supported by the fact that Hilary’s medical gaze is not the only form of objectification represented and censured. The aerial and militaristic view Rafael remembers achieving from the cockpit of a fighter plane is repeatedly aligned with Hilary’s medical voyeurism. Accordingly, although Rafael no longer has access to such a gaze, both characters – and, by association, both men and women – are potentially able to exercise oppressive visual power. Indeed, constructing others as objects, particularly by adopting a voyeuristic gaze, is portrayed as the only form of subjectivity conceivable within the visually dominated, patriarchal society depicted in *Last of the Sane Days*. While the ultimate failure of both forms of vision represents an extensive and sustained critique of
objectification and of the patriarchal structures underlying and compelling such an approach that is unmatched in any of the other novels, the enormous challenge this failure poses to both Hilary’s and Rafael’s sense of self reinforces a reading of both characters as constituted and constrained by the dichotomous subject positions permissible within patriarchal discourse.

Like Hilary’s introduction to medicine and gynaecology, flight is described extensively in the narrative, always in visual terms. Although “grounded” (35) as a result of his pain, Rafael obsessively recalls the view from a cockpit, and is often “possessed by a fierce urge to make [others] see how [the world] looked from the sky” (47). The association of medical and militaristic/aerial vision suggested by the novel’s dual emphasis on both ways of looking is reinforced in various ways throughout the narrative. Eva, for example, the character who unites Hilary (the doctor) and Rafael (the pilot), abandons medical training to become a pilot, suggesting a progression or an interchangeability between medical and aerial gazes. A conversation between Hilary and Peta – a hot air balloon pilot and, by the end of the narrative, Hilary’s lover – reinforces this connection. After describing the many things she has seen on her travels, Peta tells Hilary, “I want to know about you.” When Hilary demurs, saying, “I can’t match your tales,” Peta replies, “You’re a doctor. You’ve taken other journeys …. Into the heart of things” (161). In invoking Hilary’s earlier description of medicine as a “journey into the hidden territory of the human body” (16), Peta’s statement compounds the alignment of medicine and flight, while emphasising the panoptic nature of both ways of seeing. Hilary’s conception of medicine as allowing her access to this internal landscape similarly resonates with Rafael’s descriptions of flight as permitting access to “another dimension” (35) and “a whole other landscape in the sky” (56).

This parallel is extensively reinforced by the association of both visual paradigms with the characteristics Mulvey ascribes to voyeurism, including detachment, omniscience and omnipotence. While Hilary’s medical gaze offers her distance from her own body and the bodies of others, flight allows Rafael a “sense of utter abandon. Abandoning the world below” (35). Flying, he insists, “lifted you out of the rut,” out of the everyday world of traffic jams, “cars bumper to bumper … knowing you never need live like that” (175). Similarly, just as medicine allows Hilary to “remain detached” (16), being a fighter pilot demands Rafael “detach himself … become an extension of his craft, the cool, calculating
mind at the centre of a precision machine” (57-8). While Hilary’s medical training offers “answers to the secrets of life and death” (17), Rafael achieved a similar omniscience from the cockpit, remarking, “When you look down from the sky in a plane, nothing [is] partial” (34).

This association of vision with distance, disembodiment and omniscience has a long tradition in Western epistemology where seeing is repeatedly and, often implicitly, constructed as a privileged way of knowing. According to Harding, “seeing has become synonymous with knowing in Western philosophical and scientific traditions, and the eye a metaphor for the mind” (31). Similarly, Rosi Braidotti identifies metaphors of seeing as central to “everything our culture has constructed in the ways of knowledge” (70). The association of vision with objectivity, direct and unmediated knowledge, and impartial and unbiased observation and classification (Harding 31) occurs because of the distance this sense enables between the subject and the object of knowledge. As Grosz explains,

Of all the senses, vision remains the one which most readily confirms the separation of subject from object. Vision performs a distancing function, leaving the looker unimplicated in or uncontaminated by its object. With all the other senses, there is a contiguity between subject and object, if not an internalization and incorporation of the object by the subject. The tactile, for example, keeps the toucher in direct contact with the object touched; taste further implicates the subject, for the object must be ingested, internalised in order for it to be accessible to taste.

In contrast, the look “provides access to its object without necessarily being in contact with it” – a capacity for distance that has accorded vision a position of “domination and mastery.” As a result, the other senses, and indeed, other forms of perception and knowledge, are “hierarchically subordinate to the primacy of sight” (Jacques 38). Haraway similarly asserts that “The eyes have been used to signify a perverse capacity … to distance the knowing subject from everybody and everything in the interests of unfettered power” (“Situated” 188). Certainly, for both Hilary and Rafael, vision is the sense which, in Evelyn Keller and Christine R. Grontkowski’s words, connects them to (what they privilege as) “the truth as it distances [them] from the corporeal” (209).

Hilary and Rafael’s distanced and disembodied ways of seeing/knowing enable them to exercise power over others and the natural world. Just as Hilary transforms knowledge into power in performing Eva’s abortion, Rafael’s militaristic/aerial vision permits a feeling of superiority. He remembers how, as he “climbed into the sky,” the world “beneath” him, and those on it, “grew smaller” (96). “Looking down on his parents from
the sky,” on his first solo flight – without permission, in his mother’s plane – Rafael is “struck by their helplessness” (218). Similarly, from the air, the trappings of humanity – “the suburbs and the roads and the government buildings” – seem “absurd” (34). In contrast to the inconsequence of the world and those on it, Rafael, in flight, feels himself to be “king of the universe, lording it over those below who were stuck on earth” (218). The sense of power and control Rafael’s aerial gaze permits is reinforced by the militaristic and masculine associations of his fighter pilot role. Finally, just as Hilary’s medical gaze establishes her as a replacement for God, Rafael’s belief in his own disembodiment and power leads him to assert a god-like immortality and omnipotence. Thus, if only “[f]or a matter of seconds,” he feels that “physical limits were all in the mind, that he could crash through the earth and come out the other side” (219). Similarly, he remembers flying as:

… hurtling through space like a god, calm in the conviction that he was much more than human and that in surpassing human limitations he had escaped all petty events, the straight-jacket of hours and minutes, all the measurements of earth-bound life. He had entered a state of grace. He was one with the sky. (34-35)

Thus, Hilary’s medical and Rafael’s militaristic vision – which are also forms of voyeurism – allow them distance from their own bodies, from the bodies of others and from the natural world. Shared by both main characters, their perverse approach becomes the norm – the mark of subjectivity in the novel.

Such vision, and by association, such a mode of subjectivity, are insistently associated with cowardice, unhappiness and death in Last of the Sane Days, and thus undermined. While the power apparently offered by Rafael’s militaristic/aerial vision might seem an obvious solution to masculinity crisis, both medical and aerial vision are identified as pusillanimous forms of escape. As a child, Rafael would fly with Eva because “it was the only way to escape [Gerald’s] anger.” Both “knew they were taking the coward’s way out” (96). The association of militaristic/aerial and medical vision with escape is reinforced by depictions of Hilary and Rafael as each travelling in order to “escape” (87). Nice, for instance, is described as “the kind of place where you could lose yourself and be confident no one would ask why you had come” (4). Accordingly, in that city, Rafael’s “eyes” continually “sought out distractions” (53), while Hilary attempts to “forget herself in the twisting alleys of the old town, to be distracted by sights until it was time to get moving again” (19). Given the strong theme of avoidance running throughout the novel, Rafael’s
absolute faith in Nietzsche’s ability to heal his pain, and Hilary’s transfer of her obsession with Eva to Rafael, also emerge as ways of escaping reality.

This implied critique is also made explicit. The dangers of flight, as well as its pleasures, are intimately tied to a failure of vision. “[V]ertigo,” for example, manifests itself in “haywire illusions” (57), while the “threat of G-loc – the pull of gravity that left the blood pooling around the feet” (57) – causes pilots to “black out ….” First there’s the pinpricks of grey at the corners of your eyes, the swarming dots that crowd your vision until you’re looking through two keyholes. By then, it’s almost lights out” (92). Rather than permitting the disembodied and omnipotent perspective of a god (or an angel), it emerges as a “god-trick”, one that pretends perfect and unlimited vision but in fact “make[s] it impossible to see well” (Haraway, “Situated” 191).

As well as affecting vision first, the dangers of flight are shown to arise from a reliance on vision. This is demonstrated when Rafael recalls piloting the final flight of “the old Lockheed Orion, which the RAAF was about to retire”:

After cruising around for a bit, he committed the nose downward and went spearing through the air …. The land rushed into focus and every atom in his body seemed to go into fission. … He was on the verge of blacking out when he came to his senses and pulled up just in time. (219)

As the “land rushed into focus,” Rafael’s feeling of disembodiment – signalled by his belief that “he could crash through the earth and come out the other side” (219) unharmed – reach their peak. Thus, his impossible belief is permitted by the focus of his eyes, and it is as his eyes focus that his body goes into “fission.” While perhaps a loose reference to dissolution, the term fission actually describes a splitting into parts, often two. Understood in this way, fission emerges as a metaphor for splitting mind and body – a splitting that almost results in his “blacking out,” an excessive reliance on vision again producing its failure. The visually oriented dangers of flight contradict the fantasy of disembodiment, immortality and omnipotence Rafael accords to flying. Indeed, the fantasy of disembodiment – given the real threat of death flight portends – is presented as a dangerous illusion.

Of course, Rafael’s description of his flight in the Orion could have more to do with a demonstration of his bravery and manliness than any metaphor for the division of mind and body or the dangers of visual predominance. However, this passage is immediately followed by two images of disintegration which can be understood in relation to the discourse of masculinity crisis. Specifically, the novel seems to suggest that a disembodied
approach (fantastically produced by a reliance on vision) cannot withstand the embodiment of men in contemporary society – an embodiment tied to Rafael’s pain. He describes what would have happened if he had not pulled out of the nosedive. His death, in this eventuality, is taken for granted; what he adds is a description of the effects such speeds would have on the plane:

He had gone to the brink, pushed the Orion as far as it could go before it reached the Velocity of Never Exceed – the predetermined speed limit built into the design of every craft. Beyond that, the frame would shake uncontrollably and, if the speed was maintained, a wing panel might distort and then the propellers would start snapping off, the aircraft disintegrating until it dropped out of the sky. (219)

Such disintegration might be understood as a metaphor for the impossibility of disembodiment. Even the aircraft – the phallic tool that enables Rafael to “detach himself” from his body and “become an extension of his craft” (57) – is vulnerable to physical pressures. It is not, as Rafael would like to pretend, an inviolate metal skin for masculinised rationality – “the cool, calculating mind” – at its “centre” (57). In the very next paragraph, disintegration is again invoked in the description of Rafael running

… like a madman through the streets, followed by a blaze of horns as he dodged in and out of the traffic. Around him people were … laughing as if they had all the time in the world, blissfully unaware that the earth had sped up on its axis and was spinning faster and faster towards the Velocity of Never Exceed. (220)

Rafael’s movement towards this “Velocity of Never Exceed” is motivated, at this point, by his increasing physical and emotional pain. Not only does this passage return him, brutally and bodily, to the grounded world of traffic jams, and signal the onset of his madness, it aligns his body with the disintegration of the plane.

Rafael’s movement towards disintegration is immediately followed by a description of Gerald, which ties the failure of his militaristic/aerial vision to the pain and disintegration of masculinity as a whole. Devastated by the “relentless” drought and the death of his stock and dreams, Gerald watches “a small willy-willy … spinning down the driveway, a vortex of wind like a baby cyclone that, full grown, would have the power to annihilate everything in its path” (221). Gerald’s rage at Eva’s decision to fly to Europe to see Rafael – a rage that arises because he “had known all along she would leave him, leave him there to watch everything die” (223) – is mirrored in this “willy-willy,” a mirroring that includes Rafael’s own rage at Hilary. But this “baby cyclone,” and by association, Gerald’s and Rafael’s rage, is ultimately impotent, so small it can only “danc[e] its way to
its own destruction against the boards of the house” (223). The masculinity crisis both suffer – indicated by their emotional/physical pain – is therefore encapsulated in an image of self-destruction that presages their suicides.

The omnipotent vision Hilary asserted through medicine also fails her in the end. Despite all her training, Hilary is ultimately unable to save lives or to help Rafael with his pain. This failure begins with the deaths of a number of patients. Although there is no suggestion of negligence, the accusations of Mr Conti, whose wife died under Hilary’s care, shatter her belief in the control her medical vision once seemed to allow. Hilary’s loss of faith in her medical gaze causes her to become “uncertain of everything she had once believed herself to be,” and to feel as if “everything she touched turned to dust” (18). Ultimately, though, it is her vision that is shown to be insufficient: in Nice, for instance, when a man who crosses the road in front of Hilary is hit by a car, she “had been sure he was alive until the moment she touched him” (70). Even if her vision were reliable, it emerges as useless in relation to Rafael’s unseen and unseeable pain. “[L]ook[ing] at his heaving form under the blankets,” she realises that, despite the “[c]ountless times she had seen women in pure agony during childbirth … she had never felt as helpless as she did now. … Nothing was clear anymore” (181). Rafael’s pain is “beyond diagnosis” (227), inaccessible and indifferent to the medical gaze despite its claims to absolute power. Hilary’s subsequent helplessness is reflected in her dreams, in which she and Rafael are “always trudging across a vast plain of melting snow, the ground turning to mud beneath them and sucking at their shoes like quicksand.” Bereft of vision and knowledge, the only solace Hilary can offer him is her body, and it is for this reason, perhaps, that she does “not resist when he buried himself in her, thrusting so hard she gasped with the pain” (181).

As well as being unable to help Rafael, Hilary’s reliance on her medical vision often causes her to reject the existence of his pain. Finding it “hard to reconcile” his talk of pain “with the young man who sat before her,” Hilary gives credence to Rafael’s physical appearance – “the olive glow of his skin … how fit he looked, how animated he had become” (67) – rather than his own story. The significance of Hilary’s refusal to believe in Rafael’s pain is reinforced by references to the similar disbelief of Nietzsche’s friends (188), and is mirrored by the approach of the medical establishment as a whole. Unable to identify a specific physiological cause, and relying solely on the truth they believe they can access through their medical gaze, the specialists, like Hilary, discount Rafael’s own story.
Such disbelief – in conjunction with the focus on Hilary’s role as a doctor and the presentation of Rafael’s dehumanisation and objectification – shows the ways in which the medical establishment generally is implicated in the failure of Hilary’s medical gaze. The portrayal of Rafael as misunderstood by both Hilary and the medical establishment compounds the sense of his crisis while resonating with the individualistic approach to male pain taken in men’s liberationist accounts. At the same time, the association drawn between Hilary’s medical gaze and Rafael’s militaristic/aerial view represents a critique of unequal power relations at a societal level while implicating Rafael in the production of his own crisis.

Although Rafael’s suicide is linked to Hilary’s objectification of his body, it is also motivated by his inability to “retur[n] to the sky” (54). Thus, his inability to exercise his militaristic/aerial vision is implicated in the destruction of his subjectivity. Hilary’s sense of self is similarly damaged by the failure of her medical gaze. This is demonstrated near the end of the novel when “Hilary found herself sitting in a wicker chair, staring at her upturned palms. There were no life-lines, no love-lines, nothing at all to read or interpret. Just an aerial view of a desert etched by dry riverbeds” (241). Occurring just after Hilary tells Rafael that both his parents have died, and following his subsequent and final descent into madness, this description combines an aerial perspective with a (medical) view of the body. Neither perspective provides answers: there is “nothing at all to read or interpret.” Hilary’s despair demonstrates that she has, like Rafael, been constituted by a particular (distanced, detached and omnipotent) way of seeing – a way of seeing, moreover, that seems to offer the only means for these characters to constitute themselves as subjects within patriarchy. While the failure of such vision represents a sustained and forceful critique of this god-trick – as well as the version of subjectivity it permits – the sufferings experienced inspire sympathy.

Ultimately, though, and in accordance with the credence given to masculinity crisis in the text, there is a suggestion that women are somehow more able to cope with the upheavals of contemporary society than are men. Although Hilary’s identity also disintegrates following the failure of her medical vision, unlike Rafael and Alfred she recovers, though not because she is more fortunate or privileged. Rather, the power she has accessed through the medical establishment – those “cultivated” (100) rights, the loss of which Alfred (and in his understanding for his father, Rafael) rages against – were never
truly hers. Their removal, by consequence, is perhaps not so overwhelming. Furthermore, Hilary recovers because she is able to find solace in others, specifically, a women-centred community. Alfred and Rafael are forced to rely on themselves, but Hilary falls in love with Peta, and moves to a place where her abilities as a skilled midwife eventually allow her to win the faith (rather than the blind acquiescence) of a community of women. Hilary’s recovery implies that women have resources or avenues that are unavailable to men, and implicitly reinforces the idea that men need to find solace in one another.

Despite repeated condemnations of Mulvey’s work as ahistorical, acultural and heterosexist, the continuing relevance of her arguments is demonstrated by the resonance between her description of patriarchal looking relations and the depiction of visual interactions in *The Architect, Miranda* and *Last of the Sane Days*, as well as by the use of her framework in many contemporary discussions of women representing and/or looking at men. Indeed, and ironically given Mulvey’s insistence, even in revising her work, on the impossibility of a male spectacle, her analysis emerges as particularly relevant to understanding the position of men’s bodies in the patriarchal visual economy. Perhaps this is because, paradoxically, the function and position of the male body in psychoanalytic and patriarchal discourse is so similar. Both discourses – psychoanalysis (explicitly) and patriarchy (implicitly) – refuse even the possibility of male spectacle. At the same time, such spectacle is central to both paradigms: in psychoanalysis, the penis’s visibility is the precondition of sexual difference, and hence, of subjectivity; the perpetuation of patriarchal society similarly relies upon the naturalisation of male dominance enabled by the visibility of the hegemonic male body. Accordingly, psychoanalytic models most accurately (though unintentionally) capture the paradox of male visibility: the fact that, although the male body is a necessary presence in the visual sphere – required (as Mulvey asserts in relation to the male movie star) to signify “the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ego ideal” – patriarchy itself “cannot bear” the “sexual objectification” (“Visual” 20) of this body. Patriarchal power, in other words, like psychoanalysis itself, is so enmeshed in the signifying power of the male form – and vice versa – that when that body is objectified, both are undermined.

Another reason for Mulvey’s continuing relevance to contemporary discussions of men’s visibility and women’s vision (and one that is sometimes overlooked by theorists intent on identifying her argument’s many failings) is that there are no readily available
terms to substitute for the dichotomies she employs and explains. Concomitantly, there is a sense in which the didacticism of her approach is necessitated by the violence and excessiveness of the cultural model she analyses. Certainly, the remarkable tenacity of Mulvey’s model – even only in terms of the continual implicit and overt engagement with and questioning of her analysis by other theorists (including those who theorise through fiction) – suggests that psychoanalytic conceptions of gender encapsulate something fundamental about the way gender is understood, constructed and enacted in contemporary society.

At the same time, the ahistorical and acultural nature of Mulvey’s psychoanalytic framework make it difficult to imagine or to facilitate changes in gender relations and constructs. Her argument can only respond reductively to the various ways in which bodies, gender and vision emerge and interact in society generally and in these fictions particularly. This chapter has approached this conundrum – the simultaneous usefulness and counterproductiveness of Mulvey’s analysis – by acknowledging the ways in which psychoanalytic conceptions of gender resonate with these texts, while simultaneously recognising such dichotomies to be descriptive rather than prescriptive. As Williams asserts, psychoanalysis is “an unavoidably partial explanation” (Hard 270), but one that, when subjected to a radical contextualisation, provides a useful and culturally relevant starting point for feminist analyses. Accordingly, although produced and read in relation to Mulvey’s theory, many of the fictions discussed in these last two chapters depict genders, bodies and looks that exceed binary constraints, and thus provide a way of imagining alternatives to such a model (necessarily contingent and variable according to context). Other fictions – most prominently, The Architect – demonstrate the importance of vigilant attention to context in the way that they reinforce such a model, while appearing to trouble patriarchal gender constructs.

Ultimately, in relation to the visual interactions discussed in this chapter, the differing outcomes of the feminisation of male characters’ bodies and the masculinisation of female characters’ looks challenge a reading of gender reversals as simple, whether they are accordingly viewed either as entirely ineffective or inevitably subversive. In The Architect, Jules’s feminisation and Donna’s masculinisation seem largely to function as a premise, allowing patriarchal gender positions to be reasserted. Contrastingly, in Miranda and Last of the Sane Days, gender reversals disrupt the naturalised association of
masculinity with the male body and femininity with the female body, thereby allowing the portrayal of new gender configurations.

Moreover, as well as describing gender reversals, these fictions also function as such. In addition to depicting female characters looking at male characters’ bodies, they involve women writers extensively representing men. Indeed, in *The Architect* and *Miranda*, a certain parallelism exists between the writers’ and the female protagonists’ approach to men’s bodies. Like Donna’s “proper look,” Watkinson’s depiction of Jules – as a paragon of manliness – effectively defuses any potentially subversive connotations of his exposure and passivity. Similarly, Miranda’s intellectually and emotionally distanced approach to John/Helios’s body resembles the author’s use of male corporeality which emerges as a device for Scarfe to explore the nature of creativity and perception (see Chapter Five). Due to this doubling effect, these novels challenge a reading of gender reversals as simple at both an intra- and an extra-textual level. As outlined in the Introduction, theorists like Wallace (“Ventriloquizing”) and Schoene-Harwood argue that, “cross-writing” – wherein an author portrays a protagonist of the opposite gender – when practiced by women reveals the constructedness of gender and of patriarchal power differentials generally. While this is the case in Scarfe’s and Capp’s (*Last*) writing, Watkinson’s treatment of Jules challenges the generalisability of this claim.

The differing outcomes of women writing men’s bodies also suggests something particular about the operations of the discourse of masculinity crisis in these texts and in society generally. Specifically, while all of the authors discussed in the first two chapters of this book use imagery and arguments present in the popular discourse of masculinity crisis to describe these male characters’ bodies, some – like Watkinson in *The Architect*, and to an extent Blain in *The Blind Eye* – use this discourse rather unproblematically. The other authors, in contrast, problematise and transform this discourse by introducing feminist meanings and implications. Ultimately, though, while different in their relationship to patriarchal discourses and dichotomies, all these fictions use the competing discourses of feminism and masculinity crisis to explore and problematise objectification. The operations of this problematisation in *The Architect* and *The Blind Eye* – two texts which ultimately leave the power dynamics underlying objectification in place, and hence, continue to privilege men and masculinity – is the focus of Chapter Three.
Chapter Three
Different ways of seeing and knowing?

Psychic abilities and homeopathy in The Blind Eye and The Architect

All the fictions discussed in Chapters One and Two identify objectification (of either male and/or female characters’ bodies) as problematic in one way or another. The next three chapters explore the alternatives these same novels – and Machines for Feeling – offer to objectifying visual interactions. On one level, these alternatives differ radically. The Blind Eye and The Architect respectively present homeopathy and psychic abilities as embodied, partial and liberating ways of interacting with men’s bodies. In the relationships privileged in these novels, such practices are shown to have supplanted objectifying visual relations. In contrast to these unconventional and (ostensibly) successful paradigms, the fictions discussed in Chapter Four – Last of the Sane Days, Transplanted, Machines for Feeling and (aspects of) The Blind Eye – present idealised (hetero)sexual love (a familiar theme in women’s romance fiction) as a possible, though never fully realised solution to objectifying engagements between men and women. Alternatively, Miranda, analysed in Chapter Five, constructs a postmodern but insistently feminist visual economy where the subject/object dichotomies that enable objectification, including, even, male/female, are disrupted, deconstructed and, temporarily at least, disabled. The diverse alternatives these fictions offer to objectifying visual engagements, explored in the following chapters, have various implications for thinking about men’s bodies and women’s looks, both separately and in conjunction with one another. Significantly, however, while overtly different, these non-objectifying approaches are underlaid by and structured according to the same principles. Specifically, they are all directed at male characters’ bodies and particularly, in all of the novels except Miranda, at their pain. Additionally, as well as depicting other, less oppressive forms of visual engagement, these alternatives to objectification are constructed in a way that emphasises the importance of senses other than vision – predominantly touch – in perceiving, experiencing and understanding men’s bodies.

Homeopathy, in The Blind Eye, and psychic abilities, in The Architect, are repeatedly portrayed in such terms, with non-objectifying visual and tactile interactions with men’s bodies being consistently represented in descriptions of these practices. On the
one hand, both homeopathy and psychic abilities are constructed in relation to specifically
female and explicitly non-objectifying visual agency and understanding; on the other, these
practices pertain to, and are manifested through, tactile interactions between male
characters. In aligning women, rather than men, with visual agency, and associating men
with the tactile realm, both novels chart a double departure from the “male gaze” – a gaze
repeatedly evoked and apparently critiqued in descriptions of interactions between blind
female and seeing male characters in these same novels. Homeopathic or psychic looks and
touches are specifically directed towards the bodies of the central male characters in these
texts – Silas and Jules – and both approaches are presented as being more productive ways
of understanding and empathising with these male bodies than objectifying visual relations.
This contrast is reinforced by depictions of homeopathic and psychic practices healing male
pain, ambiguously associated with male visibility. The insistent, even didactic way in
which homeopathy or psychic abilities are portrayed as revolutionary, and their association
with healing, suggests a desire, in both novels, to promote a reading of this departure from
the male gaze as liberating and progressive. Combined with the focus on female visual
agency, and given the resonance between recent feminist theories of embodiment and the
construction of homeopathy and psychic abilities in these fictions, this explicit departure
from objectification seems to promise a liberatory perspective that is intrinsically feminist.

However, just as in these same novels the sufferings of blind female characters are
insidiously overwhelmed by a focus on male pain, the explicitly liberatory and apparently
feminist constructions of homeopathy in The Blind Eye, and psychic abilities in The
Architect, are underlaid and informed by conservative and profoundly anti-feminist ideas;
these are ideas, moreover, that resonate strongly with those underlying popular notions of
masculinity crisis. These include the appropriation of women’s experiences and abilities in
the service of male pain or power; a privileging of homosocial bonds, manifested
particularly through the depiction of father-son relationships, and in the strong suggestion
that only men can fully empathise with other men’s pain; the concurrent marginalisation of
women; and again, an individualistic focus on male pain and healing that deflects attention
away from collective inequalities. Indeed, the underlying concepts that emerge through
close reading are so unnervingly close to the ideas that implicitly inform popular notions of
masculinity crisis that the representations of homeopathic and psychic healing can be read
as attempts to provide an imaginary and idealised resolution to such crisis. Furthermore,
and again like the popular discourse of masculinity crisis, these apparently liberating perspectives are ultimately underlaid by a dogmatism that emerges in the gradual transformation of both homeopathy and psychic abilities from partial and embodied forms of knowledge to absolute and unassailable truths.

Haraway’s description of embodiment, in her essay “Situated Knowledges,” offers a loose framework for identifying and exploring these texts’ explicit portrayals of homeopathy or psychic abilities as partial and embodied ways of engaging with and understanding men’s bodies. While many theorists have discussed embodiment, Haraway’s work is of particular interest to this study because it grounds its consideration of embodiment in visual terms, what she describes as that “much maligned sensory system in feminist discourse.” The reason for feminism’s malignity towards vision is well demonstrated by Haraway, who acknowledges that, in Western epistemological, and particularly scientific discourses, vision has been

… used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere. This is the gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation … [that] distance[s] the knowing subject from everybody and everything in the interests of unfettered power. (“Situated” 188)

Certainly, this sense of empowered distance and disembodiment is characteristic of depictions of objectifying visual relations in many of these novels, including *The Blind Eye* and *The Architect*. Despite acknowledging the way in which vision has been constructed and used, Haraway asserts its usefulness for a feminist politics, arguing that “Vision can be good for avoiding binary oppositions” (188). For vision to function in this way, however, it must be understood as particular, situated and embodied, rather than universal, infinite and transcendent. It must be acknowledged, in other words, that everyone sees from somewhere – from the individual and particular, as well as the social and constructed site of their own bodies.117 “[T]uned to resonance, not dichotomy” (194-95), Haraway aligns embodied vision with locations, perspectives, conversations, translations, constructions and connections in a way that rejects “axes of domination” (192), while encouraging transformative ways of knowing, intellectual responsibility and critical enquiry. Only an awareness of “situated knowledges,” Haraway asserts, permits “feminist objectivity” (188).

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117 Haraway is not alone in associating the conceit of objective knowledge with the fraudulent assumption of a universal perspective from a disembodied (actually, masculine-normative) position (see also, Harding and Marsha Meskimmon).
The construction of homeopathy in *The Blind Eye* resonates, in many ways, with Haraway’s theory of embodied vision. Indeed, the extent to which homeopathy is repeatedly and explicitly presented as a route towards particular and relative visual knowledges, engagement rather than power and, above all, acknowledged embodiment, suggests a didactic approach equivalent to that evident in descriptions of Silas’s objectification of Constance. Further, although presented in similarly pedagogical ways, objectification is criticised by its contrast with homeopathic perception. Daniel – the novel’s narrator and principal homeopath – describes homeopathy as “a whole new way of looking at the world” (18), a means of “seeing the world in a different way” (137), “*just a different way of looking at the world*” (158). In addition to these direct references, homeopathic practice is repeatedly aligned with the creation of individual and embodied ways of conceptualising the world, primarily through the analogy of visual art. Proving, for example – the testing of various homeopathic remedies – is described as producing “the finer picture: the highly refined and specific symptoms” (60-61). Similarly, Daniel describes case-taking as “an art,” while the “interviewer” is “compared to a painter who slowly and painstakingly brings forth an image which represents in its essence a particular vision of reality” (27).

This representation of homeopathy as permitting a sophisticated form of understanding is reinforced by the centrality of individual patients’ experiences and narratives in descriptions of diagnosis and treatment. In order to help his patient Silas, the homeopath Daniel explains that he needs to him “to describe what happens to you … your impressions. … What I’m wanting is the particulars of what actually occurs from your perspective.” More than uncovering the cause of his condition, Daniel is interested in what Silas “*remember[s] feeling, thinking, seeing, hearing*” (157) during the times when the symptoms of his condition have manifested themselves. The importance of the individual’s narrative is also emphasised in descriptions of the proving process. As Daniel asserts, provers must “be capable of describing the most subtle changes that occur in each plane – the physical, emotional and mental” (61). Like the repetition surrounding the description of homeopathy as a different way of seeing, this exact phrase – “physical, emotional and mental” – is repeated (139, 209). The importance of the patient’s individual narrative is

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118 As defined in *The Blind Eye*’s first epigraph (taken from Samuel Hahnemann’s *Organon of Medicine*), proving is the process whereby the “curative power” of homeopathic medicines is determined by assessing “the morbid phenomena” these medicines “produce in the healthy body.”
explained, and tied to the visual motif created around homeopathy, when Daniel explains that “Everything that we do, everything that we experience, adds to the picture of who we are. It is retained within us” (220). This emphasis on individual perspectives reinforces the presentation of homeopathy as an embodied way of seeing and knowing, and as a more sophisticated alternative to absolute truth. Simultaneously, this unity of “physical, emotional and mental” – also suggested by the importance of “experience” and the conglomerate of “feeling, thinking, seeing, hearing” – signals a rejection of the mind/body division. The patients’ experiences, not just their mind or body but an intermingling of both, are important to homeopathic diagnosis and treatment.

The importance to homeopathy of individual narratives is not restricted to those of the patient. As Daniel explains, if he feels “some kind of affinity” for the patient, he can often gain a sense of the remedy required before he interviews them. Such a sense, as well as the original affinity, arise from Daniel’s previous experiences, his particular life-narrative. He says of his patient Larissa, for example, “she immediately struck me as a person who would benefit from Aurum. … After Larissa left, I realised there was a sadness in her smile that reminded me of my mother” (85). Daniel’s awareness that he is, like his patients, embedded in the particular context of life experiences is also demonstrated by the reasoning process he goes through when his former girlfriend Greta informs him that she has revealed intimate details about their relationship to Silas. At first, he feels “irritation,” considering her actions “an irresponsible … invasion.” In this reaction, he holds himself apart from his homeopathic practice, constructing himself as a transcendent expert. However, he quickly realises he is being “too sensitive to a patient being privy to my personal life, too quick to infer that if I was [sic] seen as human I would not be as effective in my treatment.” Ultimately admitting that, “[p]robably the reverse is true” (222), Daniel acknowledges the individualised and particular position of both patient and homeopath as conducive, rather than detrimental, to homeopathy.

Partiality is also extensively explored through the foregrounding of Daniel’s lack of narratorial omniscience. The text’s main focus is Silas’s past, particularly his interactions with Constance in Port Tremaine. Secondary narratives are woven around Silas and Greta’s developing relationship, Daniel’s past, and the proving he undertakes while telling the story. As he is not present during many of the occurrences he describes, Daniel admits that he can “only guess” (32) at what happened by piecing the story together from Silas and
Greta’s reports: “I can only take the pieces that I know and join them myself” (32-33). His acceptance of such partiality, and his decision to tell the story regardless – contained in his assertion that “this is the way it will have to be if I am to form a coherent whole” (33) – might be seen as an acknowledgement of the embodied position from which all stories are told. This recognition of partiality, made at the beginning of the narrative, is reiterated at the end when Daniel admits that “as for whether all that [Silas] had described for me had ever existed, I did not know, I would probably never know” (288).

A sense of Daniel’s story as a particular and partial version/vision of reality is further encouraged by his acknowledgement that he was blind to aspects of Silas’s condition. He admits, for instance, that “I … failed to see what was, without doubt, the most worrying aspect of his condition” (155), and later, “would wonder at my inability to see what was obvious” (205). When Greta explains that Silas is cutting himself because of the guilt he feels at Constance’s death, Daniel again

… wondered how I could I have failed to realise what had happened. It was all there, every piece laid out in front of me, but I had somehow remained blind to that one essential kernel, unable to see the grain from which it had grown, until Greta made it clear to me. (249)

Daniel’s blindness results from the “affinity” (86), even obsession, he has with Silas, arising from the way in which events in Silas’s life mirror his own. Like the provers who cannot see the effects of Scorpion because they are Scorpion, “right there in the centre of their beings,” Daniel is blind to Silas’s condition because he is “blind to [his] own nature” (139). In this sense, The Blind Eye can be read as an extended case-taking, a manifestation, in a sense, of the very practices of embodiment and particularity the narrative ascribes to homeopathy. Accordingly, Daniel emerges as the very embodiment of this perspective.

References to Daniel as a partial, and possibly unreliable narrator represent only one of the layers of uncertainty established in the narrative. Other such layers are particularly evident in the novel’s main narrative strand, in which Daniel’s description of Silas’s experiences in Port Tremaine is repeatedly identified as a retelling of Silas’s story, related during their consultations. Silas’s narrative, in turn, is composed of stories he was told by various inhabitants of Port Tremaine, including Rudi, Constance, Pearl, Steve and Thai, as well as his description of his own experiences. All these Port Tremaine characters – including Silas himself – emerge, to varying degrees, as unreliable. For instance, when Daniel goes to Port Tremaine in search of “some truth to the vision [Silas] had attempted to
describe” (95), and believing Pearl to be “the one person who … would help,” she had not “revealed anything of any substance.” Indeed, as Daniel relates,

… I had realised almost immediately that it was foolish to expect a direct answer; I had sensed it as she took off her glasses and rubbed them against the sleeve of her nightgown … as she had tried to work out a story, something, anything to keep me there with her, a rare distraction from the relentless tedium of another day. (286)

The suggestion of unreliability that subsequently surrounds Pearl’s version of events, as well as the stories she told Silas while he was in Port Tremaine, is particularly evident in the characterisation of Rudi. Thai (114) and Steve (68) are convinced of his insanity, while Daniel and Jeanie (who was once Daniel’s teacher) describe the madness of his homeopathic theories (169). Even Constance, Rudi’s ever-faithful daughter, is shown, on one occasion at least, to “doubt … his judgement” (238). Other aspects of Rudi’s characterisation that challenge his reliability include his alcoholism (40, 67), and the suggestion that he would say anything to capture Silas’s attention (129). At the same time, other characters’ opinions of Rudi (particularly Steve’s and Thai’s) are variously biased, and at times contradictory, thus creating a proliferating uncertainty.

The resonance between narratorial and character partiality and the construction of homeopathy as a particular and embodied perspective is explicitly reinforced by Daniel’s repeated insistence that homeopathy liberates us from the constraints of absolute truth. He informs Silas, “We are all trained to see the world in a particular way.” Thus, in order to understand homeopathy, Silas must attempt “to think a little differently, to throw away notions … held as truths” (87). Similarly, in one of Daniel’s many musings on homeopathy, he identifies its practice as a way of “discarding boundaries as we have been taught to construct them” (139). The suggestions of liberation and freedom implied by such statements are reiterated in Daniel’s memory of a conversation he had with Silas, in which he urged him

… to throw away notions he held as truths …. Because it is only then that whole new worlds begin to unfold in front of us, sometimes beautiful, sometimes terrifying, sometimes both at once, depending on how far we are prepared to let go, how willingly we take the leap. (140)

This required “leap” into the unknown, and the necessity of “let[ting] go” present homeopathy as undermining, even overthrowing, the false ideas that were believed to represent truth, thus enabling new and wondrous ways of knowing to “unfold.” As with the other repeated phrases, these reiterated references to the throwing away of notions held as
truths reinforce the portrayal of homeopathy as an embodied and liberating perspective while demonstrating how centrally and insistently concerned the novel is with homeopathy itself.

The presentation of a different mode of perception – aligned with embodiment and liberation and evocative of Haraway’s theory of feminist objectivity – is similarly evident in *The Architect*. Like *The Blind Eye*, this novel encourages a sense of partial perspective through narration. Each chapter, and sometimes even sections of various chapters, are narrated by different characters, including Jules, Donna, Marc, Peter and Chloe. This technique creates a host of differing, often conflicting perspectives. Such conflict is overtly established at the beginning of the narrative, with the different opinions Peter and Donna express regarding Jules’s house and courtyard. Perceiving his home as “incredibly ordinary, opulent but plain, it disappoints [Donna] every time”: “It’s not how I imagined the house of an artist would be” (14). Peter is less disappointed. As an artist he understands its implicit “harmony” (16). And while Donna notes the “stark” and “paved” (14) courtyard only in passing, Peter is “transfixed,” describing it as “the most sublime example of architectural minimalism I have ever seen” (16).

While less relentlessly explicit in its agenda than *The Blind Eye, The Architect* is nevertheless interested in imaginatively constructing an alternative to, and an escape from, the dichotomies that organise and enable objectifying visual practices. Psychic abilities provide the focus for this exploration of an alternative or different approach to perception. Significantly, although female as well as male objectification is explored in both novels, the focus of the purportedly emancipating properties of psychic perceptions are, again, a male body. However, whereas the presentation of this difference in *The Blind Eye* is embedded largely in visual metaphors, in *The Architect*, psychic abilities are shown to involve an entire or unified sensory experience of Jules’s body. Although this move away from vision seems to limit the applicability of Haraway’s theory, her notion of “feminist objectivity” – one that acknowledges relative and partial knowledges, involves engagement rather than power, and insists on embodiment – is relevant to *The Architect*’s portrayal of psychic abilities.

As in *The Blind Eye*, the difference promised by a psychic mode of perception is overtly signalled, this time by the title of the novel’s prologue: “*a different way of knowing.*” A similar suggestion of difference is invoked by Jules, who identifies psychic
abilities as “a gift that enables [psychics] to experience the world differently” (209). The nature of this difference is immediately and extensively demonstrated in the prologue. As Marc and Clint drive closer to the site of Jules’s accident, “Unheard words come riding into [Marc’s] mind on the backs of their meaning. You are to die by the breath of the dragon.” Although Marc does not speak these words out loud, “his brother stirs from a sleepy huddle” in the passenger seat and asks him, “What did you say? About a dragon?” (1). The fact that neither of these brothers knows the meaning of these words suggests that their psychic capabilities, while offering different perceptions, do not permit omniscience. When, in the first chapter, Jules tells Donna that he has been “scorched by the breath of the dragon” (7) these words become associated with his body, but still there is no revelation of their meaning. This technique involves the reader, as well as the characters, in a world of partial knowledges and perspectives.

The suggestion of extraordinary perception contained in the depiction of Marc and Clint’s psychic connection is reinforced when they arrive on the scene of Jules’s accident. Marc “closes his eyes and reaches into the night’s secrets,” searching for the lost rider. Detecting him – “There! Fallen. Smouldering now” – he points the location out to Clint. As Clint runs towards Jules, Marc “bows his head, concentrating.” The ensuing description of events places him inside the bodies of both Clint and Jules, smelling, feeling and seeing from their perspective:

He smells spilt petrol as his brother passes through heat radiating from the incinerated bike. He feels the rain falling. Fat, heavy drops, spluttering and hissing onto burnt flesh. Now he’s with the biker. Panting, lying spent, watching the sky through rain-streaked soot on the visor of the helmet. He sees the dark face of a searcher, leaning close, eyes widening with horror. (2)

Marc’s perception involves not only sight, but smell and touch. According to Haraway, vision “distance[s] the knowing subject from everybody and everything,” but other sensory systems – particularly smell, taste and touch – require a proximity that dissolves the binary oppositions “perverse[ly]” (“Situated” 188) signified and enabled by sight. Haraway’s suggestion that multi-sensory perception deconstructs spectator mastery resonates with Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s description of perception in terms of echoes and immersions.

We perceive things in the world, Merleau-Ponty asserts, “because they awaken an echo in our bodies and because the body welcomes them” (“Eye” 125). In response, we open ourselves to the world and become immersed in it, blurring the boundaries between
body and world. In these terms, the body acts as a kind of middle ground where the exchange between things takes place: “There is a human body when, between the seeing and the seen, between touching and the touched, between one eye and the other, between hand and hand, a blending of some sort takes place – when the spark is lit between the sensing and the sensible” (*Primacy* 163). The presentation of Marc’s psychic abilities in terms of a complete sensory experience is perpetuated by other descriptions, predominantly relating to touch. For example, when Marc finds a newspaper article about Jules,

I press a finger to the photograph.
I can hear the beat of his heart.
Can hear those raindrops hissing against seared flesh. …
I feel the flames eating into flesh. (57)

Similarly, picking up the pottery feather Jules has sent Jan (Marc’s mother), he “almost dropped it” because he “can feel the beat of [Jules’s] heart, the touch of his loneliness” (141). Additionally, and in a way that resonates particularly with Merleau-Ponty’s description of perception as an opening of the body to the world, when touching Jules’s back, Marc “open[s] up a bit to feel what [his pain] is doing” (243).

Contrasting with the depiction of objectification in the novel is the way in which Marc’s psychic abilities dissolve, or at least challenge, the division between active spectator and passive spectacle. While, in some cases, he deliberately enters into another’s body in order to see from their perspective, often, emotions, thoughts and feelings are thrust upon him. When Jules speaks about his son, for example, Marc is unable to avoid the impact of his emotions. Indeed, the “wave of desperation” emanating from Jules hits Marc “with a thud,” entering his body such that he is “choking on the hopelessness” (268). Similarly, Jules’s nightmare “intrudes into [Marc’s] thoughts”: “He’s dreaming and his pain opens me up” (242). At other times, people’s thoughts, memories and feelings filter through to him with no effort on his part. When he and Clint discover a newspaper article reporting the accident, Marc senses Clint’s thoughts: “his feelings leak through to me. He’s thinking about the other night when he undid the chinstrap of the helmet and cradled the burnt man’s head in his lap” (9). This passive element of Marc’s perception is more prominent in descriptions of Clint’s psychic abilities. Clint generally perceives people’s emotions through their auras, in a way that often frightens and confuses him. When he arrives at The Studio to drop off a package, Jules’s aura is so strong that he believes Jules is “sucking the energy” out of the other artist, “[c]annibalising them.” Clint is so disturbed by this
unbidden image that he tries to protect himself, raising his hands “to shield his face” (209). Thus, psychic abilities in *The Architect* emerge as sometimes active, sometimes passive, and sometimes ambiguously both; they cannot be reduced to the dichotomous relations of objectification. Additionally, psychic perceptions offer no way of controlling what other people do in the way that Jules’s voyeuristic gaze controls Chloe.

Although Marc’s psychic abilities are largely directed, like most of the gazes depicted in *The Architect*, at Jules’s body, they are simultaneously differentiated from objectification by the form of exposure they facilitate. As demonstrated in Chapters one and two, the responses in the eyes of strangers following his accident individualise Jules in a negative way, and Donna’s medical gaze briefly dehumanises and objectifies him. In contrast, Marc’s extraordinary ability to sense thoughts, feelings and emotions, as well as the external form, means that he perceives the whole man, rather than only Jules’s body. Looking at Jules during the opening of one of Chloe’s exhibitions, Marc sees his body (his clothes, the loss of his arm, his stance and style), but also “feel[s] the frustration … resonating inside him,” and realises that, although Jules is “surrounded by people … he’s as lonely as hell” (98). Thus, Jules is individuated by Marc’s psychic abilities, but not in a negative way – he is not reduced to his body. In this sense, Marc’s look provides a direct analogy for Schultz’s description of a visual, yet equitable form of desire, one that can exist outside the strictures of Mulvey’s male gaze. While we are all objects as well as subjects in the world, Schultz asserts, power imbalances occur when we fail to acknowledge another’s individuality, their embeddedness in time and experience. The holistic compass of Marc’s psychic abilities – reminiscent of *The Blind Eye*’s mantra of “physical, emotional and mental” – is so far removed from the instances of objectification presented in the novel that they emerge as an acknowledgement rather than an exposure of Jules.

Nevertheless, and due perhaps to his extreme, even obsessive desire to conceal himself, Jules often perceives Marc’s psychic abilities as an invasive exposure (rather than an acknowledgement), often wondering “how much he sees, how far he goes into the layers of my privacy” (233). These feelings are demonstrated when Jules hears Marc playing the guitar and is discomfited by a repeated wrong note in an otherwise perfect performance. Seeing Marc’s “expression … smug with satisfaction,” Jules believes he has “spied through the pinhole of the dropped note and has seen the vulnerabilities within the perfectionist who seeks always to have balance. … I feel exposed, flayed of the layers with which I protect
myself” (192). Marc, however, has seen only “a dark pit full of shadows” (199), and when he kisses Jules’s hand in an attempt to “get in there to see what he’s hiding” (199-200), Jules instinctively conceals his emotions: he “just turned his hand over …. He guards that dark place without even knowing it” (200).

Jules’s involvement with the extrasensory is not restricted to instinct and intuition. Growing up in a “village in the mountains with an animistic religion. Witch-women and curses” (260), Jules is intensely open to and aware of the supernatural. In relation to Marc, he ponders: “I … remind myself that I must be careful with my emotions. Obviously Marc Masters, with his perfect timing for intervention, possesses a talent that is stronger than I have yet seen in this country where suburban safety inhibits instinct and intuition” (193). Jules’s own intuitive talents are demonstrated when he helps Clint overcome his fear of Jules’s overwhelming aura. Indeed, for Jules, “[t]his is an easy matter to manage.” As he explains to Clint,

… once [in Saigon] I knew a woman who told me I have a visible aura that is very different from that of most other people. This aura became stronger, more fluid, she said, when I was working. … And in Paris, an old gypsy taught me how to conceal myself from eyes that see the emanations of passion. (209)

Following this explanation, Jules “[r]elease[s] visual referents” (210) and, to the wonder of Clint, causes his aura to fade. The casual way in which Jules approaches Clint’s difficulty reinforces his psychic expertise. In contrast to Jules, Clint – the one with the psychic abilities – appears almost child-like in his inexperience and wonder. Jules’s own psychic abilities reinforce his position as another subject rather than an object in his exchanges with Marc and Clint.

On the whole, the properties of absolute omniscience that Jules attributes to Marc’s psychic abilities seem largely motivated by Jules’s fear of exposure. Although Marc has seen “under [Jules’s] bright surface … a dark pit full of shadows, a place inside himself where sleeping dragons lie” (199), he has only a veiled and ambiguous sense of what this vision means. That Marc’s understanding of Jules is presented as indirect, partial and incomplete is highlighted in all their interactions until the very last pages of the novel. Even then, when mutual understanding is finally achieved, it is Jules’s explanations, rather than Marc’s psychic powers, that enable their connection. The association of Marc’s psychic

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119 Animism is a belief system that understands the universe to be animated and organised by a supernatural force found within nature (for instance, in trees, mountains and the sky). People, according to an animistic belief system, have spirits that do or can exist separately from their bodies.
abilities with a benign acknowledgement rather than a dehumanising and objectifying exposure is compounded by the fact that, although his understanding is incomplete, he responds to Jules’s concerns regarding privacy – his “warn[ings] … not to spy into [his] memories” (260) – by making a concerted effort not to perceive Jules’s emotions and thoughts. For instance, when Marc invites Jules back to his house for dinner and Jules speaks about his past, Marc allows “[t]he hint of reminiscence” to warn him to “turn away from the shadows as they begin to shift,” and insists, “I mustn’t look into his secrets” (267). Thus, in both novels, these different, embodied and openly partial modes of perception are shown to conceptualise male bodies in a way that does not expose or reduce them to the status of objects.

This non-objectifying approach is reinforced by the contrast established between both homeopathy and psychic abilities, and conventional medicine, a paradigm that (in these and other novels) is repeatedly aligned with objectification and dehumanisation. In *The Blind Eye*, this contrast is signalled by Daniel’s description of his move from medical studies to homeopathy: “Six months into my medical degree, I stumbled upon this field and switched courses, despite considerable advice to the contrary” (18). Daniel is able to disregard the advice he receives because of his conviction that his “decision had been unquestionably right. I had discovered a way of thinking that made sense, and I wanted to take it to its outer reaches” (168). One of the strongest detractors Daniel encounters is his father, a doctor himself – a psychiatrist – who thought him “a fool (he forgave everything except a lack of intellectual rigour, a deficiency that was defined, always, by his own standards)” (168). The presentation of the difference between conventional medicine and homeopathy in terms of a father-son relationship reinforces the association of conventional medicine with an older patriarchal vision, and homeopathy with the new – implicitly, new modes of masculinity that replace those of the father. References to the “standards” of medicine and the “outer reaches” of homeopathy consolidate this contrast, while perpetuating the notion of homeopathy as unorthodox and liberating.

Another way in which conventional medicine is constructed as old-fashioned and out-dated in contrast to the new and subversive possibilities of homeopathy is through Daniel’s description of diagnosis. As he informs Silas, he is “more interested in the way your body has reacted, rather than why it has had this reaction.” He explains his reasoning
behind this seemingly counter-intuitive interest, in a way that explicitly differentiates conventional medicine and homeopathy:

You and I might both eat contaminated food. You might have mild stomach cramps, while I might be violently ill. … A doctor would look at what caused my illness and then intervene. But your body has experienced little difficulty in adjusting to this outside influence, while my defence mechanism is producing certain signs and symptoms that doctors would call disease. That’s what I’m interested in, more so than what’s caused the problem. (158)

Medicine, according to Daniel, understands bodies only in terms of a simplistic cause and effect model. Homeopathy, on the other hand, is interested in the ways different bodies react and the reasons for that difference: it does not apply the same model to every body. Additionally, while medicine acts on and objectifies the body, homeopathy “help[s] the body heal itself.” According to Daniel, this framework permits an understanding of bodies “more complex than you can imagine” (88).

As in The Blind Eye, The Architect differentiates psychic abilities from medicine through the depiction of the relationship between a parent and a child. At the beginning of the novel, Jan is representative of the staid and disparaged medical establishment. When, after ringing all of the major hospitals with a burns unit, Marc can find no information about a Jules van Erp, Jan casually suggests, “Perhaps he died.” Marc, who is training to be a doctor, is shocked by her nonchalant attitude, which he attributes to the fact that “She’s a doctor, she’s been toughened like I hope I’ll never be” (9). This difference between these two doctors, as with the division between homeopathy and medicine in The Blind Eye, seems designed to illustrate the distinction between the conventional practices of medical objectification and new, more equitable and aware ways of treating individuals (in these novels, men) without dehumanising them.

The differentiation of homeopathic and psychic abilities from medicine is reinforced by the association of central elements of both paradigms with better ways of healing. In The Blind Eye, Kirlian photography (a homeopathic diagnostic technique) is established as the central metaphor for homeopathic vision, and is associated with Constance’s view of the world. Identified as “a technique for capturing the electromagnetic field that surrounds every living object” (42), Kirlian photography and Constance’s vision each offer a different picture of “all we can see and touch. The images are like thousands of flares of light, dancing and moving, a galaxy within a galaxy” (70). Most importantly, Constance’s Kirlian-like gaze is able to “reveal an ailment before it had manifested itself” (70).
Additionally, as Rudi tells Silas, “She can look at you and she can know what remedy it is that you need – just like that” (138). At various points in the narrative, Constance’s visual capabilities are associated with healing and, in line with the concentration of homeopathic vision on male bodies, her gaze is specifically focused on male suffering.

Although physiologically blind, Constance knows Silas has a nosebleed without his telling her (134). Similarly, when Rudi doubles over as a result of his chest tumour, Constance “had turned to him in alarm, despite the fact that he had not uttered a sound.” Although Rudi insists that, “It is nothing,” Constance “had not taken her eyes from him, seeming to assess something not visible to anyone in the room but her” (209). Again, when she is treating him, she looks at her father and “her eyes were focused. But it was not her father that she was looking at, it was the air around him … the light, I suppose, the charge” (257), Silas tells Daniel. Given these demonstrations of miraculous ability, it is unsurprising when Constance admits that she “had known about the tumour” despite her father never speaking about it. Similarly, the fact that she is able, against all odds, to cure her father, supports, seemingly beyond doubt, the association of Constance’s visual capabilities with healing. Certainly, Silas seems convinced by “Rudi’s miraculous recovery”: he “had no idea what she had done, but he had seen the change that had occurred, the feat she had performed” (255).

In a way that reinforces the association of homeopathic vision with partiality and embodiment, the extent and nature of Constance’s visual abilities remain ambiguous. Rudi’s claim that she sees “Not the object itself, but the force that surrounds it” (70) seems to present Constance’s vision as a means of “seeing the world in a different way.” However, his assertion that, “She sees. More than you or I will ever see” (106) challenges this interpretation with the suggestion of a wider view. Rudi’s enthusiastic proclamation that, “It is a question of knowing …. It is extraordinary … her ability to actually see the essence of it all. Everything” (138), further imbues Constance’s vision with a totalising and healing omniscience. On the one hand, the seemingly far-fetched nature of Rudi’s claims (Constance, after all, is blind) might be taken as evidence of his willingness to say anything to Silas in order to achieve the recognition he so desires. On the other hand, his self-deprecating assertion that, “All my notes, they are not what I have found, they are her words, they are what she knows” (239), ironically appears reliable. Made on what seems to
be his death-bed, and placing him in an undoubtedly subordinate role, it destroys his credibility while affirming Constance’s powers.

Continuing many years after her death, Silas’s obsession with Constance and the way she perceives the world seems to affirm his belief in her visual abilities. After leaving Port Tremaine, and following the onset of his intense abdominal pain and self-mutilating behaviour, Silas is consumed by his desperate desire to enact Constance’s vision. He spends his days in the library, taking notes on Kirlian photography and “press[ing] his knuckles into his eyes, wanting the world to swim momentarily, wanting to see the swirl of colours that filled his vision before darkness took over” (42). In particular, Silas is interested in whether Constance had

… seen the changes in him before the ailments which he now suffered had begun to manifest themselves. … Silas wanted to know when the change had occurred, when the rot had begun; was it after he met her, or had he gone to her with it all set in place, there inside him before he even laid eyes on her? (71)

In this description, Silas seems to believe that Constance was capable of perceiving the true nature or essence of his body. However, as any portrayal of Constance could only be the outcome of Daniel’s version of Silas’s obsessed and “ludicrous vision” (263), such beliefs are unreliable, and hence, the nature of Constance’s vision remain ambiguous. Constance’s reply to Silas, when he asks her how she knew about his nose bleed, perpetuates this ambiguity. Her verbal response – “My powers …. My very strange powers” – seems to support Rudi’s assertions regarding the absolute properties of her gaze. However, “[w]ith the darkness of her hair hiding her expression, [Silas] was uncertain as to whether she was smiling. …. [H]e realised he had no idea whether she was joking or not” (136).

The ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding Constance’s vision is compounded by her physiological blindness. In a sense, this merely strengthens the potential of her vision. As Daniel explains in the opening pages of the novel, “blind testing” is a vital element of the proving process. In this sense,

… blindness … is essential if we are to build up a picture of the true nature of the substance we are proving. Any knowledge on our part would only distort each of our responses …. [W]e would see what we think we should see, we would bring all that we associate with that substance to this process, and our time would have been wasted. (3-4)

120 The absurdity of Silas’s perspective is certainly compounded by the fact that he is speaking to Daniel about Constance’s vision years after his return from Port Tremaine (and years into his obsession).
In these terms, Constance’s simultaneous blindness and sight construct her as an ideal representative for homeopathic vision. At another point in the narrative, however, blindness is presented as something that must be guarded against in provings, rather than introduced. As Daniel explains, the possibility that the provers can become “blind to [their] own nature” has a serious potential to corrupt homeopathic experiments. In this situation,

… the provers can become the proving and therefore may not know that they are experiencing change. If we were testing the Scorpion they would become the Scorpion, right there in the centre of their beings. They would feel that all they were experiencing was perfectly normal … because the part of them that observes would also be Scorpion. (139)

Additionally, Constance’s description of her father – “He could not see himself” (237) – casts him as metaphorically blind and draws an obvious parallel between his inability to perceive his life-threatening illness and Constance’s own inability to see the snake that kills her. Combined with Daniel’s blindness in relation to Silas’s condition, this parallel simultaneously challenges his reliability and her all-seeing, all-knowing Kirlian gaze.

Daniel’s own reflections on Constance’s visual capabilities offer no resolution to the ambiguity. At times, he is enormously excited by the implications of her Kirlian gaze, due to the benefits such a true view would have for homeopathy. Pondering the implications of Silas’s claims, Daniel realises that, if Constance could indeed see the “essential nature” of things – “A flower, a tree, a stone, a piece of grass, a venom; the list of potential substances with therapeutic properties is infinite” – there would no longer be any need to conduct provings and homeopathic practice could be vastly expanded. At other times, however, he expresses significant scepticism. The inclusion of conditional phrases – such as, “at least that was what Rudi had told Silas” (70), “[i]f Rudi had spoken the truth” (71) and “the vision supposedly possessed by Constance” (137) – increase the ambiguity.

Despite, and perhaps because of this ambiguity, the association of Constance’s visual capabilities with Kirlian photography aligns homeopathy (a partial and embodied perspective) with a woman’s ability. While Constance’s own comments on her vision are usually pre-empted by the proclamations of male characters, shortly before her death she asserts ownership of her vision in an explicit way. In a proving session that Silas observes, Rudi holds a remedy in front of Constance’s eyes and asks her to describe what she sees, “believing that if she could just paint him a picture of what it was that danced before her eyes, he would know, he would be able to see” (211). Although Constance is willing “to
tell Rudi how each aspect of her physical, emotional and mental being had responded to the remedy they were proving” (209), she pulls back at this request, telling him “he was asking for the impossible, a description of something he would never be able to see.” This statement identifies her perspective as fundamentally individual. Indeed, Constance’s vision, according to this interpretation, emerges as something even more particular than the embodied unity of the “physical, emotional and mental” so important to homeopathic practice. The idea that Constance’s view of the world belongs only to her is upheld by her whispered aside – “Besides … it’s mine” (213) – made as she wipes the tears from her eyes. Constance’s ownership of her Kirlian vision associates homeopathy with an ambiguous but potentially powerful woman’s perspective, a form of situated knowledge that she is unable (and perhaps unwilling) to share with others.

Psychic abilities are similarly aligned with female characters in *The Architect*. Women’s knowledge is identified as the basis of Jules’s psychic understanding: “Witch-women” (260) hold the secrets and deliver the curses in his childhood village, and women – specifically, the woman in Saigon and the Parisian gypsy – help Jules understand and refine his intuitive powers (209). The embodied partiality of Marc’s psychic abilities is similarly affiliated with Chloe’s perception of Jules. This is implicit in both characters’ multi-sensory engagements with their surroundings. Like Marc’s psychic perception, Chloe’s “imagination,” as she informs Jules, involves touch, “shapes and textures. Smell, too. Sound” (74). When Jules asks Chloe if there are concepts she does not understand, her reply suggests an openly partial and embodied knowledge – “Who knows. Everyone has their own reality, right?” (74) – that further aligns her perspective with Marc’s.

In addition to these implicit parallels, the similarities between Marc’s “seeking touch” (197) and Chloe’s “seeing touch” (83) make their association explicit. Chloe explores Jules’s appearance tactilely: “She raises her hand to my face. her fingers brush across my eyebrows, eyelashes, and my cheekbones” (67). Marc’s touch is similarly “gentle … lingering as Chloe’s touch sometimes lingers, as if he too can read [Jules] through the seeking contact of skin against skin” (101). The association between Marc’s and Chloe’s touch is demonstrated in other descriptions of them touching Jules’s body:

[Marc] runs his fingers along the thinness [of Jules’s forearm], feeling the bones through the skin. There is wonder on his face with the tears, a need to know and to understand. He is absorbing the details to store, to analyse, to apply to some other person at some other time. (216)
Conversely, when Chloe is finally permitted to touch Jules, she applies information gleaned from interactions with other people at other times to understand his body. She describes this method of perception as “cross-referencing” – associating various senses and experiences in her “imagination” (74) to produce a particular vision of reality. Thus, when she touches Jules’s right shoulder, above where his arm has been amputated, she “feels how the shoulder belongs to an adolescent boy who has grown too fast and whose muscles have not caught up, and she is reminded of her grandfather, who was like this too, frail with age and inactivity” (182). She does not, however, limit her understanding of Jules’s body to these previous points of reference, realising that “Jules is neither a youth nor sapped. His energy is mature, encompassing, potent. She knows Jules is not this skeleton she feels” (182). Like Marc, Chloe’s mode of perception, while not offering a complete understanding of Jules, provides a different way of knowing than is achieved by other characters.

There is also the suggestion that, because Chloe does not see, she understands more about Jules than do characters such as Peter, who rely exclusively on visual perception. Although Peter “want[s] the man underneath,” he generally sees only Jules’s “self-portrait” (30) and, for this reason, acknowledges that “Chloe understands him far better than I do” (147). Significantly, like Constance’s Kirlian/homeopathic knowledge, Chloe’s deeper understanding of Jules (and more specifically, the fact that she cannot expose him) is associated with healing. Chloe’s understanding arises from the fact that the disguises Jules constructs in order to conceal himself work on a very visual level, one that Chloe cannot perceive and, as a result, is not deceived by. This interpretation is reinforced by Peter’s reference to “[t]he understated extravagance of [Jules’s] clothes, his hair, his bearing, everything about him is by design, and the design invites the eye” (148). Marc’s thoughts following his first sight of Jules after the accident compound the notion that Jules’s disguise deceives those who rely on vision. Before his psychic abilities permit an awareness of Jules’s loneliness and isolation, his eyes perceive only a “tall guy” (97) with “a smooth, polished smile”:

Too polished. I dislike insincerity, particularly from expensively dressed, dapper, one-armed men. ... He’s got the bottom of his superfluous sleeve rolled back into an I-don’t-give-a-damn cuff. More insincerity .... He’s a bit too pretty. Brains are probably in a sac between his legs. (98)
Engaging with Jules on a purely visual level, Marc makes “simplistic judgements about a man who is not simple” (220), a judgement that conflicts significantly with the intelligent and sophisticated man the novel so insistently portrays.

At another point in the novel, where Marc again focuses on Jules’s body rather than his thoughts, feelings and emotions, his perception is similarly confused. After seeing a patient die from burns similar to Jules’s, Marc has a vision of Jules burning. This hallucination – portrayed as some sort of waking nightmare (216) – ends with Marc pulling Jules’s clothes off and leaving him exposed under the moonlight, his scars on prominent display (215).121 Condemning this physical exposure by emphasising Jules’s resulting pain, and the guilt and regret Marc subsequently feels, the novel affirms by contrast the holistic nature of Marc’s extra-visual perceptions of Jules. The contrast established between this visual mis-recognition and the deeper understanding Marc and Chloe achieve through a unity of their senses, can be aligned with the feminist critique of the dominance of ocularity in Western culture.

The privileged, non-visual aspect of Marc’s psychic approach to Jules is also associated with a female character in Jan. Although on her first entry into the narrative Jan seems callous and detached – a representative of the objectifying medical establishment – when Jules and Jan finally meet she is anything but. Her detachment is transformed into a supreme dignity and composure, with Jules describing her as “wear[ing] the air of easy serenity” (96). Even more than Chloe, Jan is shown to understand Jules. The closeness that develops between them attests to this understanding, given that Jules does “not bother with the labour of establishing intimacy if there [i]s no meeting of minds to enhance the other pleasures” (207). The description of their relationship in terms of this equitable meeting contrasts explicitly with Jules’s manipulation and control of Chloe. Whereas Chloe’s blindness necessitates her non-visual approach to Jules, Jan’s is a choice. As Jules notes, “It is as if, in her contentment, she has stopped seeking, and so from the corner of her eye … she sees more” (191). The idea that Jan “sees more” because she does not look is repeatedly demonstrated by descriptions of her noticing things others do not. When she tells Jules that she “like[s] the way the wind meets at the centre stone [of his pavilion], the way the breeze becomes confused,” Jules replies, “I think that not many would notice this.” Similarly,

121 Interestingly, as with the transformation in Donna’s look from one of objectification to a “proper” look of acknowledgement and understanding, Marc only stops pulling off Jules’s clothes – and thereby exposing his body – when Jules forces him to “Look at me. Look at me properly” (216).
Jan’s realisation that one of the sculptures in Chloe’s exhibition is not her work but Jules’s – “This has a refinement not in the others. It poses certain question which may not be relevant to Ms Tiffin” (100) – is again presented as “something … not many people would notice” (99).

The suggestion that it is Jan’s different way of (not) looking (directly) at Jules that allows him to abandon the disguise of “the architect” also functions to privilege her approach. Although, when Jules first sees Jan at Chloe’s exhibition, he is “hauled away from [his] detachment and back into the persona of the architect” (96), it is almost as if there are levels to Jules’s concealment – detachment, followed by “the architect” and then the ‘real’ man. When they speak, Jules is “startled by the directness of her manner. … Such openness intrigues, it challenges” (100). Encouraged by her straightforward manner and reassured by the fact that Jan does not attempt to expose him, Jules seems able to open himself up to her. The sympathy generated for Jules in the narrative – the fact that the reader is encouraged to hope for his rehabilitation – reinforces the privileging of Jan’s perspective, while contributing to the idealisation of their relationship, a point emphasised by Jan’s recurrent association with the natural world. Jules compares her with a “seasoned Baltic Pine” in “its mountain forest” (96) and a “desert kestrel” (191): thus Jan emerges as the perfect complement to the cultured Jules. Their complementarity is made explicit in their discussion of love. Jules asks Jan how she remains “so even …. [s]o accepting” with those who love her. Jan replies, “I’ve come to realise there’s no such thing as a balance between people who love. There always will be moving towards and moving away from. Sometimes, just sometimes, there is momentary perfection.” Jules’s rejoinder – that such balance occurs “[p]articularly when one does not seek it” (246) – again implies that it is Jan’s already privileged non-visual approach that underlies and permits such balance.

Rejecting vision, Jan’s loving approach to Jules is centred on touch. At first, however, touching is difficult for them both. Jules is the first person Jan has touched in an intimate way since the death of her husband, two years previously. Although Jules has been repeatedly touched since his accident, on almost every occasion he has been the unwilling recipient of such contact: he “steps away” (24), “flinches” (39, 87), “explodes” (39) or “stiffens” (64). As Peter says, “We don’t touch him. He’s never said anything, but we’ve

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122 Jules’s association with culture is foregrounded, for example, at the opening of the Design Centre, where Peter describes him as “talk[ing] politics from arts grants to human rights … with the evasive but knowledgeable savoir-faire of a professional diplomat … [with the] charm of perfect manners, rote-learned and polished in greater halls than this” (168).
all seen the way he freezes, the way his face turns to stone if we brush against him or include him in the spontaneous closeness we share when we’re working” (29). Even when Jules has sex with Chloe, the experience is portrayed as an almost reluctant experiment, an attempt to overcome his fear of his damaged body (182-83). In contrast, given their shared vulnerability, Jules and Jan are able to become tentatively and mutually accustomed “to the newness, to the shape and smell and warmth of closeness” (205). Significantly, whereas when Chloe touches Jules’s right shoulder it is a traumatic experience for both characters, Jan “rests against [Jules], against the right side, without hesitation.” She does hesitate, however, in touching Jules’s leg: her hand “hovers a moment before she lays it onto my thigh. Slowly she rubs across the fabric of my trousers, and it’s as if she is trying to realign her memories” (205). Jan’s hesitancy, and the reference to memory, invokes the reasons underlying Jules’s own reluctance regarding Peter’s (81) or Chloe’s touch – his assertion that his scars “are joined to memories, if you touch them I will be sick to my stomach” (183). Once again, therefore, Jules and Jan are presented as a complementary yet evenly balanced pair, united in their struggle to re-learn the intimacy of touch.

For a time after this moment of initial touching – when Jan leans into Jules and strokes his leg as they become accustomed to the feeling of closeness – their physical interactions are presented in terms of an uncertain and precarious “balance” of love. In an extreme “moving towards and moving away from” (246), both Jan and Jules “fight the impulse to withdraw” (207) from each other, as they battle their own vulnerabilities and memories. Gradually, however, a “balance” is established – a balance manifested and expressed in Jan’s touching of Jules. Having dinner with her family at Jock’s farm, Jan “drapes her hand over [Jules’s] thigh,” reiterating the moment of their initial contact, but this time unhesitatingly – making “a silent statement of … established intimacy” (236). At the end of the novel, when Jules returns from Europe filled with grief at his son’s death, the description of Jan’s touching brings together notions of balance, silence and the importance of touch in the expression and realisation of their love. When Jan tells Jules that she has “taken the next few days off. … For you” (275), Jules relates:

I push away from the table, spin away, and come up against an invisible wall. I hit it hard and cry out. Then I am sobbing and she walks me to the bedroom and holds me and holds me.

When I wake she is holding me.
I cannot talk. It is too soon to talk. (276)
There is a strong sense, at the beginning of this passage, of pendular movement as Jules pushes, spins and hits the “invisible wall” of his emotions. In Jan’s arms, such movement is arrested and balance is achieved, allowing Jules to release his emotions for the first time in the novel. At the same time, this reference to “an invisible wall” reinforces the sense, in the rest of the passage, of a proximity too close for sight, a closeness that allows Jules to open himself up to Jan without fear of exposure. The silence with which the passage ends compounds the association of a deeper or implicit understanding of Jules – achieved by Marc and Chloe as well as Jan – with a refusal or inability to rely on vision.

Recurrently, therefore, *The Architect* insists on the importance of Jules’s character and emotions over his physical appearance. While this message is expounded generally, it is particularly focused on his relationships with female characters, who are commended to the extent that they do not look at him, but instead recognise his inner worth. In this sense, the depiction of heterosexual relationships is closely aligned with the traditional beauty and the beast narrative. As Lehman notes, this archetypal plot delivers not a humanist message, as is often supposed, but a gendered one, namely, that “a woman must learn to stop looking and seeing the male body while falling under the sway of powerful words and actions” (*Running* 13). In maintaining that men should not be subjected to an objectifying, evaluating or desiring gaze, this narrative upholds a fundamental tenet of the patriarchal visual economy.

Significantly, while the deep understanding of men’s bodies permitted by women’s knowledge in both *The Blind Eye* and *The Architect* either facilitates healing or seems to alleviate male pain (emotional or physical), it is ultimately other male characters who actually heal Silas and Jules. Although Constance is able to heal Rudi’s tumour, her vision emerges as not only incapable of healing Silas, but as unable to perceive his condition sufficiently, and possibly, as damaging to him. There is a strong suggestion that the cure she provides for his nosebleed actually makes Silas sick. He still has the “taste of the flower Constance had given him” in his mouth when “illness … roll[s] in.” The days he subsequently spends “being rocked mercilessly by a fever of extraordinary intensity” (143) are punctuated by lucid “moments … when he … wondered whether she had wanted to make him ill.” Although, when recovered, Silas rejects his suspicions that Constance had poisoned him as “a ludicrous notion” (146), his doubts resurface when it becomes evident that his condition originated during his time in Port Tremaine (276). The fact that
Constance did not try to help him implies that either she saw the problem and negligently or cruelly did nothing, or that she did not perceive his condition, rendering claims about the diagnostic capabilities of her gaze, and her ability to heal, uncertain.

In contrast, Daniel is able to more fully understand – to feel and empathise with – and therefore to heal, Silas’s emotional and physical pain. During their first consultation, Silas experiences an onslaught of the chest pain he has suffered, intermittently, since leaving Port Tremaine. As Daniel recalls:

> It took me an instant to see that he was in pain, and the moment I did, I reached for him ….
> Slowly, Silas sat up. He touched the spot where I had been holding him, gently, carefully. I could still feel it, the burning tightness there in my hand.  
> *So that’s the pain.* (47-8)

Daniel’s touch is able to sense Silas’s emotional as well as his physical pain: Daniel reports feeling “in my own flesh, the hard hatred of the wounds I had been touching, there in my own body” (206). Such empathy is further associated with trust when he recalls, “I reached for him, my fingers touching the wound on his wrist, alighting there briefly, but with a sense of purpose that could not be mistaken because … I wanted him to trust” (159). Significantly, and in contrast to Constance’s vision, Daniel’s ability to feel and heal Silas’s pain is never questioned. Through this empathetic (male) connection, Silas – who “had found no help from traditional medicine” (14) nor, ultimately, from Constance’s ambiguous vision abilities – is healed. At their final consultation, Silas reports that his pain is almost gone, and that it has been six weeks since he has cut himself (275).

This same privileging of a man’s healing touch occurs in *The Architect*. While Chloe’s and, particularly, Jan’s non-visual approaches lessens Jules’s emotional pain, Marc’s touch easily surpasses these women’s abilities, healing Jules both emotionally and physically. Although Jules becomes uneasily accustomed to the touch of others – namely, the junior in the architectural firm (38), Chloe (64) and Peter (153) – such contact, like Donna’s “proper look” (6), is restricted to undamaged parts of his body. Contact with his damaged body he limits to functionality – “To attend to wounds …. To remove dead flesh. To roll the puss from under infected graft sites” (217). Marc defies Jules by touching damaged sites on his body: “His fingers curl around the inert, scar-bound butt of my shoulder. … His hand moves against the scars on my chest wall. … Never have I permitted anyone to touch me in this way” (216-17). Moreover, Marc insists that Jules touch his own
body. By teaching Jules “about getting in touch with his body” (251), Marc helps him to “own,” “understand” and eventually overcome “his fear of his damaged body” (244). When his scars “hold less terror,” Jules is able to deal with his emotions.

Marc’s ability to help Jules is partly due to the fact that, because his body is also damaged, he has had to deal with similar issues of understanding and ownership. Before the interactions between Marc and Jules, Clint is shown using touch to help Marc reconcile the two parts of his body – damaged and undamaged. Marc explains:

He undoes my trousers and runs his other hand across my belly between my bony hips. He likes the feel of the muscles here, the mixture of firm and soft on the edge of my body where sensation blurs. I push a pillow under my head so I can watch as his touch moves up and down. His hand confirms that the two parts of me are one. (222)

More importantly, however, Marc is able to help Jules because, like Daniel, he can feel Jules’s pain by touching him. Massaging Jules’s back he senses, “Not sharp pain, but an ache of massive intensity” (243). This pain is indeterminately physical and emotional, with “scars … joined to memories (183) and “pain … strongly coloured by anxiety” (243), and is further associated with Marc’s tactile awareness of Jules’s emotional distress.

Both Silas’s and Jules’s emotional and physical pain can be interpreted in relation to the popular discourse of masculinity crisis. A reading of Jules’s pain as arising from patriarchy’s restrictions is supported by the emotional healing he undergoes once he learns to “get in touch” with himself and Marc. Silas’s pain, in contrast, can be seen to resonate with claims regarding women’s emasculating influence. This explanation for Silas’s pain emerges when the origins of his condition are located in Port Tremaine – the place where Constance “got under his skin” (165) and infected his life. More specifically, much of Silas’s pain seems to arise from the guilt he feels at her death. Accordingly, misplaced male guilt – resulting from feminism’s purportedly exaggerated claims regarding women’s oppression – is frequently described in popular discussions of masculinity crisis. The way in which women’s (potential) knowledge and power are trumped by male touch in both The Blind Eye and The Architect similarly functions in accordance with this discourse. Indeed, the ability of Daniel and Marc to feel (respectively) Silas’s and Jules’s pain represents, in an extremely idealised fantasy form, the development of precisely the deep, trusting and empathetic male connections advocated in many popular discussions of masculinity crisis.

123 Correspondingly, much of the difficulties Daniel has experienced in forging emotional connections with others can be traced back to the guilt he feels in relation to his previous relationship with Greta.
Similarly, the fact that healing occurs through one-on-one interactions between men resonates with the focus in such discussions on individual liberation rather than societal change and with the idea that only men can understand other men’s pain. As Robinson asserts, the individualistic focus in popular discussions of masculinity crisis renders “a therapeutic solution … adequate and social revolution … unnecessary” (“Men’s” 209).

An understanding of Marc and Jules’s connection in relation to the popular discourse of masculinity crisis is particularly encouraged by the frequent portrayal of their relationship in terms of “Father and son stuff” (270). Each character uses the other “to fill complementary roles” (233; see also 271), and each one constantly identifies their father (for Marc) or son (for Jules) in the other (see, for example, 99, 142, 239). Indeed, the main reason that Marc gives for helping Jules “with his fear of his damaged body” is so that he can “lie fully in the space left by my father” (244). Correspondingly, in response to Marc’s touch, Jules longs “for the touching and loving of [his] own son” (241). Even when Marc’s father was alive, their relationship, as Marc tells Jules, “was never brilliant although I loved him like mad. He was always sort of untouchable …. I turned Dad into this hero figure as an excuse for the distance that was always between us” (271). Jules is similarly estranged from his son, Che Lai. As he tells Jock (Marc’s uncle):

I have a son who is much the same age as Marc. Once upon a time my son made me into something I am not – he turned his father into a fiction, a hero. When I thought this was not healthy for him I destroyed the fiction with the truth. Unfortunately, in doing so, I also destroyed the father, and now I have lost the son. (259; see also 269-70)

Che Lai constructed Jules as a hero because, like Marc’s father, Jules “simply … provide[d],” whereas “a child needs to be loved” (241). Paradoxically, Jules’s avoidance of emotional connections is subsequently attributed to his failed relationship with his son. When Marc asks him to “accept some love from me,” Jules replies, “No! Che Lai loved me. His loving turned against us both. … It will be the same with you” (272). Yet at the same time as he rejects Marc, Jules needs him: “He has the irreverence of a child and that boldness I have been waiting for” (231). Within this convoluted elaboration of father/son love and distance, both Marc and Jules are explicitly described as searching for a replacement “hero” (270, 272) in each other. However, as their understanding deepens, they

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124 According to Judith Newton, this assumption constitutes the “male romance narratives” – involving “men going off with other men and leaving women, to all intents and purposes, behind” (230) – which she argues underlie and inform the popular discourse of masculinity crisis.
are able to accept one another as simply human. Such acceptance is demonstrated in the final chapter “THEY: ways of knowing” (276), which combines their emotional openness with their tactile connection. As Marc relates,

I put my hands on his shoulders.
The wide framework of his bones disguises the fragility.
We are still.
He is thinking. I am feeling.
Two big men on either side of loving. (273)

Paradoxically, the fact that this final chapter is followed by an epilogue depicting the wedding of the junior and his mechanic boyfriend suggests why the intimate, healing connections between male characters in both texts are explored in relation to women’s involvement with the same male bodies. As Sedgwick argues in *Between Men*, the heterosexual relationships enabled by the presence of female characters in English literature, though secondary to male-male interactions, enable male bonding while denying the erotic nature of such connections. Chloe, Jan and Constance, in other words, function as alibis, as conduits in relationships where the real subjects are men. They function to maintain the semblance of normative (heterosexual) masculinity by concealing what Sedgwick terms the artificial distinction between homosociality and homosexuality. The gay wedding at the end of *The Architect* need not be seen as paradoxical to such heterosexualisation: as Sedgwick argues, a deep homophobia is on occasion marked by the presence of openly homosexual minor characters who can be differentiated immediately from the heterosexual male couple.

The importance of male relationships in *The Architect* and *The Blind Eye* is reinforced by the organization of both novels according to male-female-male erotic triangles (an arrangement Sedgwick identified as typical of male-authored plots). Such an arrangement contrasts with the female-male-female triangle Wallace describes as characteristic of the female-authored novels she analyses in *Sisters and Rivals*. Although, as Wallace argues, such narratives create plots that centre around female rivalry, they concentrate on and complicate women’s experiences and relationships, rather than reducing them to mere conduits between men. Contrastingly, the male-female-male erotic triangles central to *The Architect* and *The Blind Eye* underlie and demonstrate the primary interest of
these novels – men and men’s experiences – and their concurrent marginalisation of female characters.

The privileging of male relationships is reinforced by the way women’s knowledge and (potential) power are insidiously appropriated by male characters in both novels. Although his powers derive from women’s knowledge, Jules ultimately emerges as the psychic expert in *The Architect*. The passing nature of his reference to his female teachers (209) implies that he has surpassed their teachings; his ability to defeat the witch-woman’s curse consolidates his power in relation to the female supernatural. Jules’s appropriation of women’s knowledge is consolidated by the construction of his psychic abilities not as partial and embodied (as they are when exercised by other characters), but as omniscient and omnipotent. This is particularly evident in demonstrations of his extraordinary artistic perception. Whereas Marc’s and Clint’s psychic abilities reveal only veiled and indeterminate meanings, Jules’s artistic perception allows him to see the absolute essence of everything, in an ordered and patterned way. He is able “to see the forces that connect all masses” (38), and when he “look[s] into the details of the landscape” he is easily able to “break it into parts, examine it minutely, grid by grid” (238). Jules’s appropriation of women’s knowledge is extended by the way he imparts his psychic abilities only to younger men, for example in the assistance Jules offers Clint in overcoming his fear of Jules’s overpowering aura. In accordance with Sedgwick’s description of women’s intermediary role in interactions where the real subjects are men, Jan plays no real part in this interaction, yet her presence allays fears of openly homosexual desire. Jules also assists the junior. Although they share the ability to “see the lines already on the page,” the junior cannot manage his ability; Jules promises to help him “control this gift so it does not madden” (38).

The privileging of the tactile that occurs in the portrayal of psychic abilities in *The Architect* upholds patriarchal dichotomies in other ways. Although insistently portrayed as enabling equality, descriptions of Jules and Jan’s relationship actually manifest patriarchal strategies and dichotomies. As Rebecca Lin asserts, women are constructed in patriarchal society as “male counterparts … [and are] never treated independently” (201). The association of Jan with nature and Jules with culture, particularly given the novel’s obvious privileging of the cultural, positions Jan as merely Jules’s counterpart. Indeed, the association of women with nature has been repeatedly identified by feminists as a classic
patriarchal dichotomy. Simone de Beauvoir, for instance, called the association of “woman” and “nature” one of “the great collective myths” of masculinist fiction. Interestingly, Beauvoir’s explanation of the purpose and effect of this association captures, with uncanny accuracy, Jan’s role in relation to Jules. As an incarnation of nature, Beauvoir argues that “woman … bestows a peace and harmony. … [S]he appears as the privileged Other, through whom the subject fulfils himself: one of the measures of man, his counterbalance, his salvation, his adventure, his happiness” (278).

Moreover, Jan’s non-visual approach to Jules ultimately functions in accordance with the specific binary organisation of the patriarchal visual economy. Just as Donna’s voyeurism is circumvented when she takes a “proper look” (6) at Jules, Jan’s practice of (not) looking at Jules allows him to be rescued from the position of object. Marc and Chloe’s different perspectives on Jules can also be read in this light, given the way in which their understanding individualises and validates him, while not reducing him to his body. The deeper understanding achieved in these relationships (compared to those in which characters rely on their vision of the outer man) seems designed to demonstrate that Jules should not, and cannot, be reduced to his body. Indeed, the focus on the inner man that these perspectives permit allows Jules to remain, in a sense, supremely disembodied. Accordingly, Jules’s body is concealed even in the one description of his explicitly sexual engagement with Jan. Although a description of an interaction based on touch would seem to necessitate a simultaneous revelation of both bodies (his hand touches her leg, her mouth touches his nipple), Jules’s body is firmly concealed, even when Jan “sheds her borrowed robe.”125 In contrast to their non-sexual interactions – in which it is Jan who touches Jules – in their love-making Jules touches but is untouched, sees but is unseen. At the same time, his touch on Jan is explicitly active, and is sometimes described in penetrative terms. Thus, Jules relates:

I burrow, seeking the scent of her. … [M]y fingers slide into the robe seeking reassurance from the warmth of her skin. …

Through the leaves of the shrubs beyond the window the sunshine paints a filigree across her breasts and I sup from the splashes of light. (246)

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125 While I would not want to make too much of this phrase, the two connotations of the word disrobe – a loss of clothes as well as authority – are notable in the context of Jan’s subordinate position in relation to Jules. Additionally, the fact that this robe is borrowed from a man – Jock – resonates with the dichotomy of male concealment and female exposure repeatedly inscribed in this novel.
Although a revelation of Jan’s body is repeatedly and insistently sought by Jules in this passage, his body (except for his fingers) remains invisible. Even when it is logical to suppose that other parts of Jules’s body are involved, the use of verbs (“burrow,” “sup”) instead of nouns concentrates attention on Jules’s actions while perpetuating the concealment of his body. Jules’s activity in this passage is reinforced by the fact that it is his character that narrates the exchange.

Finally, rather than enabling women’s power, Clint’s, and particularly Marc’s, psychic perceptions allow an awareness of Jules’s intense pain while demonstrating and reinforcing his superior masculinity. Although Jules suffers as a result of being out-of-touch with and unable to express his emotions, his stoicism is also celebrated. He emerges, for instance, as a true hero because he assists children without seeking credit or acclaim; likewise, his experience of and ability to overcome intense physical and emotional pain would be devalued if he complained. Marc and Clint’s psychic abilities allow them to function as conduits for describing – and enabling readerly sympathy for – Jules’s enormous suffering without him having to break his stoic silence. Although Jules is ostensibly composed and in control when he talks about his son, for instance, Marc senses a “wave of desperation … the feelings that Jules keeps trying to deny” (268). Similarly, while Jules gives no external indication of his pain, the “ache of massive intensity” (243) Marc perceives when he touches his back demonstrates the suffering Jules is withstanding. In this sense, Marc fulfils the role of an omniscient narrator, within a narrative that explicitly privileges partiality. As well as allowing Jules to maintain a masculinity marked as heroic as well as damaged, the psychic messages Marc and Clint receive from Jules are often assertive, even aggressive, confirming the potency of Jules’s masculinity. For instance, like Clint’s description of Jules’s “[c]annibalising” (209) aura, when Marc looks at a book of Jules’s photographs he is struck by a “blast” of emotion that makes him “want to cry” (260). This is not the only time Marc appears childlike in relation to Jules: when they shake hands at the art gallery, for instance, Jules “see[s] in his upturned face the shock that comes across a child in the moment of realising he has stepped into water that is too deep” (101). Such comparisons between childlike Marc and mature Jules reinforce Jules’s depth of experience and pain, as well as his superior masculinity and their father-son connection.
While psychic abilities and touch in *The Architect* protect Jules, the appropriation of similarly conceived women’s knowledge and (potential) power in *The Blind Eye* functions to subtly construct homeopathy as truth. When associated with Constance, homeopathy is constructed as embodied, partial and entirely ambiguous, yet when practised by Daniel, it is represented in terms of absolute truth. Correspondingly, although Constance’s Kirlian gaze is continually questioned, the capabilities of Kirlian photography – a homeopathic technique – is never challenged. The absolute credence given to the idea that these photographs can detect ailments before they are physically manifested in the body aligns homeopathic vision with truth rather than partiality. This shifting between partiality and truth is perpetuated, more generally, by the construction of homeopathy as concurrently mystical and rational (a double structure similar to the one that underlies mythopoetic elaborations of masculinity crisis126). While rationality requires investigation and analysis, mysticism encourages intuition and insight through faith and discourages, even rejects, rational thought. However, while opposed in many ways, both rationality and mysticism promise access to truth that cannot be assailed.

In descriptions of homeopathy in *The Blind Eye*, these apparently contradictory approaches are consistently combined. This is demonstrated, for example, in Daniel’s repeated descriptions of homeopathic concepts. On the one hand, the measured, assured tone he employs in his extensive explanations of the specific and minute details of homeopathic diagnosis, remedies, concepts and processes signals an underlying reasoning and logic. At the same time, the repetitive intensity of Daniel’s statements creates the sense of a sermon aimed at the readers. The book’s epigraphs similarly portray homeopathy through both mystical and rational frameworks. Taken from various homeopathic textbooks such as *The Science of Homeopathy*, listed in Blain’s “Sources,” these epigraphs signal a rigorous, distanced, even scientific research process. Simultaneously, however, they report mystical phenomena, including a girl who shoots electricity from her body, and a spider’s bite that is cured by dancing. The final epigraph in the book – Constantine Herring’s description of proving – captures this doubled deployment of the mystical and the scientific beautifully. Immediately after positioning himself and his fellow provers as scientist-explorers, entering “the unknown world of results, of effects,” Herring describes these

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126 For example, Bly’s *Iron John* combines apparently rational discussions of contemporary gender relations with assertions regarding “Wild Man” masculinity that rely on a belief in the mystical truths encapsulated by various mythologies and fairytales.
apparently scientific provings as “the high feasts of our church.” This image of religious celebration is accompanied by a description of transcendent religious suffering, bordering on martyrdom, which itself ends with references to “certainty” and the apparently rational arenas of school and learning: “Proving is the most wonderful thing, the world has never known its like. We suffer, and we enjoy it; we sacrifice a little of our comfort, and gain years of strength by it; we go to school to learn, and we increase the certainty of the healing art” (247). The construction of homeopathy as indeterminately mystical and rational – which occurs concurrently with its gradual transformation from “just a different way of looking at the world” (158) into “a complete picture” (137), “the total picture” (45-210) and “the whole picture” (285) – affirms the truth of homeopathy without resorting to obvious, and easily resisted, didacticism.

The association of Daniel’s practice of homeopathy with absolute truth is mirrored and facilitated by his gradual transformation from a partial to an omniscient narrator. Daniel’s ability to feel and heal Silas’s pain demonstrates his own omniscience, not to mention omnipotence, while simultaneously affirming the validity of homeopathy. Additionally, just as Silas’s descriptions of Constance’s suffering (noted in Chapter One) subtly shift the focus from her pain to his own, Daniel’s narration begins with his acknowledging his own partiality – admitting that he can “only guess” at the events he describes – but gradually transfers attention to Silas’s (and the other Port Tremaine characters’) reliability. Ultimately, as with psychic abilities in The Architect, the depiction of homeopathy as a contingent and liberating alternative to absolute truth – and Daniel as an embodied and partial narrator – functions as a smoke-screen for the novel’s fundamental endorsement of the truth offered by homeopathy. While the perspective that results is similar, in its totalising compass, to voyeurism and fetishism, the novel’s portrayal of homeopathy creates, if anything, a greater sense of absolutism. This is because, whereas objectification is critiqued, homeopathy and its mouthpiece, Daniel, are exempt from criticism. Daniel, like Jules, thereby emerges as entirely positive in ways that imbue with poignancy and authenticity the discourse of masculinity crisis explored through such characters.

The fact that these novels appear feminist while actually propagating the anti-feminist discourse of masculinity crisis is at least partly to be expected. This is because, as theorists like Robinson (Marked) have convincingly argued, the discourse of masculinity
crisis draws heavily on, and is largely validated by its subsequent resemblance to, feminist rhetoric. Central to proclamations of masculinity crisis are references to recognisably feminist notions like equality, a deconstruction of the private and the public, an acknowledgement of the pain produced by patriarchal oppression, and an openness to the importance of emotions and feelings rather than exclusively rational arguments and ideas. This rhetoric, as Robinson asserts, is used because it has cultural currency in contemporary discussions of identity politics. However, and in a way that is mirrored in the portrayal of homeopathy in *The Blind Eye* and psychic abilities in *The Architect*, proponents of masculinity crisis use feminist rhetoric to paradoxically argue for a nostalgic return to a time of gender segregation and inequality. This apparent movement towards but actual rejection of gender equality largely accounts for the insidiousness of, and hence the danger posed by, the popular discourse of masculinity crisis.

Certainly, as Haraway asserts, the imaginative construction of an embodied and liberating visual paradigm really does requires “more than acknowledged and self-critical partiality” (“Situated” 192). The question of what more is required (and the discussion of a novel – *Miranda* – that manifests these additional requirements) is one to which I will return. Firstly, however, Chapter Four explores another path that many of these novels take in attempting to imaginatively construct an alternative to, indeed, a solution for, the problem of objectification: namely, the portrayal and exploration of an ideal, heterosexual love, able to forge or at least to approach a desire beyond dichotomies. While Jules and Jan’s relationship is explicitly privileged in such terms, the heterosexual interactions between characters in *The Blind Eye, Last of the Sane Days, Transplanted* and *Machines for Feeling*, are predicated on a mutual exposure denied in this interaction. At the same time, elements in the portrayal of Jules and Jan’s relationship – namely, vision, touch, balance and silence – are central to the depiction of an equitable heterosexuality in these other novels, and will be discussed in relation to the notion of erotic reciprocity.
Chapter Four
Happily (n)ever after

The (im)possibilities of equitable heterosexuality in The Blind Eye, Last of the Sane Days, Transplanted and Machines for Feeling

In actual bodily contact, contrary to the dominant iconographies of sex, the polarities of gender falter and blur.

In sex, bodies meet; and the epiphany of that meeting, the great threat and joy, is precisely that the dichotomies of active/passive, subject/object, heterosexual/homosexual which have up until now sustained the charade of their source in the gender ordering of masculinity/femininity are always in danger of collapsing. They all collapse together. For beneath the veil of the phallus is merely a vulnerable penis, which men may or may not gain pleasure from pushing into others; even as they remain vulnerable to the embraces, enclosures and penetrations of others. In sex, beyond phallocentric metaphor, one body actively seeks its passive objectification in and through the desire of another. The heterosexual embrace … can be as ‘queer’, or as threatening to the gender order, as its perverse alternatives.

[Lynne Segal, Straight Sex 296]

In this chapter I explore the construction of utopian heterosexual relationships in The Blind Eye, Last of the Sane Days, Transplanted and Machines for Feeling. As with depictions of homeopathy and psychic abilities, representations of heterosexual love in these novels reject an exclusively visual relation to male characters’ bodies, supplementing visual knowledge and understanding with touch (a sense that is again aligned with healing). In these fictions, however, and in contrast to the interactions between Marc and Jules in The Architect, and Daniel and Silas in The Blind Eye, the healing of male bodies, and by analogy, their emotional pain, is associated with female rather than male characters’ touches. Such touching occurs within, and contributes to the construction of, utopian heterosexual spaces. Often, these spaces also provide a site where female characters’ pain is healed, and where their view of and desire for the male characters’ bodies are enabled. Thus, whereas the portrayal of men healing male pain in The Architect and The Blind Eye privileges homosocial relationships and produces narratives of male bonding that echo popular and anti-feminist solutions to masculinity crisis, this common theme seems to promise texts that are positive in feminist terms.

This interpretation accords with Parker’s reading of the recurrence of wounded men in women’s art and fiction. As elaborated in Chapter Two, Parker insists that this trope
signals a desire to expose, challenge and overcome power imbalances between men and women. Specifically, the depiction of wounded men enables scenarios in which female characters can occupy traditionally masculine narrative roles, and where male characters, consigned to positions of powerlessness usually associated with women in patriarchal society, become intellectually, physically and emotionally feminised. Gender difference is consequently transcended, or at least minimised, thus permitting the portrayal of equitable heterosexual relationships. This consequence of male wounding – described already in *Miranda* and *Last of the Sane Days* – is continued and extended in portrayals of utopian heterosexual spaces in these novels and in *The Blind Eye* and *Machines for Feeling*. Also evident in these fictions is the other main consequence of “invalided” men in women’s writing identified by Parker: namely, the shared awareness of suffering experienced by women and wounded men creates a point of connection that enables them to overcome difficulties and misunderstandings, and thus to achieve a romantic and idealised rapprochement.127

Simultaneously, however, the fact that romance fictions are a dominant site for this theme of rapprochement between “invalided” men and caring, nurturing women – combined with the strong resonance between this genre and the fictions discussed in this chapter – indicates an underlying generic framework with the potential to reinforce rather than transform oppressive gender relations. Disparaging descriptions of women’s romance fiction are a familiar feminist position. While Segal, for instance, critiques many of the cultural and discursive means by which women are oppressed, she reserves particular scorn for “the conventions and pleasures of the classic romance novel.” These, she identifies as one of the main reasons “it is so hard to break the codes linking sexuality to hierarchical polarities of gender.” Specifically, the pattern whereby “the waiting female heroine … at the very last moment” finds herself “the infinitely adored object of [the] always more-forceful, more-thrusting and powerfully assertive (if not reluctantly brutal) male hero” – due to “his own helpless love” – is identified as upholding gender dichotomies while compelling women to “vicariously” delight in such a reinforcement (*Straight* 241).

127 Rochester’s blinding in *Jane Eyre* is a frequently cited example of this trope of male wounding and subsequent romantic rapprochement (see, for example, Parker 46; J. Miller 80; Kendrick paras 26-27; G. Griffin 238). While the nineteenth-century has been identified as “the heyday for male invalids” (Parker 46), the wounded and/or powerless male body is also a noted aspect of women’s fiction of the late eighteenth (Rogers 10-11) and early twentieth centuries (Wallace, “Ventriloquizing” 325).

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Of particular relevance to an interpretation of the wounded men in the texts explored in this chapter is Segal’s contention that the depiction of male suffering in women’s romance fiction manifests a depoliticised humanism that is disabling for feminist politics. Specifically, she argues that the pathos evoked by depictions of male disempowerment has the potential to forestall women’s righteous and politically useful anger by fooling them into believing that men are ultimately as emotionally dependent on women – or, more specifically, on a particular woman – as women are economically, socially and emotionally dependent on men within patriarchal social structures (Straight 241; see also J. Miller 81, 161; Hopkins 9). In other words, attempting to locate the natural equality of men and women in shared suffering “not only flattens out difference but simplifies experience” (Kaye para 15), and thus overwrites actual social inequalities. At best, it is argued, the romance plot subsequently becomes a way of undermining men without freeing women (J. Miller, 160); or, in its implicit suggestion that men would be better partners and people if they were more like women, as a means of “smoothing the way for slight changes in the culture of heterosexual coupling without seriously challenging gender relations or acceptable notions of appropriate sexuality for men and women” (Kirkham 109). In these terms, the rationale of equality through shared suffering in both women’s romance fiction and the novels discussed in this chapter can be aligned with a post-feminist tendency to obscure social inequality by accentuating men’s suffering through the appropriation of feminine characteristics (Modleski, Feminism; Rowe, Unruly, “Melodrama”). Alternatively, this theme can be identified with the discourse of masculinity crisis, in its insistence that men are at least as damaged by patriarchy as women.

However, while the heterosexual relationships depicted in The Blind Eye, Last of the Sane Days, Transplanted and Machines for Feeling resemble those of the romance genre, these novels also escape such conventions in various ways. Perhaps most obvious is the absence of happily-ever-after endings. Without exception, the utopian heterosexual spaces that are constructed in these texts collapse with a sense of inevitability. According to Gledhill, changes in conventional cultural narratives like the romance plot represent “the material of cultural struggle” (“Women” 91), signalling the emergence of new ideas about gender. This is because, when new discourses emerge, cultural narratives (while continuing to draw upon patriarchal myths and archetypes) must adapt in order to sustain attention and belief. Schor’s view that, “because of the constraints of a representational system
coterminous with patriarchy … women writers … [are] obliged to resort to complex strategies to lay bare the source of both male power and female powerlessness” (114), raises the possibility that this adaptation of a patriarchal plot may represent a deliberate means for Australian women writers to respond to, negotiate with, and imaginatively redress, changes in gender relations.

Another departure from the conventions of romance fiction evident in these texts (the consistency of which supports the idea that these novels are influenced by particular and emerging cultural conceptions of gender) is the portrayal of heterosexuality through the concept of erotic reciprocity. In contravention of Segal’s description of the waiting heroine and the active, forceful hero – a plot that basically encapsulates Jules and Jan’s relationship in The Architect – heterosexuality is explicitly and repeatedly positioned in terms of reciprocal visual and physical engagements between male and female characters. The notion of erotic reciprocity, which provides a framework for exploring the fictions in this chapter, is described by Mariana Valverde as “[a]n eroticism that is both sexy and egalitarian,” “one in which both partners are simultaneously subject and object, for one another as well as for themselves” (46). Although this explanation employs a subject/object binary, the co-existence of these positions – as in Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of perception – problematises the dichotomy. Reciprocity in these fictions consequently responds to Segal’s call for a movement “beyond phallocentric metaphor” by imagining heterosexualities that destabilise and “collapse” patriarchal divisions (Straight 296). As a result, and although ultimately unsustainable, depictions of visual and physical reciprocity positively imagine desire and represent it outside the bounds of objectification, and permit glimpses of heterosexual relationships that are mutually-caring and-fulfilling. Thus, just as imagery derived from the popular discourse of masculinity crisis is used by some of these authors to construct new ideas about gender relations, so too is the romance plot employed as a framework for the depiction of heterosexual relationships that escape the dichotomous gender relations delineated in (and reproduced by) such a genre.

A basic model for the visual reciprocity privileged in these fictions exists in descriptions of Silas’s mother and father’s relationship in The Blind Eye. While neither of these characters is paragon of virtue (Silas’s mother is a confused alcoholic and his father is a criminal), their relationship manifest a version of love that the narrative, in different ways, strongly endorses. Forced to flee the country because of her husband’s crimes, Silas’s
mother is devastated by their exile. Despite her misery, the couple are held together by love: “through it all, his mother had never thought to leave his father.” Significantly, the resilience of their partnership is described in strongly visual terms. Silas asserts, “there was a softness in her gaze, a visible easing in her tension whenever his father had entered the room, whenever he had looked at her with adoration in his eyes” (81). While Silas’s father’s adoration might suggest, at first glance, a fetishist’s overvaluation of the desired object, such an interpretation is variously counteracted. Although Silas’s mother is an object to her husband’s gaze, her own subjectivity, her soft “gaze” (highlighted by the specific use of the term) is evident in their interaction. Further, and in contrast to the way Jules looks back at Donna in the hospital, Silas’s mother’s returned look is not a challenge or a refusal. Rather, it represents an acceptance of, indeed a relaxing into, the position of object. It additionally suggests a meeting of the two looks: the “softness in her gaze” resonates with the “adoration in his eyes,” reinforcing a sense of reciprocity, which is compounded by the syntax: although Silas’s father is specifically described as looking at his wife, it is her gaze that begins the sentence and consequently contextualises their subsequent interaction. It is impossible, therefore, to determine whether his adoration and her position as object precede, and create, the softness in her gaze or vice-versa. Indeed, the fact that the passage describes an ongoing relationship – a repeated visual interaction – renders the question of precedence unresolvable, if not irrelevant.

From this base of reciprocity, the element of visual love that is most celebrated is the clarity Silas’s mother achieves in looking at and accepting her husband. Although her vision is not literally clear – Silas describes her as “always in a slightly inebriated haze” (52) – she “had seen [her husband] for what he was and she had not stopped loving him” (81). This privileged association of love, acceptance and metaphorical visual clarity is reinforced by Constance’s description of Mick’s love – “He knows me … He sees me for what I am” (261). Combined with Silas’s identification of love as necessary to “affirm his existence” (81), love is raised to the level of existential necessity. The depiction of other heterosexual liaisons – like Daniel’s relationships with Greta (155) and Victoria (234) – in terms of love-blindness, illustrates by contrast the desirability of a clear and accepting love.

Shame – chiefly represented by Silas and Greta’s mutual inability to look at (and accept) themselves or each other – is the principal obstacle to their relationship. Silas’s shame predominantly arises from Greta’s knowledge of his self-mutilating behaviour, while
her shame is largely associated with his awareness of her actions in her relationship with Daniel, particularly her attempt at suicide, motivated by a desire to make Daniel feel guilty. While shame is a barrier in their relationship, each is able, at different times, to accept and love the other by remembering their own actions. In particular, the closeness Silas and Greta do achieve is the result of their tentative but mutual desire to reveal themselves to one another – to be both subject and object in their relationship. But while enabling their closeness, the revelations prompted by their awareness of mutuality produce more shame and distance. Their relationship is consequently characterised by a pendular motion: they continually move towards and then away from each other.

This movement is repeatedly evident. For instance, in their first meeting after Greta witnesses Silas’s self-mutilating behaviour, shame causes her to hide, creating a visual distance between them:

She put her hand across her throat, aware of Silas’s eyes on her again, and wanting to cover the softness of her skin near the top of her breast, because she suddenly felt uncomfortable at the memory of the night they had spent together, flitting at the edge of each conversation they had. (120)

In addition to covering her throat, Greta avoids Silas’s gaze by “star[ing] at the ground” (122). While Greta’s discomfort is reminiscent of Julia’s response to Ross’s voyeurism in Transplanted (when she pulls her collar over her mouth in an attempt to conceal herself from his gaze), Silas’s look (at least in his relationship with Greta) is portrayed as uninterested in power and control. Indeed, he renders himself vulnerable to her gaze by exposing his self-inflicted wounds, in other words, the physical manifestations of his emotional pain: “He pushed up his sleeves, not bothering to hide the full extent of the damage from her” (121). Silas also “bent his head so that he could catch her gaze” (122), indicating his desire to establish a mutual look, rather than a relation to domination and control. This gesture establishes a mutual and reciprocal looking relation, similar to that described by Valverde. Looking into her eyes, from a position below and under her gaze, Silas asks Greta:

*Am I too much of a mess?* His smile was rueful, but his eyes were serious.

*For what?*

*For a friendship.*

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128 At the same time, Silas and Greta’s mutual shame functions as the proof and measure of their visual reciprocity – the fact that both are subjected to the gaze of the other. As Sartre asserts, “shame … is shame of *self*; it is the *recognition* of the fact that I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging” (261).
No, and she was surprised to find herself uttering what she had always known was inside her, a trust in him, despite what had passed. (122)

In this instance, therefore, Silas’s willingness to expose his body to Greta introduces a reciprocal look that reminds her of the bond they share, and enables them to transcend the visual distance and disjunction shame introduced into their relationship.

Their rapprochement is further facilitated by reciprocal touching. When he begins to tell her about Constance (120), Greta “did not know if she wanted him to continue.” Silas, however, reassures her with touch: “when he reached for her, she knew he was trying to let her know that it was all right. He was not going to do or say anything that would damage the tentative beginnings of the friendship they had constructed” (121). Greta consequently returns Silas’s touch: “she reached down to help him up” from his position below her. Feeling “his hand … warm in her own, [Greta] realised how much she had missed seeing him around.” To Daniel she admits, “I guess it was then that I knew … I had fallen for him …. I just hadn’t wanted to admit it to myself” (122). In Greta’s room, “with the trees swaying against the window, they finally moved towards each other. … [T]heir eyes met … he felt her soften” (245). Silas’s mother’s “soft” love is evoked in Greta’s softening, while the pendular nature of their relationship is suggested by the swaying trees. Reciprocal touch and vision – “they moved towards each other,” “their eyes met” – underpin their reunion. The ensuing description of this “union” is similarly couched in reciprocal terms:

... she could feel his hand on the curve of her breast as he unbuttoned her shirt. She was surprised to find she was helping him, her fingers knotted in his, her velvet skin warm against him, her breath sweet and smoky in his mouth, her eyes still on him as she slid her hand into his jeans, rolling them off as she told him that she, too, had missed him, both of them fearing that the other would pull away, that this hold would be broken at any moment. (245)

Visual and tactile reciprocity are also central to the equitable intimacy Hilary and Rafael share in Last of the Sane Days. As noted in Chapter Two, the first part of this novel, and Hilary’s fetishism, is separated from the second part, and Hilary’s voyeurism, by a train journey. On this journey, she and Rafael experience a brief period of parity, so different from their other interactions that it represents an alternative space in the narrative. Not only is this journey characterised by reciprocity rather than objectification, but during this time Hilary’s attention is focused on Rafael’s male body (rather than on Eva or Peta’s female bodies). Entry into this alternate sphere begins with Rafael touching Hilary, initially at least, by accident. Walking behind her,
… Rafael tripped on the uneven cobbles and lurched forward, grabbing hold of her to steady himself, pressing his body close. Even when he had regained his balance he didn’t let go. As she turned to face him, he reached out for some strands of hair that had loosened from her chignon and fallen across her face. With the tenderness of a lover he brushed them from her eyes. (74)

Although clichéd – indeed, such a scene would not be out of place in any popular romance – the intimacy Rafael’s touch instigates starkly contrasts Hilary’s objectifying gaze. This is only the first in a series of touches and looks between Hilary and Rafael that gradually move away from the banal to create an alternative realm.

Their second touch occurs in a bar. Although drinking excessively, Hilary believes that “[w]hatever the quantity, she remained stony-eyed and in control” (88). In this instance, however, her control deserts her and she “feel[s] herself slumping forward.” Significantly, this time it is uncertain who makes the first move – “Perhaps he pulled her to him, perhaps she reached out to him” – and their subsequent touch is rendered reciprocal. This touch, which is immediately preceded by Rafael’s description of one of the visual indicators of danger during a flight – the “pinpricks of grey at the corners of your eyes” – is directly associated with a loss of vision for Hilary: when they touch, she “grey[s] out.” Aligned with a disruption in both Hilary’s (implicitly) medical gaze and Rafael’s aerial vision, reciprocal touching thus interrupts visual approaches based on power imbalances and objectification. Accordingly, “when she opened her eyes the light outside had changed. And so had the rules between them” (92). Rafael senses this change when he describes her relaxation during “the time I held her” – “For once she didn’t hold back. I could feel her muscles twitching and slowly relaxing, feel her sinking into sleep as though it were something forbidden, a luxury she had been resisting for a long, long time” (101). This change is endorsed through its association with relaxation and luxury, an endorsement that resonates with the critique of control contained in the novel’s portrayal of medical and aerial vision. A loss of control and heightened sensual awareness are again aligned the following day, when Hilary becomes profoundly aware of “the fluid gleam of her hair, the musky scent from her glands, the silkiness between her legs.” Although she characteristically attempts to impose a medical rationale on this change – “[s]he told herself it was just the effects of ovulation” (102) – this explanation is deliberately rendered insufficient.
Following this disruption of Hilary’s objectifying/medical gaze, a new mode of visual interaction emerges, characterised by equality. After their night in the bar, Hilary “found herself staring boldly at passers-by and returning their looks in a way that felt so natural it seemed that, until this moment, she had been wilfully blind, so lost in herself and her work she couldn’t see what was in front of her nose” (102). While Hilary’s blindness recalls the objectified female characters of Chapter One, the link she draws between blindness and her work – in conjunction with the novel’s description of the insufficiency and failure of medical vision – attributes blindness to her previously voyeuristic gaze.

Hilary’s new way of looking becomes particularly evident in a visual game she and Rafael play a hotel foyer the following evening. “As they created more outlandish histories for the guests who passed by, they were at the same time conjuring up a world of their own in which they were agents in enemy territory with no one but the other to trust” (105). Instead of Hilary objectifying Rafael, this game requires them to look together, at other people, aligning their individual perspectives with each other’s view. This visual equality – which is shown to create “a world of their own” – is reinforced by the fact that they have only the other to rely on. Immediately following this visual game, Hilary signals the possibility of a sexual relationship with a touch: “her hand reaching out for his cheek, making an arc through the air like sign language for what couldn’t be said” (106). Although struck by a spasm of conscience the next morning – Hilary books a ticket to Locarno in an attempt to prevent their sexual relationship evolving (109) – when Rafael asks her to come to the Alps with him, she again surrenders control: “A smile spread across her face like melting snow. She was tired of saying no” (111).

The description of their train journey perpetuates and develops the association of their visual and tactile reciprocity with equality, a loss of control and the creation of another world. “[A]bsorbed in the view” (112) of each other’s bodies, “[t]heir world shrank to the size of a cabin, to the size of two bodies in a knotted embrace where nothing else mattered” (113). The equality suggested by their mutual absorption, as well as by their knotted – undifferentiated and united – bodies compounds the trust they shared as agents in enemy territory. In the “closed capsule” of this other world, “the past receded” and Hilary completely abandons any remnants of control: “Hilary had finally stopped resisting.” Freed from this state of resistance (and, by implication, opposition), she “hardly knew herself. …
The pure headiness of it, the sheer force of her lust. She had never imagined it could take her over like this” (112).

Descriptions of their sexual contact during the train journey reinforce their intimacy and parity. Lying next to Hilary, “Raf slowly uncoiled, his eyes pursuing her with disbelief” (112-13). In a way that maintains the general silence of their other worldly cocoon – suggested by the previous description of Hilary’s touch as “sign language for what couldn’t be said” (106) – she reassures him with touch rather than words: “Lifting his bruised fists to her lips, Hilary kissed every knuckle before uncurling his fingers and sucking them to the back of her throat. She put her hands on his naked chest and moved her lips over his body, tasting every part, even his tears” (113). In contrast to the portrayal of sexual intimacy between Jules and Jan, Rafael’s male body provides the focus for desire in this passage. Given the association of male visibility and vulnerability in these fictions, it is significant that Rafael’s exposure occurs concurrently with the depiction of his body as bruised, naked and crying. However, Rafael’s body is not the only one exposed: Hilary’s touch enlivens Rafael, whose subsequent, and explicitly non-penetrative touch reinforces their equality. Rafael “crouch[es] on the floor,” positioning himself below Hilary (as Silas does with Greta) “his head moving towards her open thighs. From the wolfish curve of his lips came the tender pink of his tongue” (113).

Their first touch on the train presents a poignant metaphor for the tactile reciprocity they share in their other world: “They lay side by side … and cautiously pressed their palms together as if making a pact” (112). The allusion to prayer sanctifies the equitable nature of their touch, while the purity of their love is reinforced by the allusion to Romeo and Juliet. Their pact’s wordlessness reinforces the association of touch with silence, while simultaneously problematising an elaboration of the meaning of their tactile reciprocity. According to Maurice Hamington, the resistance of embodied experience to language presents a fundamental problem for theorising:

The meaning found in embodied experience is not easily transposed onto explicit forms of communication such as language. A neat correspondence of understanding to sign is not present, because the experience of the flesh is radiated over time in the formation of complex interrelated and shifting meanings. (277)

129 I am referring particularly to the “holy palmers’ kiss” (Shakespeare, Romeo 1.5.99) shared by the young lovers.
Although Hamington identifies Merleau-Ponty’s notion of flesh as a way to theorise beyond such resistance, this concept fails to encapsulate the full meaning of the tactile reciprocity Hilary and Rafael experience on the train. This is because Merleau-Ponty’s concept of reversibility, or “flesh,” is spatial, but not temporal: it involves a gradation within one body between subject and object – a “double sensation” – but never the simultaneous experience of both positions. Fittingly, Merleau-Ponty uses the example of two hands to demonstrate the nature of this gradation. When a person’s two hands are touching, both hands are able to feel themselves touching and being touched, but not, he insists, both positions simultaneously or with equal intensity. This is what he means when he identifies flesh as “a reversibility always imminent and never realized in fact. My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching things, but I never reach coincidence; the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization” (Visible 147).

While the pendular movement of Silas and Greta’s relationship might be imagined in relation to this notion of “double sensation,” Hilary and Rafael’s prayer/pact represents a realised reversibility, a reciprocity that is mutual and simultaneous. Luce Irigaray’s reading of Merleau-Ponty provides a way of conceptualising the difference represented by their touch. Slightly but significantly altering Merleau-Ponty’s example, Irigaray poses an image of “[t]he hands joined, palms together, fingers outstretched,” arguing that it is impossible to divide the toucher from the touched when the hands are in this position (“Invisible” 161). Thus, in positioning Hilary and Rafael as simultaneously subjects and objects of their physical exchange, their prayer/pact – in contrast to Jan’s position as an object to (the supping and burrowing) Jules – offers a tactile manifestation of Valverde’s notion of visual reciprocity, and encapsulates the equality they experience while on the train.

Both characters want this journey/equality to be endless: “They didn’t want to arrive, didn’t want the journey to end. They dreamt of a circular track that would take them round the earth in an endless loop” (113). Nevertheless, their journey and their equality cease with a sense of inevitability – an inevitability reinforced by foretokens of disasters. The most explicit of such warnings occurs when they touch in the hotel foyer: “As if she had triggered an alarm or brought down the wrath of the gods, a sharp voice rang out at the moment when her fingers touched his face” (106-7). While the voice is ultimately unrelated to their touch, this alarm nevertheless contributes to the sense of disaster.
The inevitability of the end of Hilary and Rafael’s reciprocal equality is further suggested when, at the end of their journey, Rafael finishes reciting a poem he began in the bar shortly before their first reciprocal touch. Due to their position in the narrative, the two halves of this poem function as brackets – significantly, brackets of sound or language – encircling and describing, but also limiting the silence and equality of their other world.

\begin{quote}
I knew a woman lovely in her bones,
When small birds sighed, she would sigh back at them,
Ah, when she moved, she moved more ways than one. (89)
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
How well her wishes went! She stroked my chin,
She taught me Turn, and Counter-turn, and Stand,
She taught me Touch, that undulant white skin. (114)
\end{quote}

In the first three lines (those recited in the bar), there is a strong sense of freedom and movement. The touching described in the final three lines reiterates this sense of movement, perpetuating it in the fluidity of “Turn, and Counter-turn” as well as her “undulant … skin.” Yet when Hilary “stepped out into the mountain air,” the idealised and sanctified quality of their relationship during the train journey is shattered. Indeed, the woman she was on the train – “a woman lovely in her bones” – becomes “[a] stranger Hilary might pass in the street and not even notice they shared the same face. She had left that woman behind” (216).

While Hilary and Rafael’s other world endures, touch – as in the relationship between Daniel and Silas in \textit{The Blind Eye} and Marc and Jules in \textit{The Architect} – alleviates male pain. However, in \textit{Last of the Sane Days}, it is Hilary’s touch, rather than a man’s, that heals. After their night in the bar, “Rafael had slept so well he felt he had satisfied a terrible thirst and now not even the pain could touch him. He was breathing air from the stratosphere” (103). While this passage might suggest a return to Rafael’s disembodied aerial view, his “amaze[d]” pronouncement – “There are … other ways to fly” (113) – made on the train after he and Hilary have sex, firmly associates his absence of pain with their physical connection. Hilary, however, is never “convinced by his pain’s remission …. It frightened her the way Raf gave himself up to her as if she were responsible for his sudden well-being. This was not the medicine she practiced” (130). The difference between the tactile healing Rafael associates with Hilary’s touch, and Hilary’s medical approach, is similarly demonstrated earlier, when Hilary insists, “you couldn’t connect with someone else’s hurt by holding their hand or touching their cheek. Here medicine and epistemology
converged. No matter how great your compassion, the pain was theirs alone.” In the face of chronic pain, “medical knowledge,” Hilary admits, “was useless. Understanding these patients’ condition required a kind of faith” (77). The faith Hilary achieves by the end of the novel – combined with her guilt at not believing in Rafael’s pain, and the novel’s extensive critique of medical vision – supports his belief in her healing touch while suggesting an epistemology beyond and superior to medicine.

She could remember Rafael saying, ‘Faith has nothing to do with facts’, but then, when was medicine ever just about facts? Of all that had happened between them during those last weeks together, what haunted her most were the doubts she had harboured about his pain – her lack of faith. Even now, it seemed unforgivable. (253)

While Rafael is alive, however – and despite his belief in the “simple” curative “way she had touched him” – Hilary refuses to believe that touch can heal pain (124). Correspondingly, while male touch offers a solution to male pain in The Blind Eye and The Architect, Hilary’s touch offers respite only while their touch is reciprocal and expressive of their equality. Once they leave the train, Rafael’s pain returns and, indeed, escalates.

Thus, although male pain is acknowledged, and heterosexual rapprochement is identified as a solution to that pain, the seemingly inevitable ending of their relationship suggests something fundamentally unsustainable about heterosexual interactions – an untenability that contrasts with the healing connection established between male characters in The Blind Eye and The Architect. It seems, moreover, that heterosexual equality is only possible when it is somehow set apart from the real world. Perhaps, as Hendershot notes in relation to Ada and Baines in Jane Campion’s The Piano, the equality Hilary and Rafael achieve in their other world “poses an imaginary resolution to a real problem in our culture” (213), a problem unsolvable within the current gender order.

There is also no happily-ever-after ending for Silas and Greta in The Blind Eye. The balance they achieve on the steps of the library and later, when they move towards one another in Greta’s room, is immediately destabilised by additional revelations and shame. “Later, when her room was dark … she asked him if he was going to tell her his story” (245). Even before Silas reveals his possible role in Constance’s death, shame prompts him to re-establish a physical and visual distance from Greta: he “moved away from her” (245), “couldn’t look at her” and ”sat with his back towards her … as he began to speak” (246).
Although Greta is horrified, she finds the strength she needs. “[R]emembering the way in which she had once tried to punish [Daniel] … she had reached for [Silas]” (265), thus attempting, from a position of empathy reminiscent of Daniel’s ability to feel Silas’s pain, to alleviate pain with touch. Silas, however, is too ashamed to accept Greta’s tactile understanding and reassurance. Instead, he again exposes the physical manifestation of his emotional pain to Greta’s gaze, holding “out his arms, bare under the light” and asking her, “Can you see why I am like this? … Can you see now?” (265). Looking at his wounds, Greta continues to reassure Silas, telling him that

... she could, that she understood, swallowing deeply as she spoke, the entire weight of his story there inside her, needing to be digested before she could look him in the eye again, because that was what she wanted, to face him, knowing all that she knew, and to see that he was still the Silas she had slowly come to love. (265)

This description of Greta’s understanding and empathy – her desire to “look him in the eye … to face him, knowing all that she knew, and … love” – explicitly evokes the clarity and soft acceptance of Silas’s mother’s gaze. However, although she wants to, Greta is not yet ready to accept.

Following this interaction, Greta and Silas individually decide to leave the city, thus apparently cementing their visual and physical distance. Immediately following his decision, Silas encounters a woman from his past who functions in the narrative as both Silas’s mother’s and Greta’s opposite, and a personification of the horrible consequences of a life lived without a love. In contrast to Silas’s mother’s insightful and accepting look, this woman, and the all-night café where Silas encounters her, are characterised by distorted vision. The café is lit by a “single light,” making it “impossible to see anyone too clearly, unless they were right there.” However, as Silas asserts, in that room, such “proximity would probably only lend a distortion of its own” (267). Taking a chair at the back, he is “almost lost in the folds of the faded red curtains that acted as a door leading to a dingy outdoor toilet used by junkies to shoot up” (266). In conjunction with the procession of “junkies” passing Silas – an “almost lost soul” – on their way to a hellish version of heaven in the back toilet, this red room strongly suggests damnation.

The room’s hellishness contextualises the images of burning foregrounded in descriptions of the woman Silas encounters. When he first notices her she is asleep at the

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130 As the content of Silas’s story is not revealed to the reader at this point, his shame and Greta’s horror are highlighted, providing, in fact, the exclusive focus in the depiction of their interaction.
table next to him, her cigarette is “dangerously close” to her hand and her hair. Although Silas averts this danger by waking her (while trying unobtrusively to ease the cigarette from her grasp), subsequent descriptions of the woman allude to a disintegration that perpetuate this sense of an immanent or actual burning. “She was still looking at him” as “the last ash from her cigarette finally crumbl[ed] into the brittle petals of the plastic roses on the table” (267). Later, when she “leant a little closer, almost falling off her seat,” the woman’s obvious lack of balance recalls her crumbling ash, while contrasting with the idealised moments of balance achieved by Silas and Greta. The “brush of her hair, the ends brittle and dry, along his skin” that Silas feels when she leans closer suggests his eerie incorporation into her world.

The contrast between Silas’s mother and Greta, and the woman in the all-night café, is compounded by the centrality of the woman’s gaze to the descriptions of her burning and disintegration. Specifically, her gaze alludes to, while representing a perversion of, Greta’s look. Given Silas’s repeated exposure of his self-inflicted wounds to Greta, her gaze is evoked when the woman peers at the scars on his arms. However, while this physical manifestation of Silas’s emotional pain motivated Greta’s soft and understanding look, this woman’s gaze is hard. When Silas admits the source of his scars her immediate response is laughter, the description of which functions to condemn her lack of empathy in strongly visual terms:

When it came, her laugh was raspy, and as she opened her mouth, the smear of lipstick cracked at the corners of her lips leaving dry flakes of red clinging to her skin, as Silas could see that her teeth were rotten; the holes were visible, even in the darkness of that room. (268)

As well as reinforcing the sense of disintegration, her “red … rotten” core becomes the only clear fact in the hellish room. The woman’s description of their previous meeting – “I reckon we fucked” (267) – reinforces the contrast between this encounter and Silas and Greta’s relationship. In particular, the absence of reciprocity in Silas’s previous meeting with this woman is starkly demonstrated by his failure to remember her. Although he “couldn’t dismiss her claim as impossible” (267) – and her use of Silas’s name lends credence to her assertion – Silas “did not like to think he could have had that level of intimacy with someone and be left with no memory of the event” (269).

In contrast to this encounter, Greta’s imagined reunion with Silas inspires hope for their relationship. As she prepares to leave for New York, Greta repeatedly contemplates
contacting Silas. In her mind, their reunion mirrors his mother and father’s relationship: “they would look at each other … as she told him that it was all right, they were aware of the worst in each other and it was all right” (271). The foregrounding of their mutual looks in this imagined reunion, and the suggestion of balance contained in the reiteration of the words “all right,” explicitly evoke the balanced, clear and accepting love idealised throughout The Blind Eye. However, as in Last of the Sane Days, this ideal state seems possible only in another – imaginary – sphere, since when they do meet, “[t]hey kissed awkwardly, neither of them able to fix their gaze on the other” (280). While Greta comes “towards reaching a peace with all he had told her [after] he was gone” (282) – thus maintaining the possibility of reunion – once again heterosexual reciprocity emerges as unsustainable in the novel’s real world.

In contrast to Last of the Sane Days, male pain is healed in the real world of The Blind Eye. However, it is not Greta’s touch that enables such healing. Like Constance, and again in accordance with Sedgwick’s thesis in Between Men, Greta functions only as an intermediary in the healing relationship between Silas and Daniel: she enables their connection – particularly by explaining Silas’s motivations to Daniel – but is ultimately excluded from what the novel presents as a perfect union. Daniel’s disparagement of Greta’s search “for the person who would save her, who would love her enough to make everything all right” (34), and his contrastingly sympathetic reading of Silas’s desire for salvation in love (240), reinforce her subsidiary role while validating the solution of emotional connection between men. It is notable, in this respect, that the perfect union imagined in Last of the Sane Days occurs between women – namely, Hilary and Peta.

Despite this difference, both The Blind Eye and Last of the Sane Days imagine an equitable (though, respectively, unachieved and unsustainable) heterosexuality through idealised notions of reciprocal looking and touching. Such reciprocity avoids, at least occasionally or temporarily, the gendered inequalities associated in both novels with visual objectification. While vision, as a result, is presented as potentially oppressive and equitable, touch is generally idealised. Nevertheless, both narratives contain examples of unequal or negative heterosexual touches. While Silas’s meeting with the woman in the café is largely described in visual terms, her memory of their previous interact refers to a tactile encounter in which love, reciprocity and equality are markedly absent. In Last of the Sane Days, Hilary and Rafael’s non-penetrative contact on the train journey is explicitly
contrasted with both characters’ penetrations of the other. Due to their scarcity, however, these negative heterosexual touches seem largely intended to contrast with, and therefore more firmly to endorse, the desirability of the reciprocal touching otherwise presented. They function, in other words, as exceptions that prove the rule rather than as sustained engagements with the gendered divisions of physical objectification.

In contrast, and as discussed in Chapter One, the portrayal of visual objectification in *Transplanted* is matched (and perhaps exceeded) by depictions of violence.\(^ {131} \) Only after the negative potential of heterosexual touching has been exhaustively explored – predominantly in descriptions of Wendy and Ian’s abusive relationship – does the novel re-imagine heterosexuality through the (again) idealised notions of visual and tactile reciprocity. Consequently, whereas *The Blind Eye* and *Last of the Sane Days* can be interpreted, to some extent, as replacing visual inequality with tactile reciprocity, *Transplanted* demarcates good and bad touches, much as the other novels differentiated good and bad looks.\(^ {132} \)

Wendy’s relationship with Ian is characterised by physical and visual abuse, and Kelvin’s past is equally traumatic.\(^ {133} \) In contrast, the relationship between Wendy and Kelvin, which forms as they flee from Ian, enables each to heal, at least somewhat. Healing, as in *The Architect*, *The Blind Eye* and *Last of the Sane Days*, is predominantly facilitated by touch. However, in contrast to the exclusive focus on male bodies in these fictions, Kelvin’s touch similarly heals Wendy. This dual focus corresponds with the novel’s portrayal (also explored in Chapter One) of men and women’s joint oppression under patriarchy. On their first night together, after escaping Ian and Ross, Kelvin “carefully takes her hand, then presses the glowing paper clip against her thumbnail … all at once” releasing the “black blood” that coalesced there when Ian slammed her thumb in a drawer. Although aware that there was some technique for releasing this black blood – representative, perhaps, of the foulness of and in her relationship with Ian – Wendy had not

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\(^ {131} \) In addition to the gendered violence discussed in Chapter One, the following is a short-list of some of the more excessive acts of violence graphically depicted in the novel: Ross smashes Ian’s thumbs with the blunt end of an axe (18); Ian kicks a dog to death (64); Ian murders Ross (112); and Kelvin is severely beaten by a (male) gang (155).

\(^ {132} \) My use of the dichotomised and simplistic terms good and bad is intentional, and signals the explicitly pedagogical approach these texts take to gender relations.

\(^ {133} \) After running away from his abusive parents as a young teenager, Kelvin lived on the streets and became addicted to heroin. After overcoming this addiction, he found truck-driving work, despite his illiteracy. However, this ended with a terrible accident, in which, among other injuries, his face is “[d]egloved” (24). The faceless pain symbolised by Kelvin’s injuries represents the numerous (faceless) men who suffer in *Transplanted*. 
know it: she needed Kelvin and his careful touch to heal the damage Ian caused. While Kelvin helps Wendy to heal, it is primarily her touch that heals him.

Wendy’s touching of Kelvin’s wounds provide the focus of their interactions. And as their relationship progresses – encapsulated and limited, as in *Last of the Sane Days*, by a journey – the association between touch and healing becomes more explicit. As “the thudding day-long pressure ebbs away” from Wendy’s thumb, “the desire within her is to reach out and touch his face, his skin like a dry husk” (149). After Kelvin is brutally bashed by Ian’s associates, this desire is actualised when Wendy “reaches forward to touch his bleeding face, the cratered skin, cut and already bruised” (153). Later, in an underground pool that Kelvin shows Wendy, “[h]er hand … moves along his scapula tracing the scar which has not been touched since the hospitalised stitching of silk into anaesthetised skin” (180). As with Hilary and Rafael’s prayer/pact, Wendy and Kelvin’s touch is endorsed by the description of this underground pool as “hushed and almost sanctified, reminding [Wendy] of a church” (179). Yet during this touch, in “the pull-back of his mind,” Kelvin recalls his accident and injuries: “His scapula cracked and ripped at right angles, his face de-gloved. … [T]he truck had rolled and the arm he’d been resting on the open window had snapped. He could feel it buckle. And saw on the windscreen the spray of blood” (180). While Wendy’s touch causes Kelvin to recall his pain, the effect is cathartic: it allows him to mourn for the pain he has experienced and, thus, to begin the recovery process. Accordingly, as she touches him he feels “some veiled and inscrutable sense … not tenderness or even affection, but what she had long know as grief” (180). This reading is reinforced by the description of “water pouring over them as if in some ritualised baptism” (179), their tactile encounter in the cave thus offering a new beginning.

The healing enabled by touch, as well as its sanctity, are made explicit on the final night they spend together where, once again, Wendy’s touch is focused on Kelvin’s wounds:

… now her hand gently touches his bruised face. She leans forward, her mouth brushing across his lips, and then his cheek all the time careful of his stitched lacerations, his angry skin. Her tongue glides across him, tasting the blood, the same as her own. … [I]t seems to [Kelvin] that in this way it is possible to heal. … In the candlelight their bodies move together. … And each moment takes on the next so there seems to be no line between them, no delineation, as if it were possible to achieve a temporary sanctity. (183, italics added)
The sanctified healing made possible by touch is explicitly associated, in this passage, with Wendy and Kelvin’s equality: their blood is the same, their bodies move together and, finally, there is no division between them. On their final day together, after this process of healing, Wendy “removed the stitches from [Kelvin’s] face. Carefully” (228) in a way that reiterates Kelvin’s careful treatment of Wendy’s thumb.

As in Last of the Sane Days, Wendy and Kelvin’s tactile interactions are explicitly silent: in the caravan, Wendy, “senses his body is unaccustomed to touch, … but silently explores the unfinished vulnerability of him” (183). This silence reinforces the position of heterosexual equality beyond the dichotomies of language, while Kelvin’s vulnerability suggests another source of their underlying equality – shared suffering. Wendy and Kelvin’s mutual vulnerability – and the connection it enables between them – are made explicit earlier in the novel, when Wendy looks at Kelvin in the mirror of their hotel room and sees

… his back exposed except for a crepe bandage around his chest. She studies him as he feeds the bandage from one hand to another, and now that the bandage is removed, she can see the deepening bruises on his back and along his scapula, an old scar. For some times she observes him in this way, until he looks up and she sees again the pulped side of his face. Both of them for a moment looking at each other by way of mirrors and injury. (166)

Watching each other in a mirror – an image of reflection and mutuality – Kelvin and Wendy’s gazes are mediated and joined by this reflection and by the injuries both have sustained.

Again like Last of the Sane Days, Kelvin and Wendy’s intimate interactions are at first characterised by darkness and their inability to see one another. Such metaphoric blindness is associated with trust and contrasted with Ian and Ross’s intrusive and oppressive surveillance. Thus, in the darkness of the hotel room “the[ir] association seems more intimate” (166) and, when daylight comes, they “move away from each other” and “the collusion of night-time intimacy … with an unaccountable and unconscious distancing” (168). As their relationship progresses and trust increases, they gradually become more visible to one another. Although, at first, they “move blindly” (178) in the underground pool, Wendy has a torch and “after a while their eyes grow accustomed to the dim light” (179). Moreover, in the candlelight of the caravan – the site where their touching is explicitly described as healing – “for the first time [Wendy] holds Kelvin’s gaze” (182-3).
There is also the suggestion that Kelvin – who is repeatedly aligned with “the legend of Quickeye who could see for one hundred miles” (145) – in some way facilitates Wendy’s vision. While with Ian she is portrayed as metaphorically blind, and when she thinks of leaving him, “beneath her eyelids another world flares, rising up before her, brilliant and flame-winged” (49). When she does leave, her eyes are opened. The implicit power of her gaze is thus unleashed and, as with their tactile reciprocity, sanctified. As they drive away,

In the side-vision mirror [Wendy] can see Ian shouting, screaming, fingerling his abuse. His furious face growing smaller and smaller until he seems ludicrous, almost harmless. … And suddenly she smiles at the same time raising both hands together as if in prayer. (73)

Wendy’s vision grows in power as their journey progresses. Indeed, “[t]ravelling” with Kelvin she herself feels, like Quickeye, “that she can see forever” (75). By the end of their journey, Wendy “believes she has seen things differently” (227). Recalling “the light on the escarpment” (228) that Kelvin “wanted [her] to know” (171), she “thinks, Close your eyes and see.” Described as “some kind of miraculous contagion” (228), it seems that Kelvin’s ability to see routes and meanings hidden in the landscape – a skill repeatedly aligned with optimism and instinct for survival – has infected and released Wendy’s visual power. This new way of seeing is endorsed by the novel’s epigraph: “The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes (Proust).” Thus, while Wendy’s touch heals Kelvin’s physical and emotional wounds, Kelvin’s way of seeing gives Wendy new perspective. Significantly, this association of Kelvin with vision and Wendy with touch resonates with a certain gendered division of senses: namely, the association of men with vision and women with touch. As Keller and Grontkowski assert, “The notion that vision is a peculiarly phallic sense, and touch a woman’s sense, is, of course, not new. Indeed, it accords all too well with the belief in vision as a ‘higher’ and touch as a ‘lower’ sense” (207). Yet in Transplanted, neither vision nor touch is privileged. Rather, they are equivalent, and the way Wendy and Kelvin heal the other by helping them move towards the sense they are alienated from suggests both reciprocity and complementarity. Thus, the novel seems to imply that two equal halves – masculine vision and feminine touch – are needed to compose a full and healthy individual. Further, and unlike The Architect – where Jan’s association with nature is merely the derivative of Jules’s alignment with culture – Wendy and Kelvin’s complementarity is a form of
reciprocity: both offer something the other lacks.

Nevertheless, Kelvin and Wendy’s relationship – like Silas and Greta’s moments of balance, and Hilary and Rafael’s train journey – offers only temporary sanctuary. Although both characters attempt to “deny or somehow refute what they both know to be inevitable” (225), their journey, and with it their healing reciprocity, seemingly must end. In one sense, the description of their parting reiterates the mutual care(fulness) that characterises their heterosexual reciprocity: “their bodies [are] supported as if by each other and they kiss, so careful now, as if their brittle selves might shatter, their substance dissipate” (229). At the same time, however, the reference to dissolution implies that no final healing has been achieved: although their wounds are currently closed, they threaten, like Kelvin’s face, to re-open. Once again, therefore, and as in Last of the Sane Days, heterosexual reciprocity and healing are possible and sustainable only within an alternative sphere. The sense in which Wendy and Kelvin’s parting is inevitable is reinforced by the failure of all the heterosexual relationships depicted in the book. Ian and Ross’s mother leaves their father “[w]ithout a word, just a note saying, Please I can’t stand this anymore. Please, please forgive me” (13); Wendy’s mother sets herself on fire, apparently to escape her husband’s dogmatism and abuse (76). Similarly, while Julia’s mother and father’s relationship “had inflamed and stiffened over time … for herself and Peter everything has moved with such alarming speed” (104).

Significantly, and in a way that directly contrasts with the portrayal of heterosexual utopias through images of visual and tactile reciprocity, Peter and Julia’s growing estrangement is described in terms of visual and physical distance: they are frightened or unable to look at and touch, and ultimately, to recognise one another. Thus, in the hotel room where they stay after the burglary, Julia is “too afraid to make love, too afraid not to” (107), and following the operation, she “desire[s] to touch him again, to caress him, but she cannot” (141). While manifested in their physical distance, Peter and Julia’s estrangement is particularly evident in their visual interactions. Although “illness has perverted them both,” and he feels that she “is already someone else” (125), it is primarily Julia who believes that Peter “is different. … Everything about him has changed” (104): he is “altered” (98), “a stranger” (87), “not the same man” (198). As a result, she has increasing difficulty even recognising him. After the operation, he “is barely recognisable to her” (141) and “she can hardly believe it is him” (202), but even before the operation, indeed,

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even before Peter tells her about his heart condition, recognition is impeded: “She remembers it took her what seemed like a lifetime to realise it was actually him, standing there” (103). Simultaneously, however, Julia is immediately aware of his heart condition. Once again, this knowledge is presented in a way that suggests that the separation of the two characters is inevitable: “even before he said anything, she had learnt or perhaps she had simply seen; the hesitation like two black specks growing on the surface of each canvas, the process irreversible … [like] the knowledge which shifts a person from one life to another” (40).

Both characters attribute the distance between them to Peter’s heart condition – that ambiguous and complex symbol of masculinity crisis. As Julia describes it, “her reticence and his shame; a moving in and out of control,” has resulted in a “shift” or “transition” that both characters attempt, though fail, to “mask” (103). Their mutual loss of control – which, in contrast to Last of the Sane Days, signals the end rather than the beginning of love – further ties the distance in their relationship to masculinity crisis: men’s loss of control over their own lives, and women’s inability to help or heal the men they love. This use of Peter’s heart condition as a metaphor for some insufficiency or inadequacy at the heart of masculinity is carried across to Wendy and Kelvin’s relationship when the underground cave Kelvin shows Wendy is described as a “grotto” (179) as well as a church. This term, earlier used in reference to Peter’s empty chest cavity (137), represents a mysterious and unavoidable corruption in masculinity, and perhaps consequently, a fundamental emptiness or insufficiency at the heart of heterosexuality.

The link between a failure in heterosexuality and masculinity crisis is reinforced by the association of the end of both Peter and Julia’s, and Wendy and Kelvin’s relationships with a lack of communication and the man’s inability to understand and adapt to a changing world: two characteristics frequently identified as contributors to, and effects of, such a crisis. Like Peter, Kelvin’s “desire … for permanence” is frustrated by the fact that “everything was always shifting” (227). In a passage rendered important as “the first time [he finds] exactitude, in the imprecision of his speech” (227-8), Kelvin identifies his attempt “to complete what could not be completed” as the “mistake” he continually made with Wendy, as well as in his life before her. The resulting parallel between these male characters, and the notion of a fundamental emptiness at the heart of heterosexual masculinity, is reinforced by Kelvin’s concurrent feeling of “an incompleteness arising
within him[\textit{self}] from believing anything could be whole or wholly finished” (227). Also like Peter, Kelvin is repeatedly depicted as alienated from language.\textsuperscript{134} His resulting inability to communicate presumably underlies Wendy’s feeling that

\ldots he is unfathomable to her. If she could, she would tell him: don’t bank on me, don’t trust me. But there is something misconceived or unfinished in the way they communicate and she doesn’t think she can ever come close to truly understanding him. For a short time they have shared something, but at the deepest level there is a divergence between them. (219).

However, while this divergence is mutual, it is Wendy who decides to leave. Correspondingly, although she can “turn and walk away,” Kelvin is left with a life-long yearning: “sometimes he will feel certain he has seen her … And with that strange longing he will stand watching” (230).

The other men in the novel are similarly lost when their relationships end. Ross and Ian’s father becomes an alcoholic when his wife leaves; Wendy’s father loses his sanity;\textsuperscript{135} Peter dies and Julia survives. The greater resilience and independence of the women echoes Hilary and Rafael’s contrasting responses to the end of their relationship in \textit{Last of the Sane Days}: although Hilary continues to feel guilty and to grieve, Rafael kills himself. Thus, while both novels imply that patriarchal society damages both men and women, they also suggest that women are more able to cope with this damage and with a world in which gender norms are changing.

In contrast to the other contemporary Australian women’s fictions I have discussed, female characters objectifying male characters – or vice versa – is not an element of Juchau’s \textit{Machines for Feeling}. Nevertheless, this text is fundamentally concerned with vision, masculinity crisis and heterosexuality. And in presenting these issues slightly differently, \textit{Machines for Feeling} begins to move beyond the parameters and limitations of desire established in the other fictions. While voyeurism or fetishism are not portrayed with any comparable explicitness, the relation of the central female character – Rien – to the visual sphere is problematic, and involves both metaphoric blindness and objectification.

\textsuperscript{134} Whereas Peter is somewhat aligned with communication through his job as a translator, Kelvin has always been unable to comprehend either written or spoken words. In school, “the words on the page would not form” (153) and throughout his life they have remained “inaccessible and unknowable” (22) to him. Speech is equally difficult, and Kelvin constantly feels his “words … collapsing in his mouth … words like stones” (70).

\textsuperscript{135} He leaves the burnt shell of their old house standing, “a charred wreck for all to see,” and builds another house next door: “not just any house, but one exactly the same only a mirror image – even the interior, matching the tiles and the light fittings, working all hours and hardly eating so it seemed he’d gone crazy too” (224).
She often dreams, for instance, that she is trapped inside a “glass coffin,” where “people looked in at me, naked and lying quite still. I suppose I was dead in the dream” (10). Iterated throughout the text (179, 207) and echoed in her description of a foetus in a glass jar (32), this image of intense visibility is simultaneously one of despair and death. To escape this position, Rien continually attempts to hide. She collects newspapers and rewrites the stories in a rational, detached tone, “so that she is hardly recognisable on the page” (61). When recounting her father’s death, she adopts a similar approach. As Caroline (her counsellor at the Home) notes, “you tell that story as if you’re not in it” (165). She closes her eyes when others look at her (28, 124), and her boyfriend Mark describes her anorexia as “trying to disappear” (144). Caroline similarly comments, “I think perhaps you would like to disappear altogether” (124).

In further contrast to the other novels previously explored, the discourse of masculinity crisis does not emerge predominantly in relation to male visibility. Rather, it is specifically presented through a focus on relationships with fathers. Both Mark and Rien are plagued by their “absent father[s]” (119): Rien’s died from a heart attack and Mark’s left him when he was a child. Their search for their fathers is mirrored in the subsidiary narrative, in which an elderly blind man, Salvatore, searches for his son. For each, the absence of a son or father leaves a painful, almost unbearable absence. However, in a way that associates this theme with the focus on male visibility in the other novels, Mark’s approach to finding his father is firmly visual. He watches passers-by from the roof of his and Rien’s squat and takes photographs of the men he sees, trying to determine whether one is his father.

Although more hopeful regarding the possibility of a successful and sustainable heterosexual reciprocity, the depiction of heterosexuality in Machines for Feeling is similar to Transplanted in many respects. Both novels are concerned with painful as well as pleasurable touching. Additionally, like Kelvin and Wendy, both Mark and Rien – who have the central (indeed, the only) heterosexual relationship in the text – have traumatic pasts. Consequently, both find it difficult to forge emotional links with others. The association of Rien’s emotional detachment with visual difficulties, and Mark’s with a

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136 Examples of painful touching in Machines for Feeling include descriptions of Mark’s abuse by his mother’s various boyfriends (19), Rien hitting Mark (147) and Dog Boy’s murder (199-201, 213, 217-18).

137 As a child, Mark was abused by his mother’s many boyfriends. Following Rien’s father’s death her mother became an alcoholic and neglected her. Both Mark and Rien were subsequently institutionalised.
mechanistic approach to touch, is analogous to the gendered sensory divide evident in Wendy and Kelvin’s relationship.¹³⁸

Before Mark met Rien, he “used the limbs of others like tools. Too scared to take the things I wanted, I’d grab a hand, an arm, take it to the toy I liked, make it pick it up and give it” (48-49). His dissociation is primarily attributed to confusing childhood experiences of his “mother’s hands.” Her hands were “[s]ometimes … gentle. Other times they invented pain. You never knew which kind to expect” (49). Although the narrative does not assign an explicitly gendered meaning to Mark’s tactile dissociation, or to his perception of his body as a machine, the notion of men as divided from corporeal pleasure is common in masculinity studies literature.

Mark’s tactilely manifested emotional detachment is paralleled by the portrayal of Rien’s emotional isolation in visual terms. One of the main symptoms of her emotional isolation is a metaphoric blindness, particularly evident in her inability to see Mark or to recognise his true intentions or nature: looking at him, in other words, does not result in understanding. After she arrived at the Home

… she had watched Mark from afar, his mantle of stillness. … His body emitted a blue and tranquil light, but she saw the white violence at its edges, noticed his calm and mistook it for peace when it was the outward stillness of a body clamped in a vice of its own design. (42)

Rien similarly mistakes Mark when he burns his belongings. Watching him through the smoke, “water streams from [her] eyes” (12) and Rien thinks, “I don’t know whether he’s going to cry or attack me” (11). As this is the first extensive description of Mark, the reader, too, is unsure of his motivations. However, as the novel progresses, and Mark’s love for Rien becomes evident, the very idea that he would attack her (or indeed cry) emerges as extremely unlikely. In turn, her lack of clarity, reinforced in this scene by the haze of the smoke and the water running from her eyes, is revealed as the reader’s understanding grows. Rien’s mis-recognition of Mark is emphasised by her interpretation of the burning. While she thinks he is trying to destroy his past (11), Mark feels there is “nothing final about a fire. No escape from the things of the past. Just ways of doing something to them” (17). Given Mark’s detachment from his own body, one of Rien’s most profound mis-recognitions relates to her view of him as “at home in his skin” (113). Correspondingly, and

¹³⁸ As discussed previously, Kelvin has a strongly visual relation to the world but he is unaccustomed to touch. Correspondingly, while Wendy touches Kelvin frequently, she is often portrayed as metaphorically blind.
although indicating Rien’s knowledge of Mark’s being, her lack of visual clarity is further demonstrated when Mai (a woman Rien works with in the salon) asks her to describe his physical appearance.

Rien is dumbstruck. She tries to picture Mark and cannot conjure him up. She finds it impossible to separate what she sees from what she knows of his being, recognising him only through his gestures, his voice, the warm smell released from his skin with the rub and heat of her hands. She thinks he is perfect. (40-41)

Rien’s difficulties with vision are most profoundly tied to emotional isolation by “her dream of the glass coffin where she lay, still and cold, unable to reach beyond the strictures of the box” (179). An image of objectification, this dream also demonstrates her extreme distance from others. In this emotionally isolated state, she “sometimes felt … safe, and other times … lonely and trapped behind all that glass, like some ruined display at the museum” (207), and despite being “dead in the dream,” she sometimes experiences “a silent longing” (10) for the world outside. Thus, this dream suggests both her desire for emotional detachment (corresponding with her rejection of exposure), and her yearning for engagement with others (arising from her acknowledgement of the ruin separation creates).

Mark and Rien’s relationship manifests the same move from emotional detachment to a visual and tactile recognition described in Transplanted, with Mark enabling Rien’s vision and Rien teaching Mark to touch. Mark repeatedly attempts to show Rien a clear and colourful world-view. The first time he approaches her at the Home, he wants to “draw her out of a fast descending blackness” (43). Reinforcing the bleakness of Rien’s emotional world, her view of Mark, in this instance, is stark: “She looked up into the dark architecture of his face; it was like viewing an x-ray, so clearly did she see right through to the grey medulla of bone” (44). As an antidote to Rien’s despairing outlook, “Mark held out one of five pieces of glass he carried with him despite their jagged edges. He put the blood-red, stippled surface to her eye: a gift of solace. They stood in the company of silence and a world turned crimson” (44). This colourful world-view is by no means Mark’s only visual “gift of solace” and hope. One night at the Home, for instance, he tells Rien to “watch at the window. Promised her a good show.” Climbing on the roof, he flicks matches, making “stars twirl [so] she could plant wishes on them” (49). While, in these instances, it is not the sight/site of his own body that Mark offers, this is not because he wishes to conceal himself. In fact, he freely offers his body to Rien, hoping that sex would “deflect her fascination with the dark moments of her life.” At first, his body seems to “lift her out of
worrying dazes into a place where now and here and like this were the order required. But she would veer off into her head after the event, his body failing in all its attempts to replace the missing thing, in some physical, writhing way” (118). Rien cannot simply be rescued by Mark, but must find the strength within herself to overcome her dark past.

As well as offering her visual delights, Mark attempts not only to encourage but to enable Rien’s gaze. When they live in an abandoned car, Mark cleans the dirty windscreen specifically “so she’d have a better view” (19). He also expresses the desire, on a number of occasions, to “[p]rovide a light in all her dark moments. I’ll be the power source for her, make the thousand tiny links she needs. To think, to go down deep and dig around” (47). This depiction of a male character not only permitting but actively encouraging and attempting to facilitate a female character’s ability to look and know, strongly contrasts with the gendered visual binaries previously described in The Architect and The Blind Eye.

Although it might be argued that Mark’s desire to “be the power source” for Rien is suggestive of inequality – of his desire to control their relationship – his subsequent references to light counter this reading. For instance, in one of the (many) poems he writes for Rien, Mark attributes all light to her.

RIEN YOU ARE
Light that tears open space
Clean light, pellucid.
Torn light scattered.
Light of fire, warm light, burning light.
Light of home. (188)

In the context of this poem, Mark’s desire to “[p]rovide a light” for Rien’s “dark moments” (47) emerges as a desire for equality rather than a craving for control: he wants to be all to Rien that she is to him. Or as Mark himself explains it, this image of Rien as light signifies “what life with her had shown him” (188).

Although, as with sex, Mark’s attempts to encourage and enable Rien’s gaze momentarily draw her away from black memories, she soon reverts: hiding and erecting barriers, visual and emotional, between herself and Mark. She begins, for instance, to lose weight again, and to hide beneath “too many layers” of clothes. As Mark ponders:

Her clothes are like a defensive puff of feathers, as if some ominous thing is crouched nearby and ready for attack. She’s trying to disappear beneath all those layers of jumpers and shirts, aiming for nothing at all he thinks, knowing how skilled she is at turning her body to bone, becoming … disembodied. (144)

Rien also rejects Mark’s look, perceiving his “eyes” as “searchlights roaming [her] face”
(12), and telling him that he is no longer allowed to watch her through the salon window where she works as “it upset the customers” (76). At night, she “sleeps in a tight curl, an apostrophe that prevents possession” (63). Of course, Rien’s actions might represent a protective response to the intrusion and imprisonment she perceives in Mark’s searchlight gaze. Accordingly, Mark emerges as the “ominous thing … crouched nearby and ready for attack” (144), a reading encouraged by his stalker-like habit of watching her as she works.

Rien’s own perspective, however, compels an alternate reading. Withdrawing from Mark, she feels, “[t]here are days when looking at him directly is too much. His lingering gaze is like the itch of a question. She turns her head away. To return his look with the same force would be to surrender something she doesn’t believe she has” (112). Although compelling Rien to hide, Mark’s gaze is not dominating or controlling. Instead, it lingers and questions. This description is reinforced by Rien’s thoughts when she is in hospital, following her suicide attempt. Despite, and perhaps because of, “his kind words and gentleness” (180), she asks that Mark not be allowed to visit her: “She doesn’t want to look into his familiar eyes, or attend to his inevitable questions …. She had begun to think of herself as a kind of love vampire, taking but unable to return it” (181).

While she is in the hospital, two explicitly ocular analogies express Rien’s emotional state and growing self-awareness. When she closes her eyes, believing in her ability to achieve the blackness of emotional separation,

… the pallid morning light still passes through the papery flesh where she can see tiny veins illuminated. Her lidded eyes, she realises, still stare out into the world. She always imagined they swung down into the dark cushiony place beneath the lower rim of each socket, but here they were, peering straight through this capillaried curtain. (177)

Her eyes – symbolic, in her interactions with Mark, of the possibility of her active engagement in the world – continue to see. What they see is a view that is uniquely and physically her own. Even sleep, she realises, does not allow them “true rest. … The eyes within those tender enclosures were always restive” (177). This echoing of rest with restive suggests a further challenge to Rien’s emotional isolation, a challenge significantly represented in visual terms. Although she has long associated rest and death, rather than imagining one as representative of the other, she seems to imagine them as constituting the same state – a state existing somewhere between the two. As a child, for example, she understands her father’s death as an absence, an extended sleep. Thus, when she leaves her
mother to stay with her grandparents, she tells her to “[r]est in heavenly peace” (139). Rien’s conflation of rest and death is not resolved in adulthood, but is continued in her recurring glass coffin dream where, despite being dead, she sees “the white frosty shapes that [her] breath made” (10). Thus, in this image of emotional separation – which is simultaneously a state of intense passivity – she is dead and asleep. The contrasting insistence, in this image of restiveness, on the continual and uncontrollable movement of a female character’s eyes suggests both a refusal of passivity and an active and embodied women’s gaze.

Rien’s conception of herself as a “love vampire” is also elaborated on in highly visual terms. Pondering the nature of vampires, Rien thinks:

Vampires can’t stand the light. … They cannot see their own reflections …. Perhaps the ghouls are allergic to the brutal illumination of awareness, unable to face their endless debts to strangers or friends. Perhaps it wasn’t the requirement of blood that made the creatures evil, but the veiled manner of its harvesting. A sticky, liquid reliance. (181)

While Mark delights in the light he perceives in Rien, her lack of self-knowledge (represented by her inability to see her own reflection and aversion to the illumination of awareness), combined with her refusal to rely on others (to owe them a debt of kindness), casts her as a ghoul, a fitting term given her obsession with death. In addition to the established association of love and light, love in this passage is symbolised by blood. This alignment evokes both Rien’s desperate isolation, culminating in and represented by the cutting of her throat, and her growing awareness of the impossibility of passivity. Significantly, Rien realises that it is not her need for love that makes her “evil.” Rather, it is the covert way in which she takes it, denying Mark in order to feed herself, without any intention of returning the gift. In this context, Rien’s meditation on vampires emerges as a metaphoric endorsement of reciprocity, a reciprocity that is framed in terms of the visual.

Rien’s hospital-bed epiphanies – regarding the inevitability of involvement with other people, and the importance of reciprocity in these relationships – are bracketed by two scenes also centrally concerned with, and described in terms of, vision. Instead of focusing exclusively on the nature of Rien’s gaze, however, these scenes return us to the exploration of her visual relationship with Mark. The first centres on Rien’s attempt at suicide. The importance of the visual to this scene is signalled in a number of extra-narrative ways. It is the only event in the novel that is described from both Rien’s and
Mark’s perspectives: Rien is inside the salon looking at her face in the mirror and then at Mark; Mark is outside looking in. Additionally, the lead-up to Rien cutting her throat is one of the few times that the narrative position alters from third person: Mark’s desperate search for Rien is depicted in first person, while his view of Rien’s throat-slashing is presented in the second person. Finally, the importance of the visual in this scene is reinforced by its disjointed unfolding, which creates the sense of a series of still images.

The depiction of Rien’s suicide attempt also focuses on the visual at an intra-narrative level. After searching for her, Mark – his thoughts “like a lightning flash” – “run[s] toward the yellow, flickering light of the salon.” With his face pressed to the window, “torn between the scene and the rescue,” Mark watches as Rien prepares to slit her throat. The use of words like light, lightning and scene, against the backdrop of Mark’s search, highlights the importance of the visual to understanding what follows. In the extended moment of Rien’s throat cutting, this visual focus combines with Mark’s thoughts to demonstrate a complementarity and reciprocity between himself and Rien (encouraged and reinforced by the use of the second-person pronoun):

You stand at the window. … One thought makes sense as you watch her, the only certain thing – terror turns you against yourself.
At least you can equal her, pain for pain. A word for every silent movement.
A thousand … Something rises from the burred metal tube of your throat.
She turns fast. Squints at you. More startled by the sound than the work of her hand. You put the words to the picture because it’s all you know to do …
‘Everything will be all right. I give you my word.’
You say this as you watch her fall. The same words she once wrote and passed to you in an orange peel envelope. Back in those pain days at the Home. (170-71)

Remembering the moment when Rien originally gave this note to Mark – at a time when he was plagued by nightmares – he recalls, “The best thing about her note was the bit about the word. and her giving it to me” (80). Rien’s words of reassurance are thus constructed as a gift – like Mark’s red glass “gift of solace” that he holds to her eye – a gift that becomes reciprocal.139 Indeed, Mark’s gift is immediately evoked in a way that once again signals the confluence of these two characters: “You turn to watch a scene through the red lens of your childhood. The moment when you saw the world turn pink” (171). Given that both Mark and Rien turn, this passage refers to both characters, as well as to their present and

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139 Interestingly, and in a way that reinforces the similar concern in Transplanted and Machines for Feeling with healing and reassurance, Wendy says the same words – “It’s all right” – to Kelvin when they are in the underground pool (183).
their past. The use of words like “watch,” “picture” (170), “lens” and “saw” (171) in the description of this “scene” (170) – which is also described as a “photograph” (171) – as well as the initial foregrounding of the importance of ocular motifs to its understanding, casts the reciprocity and complementarity between Mark and Rien as explicitly visual.

The subsequent description of the event from Rien’s perspective – which associates the shattering of the salon window with her recurring glass coffin dream – reinforces the sense of an achieved visual reciprocity: “She had watched herself fall under a spray of blood …. As she fell she saw the crazed pane of the salon window and heard its tinkly shattering, the world, herself, exposed to each other. It was like her dream of the glass coffin” (179). Given the centrality of the glass coffin image to Rien’s emotional isolation, this shattering explicitly represents the disintegration of the barriers she has erected. In this context, the description of this shattering has two interesting implications. Firstly, it is not specifically attributed to Mark. Although surely his doing, Mark’s absence from the sentence transfers the active and shattering power to Rien’s gaze – “she saw the crazed pane” and only then “heard its tinkly shattering.” While potentially a description of dissociation, the fact that she watches herself seeing the window shatter also doubles, and thus reinforces the power of, her gaze. Although her power is emphasised, reciprocity is maintained by Mark’s implicit presence and action. Furthermore, Rien later notes – in a way that emphasises their visual reciprocity – that what she “remembers most is Mark’s face at the salon window, his repeated words and how he had not turned away” (182).

The description of this moment of shattering also casts Rien’s exposure as concurrent with the world’s exposure to her. This interrelation of world and body resonates with Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of perception in which, to perceive “is to render oneself present to something through the body” (Primacy 42). Applying this notion of perception to the shattering window, Rien, in looking, does not appropriate the world but opens herself to it and becomes immersed within it. At the same time, the world is open to her – indeed, the world looks back. Visibility, therefore, is the condition of seeing; and vision is not an act of aggression but an abandonment of control. In these terms, the shattering of Rien’s emotional isolation occurs in relation to her reciprocal involvement in and openness to the world of others.

The final scene of the novel depicts Mark and Rien’s (possible) reunion, and foregrounds the visual in imagining the possibility of an equitable and reciprocal
heterosexuality. Their reunion is facilitated by and imagined through Mark’s creation, and Rien’s sight, of a “prayer machine.” Mark starts building this machine when, as Rien begins to withdraw, he “realised that to merely watch events unravel around you does not absolve you of responsibility; that doing nothing can be a kind of mad interference, nasty and cowardly and small” (118). Endeavouring to avoid the cowardliness of inaction – a passivity specifically depicted in visual terms (“to merely watch”) – Mark decides to “[i]nvent something” (118). The description of this invention, as well as its aim and “power,” are also embedded in the visual. It emerges as a “wheel of coloured verse to light the darkness” (157), designed “to deflect [Rien’s] fascination with the dark moments of life” (118); the “power” of Mark’s “prayer machine” “rest in the words’ escape, their bright parts flung through beams of coloured light” (158). Depicted in this way, the prayer machine draws together two themes central to the imagining of Mark and Rien’s relationship: firstly, the move from dark to light and colour (the central and transitional image through which love is imagined); secondly, and more subtly, the importance of words in the prayer machine, and the power they possess when carried on “beams of coloured light,” resonates with the reciprocity represented and created by Mark’s use of Rien’s “word” (80, 170).

Rather than being merely incidental to the description and functioning of the prayer machine, this association of light, love and colour with the reciprocal gift Mark makes of Rien’s words is firmly reinforced by the source of the poems that Mark places in his machine. “[I]n his final days in the emptied squat,” Mark had “practiced writing the tiny prayers …. What remained after his drafts was the simplest of phrases and he repeated this twelve times around the wheel. Come home!” (241). This phrase is not Mark’s own: he discovers it in the back of Rien’s childhood “Spy Diary.” There, it was “an urgent cry from the lonely heart of childhood” (231), repeated down the page and written “in the invisible code of lemon juice” (95). Mark’s fanning of a fire with this book is “all that’s needed … to bring the truth to light” (154-55). When Rien wrote the words, “they were the desperate request of a child alone … in the bitter juice of lemon” (238). In Mark’s prayer machine, the “code of her words [is] broken and brought to bright purpose.” As Rien says, “They look better like that” (239). At the same time, as Rien acknowledges the new, bright

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140 The prayer machine is a bicycle wheel, stripped of its tyre, with pieces of coloured glass inserted in the spokes. Poems are placed between these pieces of glass. Rigged like a “Hills [sic] Hoist” (157), with a light bulb at the centre, these poems are illuminated and projected onto a wall where they can be read.
(loving) purpose of their shared prayer, “the memories came sliding in” (238). Despite being transformed, and brought (in more ways than one) from darkness to light, the original significance of the phrase is retained. In this form, however, instead of leading Rien towards the darkness of her past, the memories these words motivate are brightened.

Just as Mark attempts to enable Rien’s gaze, Rien teaches Mark to accept and understand touch outside of functionality. Mark consequently moves from being unable to accept Rien’s touch to being compelled to touch her. Motivated by memories of his mother’s confusingly painful and pleasurable hands, Mark describes how, when Rien “reached for me the first time I jerked my arm away” (49). Although they do not touch in this instance, the momentous significance Mark accords to even the possibility of touch without an explicit function reinforces the importance of their eventual physical reciprocity: “She took her hand back slowly … like nothing had happened. But the air in the room was sizzling like lighting had torn through it” (49). Although elements of Mark’s machine-like approach remain when he finally does touch Rien – when “my arm leapt around her body before I could stop it” (48) – his thoughts also suggest a movement away from detachment towards, if not reciprocity, then an emotional connection:

I wondered if she could feel the heat prickling up and down my limb. Maybe it’d make a forcefield to stop her tears. Field of warmth. Beneath the bang of my heart there was a huge hole. I felt hot and empty. And I counted the next three gusts of wind and kissed her in the middle of the fourth. Her skin and my mouth made a tiny pool of stillness in the breeze. (48)

Among other elements in this passage, the fact that Mark’s arm acts independently of his subjective “I” and the function he attributes to their touch – the creation of a forcefield – perpetuates the mechanistic approach to touch he adopted as a child. Concurrently, however, the “warmth” of this forcefield and the “stillness” when their bodies touch signal a different mode of interaction from his previously cold use of others’ limbs and the “dull whirring” (49) accompanying his young life. The concurrence of mechanistic detachment and emotional warmth is perpetuated in one of the poems Mark writes to Rien, in which he describes her as “a circuit breaker / slipping [her] vanilla skin … between me and my machines” (17).

Mark refers on a number of occasions – and in a way that suggests a gradual transition from a mechanistic isolation to an emotional connection – to the difference represented by Rien’s touch. When their tactile relationship is first introduced, he says,
“The way she touches me is different. Don’t know what sort of function it has” (49). Later, Rien’s pedagogical role in their interactions is made explicit when she puts away Mark’s living tools and says, “time for hands and gentleness.” Although Mark’s comment on her subsequent touch shows that he has not completely abandoned his mechanistic view of bodies and their modes of relating, it does suggest a change in his perception: “she touched me with the flat of her hand. I almost believed she wanted to. That it wasn’t just some robot limb coming at me. Maybe. Just maybe” (78). Rien’s specific alignment of “hands and gentleness” – a resolution of Mark’s conflicting association of his mother’s hands with both pleasure and pain – reinforces this sense of change. When, two pages later, Mark proclaims, “Now, a new way to touch. What Rien does to me with her hands” (80), it seems as if Rien’s teachings have indeed been absorbed. While Juchau’s portrayal of the recovery of an abused child is, at times like this, somewhat trite, Mark’s movement towards reciprocal touching nevertheless resonates with the portrayal of equitable heterosexuality in The Blind Eye, Last of the Sane Days and Transplanted.

Although, particularly when described by Mark, such reciprocity retains some of the mechanistic character of his earlier interactions with others, their touching also creates a connection so intimate that it permits sincere and silent communication. Reminiscent of Hilary and Rafael’s silent prayer/pact, Mark imagines contact with Rien’s body in terms of “pass[ing] her messages in the night. Connect my body up to hers. Dark therapy.” Thus, when Rien wakes from a dream, Mark is unsurprised to find that he “knew every detail …. Each thought coming through the liquid passed from my flesh to hers” (50). This description of Mark and Rien’s communication, which, as in Last of the Sane Days, situates the meaning and nature of their touch beyond language and its binary oppositions, is reinforced by Rien’s desire to “touch each object” in Mark’s suitcase “and absorb his memories through the thin flesh of my hands” (12).

However, while Last of the Sane Days specifically differentiates a caring touch from penetration, the poem Mark (characteristically) writes about the connection between his and Rien’s bodies introduces a specifically penetrative element into their silent interaction:

What she does to me in the dark.
And in the full light of day.
Plugs my body into hers.
Does the impossible.
Electric and infinite at the same time.
All my synapses implode. (49)

In obvious ways, this poem – which describes power-cord-Mark plugged into power-point-Rien – seems to perpetuate the oppressive dichotomous structure underlying and informing patriarchal constructions of (hetero)sex. In this context, the liquid basis of their physical communication – with “[e]ach thought coming through the liquid passed from my flesh to hers” (50) – suggests semen, an association and an image that offers a whole new level to the notion of phallogocentrism.

At the same time, however, Mark’s treatment of the power-cord/power-point metaphor ironically escapes oppressive patriarchal constructions of hetero-sex. For a start, Rien is the active subject of the poem – she plugs Mark’s body into hers – and a willing participant in their interaction. She is also the source of power. From this position, Rien is able to do the “impossible” – to combine the electric (the closed circuit created by their two bodies and the excitement this connection produces) with the infinite (a state unconfined by limiting dichotomies). Furthermore, Mark’s description of his synapses imploding differs from the traditionally hydrological model of male sexuality. Simultaneously, being the result of a state where external pressure exceeds internal pressure, the term implosion reinforces Rien’s relative power in the interaction. While Rien’s power is affirmed, the poem does not imply Mark’s corresponding oppression. Not only is he the author of this account – a position long associated with representative power – his relation to Rien is longed for and embraced. As in Segal’s description of reciprocity, “one body actively seeks its passive objectification in and through the desire of another” (Straight 296).

The equality of their touching, and the trust enabled by this state, is further portrayed in descriptions of Rien shaving Mark. As with the power-cord/power-point metaphor, this state of trust and equality is depicted through the establishment of another potentially unequal – and also dangerous – interaction. Scorning the safety razor, Rien chooses a sharp “blade” (113) – a tool which is also a weapon. The phallic implications of her choice further suggest her power, and this is acknowledged when Mark notes, “[s]ecurity’s conditional. It’s the vulnerable skin of the neck. The pulsing vein there.” While Mark’s trust in Rien overcomes his fear – “the fact she’s holding the blade … makes everything calm and manageable” (81) – Rien seems aroused by (at least the semblance of) unequal power. Thus, one day when she shaves him, she “puts a blindfold across his eyes and takes off her clothes. Circles him slowly in the kitchen … keeping a careful distance
from his hands” (112-13). This overtly accords her all the power. Nevertheless, the division between Rien’s power and Mark’s powerlessness, like the apparent dichotomy of power-cord/power-point, is quickly dissolved:

She is halfway through his four day stubble when a finger brushes the skin of her stomach and he says, ‘Here are the rules – for every stroke of the blade I get one touch.’

This is the way he turns her game into his. But then, with his smooth cheek against her back, there are no rules except what is translated from the skin of his body and the heat of hers. His blindfold still in place. (113)

Mark thereby transforms the apparent inequalities in their tactile interaction into an erotic game, one which once again affirms the silent communication enabled by their touching. Explicitly portrayed as a game without rules, reciprocal touching is therefore valorised as a way of escaping dichotomies and re-imagining heterosexuality.

In contrast to *The Blind Eye* and *Last of the Sane Days*, however, Mark and Rien’s tactile interactions are not always “rosy” (105). This is initially signalled by Dog Boy who says, “they were different from the other kids because of a small freshness. Maybe that’s love,” but who also describes their love as “freshness on the turn” (24). The ease with which touch can turn from pleasure to pain, and vice versa, as well as the ambiguous emotions resulting from and motivating this transition, are a constant undertone in the novel. In one sense, the idea of there being only a fine line between pleasure and pain is an obvious, and one might say, exhausted reference point for descriptions of love and sex. However, the slippage between pleasure and pain occurring in descriptions of Mark and Rien’s sexual touching also has a less obvious, and far more interesting consequence. Understood through Merleau-Ponty’s notion of flesh, the frequency with which Mark and Rien’s touching slides between pleasure and pain makes it difficult to dichotomise the two states in absolute terms: as with Mark’s mother’s hands, touch always has the potential for both and, in exceeding binary terms, functions as an always unfinished and precarious, but nevertheless conceivable, third option.

This movement between or becoming pleasure and pain is demonstrated in the novel’s most extended portrayal of Mark and Rien’s sexual practices. Occupying an entire chapter entitled “Everything and Nothing” this is, in fact, the fullest description of sex in any of these novels. The chapter begins by describing Rien’s avoidance of Mark’s “lingering gaze” and then depicts a sexual position they “[s]ometimes” adopt – a position that resists categorisation as either pleasurable and equitable or objectifying and painful. As
soon as one side of this (seeming) dichotomy appears pre-eminent, it merges into, or is in
the process of becoming, the other. Neither position, as a result, is wholly itself, nor is it
completely separate from the other. An action, attitude or pose that might have been
unproblematically objectifying in another narrative is (in its becoming equality) rendered
somewhat playful and pleasurable, and vice-versa. Again, in relation to this continual state
of becoming pleasurable and painful, these very terms, as well as objectification and
reciprocity, no longer adequately describe the actions, attitudes and poses presented. The
frequent use of “sometimes” in description of Mark and Rien’s touching reinforces the
sense in which their interactions are never entirely delineable as pleasurable or painful.

The “[s]ometimes” sexual position described involves Mark “hold[ing] [Rien]
pinned against the bed so she can almost feel the slats of wood in the pallets beneath the
mattress.” Although this position might seem to place Rien in an objectified or subjugated
role, she desires Mark’s restraining hold and weight, thinking of herself as “[t]he princess
who wanted the pea … the harder the better.” In a way that ties Rien’s refusal or inability to
look at Mark into this sexual position, the description continues: “He puts his free hand at
the base of her jaw and turns her face toward him. All that she has left, with her limbs
flattened and held to the bed, his weight on her lower half, is her eyelids’ slow decline.”
The embedding of Rien’s refusal to look at Mark in this sexual encounter imbues it with
power, as well as adding a playful, even coquettish, element to her averted gaze. However,
in a way that makes impossible the absolute classification of this sexual position – or
Rien’s averted gaze – as playful, this becoming playfulness exists alongside Rien’s
association of her held wrists with “the animals at the back of Butcher Joe’s, the ones that
she peered at, fascinated, as a child, their hooves tied and hung from the ceiling.” This
image aligns her pose with death rather than erotic play. Concurrently, however, her
peering, fascinated gaze is intrinsic to her description of these dead carcasses. The inclusion
of her gaze, as well as the ensuing description of their roles when they are in this position,
continually alludes to their mutual desire. Nevertheless, the stark and pitiful image of the
dead animals continues to hover:

He ties her this way so his hands are free to roam, he avoids the bite of her teeth
then, the pinch of her waggling fingers – but she has no interest in harming him, it’s
his squeezing grip, the points of his teeth she wants and her threshing hands against
their restraints are the only way she knows to ask him for it. (112)
The fact that violence is the only way she knows to ask for sex compounds the ambiguity of their tactile interactions.

This description of their sometimes-sexual position concludes: “When he touches her gently she says, ‘I don’t know anything about it. It feels like nothing.’ She wants his hands on her hard, or not at all” (112). Although Rien’s desire is present in this passage, there is little sense of play. Rather, her statement – which is actualised in the reverse when she beats him – suggests a depressingly perpetual cycle of violence. While seemingly conclusive, this depiction of their sexual touching in terms of violence, objectification and hopelessness is immediately followed by the description of Rien shaving Mark. Thus, the dangerous touch that Rien entreats is again transformed into an erotic game. Similarly, Rien’s reference to “anything” in addition to “nothing” evokes the chapter title, “Everything and Nothing” as well as the meaning of Rien’s name – which Mai explains means “both … nothing and anything” (228).

This same pattern continues for the rest of the chapter, which ends with another example of their touch becoming, or risking, pleasure and pain:

Sometimes she remembers the boy before all of this and she feels the rush of an ancient guilt. How has she changed him? He once knew nothing of her body’s secrets, of the tension between what is kept fast inside and what is revealed. Now she has forced it upon him, the ten pressing pads of her fingers, the gnashing weight of her bones at his hips. Everything kept tight and then revealed, her fast coming breath, the world gone white, her gasp released and funnelling up to the rafters. (113)

Sex, given Rien’s “ancient guilt,” is aligned with Eve’s original sin and imagined, moreover, as a relation of force (something she has “forced … upon him”), committed with the anger, frustration and pain of a gnashing action. Nevertheless, in the final sentence this pain once again becomes pleasure in the form of Rien’s orgasm, which is simultaneously depicted as a movement between (a becoming both) inside and outside. Such movement offers a moment of erotic transcendence in which everything fades except for the sensations of her body.

While the becoming pleasure and pain foregrounded in descriptions of Mark and Rien’s tactile interactions is not resolved through a final heterosexual union, their relationship perhaps comes closest to achieving a concluding rapprochement. In contrast to the other fictions discussed in this chapter – which finish with heterosexual couples separated – Mark and Rien meet again at the end of *Machines for Feeling*. But although
spatially re-united, they are emotionally estranged. As in *The Blind Eye*, this is represented in terms of an inability or unwillingness to touch one another. Rien touches Mark’s shirt, but does not want to touch his “flesh,” fearful that it “will be cold as her own and resistant.” “She hopes his hands will soon reach out but knows they will not, they hang at his sides … emptied …. No solace, nothing left” (240). Hope for their reunion is represented, however, by the “nest, human-sized” (237) that Mark has constructed in the shed. This nest represents “refuge. A warm place that fits the shape of the bird. Somewhere to return” (19).141 Furthermore, Rien’s plea for Mark to “Show me” (240), referring to the prayer machine and made “as if coaxing a stubborn child from its locked box of flesh” (241), reiterates the narrative of healing that characterised their moments of reciprocity. Once again, Mark feeds and nurtures Rien’s vision while Rien provides the physical contact necessary to overcome his emotional detachment. The subsequent spinning of the prayer machine – and the final sentence of the novel – urges “hope … for moments that might occur despite past consequence. For the possibility of exquisite, future things” (241-42).

Although reunion is strongly implied and idealised, it is challenged by the association established between their relationship and the Siamese twins Mark sees on a documentary. While the separation of these twins is necessary because one is taking all the sustenance from the other, the separation creates enormous emotional distress. As Mark tells Rien, “[a]fter surgery one girl’s arm kept reaching. Over and over. To where she was used to her sister being. Just kept feeling the empty space beside her” (89). This description evokes Mark’s own compulsion to continually “keep checking. That she was still there. Hadn’t disappeared in the night” (63), as well as Rien’s own fear of abandonment. Hearing Mark moving about on the roof, and imagining that he is “no doubt devising plans and tactics for leaving her,” Rien “puts an arm out in search of his remaining warmth” and “imagines herself repeating this gesture over and over” (151) once he is gone. Mark makes the association between his and Rien’s relationship and the Siamese twins clear when he insists “this story’s about us.” However, it is not a metaphor for the existential and emotional necessity of heterosexual connection. Whether or not the twins – and Mark and Rien – are “[c]onnected or cut. One of us is going to suffer” (90). Although the focus on mutual healing in the portrayal of Mark and Rien’s relationship perhaps suggests an alternative to this impasse, the story of the Siamese twins resonates with the description of

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141 Rien is repeatedly associated with birds (see, for example, 16, 18, 19, 90, 157, 220).
heterosexuality in all these novels. While the reiterated yearning for heterosexual connection implies that the health and wellbeing of both men and women relies on their ability to forge relationships based on principles of reciprocity, the prevailing distance between men and women – or the social construction of gender difference – means that such connections are currently impossible. Given this impasse, it is significant that, in *Miranda* – the most explicitly feminist of all these novels, and the focus of the following chapter – heterosexual love is absent. In this novel, Miranda’s visual agency is not bestowed or enabled by a male lover, but produced through her own courage, creativity and honesty.
Chapter Five
How to survive (without) a shipwreck

Explorations of feminism, postmodernism and the perception/construction of men’s bodies in *Miranda*

As many theorists have argued, and as Meskimmon summarises, “instrumental vision, sensory hierarchies and the pleasures attained from specular domination of ‘others,’” have been repeatedly associated with “a masculine, hegemonic gaze” (136). This gaze has been rendered pre-eminent and oppressive due to the gendered dichotomies underlying patriarchal discourse, and because of the related construction of vision as the supreme form of knowledge/power. In such terms, the privileging in contemporary Australian women’s fiction of multi-sensory and embodied engagements with male characters’ bodies emerges as a means of addressing and challenging such a regime. The intention to portray this challenge as positive and liberating is evident in the association of non-visual modes of perception and knowledge with love and equality (as discussed in Chapter Four), and with other, at least explicitly less restrictive ways of knowing, namely, psychic abilities and homeopathy (as explored in Chapter Three). However, whereas theorists like Meskimmon and Haraway (“Situated”) build on notions of embodiment to theorise women’s spectatorship, these fictional accounts manifest a general move away from questions of vision, rather than a different approach to its problematics. Such avoidance is particularly evident in *The Architect*, and in the portrayal of homeopathy in *The Blind Eye*, where the (male) touching of male characters’ bodies is privileged over, and substituted for, (women’s) visual engagements. While the portrayal of heterosexual reciprocity in the fictions discussed in Chapter Four somewhat contradicts this identification of a move away from vision, there is, nonetheless, a tendency to elide questions of women looking at men’s bodies by imagining such looks through the mediating frameworks of love and touch.

An exception to this pattern is *Miranda*. This text is centrally, indeed, almost exclusively focused not on men’s pain, but on Miranda’s many and complex artistic responses to and constructions of John/Helios’s body. In portraying and exploring the implications of a woman both looking at and representing a man’s body, *Miranda* engages with and reflects on preoccupations that are central to this book. In particular, Miranda’s approach to John/Helios’s body combines an emphasis on multi-sensory knowledge with a
radical re-conceptualisation of the relationship between women’s looks and men’s bodies. Miranda and, to a lesser extent, the other female characters in this novel, engage with John/ Helios’s body both visually and non-visually. Such engagements are explicitly contrasted with, and shown to enable a deeper understanding than, objectification. Moreover, because these women do not love John/ Helios – indeed, heterosexual love is entirely absent from this novel – the curious and fascinated looks they direct at his body are unadulterated by the soft-focus lens of romance. Although Miranda’s visual agency is ultimately circumscribed (though not destroyed) by patriarchal forces, depictions of her visual interactions with John/ Helios’s body extend well beyond what is imagined in the other fictions, even offering a way of balancing an acknowledgement of women as constrained by patriarchy with the portrayal of a visual agency that exceeds such confines. Moreover, I will argue that, in describing a vision not yet fully delineated by theory, Miranda indicates ways of moving beyond unresolved debates between modernist and postmodernist feminist visual theorists. The passage this novel offers through these stormy theoretical waters in turn suggests new ideas about ways women might look at men and about how men might appear under such gazes.

All of Miranda’s senses are engaged in her interactions with John/ Helios’s body. Upon noticing his unconscious body on the reef at the beginning of the novel, she declares: “It was surprising how impossible it was to separate one sense from another. Every sense rushed in upon one, jostling, mingling, squeezing. Smell became taste, taste became touch, touch became sight, sight became hearing” (2). Miranda demonstrates the inseparability of her senses when she tries to ascertain whether John/ Helios is alive. She puts her ear to his chest but, unable to hear his heart beat above the sound of the sea, she feels his pulse with her fingers. The sensation she subsequently describes – “What my ears could not hear my fingers felt. They felt the sound as a deaf man feels the beat of drums” (6) – combines touch and sound. Merleau-Ponty’s theory of embodied perception again resonates with the challenge this text thus poses to the pre-eminence of vision. The senses, he insists,

… cannot be understood in terms of their subsumption under a primary consciousness, but of their never-ending integration into one knowing organism. … The senses translate each other without any need of an interpreter, and are mutually comprehensible without the intervention of any idea. … My body is the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my ‘comprehension.’ (Phenomenology 233-34)
It is significant, in view of this intermingling of senses, that Miranda discovers John/Helios on the reef – in this novel, a place where all the senses are forcibly engaged. While Mother-in-law feels overwhelmed by “the assault of noise, the attack of wind” (41), Miranda loves the reef for the same reasons, describing it in terms of “freedom … the constant sustenance to my senses which sun and light gave” (130).

The interaction of touch and sound in Miranda’s perception of John/Helios’s body is echoed by a more extensive association of sight and touch. Miranda rejoices in finding him largely because this enables her to explore a man’s body tactiley, as well as visually: “Here, beneath me, was human shape. I could absorb its intricacies, not just through my eyes, nor through my hands but through the skin of my whole body” (7). This association of the dual operations of sight and touch with understanding a man’s body is reiterated when Miranda visits John/Helios in the hospital. Seeing his hair as “an aureole so deeply heated that the tips sparked fire,” she longs to sculpt this image. She is, however, unable to determine how such a sculpture could be created without the added level of perception and understanding offered by touch: “I put out my hand. If I touched it I would know” (28). Similarly, looking at John/Helios’s arm, Miranda wonders at the contradictions she perceives, and again implies that they are resolvable only in conjunction with touch:

I could see his bare arm. It had the tender fragility of youth yet beneath the roundness stretched muscles and tendons as complicated and tough as ships [sic] rigging. I longed to feel that structure as I had on the reef. I longed to hold his arm as it moved, to feel the strength, the tautness, the relaxation, the fluidity of matter.

(54)

Mother-in-law shares Miranda’s multi-sensory approach, perceiving and, it is implied, more fully understanding the world through a combination of senses. As Miranda proclaims, Mother-in-law’s “visions of the world match the illusions of night and she walks forever in a dream universe, fitting the flowers she touches, the smells she absorbs, the tasks she manages, into the panorama of dreams she creates in sleep” (21). Due to the similarities in their perception, Mother-in-law is the one character who understands Miranda’s artistic imaginings and sculptings of John/Helios’s body in the tactile manner in which they are conceived. When Miranda explains her vision of John/Helios’s burning hair to Mother-in-law, she does so through touch, placing Mother-in-law’s hand “on the up-ended base of the bucket where it sucked and absorbed all the sun beside the tank stand” and saying, “He was like this” (34). As Miranda asserts, “We both see through our hands.
When I carve wood I lead her to it or hand the piece to her and she feels it like a lover” (12). Although literally blind, Mother-in-law’s non-visual sensory awareness of the world means that she is able, metaphorically, to see. Indeed, according to Miranda, she is able to see – and hence, to understand – things that no one else can. As Miranda tells Ellie, “My Mother-in-law can see through darkness to the other side. Light doesn’t scald her eyes and stop her seeing .... [t]he other side of everything: the moon, the shadow where light isn’t” (58).

In contrast, Ellie, representative of the oppressed women of the community, emerges as not only metaphorically blind but figuratively unable to feel. When Ellie sees the root system that Miranda will use to sculpt John/Helios she perceives only “a bit of old wood” and is “horrified.” Mother-in-law encourages her to touch the wood, to feel “[w]hat Miranda will find in it.” “You must let yourself not see it” (88) she instructs Ellie, but Ellie cannot. Disheartened by Ellie’s horror, Miranda momentarily perceives only the wood’s superficial appearance: “Suddenly the wood appeared to me as it had to Ellie, a tattered old skeleton unfit for resurrection, the exhausted tree of many crucifixions but never the man. Nothing would emerge from it. It was all an illusion, myself a deluded dreaming fool” (90). Secure in her tactile relation to the world, Mother-in-law experiences no such doubt. Consequently, she is able to help Miranda find the wood’s “fat secret” through touch.

As in a benediction, she laid her hands on the wood, and ... let them wander over the surface. ‘Old, yes. Ragged, certainly. But mature. Full of ripeness. There is no emptiness here, Miranda, only fullness. This wood has a fat secret.’

‘Do you really think so? Really?’

‘I’m certain. Shut your eyes and feel it yourself.’

I obeyed and laid my hands alongside hers on the wood. It was ripe, full-bellied, ready. I remained with my eyes closed, resting in the assurance of my hands. ...

‘Yes, I can feel it,’ I said. ‘It’s the fattest secret I’ve ever discovered. And you’re the cleverest old lady that ever was.’

... She sat down smugly and smiled. She might not have been blind, so intent was the light she directed at me. (90, 92)

Miranda and Mother-in-law are united in a tactile world – one that transcends superficial appearances to permit a deeper understanding – and differentiated from women like Ellie, oppressed and senseless.

Just as Mother-in-law tries to show Ellie the secret in the wood, at the private exhibition for the contributors to the women’s art show she attempts to draw other women into this sensory, liberatory world. To this end, she suggests that before each art work is
unveiled, the women feel what is under the cloth. This, she explains, will “make them take notice” (116) – compel them to not just “look,” as they are accustomed to doing, but to “see,” and hence to more fully perceive and understand. When this sensory experience is transformed into “a children’s guessing game,” punctuated by the women’s “arguments, disagreements, assertions, hints, shrieks,” Miranda is angry. “They have no sense,” she tells her mother-in-law, “You didn’t mean this. You meant them to know through their fingers.” Mother-in-law, again more confident in the integrity of sensory experience than Miranda, tells her to “[w]ait and see” (118). When the women feel Miranda’s sculpture of John/ Helios’s body they give conflicting opinions as to what lies under the tablecloth: “It’s a leg. I’m sure I can feel a foot. No it’s not, it’s just a bit of wood. Give me a go. It’s got lots of lumps. It’s all twisty and rough. What can it be?” (118). Like the joke about the blind men who describe the elephant depending on the part they grasp, the women’s perceptions of the sculpture could be dismissed as inadequate, even comic. However, this way of knowing creates fellowship among the women: their noise, for instance, contrasts significantly with their usual, deferential silence, representative of their obedience to “nuns [and] husbands” (121). Despite initial scepticism Miranda acknowledges the significance of such fellowship, describing it as “sisterhood” (134). This term identifies partial and embodied ways of knowing not as insufficient but as a force of unity. Although subsequently fractured, such unity is at this moment celebrated, and even identified as a source of subversive or liberatory power.

Miranda and Mother-in-law’s sensory perception is explicitly differentiated from and contrasted with Alfred’s purely and patriarchally visual approach. Completely lacking any awareness of the world beyond vision, he is unable to understand Miranda’s sculptures. As Miranda relates, Alfred “looks at my work and says ‘What is this?’ and there is contempt and distaste in the question, not any desire for enlightenment. Sometimes his mother tells him ‘It’s flight. Don’t you feel it?’ and I see the pitying look he gives her” (13). Alfred’s limited understanding, arising from his reliance on vision, is further demonstrated by his racism. Regarding the kind and dignified laundryman Ah Long, he comments, “All Chinamen are uncivilised. You only have to look at them” (61). Furthermore, and in contrast to the reef, religion (a hypocritical force in the novel and Alfred’s primary way of interacting with and controlling the world) is portrayed as a paradigm that dulls the senses. This is suggested, for example, by Miranda’s assertion that,
“the Godly always deprived God of colour. … [W]hen the world shrieked red and gold and green and purple at them they turned it into a black and white photograph” (23).

Although deep understanding is shown to be possible only when an exclusive reliance on vision is abdicated, absolute truth is not the result of multi-sensory perception. Accordingly, Mother-in-law “talks in riddles” – a habit, she happily explains to Miranda, that “shows I have no answers.” Similarly, the reason that Miranda – who finds “uncertainty a stimulating experience” (90) – “sav[er{s}]” sensation, is because it is “so varied and hard to describe” (2). The association of these characters with both multi-sensory engagements and an absence of “truth” represents a privileging of embodied partiality; a way of knowing explicitly promised in The Architect and The Blind Eye, but annulled by the credence respectively given to psychic abilities and homeopathy. As the difficulty of describing sensations is also foregrounded, embodied understanding – like the silent tacticity of reciprocal heterosexuality – is positioned beyond the dichotomous structures of language. However, in contrast to the looking relations described in these heterosexual relationships, Miranda’s visual approach to John/ Helios’s body does not substitute love for objectification. At the same time, and although characterised by a somewhat distanced artistic and intellectual curiosity, her gaze (except when she first sees him) does not objectify John/ Helios’s body. Instead, her look investigates and understands his body in an openly partial and non-dichotomous way. Rather than through the terms of psychoanalytic feminist theory useful in the analysis of the other fictions, Miranda’s vision can be conceptualised in relation to what I will tentatively describe as postmodern visual theory. While ‘postmodern visual theory’ is not a field in the fully delineated and recognised manner of psychoanalytic feminist film theory, and while precise distinctions between modernist and postmodernist ideas are notoriously difficult, Esther Sonnet provides a workable definition of these two broad positions as they emerge in feminist debates.

Writing in 1995, Sonnet argues that the “theoretical paradoxes thrown up by the meeting of feminism on the terrain of postmodernism are now beginning to take shape in the form of a ‘modernist or postmodernist feminist’ choice” (219). This choice, she asserts, has particular consequence for understanding and theorising female spectatorship. Modernist feminist conceptions of vision have been, and continue to be dominated by, psychoanalytic feminist
film theory. This theoretical framework, as demonstrated in discussions of objectification in these narratives, is “premised on a bi-polar sexual economy, which admits only of male and female subjectivities” (228). The relationship between the male (or masculine) spectator and female (or feminine) spectacle is conceived as monolithic and unidirectional, and the spectator’s gaze is understood as constructed and controlled according to dominant ideology, unconsciously embedded in patriarchy and the text. Looking is consequently conceived in terms of dichotomies (whether male/female, masculine/feminine, active/passive, sadistic/masochistic or distant/close). This paradigm has offered feminists valuable terms and conditions for political critiques of and interventions in what has been conceived as a patriarchal visual economy. While arguably still dominant, psychoanalytic feminist film theory has been strongly critiqued by other feminists, who insist that it institutes a monolithic, ahistorical, acultural and heterosexist approach. Compared with what Sonnet describes as a postmodern “politics of multiplicity” (229) – characterised by attention to the diverse ways in which history, culture, individual experience, race, class, gender, sex, and other “positionalit[ies]” (228) influence the construction of the individual – psychoanalytic feminist film theory has been repeatedly shown to theorise visual interactions reductively.

Growing from and embracing this politics of multiplicity, postmodernism offers different ways of conceptualising representation and visual relations. In contrast to the stable and absolute properties of the modernist/psychoanalytic spectator, the viewer proposed by postmodern visual theory is capable of assuming multiple ways of looking and looking positions. Ien Ang and Joke Hermes, for instance, argue for conceptualising spectatorship as “an ever proliferating set of heterogeneous and dispersed, intersecting and contradicting cultural practices, involving an indefinite number of multiply-positioned subjects” (322). Taking this notion to its logical limit, Charlotte Brunsdon asserts that, “Everyone … is an other – there are no pronouns beyond the ‘I’” (316). Acknowledging the multitude of experiences and positions involved in spectatorship, postmodern visual theorists allow for and attempt to describe the coexistence of various and often contradictory ways of seeing and places from which to see, both within and between subjects.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Multiple terms have been employed to describe the manifestations of viewer agency, including scepticism, critical distance, interrogation, opposition, cultural interpretation or competency, resistance, ambivalence, negotiation and ironic detachment. Negotiation – referring to the practice of reading against the grain without
This plurality of viewing and subject positions is seen to produce a multiplicity of meanings, as each “I” brings different experiences to viewing situations. Elizabeth Klaver makes this argument in the following way:

... in uncovering a multiple positioning in viewing, the notion of the viewer as purely passive and simply acted upon ... can be given up and replaced by a performative modality in which agency, as an aspect of the interplay among viewing positions, is recognised. In other words, the viewer exerts agency by performing in the viewing situation, by bringing a history of media and life experiences to whatever ... she is watching. (311)

While this conception of multiple textual meanings is not inherently postmodern, the notion of agency has been used in various postmodern analyses to describe the performative engagement between text and viewer: the multiple meanings different viewers bring to, construct from, and find in viewing situations. Significantly, the diverse meanings and positions enacted in spectatorship are not exhausted by the processes of the text. Rather, the alternative meanings viewers bring to and construct from any given text are theorised as altering textual meaning. Jeanne Allen applies this understanding of spectatorship to Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*. She argues that contemporary feminist audiences can interpret this film (condemned as sexist at the time of its release) as presenting liberating gender relations. The meaning of the film, in other words, is transformed by contemporary feminist interpretations.

It is not only textual meaning that is transformed in the performative interaction between viewer and text. As theorists like Mercer and Natalie Boymel Kampen argue, the viewer is also altered by the text: perhaps constituted as part of a larger audience, or altered by the new meanings created in viewing an image. Thus, according to postmodern understandings of spectatorship, the relationship between texts and viewers is “not fixed, but rather mutually effecting” (Allen 6); or, as Vivienne Sobchack puts it, vision is “a constitutive activity ... an act of becoming which brings both viewing subject and visible world into being” (21). Within this relationship between viewer and text, “[m]eaning is neither imposed, nor passively imbibed, but arises out of a struggle or negotiation between competing frames of reference, motivation and experience” (Gledhill, “Pleasurable” 68). Thus, while theories of objectification require a monolithic male or masculine spectator to simply dismissing texts as patriarchal (or racist, sexist, homophobic, etc.) – has, for instance, been used to describe the viewing/reading approach of women (Gledhill, “Pleasurable”), black women (Bobo) and post-colonial subjects (Bhabha, esp. 25-27).
interpret the image in accordance with dominant ideology, postmodern notions of spectatorship conceive looking as a process rather than a position, involving multiple viewers and meanings, which may or may not correspond with dominant or hegemonic discourses. This perspective exceeds and disrupts notions of voyeurism and fetishism. Accordingly, critical emphasis shifts away from decisions regarding the text’s meaning which, in the most limited sense, leads to political assertions regarding whether a text is “good” (liberating, subversive and, in some cases, true) or “bad” (patriarchal, masculinist and false). Instead, analyses investigate what meanings are produced when particular subjects receive and negotiate with various texts. In fields like visual theory and masculinity studies, this approach has led to an ethnographic emphasis. While such an approach is difficult to adopt within the disciplinary confines of literary study, the attention I have paid in this book to various layers of narrative meaning has been an attempt to privilege the contradictoriness and multiplicity that can be created through reading.

Just as most of the texts under discussion here seem to evoke notions of objectification and the male gaze described by Mulvey, so too does *Miranda* suggest an affiliation with, though never an absolute ascription to, the postmodern conceptions of viewing just described. Not only does *Miranda* present a gaze that manifests the properties of spectatorship described by postmodern visual theory, the novel concurrently engages the reader in a postmodern reading experience, laying meaning upon meaning to encourage a variety of different and sometimes contradictory interpretations. Thus, in *Miranda*, both vision and reading emerge as active processes of interpretation and negotiation requiring viewer and reader to actively engage with the text in order to produce meanings – meanings that are, in turn, never complete or stable. In consequence, my reading, which necessarily alters the meaning of *Miranda*, will exceed and be exceeded by the text. Although my critical analyses of the other fictions explored in this book have been similarly provisional, this novel explicitly foregrounds such conditionality. Particularly when elucidated in relation to Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, the extensive mediation on postmodern

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143 There are exceptions to this rule. Knights’s recent analysis of masculinities in twentieth-century fiction, for instance, investigates the ways in which certain texts are addressed “not to a supposed universality of reading experience but specifically to the masculine” (8). Working from the notion of texts as “performativ” (7), he investigates how the construction of masculinities in these texts, and their address to a male reader, are “productive in giving rise to renewed performances of themselves” (3).
viewing and reading practices evident in *Miranda* creates a complex and intellectually sophisticated basis for exploring a woman’s look at a man’s body.\textsuperscript{144}

In a way that resonates with the association of sensory perception, embodiment and partiality, *Miranda* repeatedly privileges a conception of meaning that does not exist in the image, but is produced through interactions between images and viewers. This approach to meaning, resonating with postmodern notions of spectatorship, is alluded to in one of Miranda’s conversations with Joe.\textsuperscript{145} Telling him about Liza, a girl who eloped to California, Miranda recalls, “She wrote that the oranges there are the same only brighter … At least that is how it seemed to her. I suppose that’s all it really is.” Noting Miranda’s trepidation, Joe playfully rejoins, “All? Isn’t the seeming everything?” (103). In identifying the “seeming [as] everything” – a conception of meaning that is repeatedly upheld in the narrative – Joe disregards notions of unproblematic truth or reality, and affirms the validity of meanings that arise from individual engagements with the world. Joe again privileges this notion of “the seeming” in a subsequent conversation with Miranda in which he claims, “I’ve always found imagination disconcerting …. Suddenly something is more than it seems. … It’s the surprise …. The discovery of more when you expected very little … So disconcerting” (109).\textsuperscript{146} His description of imagination as offering more than would seem suggests the multiple nature of the seeming, the way in which layers of apparent meaning create the continual surprise of discovery. Such surprise is later associated with Mother-in-law’s memory of seeing. She recalls, before losing her sight as a very young child, opening a present on Christmas morning: “I remember, not the thing, it wasn’t very special, but the feeling of excitement as I held in my hands something I hadn’t expected to see. If I had known then I would have looked more closely … To remember a bit of the world” (116). Joe and Mother-in-law are thereby associated through their delight in surprise. Although “disconcerting” is a word with rather more negative connotations than “excitement,” Joe’s feelings of perplexity signal an engagement with the world that privileges not merely the delightful but also the difficult and challenging. In his subsequent description of Miranda, who engages his interest and respect – “You and imagination are the same. Always

\textsuperscript{144} Miranda is a complex novel, containing multiple inter-textual references. As well as through postmodern visual theory and Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, this text could be read in relation to its allusions to the Bible or to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, to name only two possibilities.

\textsuperscript{145} Along with Tom the lighthouse keeper, Joe, the American captain of a whaling ship docked in a bay near Miranda’s town, represents an alternative masculinity in *Miranda*.

\textsuperscript{146} In this case and elsewhere I use widely spaced ellipses to indicate that they are an aspect of the original text.
disconcerting with something more” (151) – Joe signals his acceptance of, even desire for, challenging and engaging multiplicities of meaning.

This same postmodern privileging of “the seeming” is affirmed in a story Miranda relates from her childhood, where she recalls running to her parents and excitedly yelling, “There are one hundred and three new chickens.” She chooses this number because “A hundred seemed like a loose exaggeration, but a hundred and three had the illusion of exactitude as well as the magnificent dimensions of size” (29). Officiously, her father insists on counting the chicks, reporting that there are “[o]nly seven, Miranda. You must tell the truth” (30). Like Alfred, Miranda’s father condemns her “flights of fancy [as] lies to judge and criticise” (154). Upon “realis[ing] that God would have counted seven chickens also [Miranda] resolved to have nothing more to do with God or truth” (30). The association drawn between Miranda’s father, Alfred and God identifies and critiques as dogmatic and restrictive an understanding of truth that considers only literality, accuracy and precision. For Miranda’s mother, her husband’s unimaginative exactitude and belief in God “made him superior. For [Miranda] it made him boring. Certainty,” Miranda insists, “was not security: it was tedium” (29). In contrast to her father, who speaks of “truth when he meant precision” (29), Miranda describes herself as “[t]ruthful but not precise” (36). In perceiving “one hundred and three new chickens,” Miranda is being truthful to the enormous numerical dimensions she perceives.

Although the “seeming [is] everything” in Miranda, such meaning is not superficial, obvious or simplistic. Complexity, inscribed in the layering of meaning upon meaning in relation to various themes or images, is created through a series of allusions that create an underlying philosophical reasoning in the narrative. One of the ways in which this complexity is demonstrated is through Miranda’s repeated rejection of images that exist only on the surface. Such rejections represent a refusal of meaning that is superficial, unrelated to context and readily apparent in the image. As Miranda asserts, “[b]right things weren’t interesting. Like the polished surface of a sculpture they were superficial, reflecting light outward.” She prefers, instead “a rougher surface where light trapped in crannies explored inwards” (125). This differentiation between surface and depth is reinforced by the comparison established between memory and amnesia. Memories, as Miranda asserts, are like rough surfaces: “Memories wrinkled my past like a fine network of lines which grew more numerous with the years.” They are associated, moreover, with context –
“memories linked [one] to places and to time” (56). In contrast to the multifaceted and contextualised engagement that memory permits, John/Helios is a “horrible” image of memory-less superficiality: “To have no memory like Helios; to experience life through disconnected jarring incidents; to chase notions which surfaced like isolated fish in a vast sea … was horrible” (56). Lacking memory,

His smile was empty, merely a mirror reflection of those directed at him, no recollections of previous smiles gave it intelligence, a sense of recognizing what is humorous in the experiences of life. It might have been a smile artificially imposed on the lips of a dead person, a comfort to the relatives but a parody of life. (50)

Existing only on the surface, his is a “dead” meaning – one that stays the same, never changing or developing. As with the dogmatism of precision, exclusively surface things are associated with Alfred who also lacks depth, “always [simply] reflect[ing] community attitudes” (50).

In contrast to the dead (unchanging, static) meaning that lies in the image and comes from dogmatism and simplicity, Miranda delights in and intensively/extensively explores images of change and transformation, that offer multiple but never absolute meanings. One of these sites of change and transformation is light, to which there are multiple references in Miranda. For instance, Miranda longs to light all the lamps in her husband’s store in order to transform the homogeneity of the shadowy corners with

… texture and dimension, defining [the articles in the shop] by the limits of their individuality, relating them to each other in a pattern of inter-mingled shapes. Nothing lived without light. Things that seemed dead were reborn in it. Light was the resurrection. If I could but light one or two and place them in the darkest corners what designs might unfold for me? (132)

Light, in this sense, would illuminate the creases and folds – the memories – of the store, transforming similarity into a complex pattern of “inter-mingled shapes.” Significantly, Miranda does not imagine light as producing a predetermined or absolute meaning. Instead, she wonders about the potential designs that “might unfold.” When the store is lit, the light transforms the scene, but ambiguously: “everywhere there were circles of light and shapes that evolved as light pulled and pushed at their edges and intruded into them, prizing out their secrets” (132) but offering no absolute answers. The transformations that light offers to Miranda’s gaze are further reinforced when she helps Tom ignite the lighthouse lamp. As Miranda relates, after assisting in the birth of this “new sun … through my blue glasses I took this sun down into the sea and all the darkness of submarine caverns lit with the
blueness of heavenly reaches of the sky and nowhere was without light and its chance of resurrection” (168). Focusing attention on the constitutive involvement of Miranda’s gaze, this description offers an alternative to the disinfected and dogmatic heaven enforced by the men in the community. Although concurrently a static image – light is everywhere and everything is exposed – such inertia is at once transformed by the continual movement of the light as it “flashed, an interval of rest and it flashed again and again” (169).

Miranda’s meditations on change and transformation are continued in her sculpting. She repeatedly expresses the desire to create “movement …. Not the thing itself but the thing disturbed, relationships altered” (49), and to “achieve,” in this way, a sense of “action poised between past and future” (102). Her description of “two white-faced herons balanced on a tree stump” above “a pool of clear water” offers a sense of what she longs to achieve in sculpture: “Immobile and intent, their reflections in the water were as solid as my sculpture, an illusion transient as the movement of water but real as the moment” (166).

Aligned with imagination or the seeming through illusion, Miranda’s sculpting is presented as a yearning for the production of meanings both transient and material. On one level, Miranda’s visions of and continual strivings to produce images that privilege fluidity presents her as a postmodern viewer for whom seeing is an active and ongoing process of meaning production. On another level, her meditations on the creation of movement within the static form and solid materials of sculpture emerge as a commentary on the difficulty of portraying a postmodern spectator, and of writing a fiction that explicitly privileges images of change and transformation. In these terms, Miranda’s frustration at the difficulty of portraying her imaginings in material form – “Why the hell had I chosen to use a medium so damn solid, so fixed in time?” (46) – comments also on the difficulties presented by words’ apparently static form.

Tom’s forge functions as a principal site for and symbol of the creation of fluid images, and offers a fantasy of a form that would lend itself to the depiction of the processes of postmodern spectatorship, reading and writing. Miranda’s “lov[e]” for “the forge, the creative fire,” is motivated by the same forces that inspire her to bring light to her husband’s store. Like light, “the blows” of the forge “wrought shapes from the shapeless,” allowing the apparently static form of “metal” to “dissolv[e] into snow heat and [be] restored from dissolution by hammer blows and sizzling water.” This site of resurrection and change also allows Miranda to engage and experience the creative process – to become
like the light moving through the store. Thus, Miranda longs to “take some metal and heat it until it melted under my strokes. Then I would bend and twist it so that it writhed out of my hand like tree roots, just for the pleasure of experiencing fluidity” (47). Miranda delights in the forge because it renders the apparently solid mutable. In this sense, the forge emerges as a metaphor for the processes of creation and of spectatorship, wherein experiences – in the form of artistic imaginings – are brought to and consequently alter the meaning of what is created.

In addition, the forge’s fires potentially signify the intended experience of reading, one where meaning is constantly melted and melded with other meanings to produce a complex matrix. Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism elucidates, and provides a link between, this reading experience and the privileging of interactive, complex and transformative meanings in the text. Resembling but preceding the work of the postmodern visual theorists described above, Bakhtin insists that every word, whether written, spoken or gestural, is embedded in the social fabric of other words, and carries within itself the residue – or the layers – of its previous usage:

> On all its various routes toward the object, in all its directions, the word encounters an alien word and cannot help encountering it in a living, tension-filled interaction. Only the mythical Adam, who approached a virginal and as yet verbally unqualified world with the first word, could really have escaped from start to finish this dialogic inter-orientation with the alien word that occurs in the object. Concrete historical human discourse does not have this privilege. (“Discourse” 279)

Words, therefore, like images, are produced within particular historical, social and cultural contexts: their meanings are constantly interacting and transforming. This complex conception of images and words is perpetuated throughout the text, in ways that create a firm and sophisticated philosophical basis from which to explore the multiple meanings produced in the conjunction of women’s vision and men’s bodies.

As with most of Miranda’s creative impulses, the forge inspires her to create men’s bodies. “[O]n fire with excitement,” she imagines “mak[ing] thin angular men from whom juice had disappeared … metal drawn like elastic into strings of arms and legs” (47). However, and in a way that returns us to the difficulties of actualising images of movement and change within solid form (whether metal or words), Miranda’s attempt to create these men’s bodies – to bring her vision into being – is unsuccessful, and her “fire [is] consumed by the inadequacy of [her] model” (48). Her creation is, like the water, an “illusion transient as … movement … but real as the moment” (166). Miranda’s artistic visions compel her to
strive continually towards something that can never be fully achieved: the meaning of her visions, in these terms, can never be stable or fully in the image.

The men’s bodies Miranda longs to create – particularly the sculpture motivated by the intersection of her vision and John/Helios’s body – are explicitly differentiated from the tradition of representations of men’s bodies in Western art. Looking through Tom’s book – a “history of sculpture” – Miranda discovers a series of images of men’s bodies:

An archaic Greek *Kore* smiled secretively at me; a Gallic warrior, head turned defiantly against his assassin, held his slain wife across one arm; a glorious young man of God-like countenance and form bestrode a pedestal. Over his shoulder his glance distained the world. He held a sling but no Goliath troubled his composure. (45)

This passage locates Miranda in relation to an artistic tradition, in which she finds Michelangelo’s *David* particularly engaging. An archetypal male body in Western art, *David’s* representative status is reinforced by Tom’s description of him as “Michelangelo’s dream – the ideal man” (45). While drawing associations between this figure and John/Helios’s body – “The tendons in his neck felt as Helios’s had done when I lay on him on the reef” – Miranda explicitly rejects the invulnerability and solidity of *David*: “Helios was fragile, his neck like tissue over bird quills. I did not want to re-create this solid mass of man, breath-takingly beautiful but static” (45). The invulnerable and unchangeable *David* is therefore placed on the side of dead meaning: superficial surfaces and a lack of context. “Stillness,” Miranda again asserts, “was acceptance, death … David was there for ever [sic] unless someone took an axe to him. He had not evolved through time and would never dissolve into it” (46). Insisting that “[c]hange must be the essence of what I created … [and] [m]ovement was at the heart of all life” (45), Miranda favourably compares Tom’s face to *David*. Although Tom’s face is “like the side of a cliff,” this apparent solidity of form has developed and moved: “sand and rocks had, like young fat, slipped out of the crevices, leaving them deeper, more shadowy. No beauty but the clear mark of time.” Miranda expresses a similar though perhaps more reserved acceptance of the figure of the

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147 The specific inclusion of both a Greek “*Kore*” and an heroic “Gallic warrior” within this tradition – which Miranda deviates from in her sculpting of John/Helios’s body – might be interpreted as a comment on an established dichotomy framing artistic depictions of male bodies. Solomon-Godeau describes this dichotomy in terms of the contrast between the invincible and inviolable herculean figure and the wounded ephebe in neoclassical French art (10). Bordo notes a similar opposition in recent advertising, where men’s bodies are constructed as either mature, muscley “rocks” or young, eroticised “leaners” (*Male* 186-91).

148 Miranda’s ability to feel the tendon’s on *David’s* neck in a photograph is another example of the intermingling of her senses.
“Gallic chieftain.” “At least,” she asserts, he “has feeling. Be damned to you, he says. You won’t get either my wife or myself. I know his tomorrow.” Although Tom mocks Miranda’s preference by calling her a “romantic” (46) – as, indeed, she often is – her reserved acceptance of the chieftain is also associated with the meaning the sculpture has for her. Embedded in narrative – “I know his tomorrow” – it manifests the depth of context instead of the dead meaning and superficiality of surface represented by David.

It is significant, in relation to dialogic construction of meaning in the text, that the distinction Miranda draws between David and Tom mirrors Bakhtin’s differentiation of the classical and the grotesque body. A model of the closed, classical body, Michelangelo’s David exists “in a finished and stable world.” In contrast, John/Helios’s established permeability aligns him with the grotesque body, a realm where “the inner movement of being itself [i]s expressed in the passing of one form into the other, in the ever incompletely character of being (Rabelais 32). Never finished or complete, the grotesque body constant exceeds its margins: a body in the act of becoming. Although similar, in some respects, to Kristeva’s distinction between the proper body and the abject it rejects or expels, the classical and the grotesque body signify not personalised horror, but different and opposing cultures or social forces: the classical body is aligned with official culture while the grotesque body signifies the carnivalesque. Accordingly, whereas the classical body is aligned with “an intellectually static and physiologically moribund” culture, the grotesque body signifies the natural, material world, outside the “imposed hierarchies of Church and State.” As Terry Harpold points out, “[t]he grotesque body is, literally, the embodiment of the dialogical interpenetration and radical contingency of human discourse: the dynamics of the social body made material, living, actual” (np). In this sense, Miranda’s repeated visions and sculptings of John/Helios’s body emerge as part of the text’s complex and philosophically cohesive elaboration of postmodern spectatorship and reading.

The changeability of John/Helios’s body – aligned, through Bakhtin’s theory, with its permeability – is perpetuated in descriptions of Miranda’s sculpting of his body. Rejecting David’s static solidity, Miranda “long[s]” instead “to create the brilliance of hair dissolving in flame, that ephemeral moment when light became fire” (45). The ephemeral, transformative effects of fire are strongly associated with Miranda’s perception/construction of John/Helios, originating when, in the hospital, she “saw his hair erupt from the wood in [her] hands, a volcanic tangle of crusted fire” (28). Miranda’s
various descriptions of and meditations on the nature of fire and, by association, John/Helios, resonate with the multiple images (discussed above, but subsequent in the narrative) of change, movement, context and transformation. Indeed, her visions of John/Helios and fire emerge not only as images of change and transformation in and of themselves. Rather – in relation to the subsequent layering of meanings associated with light, fire, memory and surface – they are constantly altered and transformed, gaining new inflections, depths and complexities as narrative experience, in the form of memory, coalesces. For instance, his hair (as Miranda tells her mother-in-law) is not a “cone of fire” – that image is “[t]oo solid.” Instead, it is “[a]s if the prisms in the lighthouse erupted and fire fled from them across the ocean” (34). When, later in the narrative, Miranda describes the lighthouse beam in terms of transformative resurrection, this meaning is layered onto the image of John/Helios’s hair. Her description of his hair in terms of fire fleeing further resonates with a later description of the lighthouse’s “great beam,” which “flensed the darkness and across the water ran like a bright causeway to the horizon” (169). Given that Miranda decides, at this moment, to escape her husband and the community, the lighthouse beam, and by association, John/Helios’s hair, become aligned with a sense of liberation, a freedom from confinement.

The alignment of John/Helios’s body with light and fire provides a focus for Miranda’s meditations on the possibility of creating movement in solid sculptural form. Following her vision of John/Helios’s fiery hair, Miranda repeatedly ponders how to represent fire and, through it, John/Helios’s body:

How could I recreate the process of burning? Not the burned, an implosion of ash and blackness collapsing upon itself, but an explosion of light that transformed one form to another, that brilliant destruction of illusion by illusion which was in itself a heavenly creation of the new. (28)

In this passage, fire is aligned with water, an element that suggests to Miranda (in her perception/construction of the balancing herons) the simultaneously transient and material. The importance of these questions for Miranda and for the narrative – as well as the association of fire with change, movement and transformation – is signalled by repetition. Walking away from the hospital, Miranda reiterates her desire to create an image of “[f]ire that was not fire but light, so incandescent that it both consumed and created. Maybe,” she fears, “the tangible made the creation of such visions impossible” (30). “Again” thinking of John/Helios – “his hair that brilliant conflagration of light and heat which defied tactile
form” – Miranda wonders, “How to create an intangible as a tangible: how to create what was light and movement and constant change in material fixed and unchangeable” (39). While such questions are never explicitly answered, the multiple layers that coalesce around John/Helios’s body produce an image (presented through words) that moves and changes.

References to men’s bodies in Christian iconography compound the layering of meaning around John/Helios’s body, while the profanity of Miranda’s views of Christ and religion again align her with the irreligious and irreverent realm of the carnivalesque. Leaving the hospital after seeing his fiery hair, Miranda’s “eyes are … dazzled by a vision of hair burning like a bush for Moses in the wilderness” (30). As with her perception/construction of the lighthouse’s beam as offering a more liberating religious experience than Alfred’s use of God as an instrument of dogmatic control, Miranda thus imbues John/Helios’s hair with alternative religious significance. Particularly given the subsequent use of the John/Helios sculpture to lead the other women of the community towards a mode of perception that encourages a multi-sensory and more active visual engagement with the world, Miranda’s connection with Moses constructs her as a visionary liberationist. John/Helios’s body is similarly linked to an alternative religious meaning in his association with Christ’s body. Sculptures of both men are aligned with tree roots. Miranda carves John/Helios’s body from “part of a root system. The tangle of dried roots meshed like wild hair” (66) and, in the church, she perceives/constructs the “body of Christ elongated on the cross … like a tree root, twisting downwards through the floor of the earth which suddenly became a roof over vast empty spaces” (76). The meaning(s) of this association of men’s bodies with tree roots depends both on the experiences and associations that the individual reader brings to the text, as well as the layering of meanings regarding roots within the text. In the text, roots are associated with movement and fluidity: with Miranda’s longing to melt metal in the forge until “it writhed out of my hand like tree roots” (47); or with her perception/construction of a tea-tree’s “roots … twisted in a dance as mad as matter dissolving in fire” (38-39). Simultaneously, however, the tree-root Christ is immediately (re)identified with the “dangling Christ space-walking and lost forever to humanity” (76) who facilitates Alfred’s appropriation of religious authority. This melding of dogmatic and alternative religion – around and through the depiction of men’s bodies –
lends depth and context to, and consequently transforms, the meaning of both religious positions in the novel.

The (re)association of Christ – and by association, John/Helios’s body – with Alfred’s version of religion is not a final statement on the meaning of their bodies’ alignments. Christ the “space-walk[er]” is immediately replaced with Miranda’s perception/construction of Christ the suffering man, an image of vulnerability and fragility that explicitly contrasts with the controlled and controlling men of Alfred’s religious/patriarchal doctrine. Miranda’s description of this suffering Christ transforms him from a tree root to a vine, to a butterfly and then to a mortal man:

His feet twined together like a thick vine and the crown on his head darted harsh thorns in the air. His rib cage strained outward from the breastbone like the wings of a butterfly stretched from the thorax. They looked fragile as if at any moment they might wrench free leaving His body a soft pulsating heart; not the kind pink little heart haloed in the breast of Catholic paintings, but an agonised organ bruised, exposed and struggling to survive without a body. (77)

Miranda’s perception/construction of Christ as a suffering man – agonised and struggling rather than uninterested – resonates with John/Helios’s later suffering. Indeed, the ways in which John/Helios is subsequently tormented by his captors, the whalers (100-02), whipped by Alfred (143) – who is at least Roman in his authoritarianism – and shunned by the community that once accepted him (157), resonates with the biblical story of Christ.

However, just as Miranda rejected the archetypal of David, in imagining, drawing and sculpting John/Helios’s body, she explicitly renounces the tradition – prominent in images of Christ and Sebastian – of representing men’s bodies as wounded and suffering. While the authors of the other fictions discussed in this book repeatedly imagine men’s bodies in pain, Miranda rejects two of her preparatory drawings of John/Helios’s body because “the body was too taut. It suggested pain. In neither drawing did the lingam look anything but an excrescence on a tortured body.” Rather than painful or distorted, Miranda perceives/constructs John/Helios’s “lingam” – a term central to her musings about men’s bodies – as “soft and intact.” Thus, she insists, “The lingam could not spring from limbs distorted with strain. Nor could it be just a natural part of the flesh as in the David [sic].” Rejecting both of these traditional ways of representing men’s bodies – invulnerable and wounded – Miranda proclaims, “Procreation need not be agony” (70). Indeed, it is only when John/Helios masturbates – an image of self-contained pleasure rather than excrescent pain – that Miranda “[t]rembl[es] with knowledge of what [she] could sculpt” (71).
According to Schehr, portrayals of male pleasure bring male physicality to the fore and, in thus allowing the sensate penis to emerge from under the insensate phallus, disrupts phallocentric power with a glimpse of “bodily immanence” (14).

Even after finished, the sculpture is repeatedly described, thus perpetuating the process of creation. As well as producing an explicitly postmodern conception of meaning, such multiplicity requires the reader to engage with the text in an active process of construction and negotiation that transforms the meanings of John/Helios’s body anew. Miranda’s perception/construction of this body emerges as multiple in its manifestation – concurrently masculine and feminine, in the ground and in flight, beautiful and ugly. Her sculpting of John/Helios’s body thus answers the question of how to depict fiery movement and fluidity using the apparent solidity of wood. As she asserts at the beginning of the novel, her sculptures “must be movement for nothing stays still. Even what appears to be stationary is only a temporary respite. What goes before and what goes after is implicit in it” (13). Thus, in accordance with Bakhtin’s dialogic, the wood and words used to create John/Helios’s body, while appearing static, are always produced in reference to other words and images, in a constant movement backwards and forwards, around and between this and other texts, my reading and those of others. Within this model, representation emerges not as a form of regulation, a strategy of normalisation (as modernist feminists would have it), but as a site where various meanings and readings are produced.

Binaries of active/passive and relations of absolute objectification are ultimately foreign to Miranda’s portrayal and production of meaning, viewing and readership as sites of negotiation, contradiction, movement and transformation. Although Miranda objectifies John/Helios’s body when she first encounters his unconscious form on the reef, this is simply one of the possibilities created by their interactions. Moreover, given the explicitly non-dichotomous nature of her gaze in the rest of the novel, this initial visual interaction seems designed to highlight the difference between objectification and Miranda’s subsequent perceptions/constructions. This difference is specifically demonstrated by the contrast between her constructive visions from his actual (fictional) body. Immediately following her “vision” of his burning hair in the hospital, Miranda looks at John/Helios and simply sees, “[a] sick young man … his hair straggling like grass uprooted and dying” (30). As Miranda later explains,

My vision in the hospital, of Helios struck like flint from the edges of the sun, remained hot and powerful in my imagination but the castaway no longer embodied
it. Like a transfiguration of the soul the vision had gone from him, leaving him as empty as a shell cast on the beach. (51)

This differentiation of John/Helios from Miranda’s visions of him specifically refutes a notion of meaning as intrinsic to the image and passively received by the viewer in accordance with dominant ideology. Instead, vision is understood as a constitutive activity where the seeming – the meaning created in the conjunction between image and viewer – is everything. When Miranda has finished sculpting the visions produced from her imaginative engagement with John/Helios’s body, she is actually disappointed that the work of art she has created so clearly resembles John/Helios.

Sight had betrayed me. Memory of the real man on the reef had been more powerful than the shape of my vision. Disappointment racked me and anger. It was no good. Visions were illusions, impossible to transfer into reality, or at least impossible for me to transform. (98-99)

It is possible, however, that Miranda’s multiple perceptions/constructions of John/Helios’s body – while explicitly privileged and portrayed as liberating in the text – might be interpreted as insensible to real power differentials in social relations. This argument, by now familiar in the feminist critical arena, is frequently made against postmodernism by the analysts Sonnet describes as modernist feminists. According to these theorists, the postmodern notion of a viewer able to occupy innumerable positions and produce multiple meanings ignores the social inequalities experienced by women (and minority groups). ¹⁴⁹ Such debates stem from differences regarding the importance and attention accorded to gender in visual and social relations. While feminists like Mulvey privilege gender as the defining element of subjectivity and vision, postmodernists regard the question of whether a man or a woman is looking as not (or not necessarily) of central importance. Instead, the postmodern critique of essentialist or foundational notions of identity combined with attention to the innumerable differences that constitute subjectivity, creates a “radical and decentred attention to multiple differences, none of which merit theoretical privileging over others” (C. Di Stefano 75). As a result, postmodernist visual theories construct gender, in Thornham’s words, as “only one axis along which, in the

¹⁴⁹ Mulvey’s dismissive and surprisingly vicious assessment of postmodernism – as “fashionable self-referentiality and self-serving intertextuality” (“British” 77) – exemplifies the extent of the division (even animosity) between modernist and postmodernist feminist visual theorists regarding attention to social power differentials.
viewing process, identifications may be constructed. On any one viewing occasion gender positioning may or may not be central, or may not operate at all” (165).

In response, various feminists have described postmodernism’s disregard for social and material differences as dangerously apolitical. As Sonnet asserts,

… while Derrida, Lyotard and others can argue that ‘the subject’ has lost its central position as an organizing category of knowledge, that the fully ‘present’ autonomous individual must give way to a notion of subjectivity as fragmentary and polymorphous, feminism must confront the very real possibility that the ‘postmodern condition’ is one that leaves no ground upon which to base knowledge claims of an emancipatory politics based on identity and lived-world experience of gendered subjectivity. (219)

Nancy Hartsock takes this argument further, insisting that it is “highly suspicious that … just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes problematic” (163). Other feminist theorists have identified postmodernism’s disregard for social and material differences as operative in the reproduction of universalist forms of knowledge/power. For instance, although identifying the move away from gender as a foundational term as an inevitable consequence of feminism’s critique of totalising narratives, Haraway describes postmodernism – and its notion of a viewer who can flit from position to position without reference to their specific embodiment – as a form of “relativism.” Such an approach, she insists, is simply another manifestation of the “god trick” enacted by white male claims of universality. Both “ideologies of objectivity” promise “vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully,” denying location and consequently “mak[ing] it impossible to see well” (“Situated” 191). Thornham agrees, asserting that, “Being everywhere is much the same as being nowhere” (151).

In these terms, it is possible to see postmodernist conceptions of viewers as free-floating and fragmentary, able to adopt multiple positions regardless of gender, race, sexuality, sex, historical moment or individual background, as sharing psychoanalytic feminist film theory’s disregard for historical and cultural contexts. While the postmodern viewer makes social relations of power, domination, submission and control essentially irrelevant, Haraway insists that “Vision is always a question of power to see” (“Situated” 192). In society at present, men’s power over women means that gender is a significant element in engaging with this question. Similarly, as Bordo asserts, “like it or not, in our
present culture, our activities are coded as “male” or “female” and will function as such within the prevailing system of gender-power relations. … One cannot be “gender neutral” in this culture” (“Feminism” 152). Although the category of women is problematic, it is necessary to consider women’s position in a gendered (as well as a racist, heterosexist, ageist, etc.) society when describing how women see and are seen.

Although perhaps seeming to ignore power differentials, I believe that Miranda offers an alternative to these dichotomised positions, combining a postmodern visual agency with a feminist sensibility in the figure of Miranda. As a postmodern viewer within a male-dominated patriarchal society, Miranda’s visual agency produces explicitly feminist meanings and offers potential sites of subversive visual power for women within patriarchy. Simultaneously, however, the novel demonstrates the ways in which she is constrained by her gender. By combining a feminist critique of patriarchy and its constraints on women with an acknowledgement of the liberating potential of a postmodern conception of spectatorship, Miranda manages to explore possibilities without ignoring constraints, and to poignantly and insistently present the difficulties women are subjected to without rendering these difficulties impassable.

Miranda’s association with both postmodernism and feminism is largely constituted by her position as narrator within an explicitly patriarchal society. In postmodern terms, and as demonstrated above, her perceptions/constructions are multiple, negotiated and frequently contradictory. Simultaneously, the adoption of a single, first-person and female narrator – from whose perspective all events are reported – imbues the narrative with feminist meaning: the reader is encouraged to sympathise with Miranda and, through her perspective, to criticise Alfred and the acts of oppression he performs and inspires in the rest of the male community.

The patriarchal nature of this community is largely presented through Miranda’s description of her relationship with Alfred. While Miranda emerges as a fully delineated character, Alfred is portrayed as an exaggerated type, even a caricature of a small-town, hypocritical religious fundamentalist. As such, he is a figure easily identifiable as dogmatic and patriarchal. No less threatening for its lack of subtlety and development, this caricature offers a firm point of reference – a patriarchal framework – for the novel’s extensive demonstration of Miranda’s postmodern visual agency. The insistence and strength of this framework means that the male-dominated nature of the society she inhabits is not
overruled by the freedom enabled by the multiple positions and perspectives her look creates. Simultaneously, such caricaturing represents an element of the humour Miranda employs in the construction and depiction of patriarchal structures and figures – a humour that renders Miranda’s postmodern visual agency explicitly feminist.

Many theorists have identified feminist humour as a radical way of undermining and critiquing patriarchy. Asserting that the “phallic [is] tantamount to the seriousness of meaning,” Irigaray describes laughter as “the first form of liberation from secular oppression” (This 163). Although adopting a completely different methodological approach, B. Ruby Rich similarly identifies comedy as a weapon of great political power that women should cultivate for “its revolutionary potential as a deflator of the patriarchal order and an extraordinary leveller and re-inventor of dramatic structure” (353). In her analysis of unruly women, Rowe agrees, arguing that laughter is “a powerful means of self-definition and a weapon for feminist appropriation” (Unruly 3).150

Referring particularly to visual theory, commentators such as Schultz (384), Brenda Cooper, and Lorrain Gamman and Margaret Marshment, identify mockery as a narrative device with particular potential to expose the sexism of the male gaze, and to provide women with the power to challenge, resist and defy patriarchy in the construction of alternative ways of looking. As Gamman and Marshment assert, “Mockery … appears capable of expressing a coherent … female gaze as well as effecting a fissure in the representation of power itself” (“Watching” 15). Rowe’s more extensive analysis also identifies humour as a productive arena for theorising the female gaze. Referring to the centrality of discussions of melodrama to feminist analyses of female spectatorship, she ties the “ennui” that has plagued this field to its repeated focus on women’s “victimization and tears rather than on their resistance and laughter” (Unruly 4). Moreover, humour engages in the production of meanings that exceed texts’ hegemonic meaning – a practice theoretically aligned with postmodernism. Catherine Lappas supports this alignment of postmodernism and humour, which she regards, along with “the multiplication of narrative possibilities” I

150 Feminist literary theorists have supported these philosophical/political statements in their analysis of the portrayal of male characters in specific literary texts. Discussing comic male characters in nineteenth-century women’s writing, Audrey Bilger argues that, in order to challenge male power and further the feminist cause, women must laugh at men. Sheridan, describing Christina Stead’s satirical treatment of male characters, similarly describes humour “as a major textual mode of opposition” with the potential to “furnish women writers with some powerful means of critique and protest against patriarchal domination” (“Woman” 2).
have discussed as evident in *Miranda*, as “a direction for postmodern feminist fiction” offering the “dream of going beyond old dichotomies” (para 12).

While there is significant support for an association between humour, feminism and postmodernism, a degree of caution is necessary. As Rowe admits, the “genres of laughter … have long been recognized as highly conventionalized” (*Unruly* 20), and have centred, moreover, on positioning women as the objects of men’s laughter.\(^1\) Rowe therefore advocates feminist attention to texts which disrupt such a tradition, portraying “women as subjects of a laughter that expresses anger, resistance, solidarity, and joy – or those which show women using in disruptive, challenging ways the spectacle already invested in them as objects of a masculine gaze” (*Unruly* 5). On both counts, *Miranda* is just such a text, depicting Miranda’s angry and resistant (as well as playful) humour, as well as her manipulation of women’s position as spectacle within patriarchy for her own subversive aims. Humour, manifest particularly in Miranda’s mockery of Alfred and centred on his body, utilises her postmodern visual agency in specifically feminist ways.

Miranda has frequent “visions of [her] husband’s life as suddenly meaningless” (11). For instance, following a meditation on the tendency of men “to regard themselves as special, superior to other life, separate from the inanimate,” she asserts:

> Often when I looked at my husband I imagined him at the peak of a triangle, balancing on a pin point above an ever-thickening crowd of shadows. At the top was a layer resembling him, dead but not yet decayed; beneath, like frog spawn, the shadows decomposed into a jelly of individual arms and legs and eyes and ears, life fractured and disappearing. He teetered on this edifice. I smiled inwardly at my image of that quivering base and him shakingly alone on his little pin. (9)

This vision of her husband is not only tied to Miranda’s visual agency – occurring when she looks at him and producing a series of meanings in the performative interaction of his body and her gaze – but can be interpreted in explicitly feminist terms. Pre-empted by a description of man’s claims of superiority over other animals (an assertion of the same religious hierarchy that subjects women to men in the novel), this vision presents Miranda’s version of the body that Alfred continually endeavours to conceal under his calico nightshirts. One possible interpretation of this vision might describe the dead, top layer

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\(^1\) Sheridan confirms Rowe’s caution when she describes her largely unsuccessful bibliographic search for “references to women as authors of satire and, as a probable corollary, men or masculinity as its objects.”

“[D]rawing a blank on both counts – except, of course, for Jane Austen” – Sheridan confirms, “most texts classified as satire are gendered masculine both by their male authorship and their female objects” (“Woman” 2).
(which resembles him) as the surface he presents to the world, embalmed by his dogmatic reflection of community opinion. This layer is, in turn, underpinned and threatened by his quivering and dissolving (not to mention revolting) live body. Perhaps representative of his fears and insecurities, his humanity is gradually disappearing as bigoted opinions consolidate as “truth that could not be assailed” (154). Teetering on a pin – a mocking representation, perhaps, of the phallus or his penis, or even his own claims to angelic goodness – Alfred’s position is rendered tenuous by the precariousness of such a balancing act. This mocking image is compounded by many other instances in which Miranda’s gaze transforms Alfred’s body in similarly mocking ways (see, for example, 14, 80, 154).

Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque – also described in *Rabelais and His World* as the culture of laughter – elucidates the subversion represented by humour in *Miranda*. Humour, particularly parody and mockery, is one of the principal ways in which the carnivalesque culture challenges the established authority of the Church and State – a dual system of power here represented by Alfred. Indeed, there is a remarkable resemblance between the portrayal of Alfred and Bakhtin’s description of the citizen of official culture: “monolithically serious and gloomy … subject to a strict hierarchical order, filled with fear, dogmatism, reverence and piety” (*Problems* 106-7). Correspondingly, the description of the carnivalesque citizen aptly describes Miranda: “familiar, cynically frank, eccentric, lauditorily abusive” and “free, full of ambivalent laughter, blasphemy, the profanation of all that was holy, disparagement and obscenity” (107).

For the reader to join in Miranda’s carnivalesque laughter at these images of Alfred, the production of specifically feminist meanings is presumably necessary. The shared laughter that results creates a feminist community: in Rowe’s terms, an awareness of “mutual and often forbidden [feminist] identifications” (*Unruly* 18). Thus, just as the women’s interactions with the John/Helios’s sculpture create a secret and subversive sisterhood within the text, humour in *Miranda*, constructs a feminist community extratextually. Such laughter – both within and outside the text – undermines the seriousness of enactments of masculinity like Alfred’s, as well as the authority men consequently accrue. Although women making jokes about men might seem merely to reverse without altering power differentials, there is, Rowe insists, an important difference: “When men make jokes about women, they assert their already-existing social power over them. When women make jokes about men, they invert – momentarily – the social hierarchy” (*Unruly* 19).
As well as creating explicitly feminist images through her mocking visual agency, Miranda, like her mother-in-law, uses her position as an object within the patriarchal visual economy to her own advantage. As I demonstrated in Chapter One, *Miranda* portrays a visual world in which women are positioned as the objects of men’s looks and, consequently, male power. Mother-in-law responds to this visual economy by using the construction of herself as a helpless and innocent (infantilised) blind woman for her own and Miranda’s benefit. For instance, when Miranda wants to see John/Helios after the rescue but realises she will not be admitted because of trouble she previously caused in the hospital, Mother-in-law suggests that she take “an embroidered cloth I made and you can say that I want it placed at the feet of Christ … Say it would be a kindness to me.” Miranda’s response – “They would be eager to do you a kindness” – and Mother-in-law’s subsequent reply – “Of course. I’m blind” (25) – show their awareness of, and ability to use the (male) community’s construction of Mother-in-law as a helpless and innocent figure for their own benefit.

Miranda similarly manipulates her position as spectacle within patriarchal society to her own advantage. When she finds John/Helios on the reef and lies on him, she delights both in this experience of his body and in the knowledge that she can deflect the self-righteous anger of her husband and the other men by appearing small and weak. Acquiescing to patriarchal constructions of women, while holding them at an ironic and critical distance, Miranda imagines, “I’d … open my eyes wide and droop my mouth and shrink a little so that I looked small and helpless” (5). Similarly, when Miranda sees the naked John/Helios in the presence of her husband, her pretence of wide-eyed innocence and incomprehension – which plays on Alfred’s notion of all women as naïve and stupid – protects her from his anger. Realising that she is considered beautiful by the men in the community, Miranda also uses this perception as a tool for her own needs. She notes, for instance, that her husband puts up with her eccentricities without “consider[ing] himself entirely cheated” because she is “beautiful enough to stir envy in the other men” (13), thereby raising his standing in the community. Miranda feels no compunction at using her appearance in this way, having learnt from her mother that “prett[iness] … has its advantages” and believing her mother also to have “used her advantages as all women should” (23). And while happy to use her beauty for her own benefit, Miranda does not
allow her body to be passively presented as an object. As she tells her husband, “I’m not a thing for display” (60).

Far from being the passive female spectacle required by patriarchal society and described by psychoanalytic feminist film theory, Miranda performs her own visibility, using spectacle itself to disrupt hegemonic powers and constraints. In actively contributing to the construction of meaning around her body, Miranda’s performances deconstruct the binary division between active subject and passive object so central to psychoanalytic conceptions of vision. Simultaneously, these subversive engagements with hegemonic power maintain a sense of play, inspiring, like her mockery, the reader’s secret feminist laughter. As with Miranda’s visual agency, her and Mother-in-law’s manipulation of their positions as spectacles within the visual economy can be understood through Foucault’s notion of power. Conceived as a process involving all individuals, social groups and structures, it follows that if women are positioned and produced through power in specific ways as social subjects, they are not excluded from these power dynamics and can, instead, utilise them as Miranda does. Developing Doane’s concept of masquerade (“Film”), Rowe describes this notion of visibility as power – involving not only women’s ability to look but their ability to manipulate the ways in which they are seen – in the following terms.

Such a sense of spectacle differs from the one that shaped early feminist film theory. Granting that visual pleasure and power are inextricably bound, this position would see that relation as more historically determined, its terms as more mutable. It would argue that visual power flows in multiple directions and that the position of spectacle isn’t necessarily one of weakness. Because public power is predicated largely on visibility, men have long understood the need to secure their power not only by looking but by being seen, or rather, by fashioning – as subject, as author, as artist – a spectacle of themselves. How might women use spectacle to disrupt that power and lay claim to their own? (Unruly 11)

In its depiction of both Miranda and Mother-in-law as subversively employing their positions as spectacles, Miranda provides one answer to Rowe’s question.

Such portrayals of Miranda as a feminist figure are reinforced by the novel’s depiction of other women following in her footsteps towards the exercise of visual agency. As suggested in the description of Miranda as Moses and John/Helios as the burning bush, Miranda’s explicitly feminist gaze provides a model for other women in the community. After the women have finished feeling the sculpture of John/Helios under its cloth, they are depicted looking in an explicitly constitutive way. They not only dare to look, but to really see, and to claim their vision as uniquely their own. In particular, the conversation they
have when they see the sculpture associates them strongly with Miranda’s active perception/construction of John/Helios’s body.

‘It’s a man.’
‘Not it’s not, it’s a woman.’
‘A woman? Don’t be silly. Women don’t have . . .’
‘A man with a . . .’
‘A woman with breasts.’
… ‘Just like my little boy when I bath him. So soft, like a tiny mushroom. Men don’t know we know.’
‘How clever of you, Miranda. It’s a woman nursing her baby boy, both in the same body.’
… ‘How clever of you, Miranda. You’ve never been a mother. How did you know?’ (119-20)

As this conversation demonstrates, all the women perceive Miranda’s sculpture in different ways, bringing their own experiences and history to it, and constructing meaning and knowledge accordingly. At first Miranda is angry with the women, believing that, as the artist, she has the right to define what people see in her work. However, her anger (which can be viewed as a foil, used to demonstrate the reasons for her subsequent acceptance) quickly dissipates when she realises that their interpretations are also valid: “I nearly said, ‘It’s not about mothering,’ but stopped. Maybe it was. It certainly was to these women. I had wanted it taken seriously. They had done this but on their terms” (121). If Miranda’s humour performatively constructs the reader as part of feminist community, her sculpture of John/Helios does the same for the female community within the narrative. Indeed, the description of these women as they “circled” the sculpture, “touching, laughing, wondering, asserting, arguing” (120), might be taken as a model for readers’ engagements with the text. Their laughter provides an opportunity, as Rowe describes it, “for imagining a social world in which laughter occurs less often to ‘break apart’” – as occurs when men laugh at women – “than bring together” (Unruly 20-21).

Although Miranda’s sculpture forges the women of the community into a collective, they decide, at her behest, that it should not be shown to the public: “the nuns [and] husbands” (121). The terms in which this decision is made suggest women’s secret knowledge:

‘Men don’t know what we know about life.’
… ‘They wouldn’t understand. So limited, poor things’
‘To need to be protected from life.’ They laughed together, looking at each other. ‘Husbands think that we need, that, and they never even see a birth. Poor
things, so limited. Like children who think they know everything until they grow up. It’s our secret.’ (120-21)

This depiction of their shared knowledge and “secret,” as well as repeated references to them laughing, speaking and looking together, evokes the sense of a secret and subversive community. Given that these women are presumably able to conceal their knowledge/power by performing a version of femininity (the innocent and obedient wife) approved by patriarchy, this community of visual agency is further aligned with the secret and subversive power Miranda and Mother-in-law access by performing as spectacles in accordance with patriarchal expectations. Although it was Miranda who suggested the sculpture not be shown publicly, she responds to the women’s agreement with some trepidation:

‘I have to sculpt,’ I repeated defensively, feeling my cowardice in not shouting their secret to the world. They hadn’t asked it of me and yet someone somewhere at some time needed to do it.

‘Yes,’ they said, ‘you have to sculpt and we have to keep our secrets.’

Reverently they took Helios from the table, wrapped it in cloths and handed it to me like priestesses of the temple offering the contents of the sacred basket.

‘Take it home, Miranda,’ they said, ‘but we’ll remember.’

Honoured and humbled, I walked home beside my Mother-in-law … “who needs shipwrecks?” (120-21)

Ultimately, her trepidation proves justified: subversive power is not enough to protect Miranda from the male community. Nevertheless, the association drawn between her sculpting and these women’s secrets presents both expressions of knowledge in terms of a subversive women’s community based in shared experiences. Miranda is positioned as the high priestess of this community, and this representation of John/Helios’s body, once transformed by women’s visual agency, is an object of veneration and delight. Thinking of the way these women exert visual agency and define the world on their own terms, Miranda imagines sculpting “a crowd of secret women’s faces just emerging from a matrix of wood or stone surprised by their own temerity in daring to look” (124).

The “shipwrecks” (121) that Miranda claims women do not need refer to the bond forged between Joe and Tom when they “were shipwrecked together off the coast of England.” As Joe tells Miranda, they “[c]lung to a spar for twelve hours. That creates brotherhood” (110). The metaphor of a shipwreck is again evoked in Miranda’s actions towards her husband when his store is on fire. “Some events,” she asserts, “have such present reality, that all other considerations are swept away … as in a storm or in the midst
of some terrifying shipwreck, I put out my hand to help him stand firm against the
encroachments of fate” (147). The fire, like a shipwreck, represents for Miranda a moment
when two people, faced with the same calamity or struggle, attain a parity that allows and
requires them to rely upon each other. Alfred, however, wants no solace (or brotherhood)
from Miranda. Upon her offer of assistance, he attempts to strangle her. Miranda’s reply to
Joe at the time he described the shipwreck he shared with Tom therefore proves justified in
relation to Alfred: “Women aren’t so lucky … to have chances of brotherhood. Women are
always on the edge … Men won’t let us in. It’s not safe” (110). In contrast to her failed
attempt at unity with Alfred, the women’s art show seems to offer a sense of community,
shared struggle and trust that acts in the same way as a shipwreck. Miranda has always felt
excluded from the community of women, describing such exclusion in terms of “a wall of
smiles like bricks, all notched securely together” (25). However, their reciprocal promise to
keep each other’s secrets and to remember, offers her a gap in this wall. Instead of
experiencing “the world outside my self as a wall which I clambered over every day … the
comradeship of women had shown me a gate that I could pass through without struggle”
(134).

Significantly, Miranda’s perception/construction of the women’s visual agency at
the art show in terms of a secret sisterhood of women’s faces (emerging from a matrix and
surprised by their own visual agency) is elaborated in relation to her imagining of a self-
portrait. Immediately following the women’s art show, Joe brings Miranda a block of black
marble and insists that she carve “what is right for the piece … [r]egardless of the audience
… [a]nd regardless of the giver” (127). Inspired by the insights of Mother-in-law’s sensory
engagement with the piece, Miranda looks at the black marble:

Light from the window over the sink sparkled like fireflies on the projecting
facets of stone. Behind them the marble retreated into purple caverns of blackness. I
turned it. Light from the fireflies extinguished, but the stone, instead of sinking into
deeper blackness without light, showed only the muted hues of darkness. If I could
carve the surface so that light settled on it what was behind might assume a
blackness rich in expectation. If I could carve a face which captured the light, then,
from behind, other faces, waiting expectantly, might emerge.

Resurrection?
Resurrection! I had found it. (135)

This description of the marble evokes the depth and light previously associated with
Miranda’s construction of meaning and perception in terms of change, transformation and
movement. The depth of this marble is reinforced by Mother-in-law’s meditations on
blackness. Whereas in “whiteness all things emerge. Are immediately clear, or so I imagine. Darkness conserves its answers, gives up its secrets reluctantly” (128). As the light refracts and reflects within the depths of the stone, Miranda has a vision of her own face. This enigmatic self-portrait – which offers secrets and answers reluctantly – reinforces Miranda’s association with the secret community of women and reiterates the secretive and manipulative routes through which she gains power in the patriarchal visual economy. Miranda’s self-portrait also resonates with the idea of Sartre’s notion of a returned gaze, that one must potentially be able to be seen in order to see. Such an insistence on the reciprocity of visual relations represents a significant trend in these fictions. And not only does Miranda’s self-portrait represent one of the more explicit elaborations of this arguably postmodern notion, it differs from the visual reciprocity depicted in other texts. Rather than occurring between two or more characters (or a character and the world), Miranda herself is both subject and object of the image, and the only viewer her vision need please. This self-portrait may be seen, consequently, as explicitly feminist. It is, moreover, associated with a feminist imagining of the visual realm through Miranda’s expressed belief that this self-portrait (a woman’s assertion of her ability to represent and to see herself) “might” allow “other faces” – the secret women’s faces of the art show – to “emerge”: to engage openly, actively and constructively in a visual realm no longer dominated by men. Thus, and as with the construction of Miranda as Moses, this passage depicts her own vision as facilitating other women’s visual agency, thereby confirming Miranda’s position as a model for an active and feminist way of looking.

Despite Miranda’s optimism regarding women’s potential to access visual agency, the sense of sisterhood that inspired her does not last long. Soon, Miranda finds that the gate to the world “had closed and I again faced the wall. Subtly the sisterhood of women was withdrawn from me and I began again to envy Tom and [Joe] the brotherhood of a shipwreck” (134). When Alfred accuses Miranda of showing the women a “disgusting sculpture,” Miranda realises that “the rebuilding of the wall” is the result of a woman having broken the trust established at the art show. Tellingly described by Alfred in terms of a “confess[ion]” (137), the women’s secret community emerges as a transgression against religion/patriarchy. Upon the acknowledgement of their sin, the women are forgiven, and reincorporated into the religious/patriarchal fold. The agency that the women experienced when looking at Miranda’s sculpture is therefore subsumed by patriarchy, and
the “matrix” Miranda imagined them emerging from is revealed as the patriarchal visual economy into which they are recaptured. The women in *Miranda*, merely grafted onto their husbands with “no roots of their own” (158), do not own themselves sufficiently to form an alliance with other women. “Sisterhood,” Miranda therefore asserts, “was an illusion and would remain so until we both shared a shipwreck or until we both recognised that life for us was a continual shipwreck” (163).

Although Miranda is a simultaneously feminist and postmodern viewer – able to exercise a subversive feminist power both in her mockery of men and in her manipulation of their perceptions – this does not protect her from the oppressive forces of patriarchal society. After it is discovered that she has drawn and sculpted John/Helios’s naked body her agency is circumscribed, and almost destroyed. The power that Mother-in-law and Miranda previously gained from manipulating patriarchal perceptions of their bodies is shown to be double-edged and provisional, and both women are henceforth trapped by this technique. After Alfred burns down the store and accuses Miranda of having an affair with John/Helios, the community avoid their house. “Although unaware of it, [Mother-in-law] had yet become dependent on the special kindness [the perception of] her blindness brought her.” Mother-in-law attributes “her isolation” (152) to Miranda – rather than to the machinations of patriarchy – and withdraws from her. Like the woman who (according to Berger) forms an identity by watching herself being looked at, Mother-in-law comes to rely on the effects of her position within the patriarchal visual economy.

Rather than being able to control the way she is perceived through appropriate performances of her gendered role, Miranda is also trapped by the way the community perceives her. But unlike Mother-in-law she is aware of such constraints. After rescuing John/Helios from the whalers, Miranda “[n]auseatingly … become[s] ‘brave little Miranda’ or ‘poor heroic little Miranda.’” Not only is her husband consequently able to “bask in [her] popularity,” accruing status for himself, but Miranda is “diminished and sentimentalised, expected to be coy and self-effacing, noble yet grateful for the accolades” (104). Similarly, when Ellie tells Miranda that the men of the town plan to have her put in a madhouse, Miranda’s first instinct is to flee. She realises, however, that “to disappear into the darkness was to invite pursuit and capture, to precipitate a certainty that I was unstable. What sane woman would leave her bed and run out into the night? Or for that matter, what good
woman?’” (163) Interpreted by the community in contravention of her own wishes, Miranda’s image is confined – and her life imperilled – by patriarchal perceptions.

Miranda’s visual agency is similarly restricted, again almost completely, by the (male) community’s plans to have her confined to a “madhouse.” Given the nature of her supposed crime (perceiving/constructing John/Helios’s naked body), internment in the madhouse can be interpreted as an attempt to punish Miranda for transgression of the patriarchal division between male spectators and female spectacles. This interpretation is explicitly supported by Miranda’s description of the madhouse as a place designed for the maintenance of the status quo: “There the shamefully insane were secreted so that their families could hold up their heads in the community.” Additionally, and as the ultimate punishment for her transgression of patriarchal injunctions against women looking, the madhouse is a place where visual agency is destroyed, where patients are

… stolen away from the light and the sun, deprived of choice, of power, of creativity, condemned for ever to a place where dreams were chained to impotence. There I would be entombed in stone and silence. Not the sculptor any longer but the face imprisoned in the matrix, never to be released. (157)

As this passage suggests, interred in the madhouse Miranda would be deprived of all creative and subversive power. In consequence, she would become like the women she attempted to free from the matrix of patriarchy, metaphorically blind.

Miranda’s realisation that the patriarchal powers of the community could easily blind her, leads her to an awareness of the fragile and conditional nature of the power she has heretofore exercised. She realises, for instance, that she “had sculpted only by the grace of my husband and his income” – an explicit reference to the social and material inequalities to which women are subjected in patriarchal society. “Humiliated by dependence, the realisation … paralysed [her] spirit,” and when she seeks her own face in the block of black marble that once foretold the visual liberation of the other women in the community, “Nowhere could I see how to chip away the superfluous stone and release it” (155). Thus, the subversive powers she accessed within the patriarchal visual economy appear conditional: little more than “obscenities” shouted “from the battlements” where she is “under siege” (31). Miranda’s rebellion, lacking the roots and brotherhood of men, is

Like light on the sea … I skittered about on the surface, darting here and there, startling by my own unpredictability but shaking nothing. Mine was only a trembling power, a matter of quivering leaves, not solid branches, skin stretched and secure. I would forever hang there in space. (36-37)
While able to undermine patriarchy in some ways, Miranda’s subversive power – here depicted through images of surface and empty space elsewhere disparaged – cannot destroy it. Thus, she is left “vulnerable” (160). She has produced – in the sculpture of John/Helios – a material image of her own secret and subversive knowledge, one that resonated with those of the women in the community to produce a transient sisterhood; however, in being too frightened to shout out and show this artefact, she is routed because she waited for it to be discovered and condemned. The suggestion, in contrast, is that if women joined together, forging roots and solid branches through sisterhood, a different power – equal to the task of combating patriarchy – might be achieved. In a way that perhaps comments on the limitations of postmodern visual practices, Miranda asserts that too much uncertainty – too much change, movement and transformation – is not a good thing: “The unpredictable was all about me. More uncertainty would destroy my confidence, dull my awareness, deaden my warning system” (165).

Unable to combat patriarchal society on its own terms – with overt rather than subversive power – Miranda’s only option is escape. She goes to the lighthouse and to Tom, believing that “[p]eople who had been shipwrecked might hunt to live but not for revenge” (165). There, Tom reveals that he and Joe had foreseen Miranda’s difficulties, and Joe had consequently remained in the area in case Miranda needed to escape. The meaning of this escape is somewhat ambiguous. Miranda is, for instance, angry at Tom’s suggestion, telling him “sharply, ‘no. Men have always arranged my life’” (169). Additionally, although I functions in the novel less as a country than a symbol of possibility and escape – a place where Miranda can imagine her “carved figure, ready to leap or fly, reclining not under a heap of sour hay in the loft but amongst golden oranges irradiated by light which bounded from a sun shining more brightly than in Australia” (142) – it could be that Miranda is merely swapping one site of oppression for another. Although she realises that she “could be happy, much happier elsewhere,” and had

... [o]n occasion ... looked the whalers over speculating on possibilities. What stopped me was the fear of leaving one trap for another – dependence on one man for dependence on another. My meeting with [Joe] had individualised one of the group. He had seen much, knew much, and curiosity pricked me. … But a wife in California probably had no more choices than I had. Change would not necessarily bring reprieve. I was impulsive but not stupid. (52)
On the other hand, although Miranda can only leave with a man, and her escape is therefore tinged with the possibility of new restrictions and submissions, Tom assures her that “there will be lots of pink marble in California” (170). In other words, her sculpting – symbolic of Miranda’s active and constructive engagement with the world and with men’s bodies – will be able to continue, and perhaps in a form (with marble rather than wood) more suited to her inclinations.

The positive associations of Miranda’s escape are reinforced by the depiction of brotherhood and sisterhood as strategic rather than essential collectives. Realising that Tom is not wanting to arrange her life but to help, Miranda says,

‘I didn’t have to be shipwrecked with you, Tom, did I?’ And shyly, ‘We’ve always been brothers.’
‘Yes, Miranda, yes.’ He patted me on the shoulder. ‘Always brothers, my dear. Or sisters, if you prefer.’ (168)

Miranda and Tom thus imagine brotherhood and sisterhood not as biological or essential groupings, but as alliances arising from a common struggle against oppression. Their resulting bond resonates with discussions of strategic or operational essentialism by feminists like Braidotti, Haraway (“Cyborg”) and Butler. In contrast to earlier feminist claims to represent all women – while focusing on white, middle-class female experience – these theorists advocate an exploration, rather than a denial, of the differences and similarities among women (and, less frequently, men). Dependent on the agency of individuals attuned to discursive and material contexts, the political groupings that result take differences and commonalities not as politically disabling, but as a positive and powerful feature of conditional, temporary alliances based in an awareness of common goals. Strategic essentialism therefore offers a way of theorising beyond feminism’s “double bind” (Doane, Mellencamp and Williams 9), representative of the fact that feminism must organise around a politics of identity while simultaneously problematising the concepts of woman and man. Functioning as a reply to Miranda’s insistence that, “There’s only one world … and we all have to live” (110), Miranda and Tom’s brotherhood/sisterhood holds out hope for such a world, one where men and women can work together.

The association of Joe and Tom, like Miranda, with both the sea and with visual openness, further positions their alliance – forged with the common aim of enabling Miranda’s escape – against the dogmatism of oppressive patriarchal/religious ideology.
Both being men of the sea, Tom and Joe are aligned with this subversive, changeable and transformative realm – a site, in *Miranda*, of deep and embodied knowledges that transcends the dead dichotomies underlying patriarchal power. A reading of this association in terms of positive difference is established earlier in the novel when Miranda looks “yearningly in the direction of the sea,” hoping that “from somewhere that is not here there are men who are different” (80). The association of their visual openness with the naked male form further positions them in relation to Miranda and at variance with the patriarchal/religious abhorrence of male nudity. Tom, for instance, “love[s]” (46) Michelangelo’s *David* and “laid his fingers caressingly on the picture of [t]his unclothed body” (80). This male acceptance of male corporeality suggests an acknowledgement of men’s embodied and, hence, situated and partial position in the world. Similarly, confronted by Miranda’s sculpture of John/Helios,

> Joe took it, unwrapped it and stood for a long time looking at it in his hands. Once he ran his fingers over it. Then he placed it gently on the floor, crouched beside it, took the lantern from [Miranda] and turned the light this way and that so shadows formed a cowl, a birth sac from which the body in the wood struggled to emerge. (149-50).

Telling Miranda that he will find a gallery to show it “[i]f I have to scour America” (150), Joe not only accepts, but encourages Miranda’s active, constructive look at this male body. He is thus differentiated from the other men – particularly Alfred and Miranda’s father – who condemn and destroy Miranda’s creative efforts.

A sentence on the last page of the novel, in which Miranda imagines California in terms of “oranges [that] fell in a shower, radiant as reflections, transient as spray, yet solid as the moment,” reinforces this positive interpretation of her escape, a movement towards a place of change and transformation. Ambiguity, however, is reinstated by the final sentences, in which Miranda asserts, “Yes. I’ll go. It’s only a death” (170). In one sense, this statement is an acknowledgement of failure: of the inevitable failure, perhaps, of women’s visual agency in a society so firmly patriarchal that it inhibits women’s ability to construct a resistant and unified sisterhood; and of the failure implied by having to escape with a man rather than alone or with other women. However, Miranda has previously associated death with a lack of superficiality and, indeed, with the nudity so problematic to Alfred’s religious/patriarchal paradigm: “Maybe the reality of death stripped life of its silliness, leaving it naked and beautiful in simplicity” (80). And when thinking of her
mother, Miranda recalls her saying “Sometimes … it can be good to leave. The pattern changes. It is only a death” (169). This reference to death also evokes the ambivalence of carnivalesque culture, the way in which its “symbols … always include within themselves the perspective of negation (death), or its opposite. Birth is fraught with death, and death with new birth” (Problems 102). Consequently, the final sentences of Miranda – which, in presenting multi-layered meanings, again involve the reader in negotiating the contradictory implications of her escape – acknowledge the constraints women face within patriarchal society, while retaining the possibility of positive and subversive transformations and liberating escapes.

Thus, as in The Architect, The Blind Eye, Machines for Feeling, Last of the Sane Days and Transplanted, Miranda describes contemporary gender relations – and the opportunities its configurations allow women – as fundamentally problematic. However, in contrast to the conjunction between men’s bodies and women’s looks in these other novels, Miranda’s engagements with men’s bodies occurs entirely without reference to (hetero)sexual love. While thereby avoiding a formulaic solution to gender inequalities offered in genres such as women’s romance fiction, the absence of love in Miranda’s attitude towards Joe’s body does not desexualise her gaze. Although only described at one point in the novel – when, in her imagination, Miranda “saw … Joe floating in the sea, thick-torsoed as the whale he hunted, thighs heavy as kelp trunks, splayed feet like fins, shovelling through the water” (112) – Miranda’s desire for Joe, like her perception/construction of John/Helios, transforms his body and again associates him with the liberating realm of the sea. Perhaps, in America – a place representative of equality, far away but nevertheless discoverable through strategic brotherhood/sisterhood – something akin to love might develop. At present, however, Miranda’s intense sexual and intellectual curiosity about men’s bodies exists only in conjunction with her cautiousness; such an approach is sensible, the novel seems to suggest, in a world where men generally attempt to control and marginalise women, and to destroy those who exercise visual agency. Ultimately, however, the conclusion of Miranda is hopeful. By escaping, Miranda lives to fight another day, presumably with increased wisdom and in a place that may be more amenable to her artistic, intellectual and sexual curiosity.
Conclusion

In an opinion piece in *The Australian* entitled “Mothers must tell the truth,” Janet Albrechtsen attacks women who commit “paternity fraud.” This occurs when women conceive children with men other than their partners, and those partners consequently support children not biologically their own. According to Albrechtsen, contemporary Australian society enables such fraud, rendering men “victims.” Women, she insists, and the uncaring “feminists” who support them, must be held legally, socially and morally “accountable for [such] deceit” (15). Accompanying this article is a drawing of a naked man being consumed, head first, by a rose. The stem of the rose, covered with threatening thorns, constrains the man (while concealing his penis) and feeds him to the flower. Male damage is also portrayed in the illustration that accompanies a similar article by John Hirst, published two days earlier in the opinion pages of the same newspaper. Entitled “Court rule offensive to families,” but with the subheading, “No-fault divorce tends to unfairly target perfectly decent fathers,” the illustration depicts a “perfectly decent” father being beaten across the face by the female figure of justice. This traditionally blind and impartial woman is depicted glaring angrily and threateningly at the man. The implications of these articles and their illustrations are unambiguous. Male authority and authenticity (represented through paternity) are being undermined by women. Men are consequently victimised by a feminist society that is uncaring of, and indeed, directly hostile to, their needs. While these articles raise complex issues – particularly regarding the meaning of fatherhood in our society – their engagement with the discourses of masculinity crisis and feminism is clear.

These articles and their illustrations resonate, in many ways, with the fictional representations of men’s bodies I have explored in this book. Both groups of texts refer explicitly to feminism and are concerned with gendered power differentials; both represent men as physically and emotionally damaged. Both are firmly pedagogical. In contrast to these articles, however, the fictions are feminist, at least explicitly and often fundamentally: the novels engage with feminist ideas whereas the articles simply castigate purported social trends they identify as feminist. Despite this difference, the strong similarities between both groups of texts indicate that ideas of feminism and masculinity crisis, and the juxtaposition

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152 By emphasising women’s transgressions and the victimisation of men as a group, Albrechtsen blithely ignores the necessary involvement of the other man in “paternity fraud.”
of these discourses, are issues with contemporary currency or relevance beyond the novels examined in this book. This popular currency is mirrored in academic debates, where the intersection of masculinity studies and feminism is an increasingly important issue.\(^{153}\)

This outbreak of interest in contemporary gender discourses implies that understandings of gender, while continually in flux, are undergoing a period of significant disturbance and transformation. The fact that the articles and the fictions use men’s bodies to personify and investigate this gender crisis is, in many ways, not unusual. Many theorists agree that “the body” functions as a significant “site on which the aspirations, anxieties, and contradictions of a whole society are played out” (Brooks 33). And while it is generally non-white male bodies that are employed in this way, this is certainly not the first time that white men have functioned in this role. Dabakis, Silverman and Solomon-Godeau are three of the theorists discussed in this book who analyse various historical periods (respectively, America at the turn of the twentieth century, during the post-World War Two period, and revolutionary France) when men’s bodies functioned as “both the sites and nexus of cultural signification” (Dabakis 204). The depiction of such bodies as damaged is also not unique: damage characterises many of the male bodies depicted in the Neo-classical French art Solomon-Godeau discusses, as well as in the Hollywood films Silverman analyses. Damaged or not, in all of these studies a cultural focus on men’s bodies is shown to coincide with proclamations of masculinity crisis, resulting from changes in, and subsequent anxiety regarding, gender identity and relations. Thus, historical precedents exist for the contemporary function of images of damaged men’s bodies as sites at which instabilities in gender relations are elaborated, negotiated and (sometimes) imaginatively resolved.

Such images, however, (or at least the ones that have been analysed) were until recently created by men, within male-dominated institutions and communities. Furthermore, as theorists like Dabakis and Solomon-Godeau contend, these images were positioned in arenas where men were the dominant, and often the exclusive viewers. Historically, therefore, the negotiation and struggle over gender meanings signified by

\(^{153}\) Two prominent collections of essays concerning this topic are the classic *Men in Feminism*, edited by Alice Jardine and Paul Smith, and the recent *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory*, edited by Gardiner. The historical progression of debates surrounding the position of men to feminism is evident in the differences between these two collections. Whereas in *Men in Feminism*, this intersection is a hotly debated and fraught issue, contributors to the recent collection not only accept masculinity as an important feminist topic, but maintain that men have an important role to play in theorising gender.
images of (damaged) men’s bodies entailed conversations between men from which women were excluded. In contrast, the fictions discussed in this book are written by women. And these women are not alone in their focus on men’s bodies. As demonstrated in the Introduction, their portrayals and explorations of male corporeality are mirrored in the work of other new and established Australian women writers. Moreover, based on a small but significant amount of critical attention to women representing men’s bodies in contemporary visual art and literary texts, this is also an emerging trend in other Western countries, like Canada (Macdonald; Parpart, “Cowards”), Britain (Kent and Morreau, Women’s), America (Tanner) and France (Stout; Hope 5, 8-10). Coupled with this fictional trend is the prominent and increasing presence of men’s bodies in popular culture, particularly advertising – a trend implying a commercial awareness both of women’s role as viewers and consumers, and of the attractiveness and selling-power of men’s bodies.

While previous crises in masculinity have been attributed to various factors, 154 I would suggest that this emerging pattern of women representing and looking at men’s bodies is a fundamental factor in contemporary conceptions of masculinity crisis. Accordingly, the escalating hysteria of recent declarations of such a crisis seems proportionately tied to the increasing tendency for women to comment upon or depict men’s bodies in Western society. Perhaps the reason this crisis is so widely proclaimed and apparently threatening is because the contemporary visibility of men’s bodies – conterminous with the (f)act of women scrutinising men – directly assails a central paradox of patriarchal society: namely, that white, heterosexual men must be both highly visible, and entirely invisible bearers of the gaze, in order for gender inequalities to continue. In turn, the emphasis on both men’s bodies and women’s looks in these fictions seems not incidental to the sense of crisis that is portrayed and interrogated. Rather, this dual focus encapsulates a distinctive characteristic of masculinity crisis in contemporary Western society, at the same time as the fictions themselves contribute to that sense of crisis.

These novels not only emphasise male visibility, but in the process signify the entry of men’s bodies into language. As asserted in the Introduction, there are more generally recognised and accepted ways of depicting women’s bodies than there are of depicting men’s. This difference in available terminology portrays and compounds the construction

\[^{154}\text{Some of the most commonly identified catalysts for a focus on the discourse of masculinity crisis include the experience and effects of war (Bourke; Silverman; Tate; Herndl), changes in the nature and definition of work (Dabakis; Norwood; Kimmel, Manhood; Seymour; C. Moore, “Colonial”), and transformations in men’s domestic role (Barnes; McLeer).}\]
of women as objects rather than subjects of representation and of vision, while simultaneously reinforcing their alignment with the body rather than the mind. Contrastingly, the extensive descriptions of men’s bodies in these fictions – mirrored by the same focus in other women’s texts – suggests that a language for men’s bodies is being forged or discovered. Fittingly, Brooks asserts that, “[n]arratives in which a body becomes a central preoccupation can be especially revelatory of the effort to bring the body into the linguistic realm because they repeatedly tell the story of a body’s entrance into meaning” (8). I have argued that the entrance of men’s bodies into a meaning defined by women writers disrupts many of the binary oppositions that have previously underwritten and maintained women’s subordinate position within patriarchal discourse and society. Accordingly, and given the position of men’s bodies as current sites of cultural debate about gender, the fact that women are inscribing these bodies with meaning suggests they are actively involved in defining contemporary notions of gender, and masculinity.

Once again, the woundedness of these male bodies is significant in this process of meaning production and inscription. Brooks’s survey of (primarily women’s) bodies in Western literature identifies damage as a principal means by which they are entered into language. In particular, the marks on damaged bodies – which he aligns with “linguistic signifier[s]” – denote, enact and are “allegor[ies] for the body become a subject for literary narrative – a body entered into writing” (3). Notably, and in a way that once again makes both women’s desiring looks and men’s damaged bodies central to the production of meanings around gender and corporeality in these fictions, and in the trend of women representing men more generally, Brooks asserts that,

What presides at the inscription and imprinting of bodies is, in the broadest sense, a set of desires: a desire that the body not be lost to meaning – that it be brought into the realm of the semiotic and the significant – and, underneath this, a desire for the body itself, an erotic longing to have or to be the body. (22)

At the same time, neither the authorship of these fictions nor the way men’s bodies are entered into language – as damaged – necessarily challenges patriarchal power differentials. Due to recent rejections of the notion that women signifies a unified identity category, the absence of an inevitable correlation between women-authored texts and feminist meanings has been generally accepted in feminist discussions. At the same time – and because the fact of reversal is often taken as intrinsically subversive – the idea has remained strong that women representing and/or looking at men’s bodies necessarily
undermines patriarchy. Yet although these fictions both function as and represent gender reversal, *The Architect* and (to a lesser extent) *The Blind Eye* largely reinforce the same power dynamics and structures that construct women as inferior to men. In these fictions, this is the case when the male characters’ bodies are healed (by men) and whole or when they are damaged. Although seeming to challenge recognisably patriarchal notions of men’s bodies as invulnerable and inviolable, the representation of male damage functions to illustrate and reinforce the notion of men’s victimisation while privileging male pain and subjectivity.

In one sense, it is again unsurprising that representations of male damage fulfil this function. Wounded men are established icons in many patriarchal texts and traditions, most obviously, those of Christianity, war and, as countless theorists have demonstrated, masculinity crisis. Accordingly, it is significant that dominant themes in *The Architect* and *The Blind Eye* – like the privileging of homosocial relationships and the marginalisation of women – resonate so closely with the underlying principles and processes of the popular discourse of masculinity crisis. Conversely, however, the focus on wounded men in *Last of the Sane Days, Miranda, Machines for Feeling* and *Transplanted* produces entirely different narratives – ones in which the instabilities enabled by the conjunction of damaged men’s bodies and desiring women’s looks are allowed to proliferate. Such proliferations create fictions with a number of positive feminist implications for imagining women’s desire and men’s desirability. Female characters are depicted delighting in male characters’ bodies – particularly when these bodies escape hegemonic constructions of male corporeality (*Miranda, Transplanted, The Blind Eye, Last of the Sane Days, Machines for Feeling*). Often male characters deliberately expose their bodies in order to please or reassure the women they desire (*Machines for Feeling, Last of the Sane Days, The Blind Eye*). Sometimes, such displays simultaneously enable female characters’ vision (*Transplanted, Machines for Feeling*), and for moments at least, allow reciprocal and mutually pleasurable heterosexual relationships (*Miranda, Machines for Feeling, Transplanted, The Blind Eye, Last of the Sane Days*). Thus, these fictions employ an archetype of patriarchy – the wounded man – to create masculinities and men’s bodies that challenge that same tradition.

In Chapter Four I identified this pattern of adoption and transformation in the way many of these fictions referred to but altered the iconography of wounded men familiar
from the ambiguously patriarchal genre of women’s romance fiction. This transformative process is made particularly evident in *Miranda*, in the way that Miranda interrogates and modifies traditional artistic and religious portrayals of men’s bodies to forge her own perceptions/constructions. Again, rather than being incidental, this common feature has implications for understanding the function and significance of these novels within contemporary gender debates, as well as the meaning of men’s bodies in these fictions. According to Gledhill, when new gender identities emerge, popular representations – while continuing to employ the traditional forms that give narratives shape and meaning – adapt plot and character in order to remain relevant in the context of social change. This process is necessitated and produced by, but is also enabling of, changing conceptions of gender ("Women").

As I have contended throughout this book, the increasing prominence of declarations of masculinity crisis, and the resurgence of debates regarding feminism’s relevance to modern society, indicate a transformation in contemporary notions of gender in Australia and in the Western world generally. As well as through their engagement with these discourses, Gledhill’s argument implies that the patterns of adoption and transformation in these fictions indicates their emergence from changing ideas about masculinity and femininity. Particularly pertinent to contemporary Australian women’s fiction – given the association of transgressive men’s bodies with female desire in these novels – is Gledhill’s insistence that transformative narratives of masculinity enable gender change by facilitating female desire. Specifically, by providing new terms and plots through which women readers are able to imaginatively engage with men’s bodies, these fictions expand and re-define recognisable and acceptable gender relations.

Graham Dawson’s discussion of the narrative production of masculinities clarifies the meaning of the emergence of these fictions. Conceptualising the composition of narratives as “an inescapably social process,” Dawson asserts that “stories” only work to the extent that they

… not only exist in the imagination of the storyteller, but resonate with the experiences of others, as shared, collective identities and realities. … The narrative resources of a culture – its repertoire of shared and recognised forms – therefore functions as a currency of recognisable social identities. (23)

Dawson’s position reinforces the idea that the issues explored in these narratives – particularly the conjunction of feminism and masculinity crisis – have currency or
relevance beyond these fictions. At the same time, his statement implicitly highlights the fact that, a decade ago, women’s stories about men’s bodies were not – and perhaps could not be – told. This suggests not only that the language for these stories is new, but that the ways in which men’s bodies are being described in contemporary Australian women’s fiction are recognisable by or intelligible to society as a whole. The emergence of these fictions therefore demonstrates that what can be imagined and discussed regarding masculinities and men’s bodies – as well as women’s desire and men’s desirability – is expanding. It is also possible that the transformations within many of these texts arise from and are indicative of Australian context in which these fictions are written. As Sheridan writes:

Australian feminism, having always provided fertile ground for the transplantation of “international” (US and UK, and latterly French) feminisms, has certain indigenous features, notable among them being its capacity to graft those others on to its own growth and in time to produce new species. (“Introduction” 1).

Combined with the specific intra-textual references to feminist theories, this transformative element suggests that these Australian women’s fictions are engaging with and moving beyond contemporary conceptions of gender in a way that is enabled by and productive of their specific geographic and historical position.

The complex and contingent issues of power, gender and corporeality posed by Australian women’s recent depictions of men’s bodies have theoretical as well as social implications. As close readings of these novels have shown, the fictional conjunction of men’s bodies and women’s looks has the potential both to support and to subvert patriarchal discourses and dichotomies. This demonstrates, in turn, that none of the conceptualisations of masculinity, men’s bodies or women’s looks explored in the Introduction is sustainable in every context. To have used one of these theoretical paradigms to the exclusion of others – or even to have imagined that theory can exhaust the meanings of representations of men’s bodies and women’s looks – would have concealed the complexity of these texts and, accordingly, the ambivalence of the recent gender discourses and debates they explore.

Most obviously – and in an argument that is virtually de rigueur in social constructionist analyses – this outcome challenges the pre-eminence of psychoanalytic models in discussions of gender, vision and/or corporeality. Based on the imposed universality of classical gender dichotomies, this acultural, ahistorical and decidedly
heterosexist model – underlying, for instance, Mulvey’s insistence on the impossibility of male spectacle – makes it virtually impossible to analyse and explain changes in gender constructs. Further, and as Robinson suggests, the dominance of psychoanalytic conceptions of gender in masculinity studies particularly, has led to a tendency for such analyses to discuss or divide representations of men into hegemonic (bad) or alternative (good) categories (“Pedagogy” 144). As regards this book, such a tendency emerged particularly in discussions of male corporeality: for instance, in the identification by numerous theorists of male abjection (or anality or feminisation) as intrinsically and inevitably subversive of patriarchal constructions. Analyses of the representations of men’s bodies in contemporary Australian women’s fiction demonstrate, in contrast, that representations of male abjection, for example, may or may not subvert patriarchal dichotomies and discourses – context is always paramount.

Although analyses that adopt a psychoanalytic approach receive the most criticism, they are by no means the only model that occlude textual nuances when theorising masculinities, men’s bodies and women’s looks. In many other studies, reference to a well-rehearsed matrix of identity categories (usually, sex, gender, race and sexuality) moves beyond the ahistorical and acultural notions of subjectivity common in psychoanalysis, but nevertheless functions as a rather glib substitute for historically and culturally specific modes of reading. Such expediency is understandable given the current economic and generic constraints placed upon academic analysis – where a final answer or reason seems to be considered the only justification for intellectual investigation. However, an analysis that simply ticks off the elements in this matrix cannot account for the gamut of textual nuances and sublimations that arise around depictions of women representing and/or looking at men’s bodies in a period of significant gender anxiety and transformation.

At the same time, all the theoretical paradigms elaborated in the Introduction have proven variously useful in deciphering meanings adhering to portrayals of men’s bodies and women’s looks in the texts considered here. In some ways, this has been particularly – and surprisingly – the case for psychoanalytic theory, especially its expression in feminist film theory. Certainly, the repeated evocation of Mulvey’s argument in these fictions implies that psychoanalytic explanations of patriarchal society still have much relevance for contemporary debates about gender – particularly, it seems, the function of male visibility in what is potentially emerging as a reformulation of, and perhaps even an unrecoverable
challenge to, patriarchal power. Also useful to understanding the meaning of men’s bodies in these texts were theoretical paradigms – like Merleau-Ponty’s notion of embodied perception and Bakhtin’s idea of the carnivalesque – not outlined in the Introduction because rarely employed in discussions of masculinity and male corporeality. The resonance between such theories and portrayals of male visibility and desirability in many of these contemporary Australian women’s novels additionally suggests a potential future direction for discussions of men’s bodies in contemporary culture (a direction already indicated by the increasing prominence of theories like Merleau-Ponty’s and Bakhtin’s in recent philosophical and anthropological debates).

Ultimately, these texts demonstrate that contemporary constructions of hegemonic masculinity can depend on the construction of men’s bodies as visible or invisible, empowered or disempowered, embodied or disembodied. Accordingly, theoretical accounts must be considered as contingent and variable according to context: as ways of asking but not answering questions about gender, corporeality and vision while remaining aware of the historically and culturally specific conditions in which such texts arise and are received. At the same time, although women representing and/or looking at men’s bodies has the potential to support or challenge these hegemonic constructions, on the whole these fictions suggest that, in the hands and through the eyes of women, men’s bodies have a disruptive effect on patriarchal dichotomies and discourses.

The emergence of a group of authors – both new and established – interested in men’s bodies, also suggests new directions for Australian literary studies, and for analyses of Australian women’s fiction in particular. The tendency, in critical assessments of Australian women’s fiction, particularly in the late 1970s and 1980s, to divide authors into (realist) experiential or (non-realist) experimental categories has been various enacted and described. As Gelder and Salzman assert, anthologies of and monographs on Australian women’s writing “have tended to offer either the realist texts that explore female experience, or the experimental texts that explore new modes and styles, but very seldom both” (60). Within this framework, much critical energy has been directed towards identifying the feminist elements of women’s fictions. Generally, realist texts concerned with depicting women’s experiences are designated feminist because they challenge the historical silence surrounding women’s lives, while experimental fictions are seen to be inspired by feminist theory to interrogate and challenge forms of language and narrative
structure recognised as patriarchal. Overwhelmingly, women authors describing women’s experiences received the most critical attention. Whitlock’s Eight Voices of the Eighties, for example, deals exclusively with realist writers. This experiential/experimental framework has been repeatedly criticised for instituting a fictional hierarchy – whereby (non-realist) experimental fictions are marginalised in relation to (realist) experiential works – one that blinds critics to the diversity of Australian women’s fiction and limits innovation within the field.

Recent representations of men’s bodies by Australian women authors traverse this experimental/experiential divide, and thus demonstrate the insufficiency of this dominant critical framework. Although fundamentally realist, experimental elements (like the use of multiple narrators) are common in these fictions. The exploration of men’s subjectivities and sufferings also signals a departure from a defining element of the category of Australian women’s realism (namely, attention to women’s experiences to the exclusion of men’s). This focus on men’s experiences simultaneously problematises the terms in which Australian women’s novels are designated feminist, as does their ambivalent engagement with the fundamentally anti-feminist discourse of masculinity crisis.

Simultaneously, these novels suggest a possible direction for reconceptualizing and reinvigorating the field of Australian literary studies. This is not to suggest that women’s representations of masculinities and/or men’s bodies should constitute a new category in discussions of Australian women’s fiction. Rather, such fictions, in requiring an opening out of the critical terms and conditions of Australian literary criticism, reinforce the need for new approaches, specifically, the need for close attention to what is actually happening in Australian fiction, rather than assumptions based on what has gone before. For instance, the fact that male authors like Christos Tsiolkas (Jesus, Loaded) are also portraying men’s bodies as damaged and desirable reinforces the idea that women’s writing should not be unproblematically separated from Australian fiction generally. While women’s writing still constitutes an important arena for feminist theorising, critical analyses should consider the issues explored, rather than selecting fictions according to the author’s gender. This would

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155 Writers generally aligned with the realist/experiential category include Barbara Hanrahan, Elizabeth Jolley, Beverley Farmer, Jessica Anderson, Olga Masters, Beverley Farmer, Helen Garner, Kate Grenville, Jean Bedford and Thea Astley (most of these authors are explicitly identified with this category by Delys Bird 187, 198-99). Women writers usually identified as experimental include Mary Fallon, Janine Burke, Jan McKemmish, Finola Moorhead, Ania Walwicz, Carmel Bird, Marion Campbell and Drusilla Modleska. Certainly, this second list of authors is composed of names less immediately recognisable than those included in the realist/experiential category.
apply the realisation that women’s writing is not necessarily feminist, and accordingly challenge the way in which women’s writing is still constituted as a separate category in studies of Australian (men’s) fiction generally.

This analysis of men’s bodies in a selection of novels by Australian women represents a first, small step into a series of critical questions and issues emerging in the context of contemporary gender debates. Even in themselves, these novels pose further questions. This book has not explored every situation in these texts in which wounded men’s bodies are depicted. My focus on the link between male visibility and damage has meant, for instance, that the recurrent association of pain with the inability of male characters to speak has gone unexplored. Additionally frameworks through which male damage could have been interpreted – such as the recurrent references to religious themes and iconography in these texts – similarly require further analysis and discussion.

Moreover, there are other fictions by new Australian women writers that suggest entirely different ways of conceptualising and engaging with men’s bodies. Novels like Miller’s *Child* and Cleven’s *Bitin’ Back* do not depict men’s bodies as wounded. While damage is perpetually threatened, these texts instead explore the performative construction of men’s bodies. As in the novels discussed in this book – where women looking at men is an intra- as well as an extra-textual issue – *Child* is both written by a woman and centrally depicts a woman (Corrie) writing about (and in the process constructing) her son’s body. After he goes missing, Corrie records minute details of his body from the point of conception to birth, through to adolescence and adulthood. By way of Corrie’s writing, *Child* foregrounds the issue of a language for men’s bodies while simultaneously inverting the biblical (and overwhelmingly patriarchal) conception of women as produced from men’s bodies. *Bitin’ Back* begins when Nevil (an Aboriginal youth) wakes up and proclaims that he is Jean Rhys. The subsequent account of a black boy/man become(ing) a white/Creole woman examines the performance of masculinity and its relationship to the continually problematised construct of male corporeality. Further investigation of these texts promises new conceptions of Australian masculinities and men’s bodies.

The prevalence of this fictional trend in Australia also suggests significant scope for comparative studies of women’s depictions of men’s bodies in other countries, and in cultural forms other than fiction. Such analyses would be particularly pertinent debates given what seems to be an increasing homogenisation of Western notions of masculinity.
At the same time – and drawing on Sheridan’s understanding of Australian feminism in terms of grafting – this approach could better define the specific ways in which contemporary Australian women are using and transforming prevalent Western gender constructions. Such future directions, as well as this book, demonstrate that the (f)act of women writing, representing, looking at and desiring men’s bodies poses new questions and possibilities that promise to be particularly fruitful sites for investigation within feminist literary studies and for feminism generally.
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